



Rereading Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi's Theory of Religious Science by Presenting a Hierarchical Explanation of Religious Science*

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Abstract

The issue of religious science is one of the most important epistemological discussions in contemporary Islamic thought, and Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi is among the thinkers who have presented a coherent view regarding its possibility and essence. In some prevailing interpretations of this view, religious science has been sought mainly in the realm of normative sciences, and descriptive and natural sciences have been deemed outside this domain due to their empirical nature. By analytically rereading the works of Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi, the present article attempts to provide a different reading of his view. Based on this rereading, the religiousness of science in his thought is not merely in the

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sense of the direct presence of religious teachings in the content of scientific propositions, but can also be realized at the level of the metaphysical and epistemological foundations of science. To elucidate this claim, using a descriptive-analytical method, the article shows that in his intellectual system, one can distinguish between two levels of scientific analysis: the level of the descriptive content of sciences and the level of their foundations and explanatory frameworks. Accordingly, although empirical propositions are neutral at the descriptive level in terms of being religious or non-religious, natural sciences can at the level of foundations rest upon divine presuppositions and in this sense fall under the category of religious science.

Keywords

Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi, religious science, descriptive sciences, normative sciences, Islamization of sciences, metaphysical foundations, philosophy of science.

Introduction

The discussion regarding the relationship between religion and science, especially in the realm of humanities and social sciences, has turned into one of the central topics in contemporary Iranian intellectual discourse. Among the put-forward viewpoints, Ayatollah Mohammad-Taqi Misbah Yazdi holds a prominent position by presenting a philosophical and systematic analysis of the nature of science and its relation to religion. However, in many prevailing readings of his view, religious science has been sought mainly in the domain of normative sciences, and descriptive and natural sciences, due to their empirical nature and discovery function, have been deemed neutral at the level of proposition content and outside the religious sphere.

The present article argues that this perception does not provide a complete picture of Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi's intellectual system. The main claim of this research is that in his thought, the "religiousness of science" does not merely mean the direct presence of religious teachings in the content of scientific propositions or its restriction to normative sciences; rather, it can also be realized at the level of metaphysical and epistemological foundations governing science. Accordingly, even natural sciences, if grounded upon divine presuppositions, can fall within the framework of religious science. From this perspective, the Islamization of science is not confined to reforming prescriptive and value-oriented sciences, but is rather directed toward the reconstruction of fundamental epistemological frameworks across all sciences.

The key to understanding this claim lies in paying attention to two fundamental distinctions in Misbah Yazdi's thought: First, the distinction between "science as descriptive propositions derived from empirical or rational methods" and "science as a scientific discipline

or tradition with specific historical and theoretical presuppositions." In his works, the negation of values' influence is mainly directed toward established scientific propositions within a specific methodological framework, rather than the entire complex process of scientific inquiry, which is always influenced by intellectual backgrounds and theoretical presuppositions (Misbah Yazdi, 2018, pp. 180 and 204). The second distinction is between "the religiousness of a science in the sense of that science's intrinsic relation to human happiness" and "the influence of extrascientific foundations—whether religious or non-religious—in the formation of macro-epistemological frameworks of sciences." Disregard for these levels has paved the way for interpretations that have either resulted in the absolute neutrality-attribution of natural sciences or negated the possibility of their being religious.

Within this same framework, his epistemological analysis of the nature of experience and induction is also significant. Criticizing the simplistic positivist view of empirical science, he emphasizes the limitations of the empirical method in achieving certainty and considers the inference of general laws from partial observations to be based on a kind of implicit probabilistic syllogism that does not yield demonstrative certainty (Misbah Yazdi, 2010, vol. 1, p. 110). Furthermore, even under strict laboratory conditions, proving the exclusivity of a cause and the certainty of an empirical result encounters philosophical difficulties (Misbah Yazdi, 2011, vol. 2, pp. 71–72). This analysis shows that in his view, empirical science is not a source of absolute certainty, but an epistemic and probabilistic activity in which the possibility of revision always exists.

Previous researches on this view have mostly engaged in critiquing the perspective or reporting and linearly analyzing the foundations of religious science, and have rarely attempted to coherently

formulate the relationship between different levels of religious science analysis. The innovation of the present article lies in offering a reading that, by providing a structural and hierarchical explanation of the levels of science, shows how his expressions regarding the relative objectivity of descriptive sciences on the one hand, and the emphasis on the role of metaphysical and epistemological foundations on the other, pertain to two different levels of analysis and do not entail inner contradiction.

In this research, direct quotations from the works of Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi have been used in certain instances. The reason for this is that the objective of the article is to present an analytical and relatively novel reading of his intellectual system regarding the relation between religion and science, which requires careful attention to the expressions and the manner of conceptual formulation in his own works. Therefore, in some positions, to avoid imprecise interpretive reconstruction and to show the ratio between the various components of this view, quoting the original expressions has been necessary. In addition, the innovation of the present article lies more in offering a fresh reading and analytical formulation of this theory than in undertaking a critical evaluation of it; hence, the direct quotation of certain expressions has been utilized as the basis for this analytical reconstruction.

It is worth noting that the objective of this article is not a critical evaluation of the theory of religious science in Misbah Yazdi's thought; researches regarding the strengths and challenges of this view have been conducted previously. Among them, the author, in an article titled "Examining Ambiguities in Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi's View on the Realm of Religion" published in the quarterly *Ma'refat-e Kalamhi*, has addressed certain ambiguities and challenges of this view. The focus of the present article is on rereading and analytically

reconstructing the discussions to demonstrate that within his intellectual system, the possibility of science being religious is not restricted to normative sciences, and natural sciences can also fall under the category of religious science at the level of foundations and explanatory frameworks. This research has been organized using a descriptive-analytical method and relying on the published works of Misbah Yazdi.

1. Elucidating Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi's View Regarding the Nature of Science

To meticulously and fairly analyze Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi's view on this complex topic—which at first glance may contain statements that appear different or even contradictory—all dimensions and subtleties of his discourse must be placed side by side with great care, as they appear in the extensive text of his statements, without omission or one-sided selection, within a cohesive and detailed logical structure. Without paying attention to these levels of distinction, the aforementioned statements may appear contradictory; however, by analyzing his methodological foundations, one can achieve internal consistency within this intellectual system. Since he is a wise philosopher, contradiction and inconsistency can be attributed to this view only if no reconciling ground exists among these statements. The goal of this analysis is to demonstrate the internal consistency of this theory and to lift the suspicion of contradiction among certain discussions. This is accomplished by uncovering the fundamental distinctions put forth by him. This key distinction, as raised previously, is the separation of "the connection and relation of a science with human happiness" as the primary criterion of being religious, from "the influence of metaphysical foundations" as an unavoidable reality in human knowledge. To achieve this goal, the analysis is advanced

step by step, relying on the wide spectrum of discussions raised in this perspective, such that every argument has firm backing from his own words. To strengthen this analysis in this section, we have inevitably made greater use of the exact phrases of Allameh Misbah Yazdi.

2. Section One: The Corpus of Statements Indicating the Commonality and Neutrality of Descriptive and Natural Sciences and the Negation of Their Religiousness

In the layer of analysis that focuses on the methodological nature and the process of discovery in empirical and descriptive sciences, Ayatollah Misbah, with explicit and repeated emphasis, states a position according to which a specific domain of scientific knowledge intrinsically and logically lacks the capacity to be attributed to religion or oppose it. This domain is none other than "pure descriptive sciences" or "science in the sense of discovering the objective relations of phenomena." To understand this position, one must see how he defines science and religion in this discussion. Ayatollah Misbah places the starting point of the discussion on definition and states that if we consider science in a specific sense, then the compound "religious science" may become meaningless. His intended definition of science in this discussion is "empirical acquired knowledge". In other words, science is that which is obtained through experience and observation and seeks to discover the relations between perceptible phenomena. In contrast, religion in this definition is restricted to "the set of beliefs and values directed toward human happiness." Accepting these two definitions, he concludes that "in this case, we will have nothing called religious science." The reason for this claim is that in this type of science, the researcher's personal faith has no intervention in the result of the work. This view explicitly states that "belief or disbelief in God and other religious teachings has

no effect on discovering the relation between two perceptible phenomena through experience, just as the researcher's other tendencies and attitudes have nothing to do with science." (Misbah Yazdi, 2018, pp. 165–166) This is a general principle upon which he insists (Misbah Yazdi, 2018, pp. 56, 214, and 282; Misbah Yazdi, 2012, p. 19; Misbah Yazdi, 2015 [A], p. 294).

To clarify this principle, an example is cited to show that completely contrasting tendencies of two scientists cannot alter the result of an empirical experiment: "Someone who has an ascetic inclination or looks at existence with a pessimistic attitude can reach the same result in empirical issues as a scientist who has a contrary inclination and attitude." Then, they explain why this is the case: "The reason for this truth is that, apart from the scientist's insight and attitude, empirical science operates within the limits defined for it and goes its own way." In other words, the empirical method has its own rules and framework that operate independently of personal beliefs. This view goes even a step further, concluding that if these personal beliefs interfere with the result of science, what is obtained is no longer science in the sense of empirical acquired knowledge: "The difference in ontological attitudes or value judgments of scholars has no intervention in the content of science, for if they intervene, it will no longer be science." From his perspective, in this limited definition of science, the final product of science is nothing other than those very formulas and discovered relations: "What is called science in accordance with this term is the formulas themselves that indicate the relations among phenomena; but the scientist's type of outlook toward existence and their beliefs lie outside the essence of science and have no intervention in it." (Misbah Yazdi, 2018, pp. 165–166) These statements clearly show that at this level of analysis, a methodological independence and a content neutrality toward beliefs are ascribed to science.

This general principle, raised in the realm of pure empirical sciences, also spills over into other epistemic arenas. The exact same logic is employed in analyzing the human sciences. In the human sciences, where it might seem that the place of values is more pronounced, this view makes a complete distinction between two parts: the descriptive part and the prescriptive part. He believes that as long as human science remains within the realm of describing and explaining relations, the same rule governs. It is also stated: "In the human sciences, as long as the discussion is about outlining the essence of a human or social phenomenon and explaining its relation to other phenomena, we are dealing with pure science." What is the characteristic of this branch of human sciences? This view emphasizes: "These sciences, which merely describe human and social phenomena, are shared between the religious and the non-religious, Muslims and non-Muslims." (Misbah Yazdi, 2018, pp. 206–207) That is to say, a Muslim sociologist and a non-Muslim sociologist, if they properly apply the scientific method, must reach similar results in describing a specific social phenomenon (e.g., the causes behind a specific type of collective behavior). These commonalities are not limited to the science of sociology and encompass other sciences such as economics. As a prominent example, he points to the science of economics and emphasizes that basic economic laws pertain to an external reality in which individuals' faith creates no change: "In economic discussions, as far as it relates to the scientific laws of economics, there is no fundamental difference between the markets of Muslims and non-Muslims. No one denies that mechanisms govern economic relations among humans which can be discovered and explained by utilizing scientific methods." (Misbah Yazdi, 2018, pp. 134–135) This shows that an economic law, such as the law of supply and demand, is a discoverable reality that does not belong to a specific society with a particular worldview.

This view even goes beyond empirical and human sciences, encompassing a broader realm of knowledge. He believes that the principle of commonality and the non-effect of faith and disbelief holds true for all acquired sciences obtained through education, experimentation, or the study of documents. In a general and highly thought-provoking statement, he notes: "Faith and disbelief have no intervention in acquiring acquired sciences that must be learned from a teacher, experimented with in a laboratory, or obtained from documents and records; hence, both a believer can acquire them by employing the proper methodology from reliable sources, and a disbeliever." This sentence by itself speaks volumes about this outlook. However, for further emphasis and to show the depth of this issue, he even extends it to the realm of understanding religious teachings themselves, adding: "Even the condition for understanding and acquiring knowledge regarding some religious issues is not that a person must necessarily be a believer, and this is the very reason why disbelievers can also understand some foundational teachings of religion and come to believe in the truth of religion." Then, he provides a theological argument for this claim: "If it were not so, disbelievers would have a legitimate excuse for their lack of faith, and sending prophets would appear to be in vain." (Misbah Yazdi, 2018, p. 174) This argument shows that the process of understanding and reasoning operates largely independently of a person's prior beliefs, and anyone can arrive at truths through reflection.

In his lectures, this stance has also been clearly repeated with tangible examples. In a clear summation during a session with university professors, he draws the dividing line as follows: "If the purpose is a scientific interpretation—meaning within the framework of science—Islam, atheism, and disbelief have no effect on it." (June 8, 2012) And immediately, so that the discussion is not abstract, he

provides a concrete and undeniable example: "Alcohol intoxicates, and it may also have benefits; this is a reality in which a believer and a disbeliever make no difference." (June 8, 2012) This example and general statement constitute the core of his view at this level of analysis. Science discovers realities that are objective and independent of our value judgments. These realities are the same for everyone. Therefore, from this perspective, applying the terms "religious" or "Islamic" to a physical law or a sociological description would be meaningless. This conclusion is the logical outcome of the specific definition of science he presents. This part of his view is primarily put forth in contrast to those who want to place an ideological label on every scientific discovery or imagine that prevailing sciences are inherently anti-religion. With this portion of his statements, he demonstrates that the products of empirical science can be accepted without contradiction with faith, because these products are neutral in and of themselves.

3. Section Two: The Corpus of Statements Indicating the Fundamental and Inevitable Influence of Metaphysical and Epistemological Foundations in Forming the Macro-Framework of Science

However, this picture of absolute neutrality and complete commonality is only one layer of Ayatollah Misbah's complex analysis. At another depth and on a macro level, with utmost seriousness and contrary to simplistic positivist approaches, he heavily emphasizes the essential and inescapable dependency of all scientific knowledge—even pure empirical sciences—upon a network of axioms, presuppositions, and a priori foundations rooted in philosophy, metaphysics, and epistemology. The selection of these foundations is neither a personal nor a preferential matter; rather, it determines the framework for interpreting the world, guides research, defines "scientific problems," and even

dictates the limits of meaningfulness for explanations. Essentially, coherent and deep scientific activity is deemed impossible without accepting (consciously or unconsciously) such foundations, and the logical structure of sciences is recognized as relying upon them. To understand this outlook, one must answer the question: how do sciences prove their issues? Responding to this foundational question, he states: "All sciences, to prove their issues, need principles that are either self-evident and from among accepted common principles, or from axiomatic principles that have already been proven in another science and ultimately in philosophy." (Misbah Yazdi, May 21, 2012) This means no science is an isolated island. To prove their propositions, sciences inevitably rely on principles that are either assumed to be self-evident (such as the principle of non-contradiction) or have been proven in another discipline and accepted as "axioms" in this science. This chain ultimately leads to philosophy and metaphysics, where the discussion concerns the most general principles governing existence and knowledge.

Ayatollah Misbah believes that the fundamental flaw and epistemic deficiency of prevailing Western sciences—which has also spread to other countries—lies precisely here: in incorrect, unproven, or even false metaphysical foundations that have been unconsciously accepted. He repeatedly and explicitly raises this critique. For instance, in a general critique, he states: "One of the general criticisms of the sciences that are today called Western sciences is that they are based on a series of axiomatic principles that have either not been proven in their proper place, or have even been refuted, but are still cited by scientists as the basis for proving and explaining scientific issues." He then concludes that this issue compromises the validity of many seemingly scientific theories: "Many issues that are raised and famous in various sciences as 'scientific theories' and acquire global

validity are based on incorrect metaphysical foundations." (Misbah, 2018, pp. 34–35) To ensure this general criticism is not merely a claim, he turns to objective instances.

One of the most prominent examples he frequently points to is the cosmological theory of the "Big Bang." In cosmology, for instance, the theory of the accidental origin of the universe has global fame, according to which the origin of the universe is explained by an explosion occurring in compressed primordial matter, bringing galaxies, various cosmic systems, celestial bodies, and so forth into existence as a result of this explosion. However, the critique raised in this view against this theory is not a technical critique of its calculations or observational data (which might be correct within its own domain). The critique targets the metaphysical interpretation offered alongside this theory. From Ayatollah Misbah's perspective, interpreting this event as an "accident" is actually a heavy philosophical claim: "The philosophical and metaphysical meaning of this answer is accepting the possibility of the emergence of certain phenomena without any cause, because accident here means the emergence of a phenomenon without a cause." In his view, however, this philosophical claim is rejected: "This is while we definitively prove in metaphysics that such a thing is impossible and no phenomenon can come into being without a cause!" (Ibid.) Therefore, in this view, the main problem of this theory is not its empirical data, but the "philosophical presupposition" hidden within it. Elsewhere, he emphasizes: "The proof of one of the most fundamental hypotheses of empirical sciences that forms the basis of many sciences (the Big Bang) rests upon a philosophical presupposition; a presupposition that self-evident philosophical principles reject!" (Misbah, 2018, pp. 243–244) This analysis shows how a scientific theory can be influenced by metaphysical foundations.

This critique is not limited to cosmology. He believes that many theories in the human sciences and psychology are also built upon incorrect metaphysical foundations. Specifically, he names materialism, the denial of incorporeal entities, and the denial of a soul independent of the body as anti-religious foundations that have penetrated prevailing sciences. This view emphasizes: "Scientific theories that are either based on anti-religious foundations such as materialism, the denial of incorporeal entities, and the denial of a soul independent of the body, or propose methods and behaviors that are incompatible or in conflict with religious beliefs or values, are counted as instances of non-religious or anti-religious science." He then explains what contradiction with religious beliefs precisely means: "Being in conflict with beliefs means that these theories are based on axiomatic principles—such as the equality of existence with matter or the limitation of human life to this world—that are not accepted by religion." (Misbah, 2018, pp. 206–207) For instance, behavioral psychology, which attempts to reduce all psychological phenomena to material interactions in the brain, is grounded in the denial of the soul. Or sociologies that view human happiness purely in material welfare are based on limiting life to this world.

Given these descriptions, should these sciences be completely discarded? No, the solution he proposes is "Islamization" or, more precisely, "reconstructing the foundations" of these sciences. This view explicitly states: "Making these sciences religious or Islamic entails discovering and promoting theories and interpretations, and prescribing methods and behaviors that are compatible with Islamic beliefs and values." (Misbah, 2018, pp. 206–207) This does not mean that all empirical data of these sciences should be thrown away; rather, it means that the interpretive framework, goals, and macro-foundations

of these sciences should be revised based on a correct view of existence and humanity. For instance, in psychology, instead of denying the soul, its existence should be accepted as a reality, and the mutual interaction of body and soul should be considered in behavior analysis. This outlook makes science deeper and more truth-reflective.

He also raises a very important point regarding the neutral and impartial nature of science, which holds great significance. He believes: "No scientist can escape the reality that their ontology—whether correct or incorrect, whether conscious or unconscious—can to some extent have an effect on their scientific knowledge. Materialist scientists are influenced by a materialist outlook in solving scientific issues, and divine scholars are influenced by a divine outlook. This reality is compatible with the principle of the neutrality of descriptive sciences, because ontology belongs to the category of knowledge, and utilizing it—like utilizing the achievements of other sciences—is unhindered for proving scientific issues. It is clear that the purpose of science's neutrality is not that using the results of other sciences is forbidden, because, for example, mathematics is used in physics, and some even condition its scientific nature on being mathematical. Scientific neutrality means that a researcher must not prejudice the result of research before investigating and examining reasons and evidence, nor allow unproven traditional beliefs or personal desires to interfere in the conclusion." (Ibid., pp. 275–276) In this statement, it is clearly specified that the intended neutrality of descriptive sciences is not about being neutral toward foundations; rather, it means one must not prejudice research outcomes prior to examining evidence, nor accept unproven beliefs as foundational principles. Paying attention to this meaning of the "neutrality of descriptive sciences" is crucial for an accurate analysis of this view.

4. Section Three: Statements Indicating the Influence of Psychological and Value-Based Factors as a Human Reality in the Process of Scientific Inquiry

In addition to the impact of macro-metaphysical foundations—which relate to the structure of knowledge and pertain to the content and framework of science—Ayatollah Misbah also acknowledges another inescapable reality in the process of scientific inquiry: the influence of the researcher's personal and social tendencies, preconceptions, interests, stakes, and values. This influence is more pertinent to the research process itself than to the scientific propositions proper. However, what distinguishes this view from certain extreme sociological interpretations (such as the Edinburgh Strong Programme) is that he considers this influence not as an inherent logical necessity of science, but as a human weakness, a flaw, an error factor, and a deviation from the correct path of research that must be overcome through epistemic and moral effort, and self-purification. He by no means justifies this influence, instead viewing it as a problem.

Ayatollah Misbah asserts that complete liberation from these influences and achieving a fully objective perspective is an extremely difficult task requiring spiritual perfection that is not readily available to everyone. He explicitly states: "Such a thing is not possible for the majority of people, and rare are the individuals who can keep themselves aloof from preconceptions and tendencies in the position of inquiry. To achieve such a matter, something akin to infallibility is required." Yet, is this unattainable? No, he believes: "This objective is attainable through abundant effort in the arena of self-purification." (Misbah Yazdi, 2010 [A], p. 114) This shows that genuine scientific inquiry is not merely an intellectual activity, but also requires moral refinement and combat against carnal desires. A scientist who is captive to prejudices, ambitions, or material interests will very likely fall into

error or poor judgment in observing, reporting, or interpreting data. On the other hand, since this task is deemed extraordinarily difficult, it can be said according to this view that the science formed so far has generally been influenced by these tendencies and values. It is unlikely that Ayatollah Misbah attributes anything akin to infallibility to the scientists who produced and shaped this science!

Thus, examining the scientist's function in the realm of practice shows that although Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi accepts the infiltration of values and tendencies in existing sciences and deems them in need of reform, his intended "pure" or "neutral" science does not describe the sciences observed today. Rather, he refers to an ideal and desirable science devoid of any susceptibility to values.

The key point in Ayatollah Misbah's philosophy of science is his sensitivity toward the intervention of values and tendencies (particularly relying on epistemological foundations). In contrast, most contemporary philosophers of science in the West, by fully accepting the influence of these factors, still consider the produced propositions to be scientific; because their approach is grounded in attention to the history of science and field realities, avoiding purely abstract discussions. They believe that scientists throughout history, even in the phase of theory evaluation and selection, have been influenced by their values (Godfrey-Smith, 2013, p. 120; Barbour, 1997, p. 226; Burtt, 1932, p. 50).

Therefore, the fundamental difference between Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi's view and contemporary philosophers of science (such as Kuhn and Ladyman) does not lie in the principle of "accepting or rejecting the influence of values on science"; because both views agree that the existing process of scientific inquiry is shaped within a context of scientists' tendencies and biases (Godfrey-Smith, 2013, p. 120; Barbour, 1997, p. 226). The main point of divergence lies in the

"epistemic possibility of transcending this limitation." Contemporary philosophers of science generally rely on methodological relativism or the structural limitations of the human mind to deem complete neutrality impossible (Chalmers, 2023, p. 85); whereas Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi believes that despite great difficulty, achieving truth-reflection and freedom from non-epistemic values is possible and accessible through demonstrative methodology and self-purification (Misbah Yazdi, 2010 [A], p. 114).

Perhaps another statement by Ayatollah Misbah better demonstrates a proximity to the philosophy of science. He points to the reality of differing viewpoints in sciences—part of which stems precisely from these psychological, social, and cultural factors—and accepts it under the broader concept of "science as a platform and space for scientific dialogue or the scientific process." Explaining this outlook, he states that sometimes "science" does not refer to definitive and proven propositions, but rather to the arena where diverse views are expressed: "If the purpose of science is the platform where scientists discuss, express views and theories, and follow a single subject and method, many factors influence it." This view explains that in this space, susceptibility to various factors is common: "If you look closely, it becomes clear that all, or at least a vast portion, of the views of our scholars in all sciences are influenced by the views of their predecessors... Now, if someone says that religious theories are also effective in science in the sense of a platform accommodating contradictory views, consequently the resulting theory will also be just one theory alongside others and will create no problem." He then points to the origin of divergences: "The differences of opinion that exist in a science originate from various factors such as social environment, value system, society's culture, and so forth." (June 8, 2012) This statement shows that he also views science as a collective,

historical, and contextual process in which various factors—including religious ones—can appear as influential sources in the genesis of an opinion or theory. However, note that he does not interpret this as the correctness of all those theories; rather, it simply means that such influences exist within the fiercely contested process of science. Ultimately, from an epistemological perspective, the correct theory is the one that matches reality, independent of its origin, and although difficult, this is attainable and rarely found in existing sciences.

5. Section Four: The Teleological Explanation of "Being Religious" and Its Sharp Distinction from the Concept of "Influence of Foundations" as the Key to Solving the Riddle

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Armed with these three seemingly heterogeneous categories of statements—which emphasize the commonality of sciences across different worldviews, the impact of metaphysical foundations, and the impact of psycho-social factors—the question might arise: Is science, from Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi's perspective, religious or not? Can one simultaneously hold to commonality and the influence of religious foundations? The key to solving this riddle and discovering the internal consistency of his discourse lies in paying attention to the primary criterion and axis for ascribing the descriptor "religious" to a science or a piece of knowledge. From Ayatollah Misbah's perspective, what makes a piece of knowledge or an epistemic system "religious" in the true sense of the word is not merely its susceptibility to certain metaphysical presuppositions aligned with religion, but its direct and intrinsic relation to "human happiness or wretchedness." Religion, in this outlook, is essentially charged with guiding humanity toward ultimate happiness, and all its knowledge, values, and rulings are organized around this axis.

Therefore, sciences that are descriptive in nature and engage in

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discovering "whats" and objective relations—even if they are formed within the framework of divine foundations, are influenced by them, and are even practiced by committed believers—are inherently and in the position of pure description "indifferent" and neutral toward human happiness. In fact, the neutrality of science does not mean neutrality toward metaphysical foundations, values, or tendencies; rather, it means that the scientific proposition itself is neutral toward human eternal happiness. These sciences are tools for understanding a portion of the world's realities, but this understanding in itself and directly does not lead humanity to happiness, even though this understanding rests upon religious metaphysical foundations. To reach happiness, a further step is required: the need for value judgment, determining dos and don'ts, and practical guidance.

This is where religion enters. This is the exact point explicitly stated when explaining the duties of religion and distinguishing it from science. Ayatollah Misbah first introduces descriptive sciences as follows: "The study of bodies and the examination of the extent and type of elements constituting a specific substance, and the expression of its physical and chemical properties, are among the goals of certain natural sciences." Then he immediately demarcates the scope of religion: "On the other hand, explaining how to utilize it in order to achieve true human happiness goes beyond the subject matter and goal of science." Whose duty is this, then? The clear answer: "It is religion that bears the responsibility of explaining the relation of phenomena to the perfection of the human soul and human interests, evaluating how humans interact with material and non-material phenomena, and determining human duties in encountering them." (Misbah Yazdi, 2018, p. 205) Simply put, science says, "This substance has this property." Religion says, "Considering that this substance has this property, how you should or should not use it to reach happiness."

Based on this, he lists a long array of subjects that are not counted among the duties of religion because they possess a descriptive nature: "Expressing realities related to physical and chemical facts, geological and cosmic phenomena, human bodily structure, physical illness and health, psychological disorders and their treatments, and thousands of other similar issues are not counted among the duties of religion." (Misbah Yazdi, 2015, p. 29) Religion's duty toward these matters is not to describe them, but to guide how these forms of knowledge are utilized on the path to happiness.

Therefore, from this perspective, even if divine or atheistic foundations are inevitably influential in the formation, selection, and interpretation of theories in descriptive sciences (which, from his view, they are), this influence by itself does not render those sciences "religious" or "non-religious" in the teleological and precise sense of the word. Why? Because the criterion for being religious is "relation to happiness," not merely "being aligned with metaphysical foundations or religious texts."

"Becoming religious" in the primary and precise sense of the word is realized when science itself directly and essentially serves the values, dos and don'ts, rulings, and happiness-inducing goals of religion, and its content is saturated with this orientation. In pure descriptive sciences, such an intrinsic orientation does not exist; hence, he calls these sciences "neutral," "pure," and "merely descriptive." These three concepts pertain to the connection of these sciences with true human happiness, not their connection with metaphysical foundations, as he fully accepts that these sciences are founded upon metaphysical foundations and is himself a critic of this current status, claiming that the first step in Islamizing sciences is reforming these very metaphysical foundations. (Misbah Yazdi, 2018, p. 236) This orientation primarily exists in the realm of prescriptive, normative,

and value-oriented sciences. For example, "Islamic economics" is a religious science not because it denies or alters the laws of supply and demand, but because it determines the goals of the economic system (such as justice, equity, poverty alleviation), moral limitations (such as the prohibition of usury, fraud, hoarding), and priorities based on religious values.

The ambiguity existing in this conception of religious science is that if "being religious" for a science entails that scientific propositions themselves point to the eternal happiness of human beings, what difference will there be between "religion" and "religious science"? According to Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi's view on the definition of religion, the centrality of religion's goal is fully evident. Specifically, defining religion, he states: Religion is a set of beliefs, values, and practical rulings that show humanity the path to achieving eternal happiness. (Misbah Yazdi, 2018, p. 100; Misbah Yazdi, 2002, p. 14; Misbah Yazdi, 2018 [B], p. 32; Misbah Yazdi, 2019, p. 31; Misbah Yazdi, 2010 [B], p. 104; Misbah Yazdi, 2016, p. 145; Collective of Authors, 2018 [B], p. 197) Furthermore, a science that directly points to human eternal happiness is considered not only religious but identical with religion itself. In fact, these directives themselves form a part of religion and are unified with it (Misbah Yazdi, 2010 [A], pp. 118–119).

6. Section Five: Islamization as Scientific Realism, Foundation Reconstruction, and Framework Correction, Not an Ideological Endeavor

Now, with the clarification of the pivotal distinction between "being religious in the sense of teleology and connection to human eternal happiness" and "the influence of foundations in sciences," Ayatollah Misbah's objective in presenting the intellectual project of the "Islamization of sciences" can be re-examined. Upon closer inspection, a

broader meaning for the Islamization of sciences can be envisioned within this perspective. Many might assume that Islamization means imposing pre-determined beliefs onto scientific data or ignoring realities to harmonize them with religious texts. Therefore, he strongly and repeatedly emphasizes the opposite of this assumption. In this view, Islamization is never an ideological, prejudiced, political, or purely slogan-driven act; rather, it is the height of realism, a hundred-percent scientific activity, and an epistemological necessity for achieving a deeper, more coherent, and more accurate understanding of the world. In fact, the goal of Islamization is to understand the world better, more deeply, and upon correct foundations—to place the edifice of science on solid ground rather than a shaky one. As is clear, such a task is not limited to the realm of normative sciences, but is entirely feasible in the descriptive branch of the human sciences as well as the natural sciences. If Islamization means a hundred-percent scientific activity and an epistemological necessity for achieving a deeper, more coherent, and more accurate understanding of the world, then descriptive sciences and natural sciences (even if they have no relation to human happiness) possess the capability of being Islamized. This meaning of Islamization can also be deduced from Ayatollah Misbah's perspective.

Ayatollah Misbah explains the precise meaning of this endeavor as entailing two essential phases: "The purpose of Islamizing sciences is that in the first phase, the foundations of the sciences are proven, and the sciences are explained based on correct foundations, so that thereafter, the connection of the sciences' issues with their foundations becomes clear." (Misbah Yazdi, 2010 [A], p. 236) Thus, the first step is working on foundations. But what are the correct foundations? He responds: "Correct foundations are principles that agree with the Qur'an; meaning that reason and revelation are in

complete agreement here." This sentence is extremely important. He does not believe that correct foundations are those we have extracted from the Qur'an and then forced reason to accept. Rather, he believes that correct foundations are principles accepted by both demonstrative reason and endorsed by revelation (the Qur'an). These foundations "will inevitably be Islamic," not due to prejudice, but because they hold the truth. He emphasizes: "We do not claim this blindly; rather, when we say it is Islamic, we have debated it and can prove it to you to reach the conclusion that those foundations are precisely what Islam—and—in the words of the Supreme Leader—the Qur'an says." (Misbah Yazdi, May 21, 2012) Therefore, Islamization is a discursive and demonstrative activity.

Ayatollah Misbah explicitly distances this project from any taint of prejudice and ideologization: "The purpose of Islamizing sciences is not a ritualistic and prejudiced act to prove an ideological tendency or a political task." In contrast, he considers the nature of this work to be entirely scientific: "This task is a hundred-percent scientific and novel activity for reforming sciences in the world, such that the entire world will feast at your table." (Ibid.) That is to say, if this task is performed correctly, its outcome will be so rigorous and beneficial that others will inevitably be compelled to accept and utilize it. Naturally, this task is feasible in both normative and descriptive sciences.

This stance is rooted in a fundamental and impartial truth-seeking that can be defended even independently of personal beliefs. He views the questioning of the foundations of science as a query that every fair-minded researcher must ask themselves: "The effort to answer these questions is a hundred-percent academic and scientific activity, not an ideological activity stemming from prejudice toward Islam, nor even to fulfill the slogans of the Islamic Republic." He then

puts forward an interesting hypothesis: "Even if we were not Muslims, or did not live under the shadow of the Islamic Republic, these questions would still confront us as a searching and truth-seeking human being, and every impartial and unbiased individual must initiate their work from these foundations as a pure scientific task; otherwise, their other scientific efforts will remain rootless, fragile, and abortive..." (Misbah Yazdi, 2018, pp. 242–243) This statement shows that critiquing the materialistic foundations of prevailing sciences and striving to replace them with more rational foundations is a universal epistemological necessity, not a parochial religious demand.

Ayatollah Misbah attributes his critical stance toward prevailing Western sciences not to anti-Westernism or prejudice, but to truth-seeking and the recognition of shortcomings: "If we take a stance against Western sciences and wish to purge our universities of certain data from Western sciences, it is not simply because they are 'Western'—for we hold the exact same stance toward 'Eastern' sciences; rather, it is because we observe flaws, deficiencies, and occasionally errors and fallacies in their data, and our sense of truth-seeking—in addition to our religious duty—dictates that we not tolerate those shortcomings and distortions, and strive to attain truths as accurately and realistically as possible" (Misbah Yazdi, 2018, p. 33).

This interpretation of Islamization elevates it from a purely identity-driven or political project to an epistemological and reformative one. On the other hand, it accounts for all of Ayatollah Misbah's statements, showing that while emphasizing the Islamization of the human sciences, he does not consider natural sciences or the descriptive branch of human sciences to be inherently non-Islamic. In fact, the Islamic nature of science has two meanings. In the first sense, it means that the science itself has a connection to human eternal

happiness; in the second sense, it means that a science is able to rest upon divine foundations.

Ultimately, even if this interpretation of Islamization is not accurate from his perspective, the assertion that metaphysical foundations necessarily and logically influence science is a correct and precise reading of Ayatollah Misbah's view, the documentations of which were presented earlier. Furthermore, the claim that values and tendencies have predominantly influenced existing sciences is also an accurate and precise extraction of his viewpoint. These analyses bring his perspective very close to that of contemporary philosophers of science. In any case, one can produce science based on theological and normative foundations, and even based on religious tendencies, and such a science is still considered science in academic circles because, according to Ayatollah Misbah, existing science is "predominantly" and, from the standpoint of philosophers of science, "entirely" based on the metaphysical foundations, values, and tendencies of scientists.

7. Final Summary: A Hierarchical Theory in Relational Analysis of Religion and Science

Rereading the works of Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi regarding the relation between religion and science shows that his view can be explained within a hierarchical model. Many interpretations that perceive some incompatibility between emphasizing the neutrality of descriptive sciences while simultaneously defending the possibility of Islamizing sciences stem from conflating two different levels of science analysis. By separating these two levels, his aggregate views can be formulated within a coherent framework.

At the first level, analysis pertains to the nature and function of descriptive sciences. At this level, natural and empirical sciences are

formed with the goal of discovering and describing objective realities, and the content of their propositions points to "whats" rather than "oughts." Hence, these sciences, logically and with respect to their epistemic function, are neither religious nor non-religious; because the criterion for being religious in this sense is a direct connection to human guidance and happiness, whereas descriptive sciences lack such a function.

At the second level, analysis is directed toward the macro-epistemological foundations and frameworks of science. At this level, scientific activity always takes place within the context of specific metaphysical and epistemological presuppositions that play a role in defining scientific problems, orienting theorizing, and interpreting data. From this perspective, reviewing and reforming these foundations based on a divine worldview can harmonize the general framework of sciences with the religious epistemic system.

Based on this distinction, the term "religious science" is used in Misbah Yazdi's thought in at least two senses, distinguishing which is essential for an accurate understanding of this view:

- **Normative and prescriptive sciences** based on religious teachings, such as jurisprudence, ethics, and certain branches of human sciences that directly deal with guiding human behavior and regulating "oughts" and "ought-nots." These sciences, due to their direct connection with human guidance and happiness, inherently fall within the realm of religion and are actually counted as part of religious teachings (Misbah Yazdi, 2010 [A], pp. 118–119).
- **Descriptive sciences** that are reconstructed or interpreted within the framework of divine metaphysical foundations; such as physics, psychology, or sociology, which while

retaining their descriptive nature, are understood within the framework of divine presuppositions. In this sense, the religiousness of science does not mean its direct connection to human happiness, but pertains to the compatibility of its theoretical foundations with a divine worldview.

Accordingly, in Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi's thought, one can on the one hand maintain the objectivity and methodological commonality of descriptive sciences at the level of reality-discovery, and on the other hand raise the possibility of critiquing and revising the metaphysical foundations governing these sciences. These two positions pertain to two different levels of analysis of science and do not conflict with one another; rather, they can be reconciled within a hierarchical framework. Consequently, the Islamization of science in this view, rather than relating to changing the content of empirical propositions, pertains to rethinking the macro-epistemological foundations and frameworks of science.

Conclusion

This research, by systematically rereading Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi's viewpoint, demonstrated that the apparent conflict in some renditions of his opinions stems from conflating two distinct levels of science analysis. The results derived from the hierarchical explanation show that:

- Firstly, at the micro and propositional level, descriptive and empirical sciences—due to their inherent goal of discovering the relations of the world's phenomena—are neutral, and the researcher's faith or disbelief plays no role in the truth-value of their reports.
- Secondly, at the macro and paradigmatic level, these sciences are inevitably bound to rest upon a priori metaphysical and

epistemological foundations. Islamization at this level is not the ideological imposition of beliefs, but the reform and epistemic upgrade of the foundations of science based on demonstrative reason and confirmatory evidence from revelation.

- Thirdly, the teleological distinction shows that the genuine criterion for a science being religious is its intrinsic tie to human eternal happiness. Accordingly, normative sciences are inherently religious, and descriptive sciences are attributed to religion by virtue of resting upon monotheistic foundations. This model provides a coherent framework for resolving the conflict between the methodological independence of empirical science and the necessity of Islamization.

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