

Islamic Ideology

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Obstacles to Belief

This book is intended to make the fundamentals of religion understandable and acceptable to a class of intelligentsia who not having been brought up in the religious tradition doubt either the necessity or the rationality of religion; and it few who have been trained to think philosophically about the ultimate problems wither of morality or of existence in general. Our theologians have lost touch with the heritage handed down to us by great thinkers, some of whom were, at the same time, men of great religious experience. The theologians were considered to be the guardians of religious truth and specialists whose verdict must be accepted as a true exposition of religion but the scientific advance during the last two centuries has left the theologians in the lurch; even the moral consciousness of the theologians had lagged behind the conscience of the elite of the age. The result of the progress of scientific Rationalism was materialistic Naturalism. Nature, was studied in terms of mechanism and mathematics; there was no place in it for any will or purpose. During the course of evolution of religious consciousness, the multiplicity of gods of arbitrary wills was replaced with the idea of One Creator who was Omnipotent and Omniscient and his One God had a will and a purpose. But the Reality for Naturalism had neither will nor purpose. There was no ought in it; there was only a must of purposeless mechanism; the laws of mass and energy produced their effects irrespective of any good or evil; they were amoral and beyond good and evil. The scientific outlook with this world-view gripped almost all intellectuals of every nation, the uniformity of Nature and its deterministic causation had no place for a Good God and Directing Will. God was banished from Universe; He was not needed. Laplace took his book on astronomy to Napoleon in order to flatter the Emperor and get praise or prize for himself. Napoleon glanced through the book and remarked, "How is it that I do not find the name of God in your books?" Laplace replied, "Sire, He was not needed." Laplace was not much wrong within the limits of mathematical physics or astronomy;

to mix up theology with astronomy might vitiate both. It is a good precept. 'Take not the name of Lord thy God in vain.' To talk of divine dispensation and interference during the course of an experiment in a laboratory would tend to vitiate the experiment. Science deals with interphenomenal relations where, for the time being, it would be good if God is not interposed. For the scientific understanding of Nature, God has often been the gapfiller of ignorance; He was the easy explanation of all happenings. The development of Naturalism had to narrow down its sphere of work and its outlook for the purposed of concentration on phenomenal inter-relation. For the scientific outlook only two vital factors were left: mechanistic Nature on the one hand and scientific Reasoning on the other. This Nature and this Reason were the sole realities; they mirrored each other; nothing else existed and nothing else counted. Scientific Reason was the only instrument to grasp truth; what could not be weighed and measured became the non-existent. God and moral values were imponderables and so was the human mind itself. Consciousness which had discovered scientific truths was itself banished from reality; it was neither a noumenon nor a phenomenon, but was called an epiphenomena, an intellectual by-product of the mechanistic causation of the brain cells. Life and Mind must be explained away in terms of matter, which was assumed to be the Ultimate Reality.

The scientific outlook in spite of its narrowness and one-sidedness did enormous service not only in increasing man's knowledge of Nature and control over it, but its overflow into other spheres of culture was also beneficial. From times immemorial the essential ideals of religion had got mixed up with pseudo-scientific, mythological and legendary explanations of the workings of Nature. The fundamental intuition of man that all Truth is one and inter-related led him to mix up things hopelessly; facts were intertwined and confused with values in a most distracting manner. A man who believed

in religion was also expected to believe in all the myths about creation in which the religious truths were wrapped. The man of science when he revolted against religion, his revolt was mainly caused by the clash of his ascertained knowledge of Nature with the myths or allegories in which he was expected to believe as literal truths about cosmological and historical facts. The service done by Science to humanity consists partially in freeing the essentials of religion from pseudo-scientific myths. With the advance of Science the relation between Science and Religion tends to be clarified and the issues become more and more distinct.

The science of every age builds up a philosophy on its top as a superstructure of over-beliefs. Mechanism and Naturalism built up a metaphysics of denials. As Nature was impersonal and scientific reason dealt with Nature impersonally, therefore any personality in man or in the universe was an illusion. All Nature is mathematical and as there is no will in triangles and circles and their properties to follow from the logically and not volitionally therefore, the will in man must be an illusion. All Nature is deterministic, governed by an inexorable Necessity; free-will is an illusion. This is the philosophy of Mechanism and Naturalism.

Mechanistic Naturalism was still in full swing when Biology also began to develop. Vegetable and animal kingdoms were studied more closely with the precision of the scientific method. Revolutionary hypotheses were brought forward. The first shock of any great scientific discovery has always had the effect of dislodging man from his assumed position in the universe. The first shock always made him lose his balance and it takes some time before he is able to effect a reorientation; initially he loses his bearings. This is what happened when the Ptolemaic astronomy was proved to be wrong by Copernicus and the heliocentric theory established itself by dislodging the geocentric theory. Man had always considered his abode, the Earth, as the centre of the universe; the whole drama of creation revolved around his abode and himself; God was specially concerned with him and the history of the earth. The religious outlook was so intertwined with this view of the solar system and the heavenly bodies that the shaking of this astronomical hypothesis meant for many the utter destruction of religious belief. But after some time humanity always some how regained its balance and even clergymen began to say, 'What does it matter to the salvation of man, whether the Earth goes round the sun or the sun goes round the Earth; it is not an essential part of religious belief; Faith lies elsewhere and is secure

from all astronomical hypotheses.' Similar to the repercussions of the Copernican astronomy, the reactions of the Darwinian hypothesis were disturbing to religious belief. The Darwinian hypothesis of the origin of species along with the discoveries of geology created a great stir in the religious belief of the West. The age of the world was not six thousand years and it was not made in six days and the species of plants and animals were not created with their present structures which were [instead] the result of the countless ages of the struggle for existence, of chance variations and the survival of the fittest, where fitness only means brutal capacity to exterminate the opponents ruthlessly and to get adjusted to the environment somehow. Darwin himself made no direct attack upon religion but religious doubts sometimes disturbed him, as it related about him that the sight of the resplendent feathers of the peacock chilled his spine with the doubt whether all this beauty could really be explained away as the product of natural selection. But the hypothesis gripped the whole intellectual world. The geology and biology that had become integral parts of religious belief were lightly waived aside. Religious belief had again to be shifted to safer ground where it could not be attacked by this overwhelming evidence. Copernicus had destroyed the centrality of the Earth and the by disturbed man's privileged position; Darwin further destroyed his dignity by making him a descendent of sub-human creatures and a little more favoured animal than the beasts. Mathematical Astronomy and Physics required no God and made man a helpless and deterministic part of Nature. God was required and man had no special importance. Evolutionistic Biology presumed to explain plant and animal life with all its order and adaptation and beauty as a product of naturalistic forces that were beyond good and evil; there was no ordering Cosmic Consciousness; man, his morality and his values to which he attached eternal and objective importance, were explained away as instruments in the ruthless struggle for existence. Between themselves physics and biology seemed to have done away with religious belief and killed it for all times. But is religion really destroyed once for all and has it now become honestly impossible for a rationalist and a scientific freethinker to believe in religion in any shape? We find, however, that religion is not destroyed and some of the most intellectual men thoroughly acquainted with the achievements of science and appreciating its genuine contribution, still sincerely believe in God with all the implications of such belief. How that is possible will gradually become clear during the course of our exposition in this book.

It may be said in adverse criticism of religion that religion has been saving itself by constant retreat and rear-guard action. It holds tenaciously to certain beliefs as essentials but when those beliefs become untenable though the advance of knowledge the ground is shifted and belief taken to a safer stronghold. But why accuse religion only of this constant shifting of the ground when something is held to be true has become untenable? Scientific method is considered to be the method of the discovery of truth par excellence and it is believed to be concerned with an objective reality. Has not the progress of Science been from error to error or if you please from lesser truth to greater truth? Science started with myths and legends and superstition; so did religion. The progress of humanity has been shedding untruths or mythological explanations from both. It is true that both have been retreating equally before the advancing knowledge of man. Every advance in science characterizes a former hypothesis as an illusion or a myth which explained certain phenomena to some extent for some time. Who can say that Science even at present is completely free of myth and mysteries? With all the limitations of human knowledge and experience, the hypothesis of pure mechanical naturalism is now being gradually superseded. The great biologists say that life cannot be explained in terms of purposeless mechanism; it has a causation sui generis. Psychologists like William James came to the conclusion that mind is more than mere biological life; mental causation and the relation of body to mind cannot be explained in merely biological terms. This may be called either the Retreat of Science or the Advance of Science; it all depends on how you view it.

Science was for centuries mixed up with superstition and magic, and wild speculation, more the product of the imagination of child-humanity than of observation, experiment and reason. Every epoch has done something to free it from these encumbering accretions. Now it is claimed that Science has finally found its ultimate postulates; the scientific outlook and the scientific method are established once and for all. After this there may be new discoveries and new orientations but the fundamental thesis of an ordered Nature amenable to the causal category and mathematical reasoning would not change. An Einstein may alter the view of time and space and may replace Newtonian physics with some more satisfactory explanation; he may replace absolutism by relativity but even the law of relativity is subject to causation and mathematical reasoning and hence absolute, because it is the very nature of law to be

absolute. Science would go on advancing indefinitely and as the infinity of Nature is inexhaustible so will the increasing discovery of its secrets. But the ultimate postulates of science are established once and for all and it is not considered derogatory to science that its earlier theories were replaced by some more satisfactory explanation with the perpetual advance of observation and experiment.

Why should not religious advance be construed in the same manner? Science expresses a fundamental human need, so does religion. Science studies phenomenal facts and their interconnection and as science it need not step over the bounds that it has set for itself. Religion is concerned with value judgments. Science tells us how things happen and in what order; religion tells us the whence and why of these happenings. Science is concerned with only one value, the value of phenomenal truth, the discovery of laws and uniformities. With other values it has no direct concern. Beauty or Goodness or Love and Happiness are not its concern. Nor do absolute beginnings and absolute ends concern it. When it begins to speculate on absolute beginnings and ends it steps into the domains of metaphysics or religion. For science the Ultimate Reality behind phenomena must ever remain unknowable as demonstrated by Kant and Spenser; and from the strictly scientific view-point no such trespass into speculation is allowable. As a Persian poet has put it in a beautiful simile., "Nature is an old book whose title page and introductory leaves giving the purpose of the book and the name of the author have fallen away, and similarly the leaves at the end have dropped off." You can read it only in the intervening pages and make guesses about its authorship, its purpose and the end of the theme. But it is in the nature of man to consider all Reality as one and all knowledge as one, however we may be compelled by our limitations to effect a division of labour and a watertight partition of spheres. Great scientists have always, somehow, not been able to resist the temptation to speculate on the ultimate problems of existence.

We have said that Science has reached its ultimate postulates but reaching them does not mean the end of enquiry; on the other hand, it is only a stable basis for all future advance and the voyage of discovery continues. Could we not say similarly that religion too has reached its ultimate postulates; spiritual progress is indefinitely open to mankind but the fundamental basis of belief won't change.

This is the claim of Islam. Man reached the fundamental religious truth the One God exists and that God is a

creative sustaining and loving God, and human morality is a necessary corollary from this fundamental hypothesis which must develop into Belief, Knowledge, Realisation and Action. All Reality is one and is governed by an order which is at once rational and moral and preserver of all real values. The Qur'an gives this as a fundamental postulate. In whomsoever this belief has entered his heart and soul and is not merely a confession b the tongue, he has attained to Truth and Well-being here and hereafter. *"Whoever submits himself to Allah and he the doer of good (to others), he has his reward from the Lord, and there is no fear for him nor shall he grieve"* (2:112). There are a number of sayings of the Prophet which corroborate it. "Show me a man who from his heart believes in God and I will guarantee salvation for him." Such a man may not necessarily remain a sinless man all of his life. There is a famous Hadith related by the saintly companion of the Prophet, Abu Zar, that the Prophet said that if a man believes there is only One God to be worshipped he is saved and shall enter Paradise. Abu Zar interrogated, 'even if he has committed great sins'; he enquired thrice and the Prophet answered thrice, 'yes, even if he has committed great sins.' The Prophet in all probability meant that such a man may slip into sin now and then, but his heart being in the right place and his outlook on life being true and sound, there is little chance of his becoming an habitual and a hardened sinner. Islam teaches that religion reached its ultimate postulate when in taught humanity to worship one Good God and man has to assimilate His attributes of goodness within human limitation. It is generally known that *La ilaha-ill-Allah* and *Muhammad-ur-Rasulullah* (P.B.U.H.) sums up the religion of Islam; that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) is His Prophet. But every Muslim knows that the essential belief is the belief in One God; the Prophet is a clarifier and practiser of that belief and not an end unto himself. He is a servant of God like all prophets and like all good and believing men. Whoever believes in God also believes and reveres all the great and good men who have shown the Path of Righteousness to man. No Muslim is a true Muslim who believes in one prophet and not in the other; and the test of true prophethood laid down by Islam is believing, preaching and practicing the Unity doctrine. Science has reached its ultimate postulates only recently, but according to Islam religion reached it long ago; with Theism begins true religion and with Theism it end; and the One God was revealed long ago to every civilised nation. *"And there is not a people but a warner has gone among them"* (35:25). This is a doctrine of the fundamental unity of religion in its essentials. Different

people have followed different laws and customs and adopted different modes of worship at different times but the belief in One God was the abiding element of truth. Whenever this truth faded from the minds of a people they become ignorant and unjust, and social injustice and tyranny practiced by them brought upon them the wrath of God. The wages of sin is death and nations that lose the vision of truth perish; vice begins to preponderate over good, ultimately leading to destruction.

When comparing science with religion, some people assert that science is universal, provable, demonstrable and its results exactly predictable while about religion the world is divided into hostile groups. Truth must be universal while religions as believed and practised by different groups contradict one another. The Qur'an has dealt with this question repeatedly and given clear answers. It says Religion too is concerned with Universal Truth: there is only one Religion and all the religions are sects of it; that one True Religion is Belief in the Unity of all Reality and Belief in Moral Order or the essential difference in Good and Evil, the results of which appear both here and hereafter. In whatever creed Islam has found individuals living on the belief it has unstintedly given praise to them and promised them the highest rewards of good life. All religions have a tendency to become fossilized and hardened into orthodoxies claiming monopoly of truth and salvation, barring the door of Paradise to all others who do profess certain doctrines or follow certain rituals, customs or conventions. Islam was aware of this tendency that dogmas are the living faith of the dead that have become the dead faith of the living. In order to warn humanity against this tendency it defined the fundamentals of religion once for all: whenever they are found, truth and well-being are there. Among the communities with which Islam came into direct contact, the Jews and the Christians both claimed monopolies of truth and salvation; those who did not subscribe to their dogmas and doctrines or their mode or worship were destined for perdition.

Let me give a few quotations from the Qur'an to prove what Islam considers to be true and universal religion and how it repudiates all claims to monopoly. *"And they say: None shall enter Paradise except he who is a Jew or Christian. These are their vain desires. Say: Bring your proof if you are truthful. Yea! Whoever submits himself entirely to God and he is the doer of good to others, he has his reward from his Lord, and there is no fear for him nor shall he grieve. And the Jews say that Christians do not follow anything good and the*

Christians say, the Jews do not follow anything good, while they recite the same Book; similar to them are the utterances of those who have no knowledge; (2:111:112:113). God is not the monopoly of any particular people or creed. To Him belong all directions; the conventional or ritualistic turning of faces to this or that direction is relatively immaterial. “*And Allah’s is the East and the West, therefore, whither you turn, thither is Allah’s Face. God is Ample-giving and Knowing*” (2:115). According to the Qur’an living a virtuous life or doing good to others is the chief aim of all religious beliefs and practices. Conventional differences are of little account except as customs and uniformities binding to a particular group socially. “*And every one has a direction to which he turns, but (the essential thing is) hasten to do good works; wherever you are, Allah will bring you all together; surely Allah has power over all things*” (2:148). There is another verse in the Qur’an which not only gives the basis of universal religion but mentions the followers of other creeds explicitly along with the Muslims as upholders of truth and deserving of the attainment of highest well-being, if they only conform to the fundamentals. It is a basis that would unite all the theists of the world who believe in a moral order and as corollary believe in survival and requital. It is again essentially theism and virtue. “*Surely those who believe (i.e. enter the fold of Islamic life) and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in Allah and the last day and does good, they shall have their reward from this Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve*” (2:62). Islam is full of praises of other scriptures and whenever it mentions an essential of religion it says you will find it also in other scriptures. It calls other scriptures Light and Guidance in which essentials of religion are given. It enjoins on all Muslims to revere all prophets, who have anywhere at any time preached the doctrine of One God and social justice.

Islam accepts and responds to the demand of Reality and all Reality is one and therefore all Truth should be one. It invites humanity to the fundamentals of one faith which has no sectarian elements and which makes all modes of worship as of secondary importance. There is no doubt that Islam organised society on a definite plan and created its own conventions; but it has the fullest appreciation of the life of those who somehow have stood outside that system but still have a hold on the essentials.

[1] *Islamic Ideology, The Fundamental Beliefs and*

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