Islam and Philosophy
(Meaning and Relationship)

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Abstract:
Islam is a divine religion. Its basic source of knowledge is revelation but it never ignores to reason and sense perception. In the acquisition of knowledge it considers necessary the use of reason and sense perception along with revelation. The basic and ultimate source of knowledge for Philosophy is reason. Both philosophy and religion (Islam) tries to describe Absolute Reality, man, and universe according to their parameters and within their own limits. Nevertheless there are a number of differences in their connotations and understandings. For example, philosophy is a Greek word and has its own etymological meaning and terminological connotations but for basic Islamic literature i.e. Quran and Hadith, it is absolutely alien, having no roots in Arabic language. In Quran (revealed book of Islam) we find the word ‘Hikmah’ for all intellectual endeavors rather than the word philosophy. For intellectual endeavors of Muslim philosophers/scholars, the term Muslim Philosophy is in fashion. But some western scholars have an objection on the use of this term. According to them there is a contradiction lies in the term ‘Muslim Philosophy’. Because philosophy means a search for absolute reality on purely rational grounds while all religious (Islamic) activities primarily rests on revelation. Prof. Dr. Abdul Khaliq pointed out this issue in his book “Muslim Falsfa(urdँ). In fact Muslim thinkers consider the term Hikmah suitable rather than philosophy. Prof. M.M. Sharif in ‘A History Of Muslim Philosophy’ vol. 1, and Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr in ‘Encyclopedia Of Islamic Philosophy’ vol. 1, have presented important work in respect of these discussions. What are the meanings of Hikmah? What is the relationship between Philosophy and Hikmah? Is the word ‘philosophy’ suitable for intellectual pursuits of the Muslim scholars? This article is an effort to answer these questions.

Key Words: Philosophy, Hikmah, Theoretical, Practical, Material, Spiritual, Humankind
Philosophy

i. Meanings

Let us start our discussion from the etymological meaning, definition, and scope of philosophy. The word ‘philosophy’ is a combination of two Greek words i.e. ‘philo’ and ‘sophy’. In the beginning ‘philo’ was philla or ‘philia’ and ‘sophy’ was ‘sophos or sophia’. ‘Philia’ means ‘love’ and ‘Sophia’ or Sophos means ‘wisdom’. So etymologically philosophy means ‘love of wisdom’ or ‘search for wisdom’.

As far as the terminological meaning or definition of philosophy is concerned, different philosophers of different ages with different cultural, geographical and historical background and with different religious and ideological perspective have defined it in different ways. Despite of all these differences, Absolute Reality/ God, man, and universe are the most common issues for all the philosophers of all the times.

ii. Definition

Here we give a brief account of the definitions of different renowned philosophers of different ages. Although Heraclitus defined philosophy absolutely in a different way by saying that “Philosophy is a sacred disease.”

Now we present an abstract of definitions of different scholars which is mostly common in different scholars of the different ages.

- “To give a speculative, systematic, complete view of reality;
- To describe the ultimate, real, nature of reality;
- To determine the limits, scope, source, nature, validity, and value, of knowledge
- The critical inquiry regarding the presuppositions, and claims, made by the different fields of knowledge; and
- A discipline to get you to see what you say and say what you see.”

From all these definitions we may conclude that the very nature of philosophy is theoretical. No doubt it tries to describe the nature of Absolute Reality. It also discusses about Man and Universe. It endeavors to discover the relationship between Absolute Reality, Man, and Universe but in all these pursuits its attitude is always speculative and theoretical. As we have
narrated in previous lines the etymological meaning of philosophy is “love of wisdom” or “search for wisdom”. The basic tool or primary source for philosophy is ‘reason’. It guides a person towards reality and truth. Metaphysics, Epistemology, and Axiology are the main fields of activity for philosophy. Further in axiology it provides the parameters and standards for

- Valid thinking
- Beauty and
- Good and Bad (i.e. Moral and Immoral)

But despite of all this guidance the nature of philosophy is hypothetical and it never compels a being to follow its direction. It is all according to the demand of its nature and the compulsions on a being for does and don’ts are out of its scope.

Islam

Islam is a divine religion. It’s basic source of knowledge is revelation. Along with revelation it considers also necessary to reason and sense perception in the acquisition of knowledge. The fundamental principles of Islam are faith in:

- “Tauhid-Oneness of Almighty Allah
- Finality of the Prophecy of Holy the Prophet Muhammad(SAWW)
- Quran-a book revealed by Allah on his last Prophet Muhammad(SAWW)
- All previous Prophets and their revealed books
- Angels
- The Day of Judgment
- Reward and punishment and
- Life here after” (Tahir, 2012)

When a person enters in Islam by reciting the Kaima e Tayyiba-the Muslim confession of faith (i.e. witness of the Oneness of Almighty Allah and Prophecy of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAWW) and having a faith in above fundamentals then he is bound to fulfill all religious duties and obey all commands of Almighty Allah which are known as off-shoots or practical parts of religious doctrines: Salat-prayer, Roza-fast, Hajj-pilgrimage, Zakat/Khums-different kinds and forms of charity, Jihad-defense, Amr bil maroof wa nahi anil munkar-to order the doing of good and to prohibit the bad. The gist of all these religious practices is the obedience of Almighty Allah and service of the humankind. All the aspects of human life whether they are related with this world or with the life hereafter have been guided by
religion. (M.M.Sharif, 1983) So the basic spirit of Islam, Quran, and the teachings of the Holy Prophet (SAWW) is practical. Allama Dr. Muhammad Iqbal has described it in these words.

“Quran is a book which emphasis deed rather than idea.”(Iqbal, 1989)

Islam and Philosophy

The nature of philosophy and philosophical thinking is theoretical and speculative while the aim of religion is to change the attitude, behavior and life style of his followers and in this way to revolutionize the society. So there is a basic difference between the aims and objects of both philosophy and religion.

In the early centuries of Islam, Muslim scholars started the study of all treasuries of knowledge from all over the world. They specifically put their emphasis on the study of Greek Philosophy. Along with other ideologies, theories, and philosophies they translated Greek Philosophy in to Arabic. They wrote commentaries and anthologies on the writings of celebrated Greek masters like Plato and Aristotle. In this way they contributed in these dimensions. They

- Introduced Greek Philosophy in Arabic language
- Described, elucidated, and explained the ideas of Plato and Aristotle
- Contributed in philosophy by criticizing the ideas of Plato and Aristotle
- Built their own philosophies and systems of thought which were developed on the fundamentals of Islam and enriched by all other treasuries of knowledge

Term ‘Philosophy’ and Muslim Thought

In the beginning, the Muslim scholars used the term philosophy for their intellectual endeavors but with the passage of time they realized that the term ‘philosophy’ comparatively had a limited scope than religion. Although the definitions of philosophy by Greek philosophers impressed them in the beginning but they soon realized that the nature of philosophy was theoretical, speculative, and hypothetical. While on the other hand the temperament of religion is realistic. So at the early stage of their philosophical career they understood that the word ‘Philosophy’ was not sufficient for their intellectual pursuits. They started to use a Quranic word ‘Hikmah’ for their intellectual activities. In the beginning they used the term ‘Philosophy’ along with ‘Hikmah’. But gradually they replaced the term ‘Philosophy’ with a Quranic word ‘Hikmah’. It has a wider perspective and comprehensive connotations. It encircles all aspects of human life whether they related with this world or
with the life hereafter. Almighty Allah has used this word approximately 118 times in Quran in different shades. His one of the attributive names is also ‘Hakim’ (the Wise). (Al-Quran, 16:60) (There are number of verses of Holy Quran in this respect but I have referred only one.) Similarly among attributive names of Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAWW) one is also Hakim. Allah declared to Quran as the book of ‘Hikmat’ (the book of wisdom). (Al-Quran, 22:2) Almighty Allah in Quran held the purpose of His Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAWW) as the teaching of Book and ‘Hikmah’. (Al-Quran, 62:1) The main subject of Quran is human being and the main object of all the teachings of Islam is the betterment and welfare of humankind. What is ‘Hikmah’? Almighty Allah has described it as the sum of all good.

“He grants wisdom to whom he pleases, and whoever is granted wisdom, he indeed is given a great good…” (M.H. Shakir)

So with this religious perspective and with these comprehensive and multidimensional connotations the term ‘Hikmah’ was most suitable for Muslim thinkers. Consequently it took the way in Muslim thought all over the centuries. Dr Syed Hossein Nasr has pointed out another aspect that the term ‘Philosophy’ became more alien after the renaissance in the West. After renaissance the West put its emphasis on reason and sense perception only. A movement of negation of metaphysics was also instituted in the West. Now the negation of religion was a new job for reason and sense perception. In this way an unbridgeable gulf developed between religion and philosophy on one hand and between religion and science on the other hand. So this trend of the Western scholars sounded a belief in Muslim thinkers of this age that the ‘term Philosophy’ was not suitable for their intellectual activities and ‘Hikmah’ is an only proper term to reflect the essence of their endeavors. (Nasr, 2002)

Philosophy and ‘Hikmah’ in the Writings of Muslim Thinkers

Al-Kindi (ca. 800–870 CE) was the first Arab Philosopher. (plato.stanford.edu/entries/al-kindi)

Al-Kindi (ca. 800–870 CE), was the great and the foremost Philosopher of the Arab. He is considered as the founder of Muslim philosophy. The classical era of Muslim thought started from Al-Kindi. The most prominent figure of the Muslim thought from 17th century to till now is Mulla Sadra. (www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/396809/Mulla-Sadra) Al-Kindi to Mulla Sadra and from Mulla Sadra to till now all renowned Muslim thinkers put their
emphases on both i.e. theoretical and practical, and material and spiritual aspects of knowledge and personality of a being. Due to this they defined philosophy as:

- Theoretical and Practical (Al-Kindi)
- Based on certainty and opinion (Farabi)
- Perfection of the human soul (Ibn Sina)
- Relationship between theoretical aspect and practical dimensions (Ismaili)
- Words and deeds in accordance with knowledge (Ikhwan al Safa)
- Purification of the soul (Suhrawardi-Hikmat al ishraq) and
- Perfecting of the human soul (Mulla Sadra-Al-Hikmat al mutaaliyah) (Nasr, 2002)

**Conclusion**

Ancient Muslim philosophers studied independently and freely all existing ideologies and philosophies of their time. Fundamental principles of Islam were in the foundation of their all intellectual activities. The basic character of all the teachings of Islam is realistic. Quran puts the emphasis on dynamism and urges to revolutionize the society. The nature of philosophical activities is theoretical and speculative. So Muslim philosophers from the very beginning changed their stance in this respect and started to use ‘Hikmah’ instead of philosophy which is a multi-dimensional term and encircles all theoretical and practical, and material and spiritual aspects of knowledge and personality of a being.
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