

مکاتیب

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جناب ایڈیٹر ماہنامہ الشریعہ
السلام علیکم

ماہنامہ الشریعہ اس وقت الحمد للہ بہت سے فکری موضوعات کے لیے اہل علم و فکر کے درمیان علمی مباحثے کے لیے ایک انتہائی سنجیدہ فورم کا کردار ادا کر رہا ہے۔ چونکہ الشریعہ کے قارئین بھی تقریباً سبھی اہل علم احباب ہیں، اس لیے خیال ہوا کہ سوویت یونین کے خلاف افغان جہاد کے حوالے سے معروف صحافی سلیم صافی کے کالم کا طالب علمانہ جواب آپ کے اور الشریعہ کے تمام اہل نظر قارئین کی خدمت میں پیش کر دوں۔ امید ہے مضمون آپ کے اور الشریعہ کے قارئین کی نظر التفات کے قابل ہوگا۔

اکرم تاشیفین

کالم نگار ماہنامہ شریعت

(ترجمان امارت اسلامیہ، افغانستان)

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This is in reference to the essay by Muhammad Abdullah Shariq titled "Ghazali aur Ibn Rushd ka Qaziyyah" in last two issues of Al-Shariah.

The premise of the essay is flimsy, since the author aims to defend Ghazali against a hypothetical attack without caring to cite even one source. In fact, there is more than one way in which criticisms have been extended on Ghazali from variety of perspectives such as scientific, philosophical or religious, some of which may are given as,

1. Less informed and reductionist criticisms by the so-called Muslim rationalists or modernists.

2. Minimalist critical attempts by Non-Muslims (including atheists) who kind of see Ghazali-Averroes tussle as a manifestation of struggle between dogma and rationalism.
3. Nuanced criticisms waged from the point of view of extending critique on Asharite cosmology and the nature of its causal underpinnings.
4. Formal all-encompassing criticisms from epistemological point of views where Ghazali and Averroes seem to be coming from different paradigms as far as theory of knowledge is concerned; of course, there are also far reaching sociological implications as different Weltanschauungs are seem to be purported.

In my humble view, the author is only defending Ghazali against the first kind of criticisms but that too remains elusive to a reader who is already aware about this classical historical debate. As far as the less informed lay-reader is concerned, the whole exposition besides being misleading, presents a simplistic and distorted picture of Muslim intellectual activity in medieval period, as well as history of philosophy and science as well.

Consequently, these Muslim intellectuals are shown by the author to belong to two distinct camps, that is, those who didn't involve themselves with ultimate metaphysical questions and those who did. Of course, this is certainly his authorial discretion; however the division presented by the author is generally superfluous. It is merely a matter of fact and interest that some of them cared to indulge in metaphysics and others restricted themselves to pure empirical disciplines. The author does not care to note the fact that it was primarily the Greek science that was passed to Arabs through the translation movement; and because the complete medieval scientific tradition was deeply rooted in Hellenistic philosophy, its metaphysical foundation could not be just overlooked. Moreover, if it is not entirely erroneous, it is at least remarkably arguable and simplistic to attribute an original compartmentalization of knowledge in physics and metaphysics within the Greek paradigm.

Therefore, when we analyze the whole intellectual tradition of medieval era,

it is merely a matter of interest that Al-Farabi, Al-Jahiz, Al-Kindi, Ibn Tufail, Avicenna or Averroes indulged in humanistic disciplines and others (some of which the author mentioned) indulged in empirical disciplines. In fact, all of them were polymaths in varying degrees and were essentially multidisciplinary. Considering for instance the case of Muhammad Bin Zakariah Razi - whom the author chooses to introduce as an example of his contributions in Chemistry - which student of Muslim medieval philosophical tradition is not aware of the infamous Rhazes, the so-called free-thinker? Hasn't he written scores of works on metaphysical questions? Wasn't he declared a heretic and a free-thinker by the religious zealots of his time? Or if Abbas Ibn Farnas - whom the author erroneously mentions as Muslim Ibn Faras - is better known as the first aviator (arguably), he was also a physician and musician; and if author chooses to present Albeiruni as a representative indulgence in Geometry, he is far better known as an Indologist too.

A more realistic and plausible contention, therefore, is that all of these myriad intellectuals were multidisciplinary polymaths. As unbiased readers of Muslim tradition we must be able to rise above the medieval herseography, try to get into the shoes of Avicenna, Averroes or Ibn Tufail's, and empathetically view them struggling with the onslaught of the challenge of Hellenistic tradition.

Considering that the author himself acknowledges the historical convergence of science and philosophy as a single academic discipline, his subsequent insistence on division between utilitarian-empirical and metaphysical-philosophical seems superfluous. Of course, he is right in contending that Ghazali is targeting the arguments which affect the religious side of truth; however, he refuses to acknowledge that inquisitive human minds are seldom able to compartmentalize truth in this vulgar fashion to keep its higher dimensions and purely utilitarian sides separately. It is a feat only achieved by ordinary masses the or exceptionally extraordinary minds such as Ghazali himself. It is no wonder, then, that his immediate detractors, for instance Averroes, find it hard to interweave all threads of his thought into a common fabric. Hence, it is not merely an

acerbic disparaging comment, when Averroes contended that,

"He was an Asharite with the Asharites, a sufi with the sufis, and a philosopher with the philosophers, so that he was like a man in the following verse:

One day you are a Yamanite, when you meet a man of Yaman

But when you meet a man of Ma'add, you assert you are from Adnan"

Moreover, if Muslim culture and civilization end up being compartmentalized and atomistic in terms of knowledge and thought, and being proud of it too, Ghazali deserves to take a large part of the blame. That however, is fortunately arguable and in recent few decades, it has been extensively shown that there is a lot more unification of thought in Ghazali then classically perceived.

More remarkably, when seen from a philosophical and scientific standpoint, the present review of Ghazali - Averroes dispute ends up making a case against any possibility of finding a holistic unified trend of Ghazalian scheme. Taking for instance the author's claim that Ghazali is not refuting 'science'. Can such a claim be warranted without any objective definition of science? Authors bent on classical discourse must realize that those who criticize Ghazali are basically coming with their own definitions of science and how it attempts to answer the questions related to higher reality and ultimate fabric of the universe, its origin as well as its destiny. Any reading of Ghazali-Averroes dispute disregarding these intricate issues, not attempting to disentangle them neatly and bordering on polemics through boisterous ridicule against supposed philosophers and scientists would prove to be simply reductionist, just like its counterparts in radical scientism and New Age militant atheism.

At the same time, it is pertinent to argue that among the two Ghazali is perhaps more novel even in his system of natural philosophy - whatever than can be deduced from his writings such as Tahafah or Iqtisad fi al-Aitiqaad - as compared to Averroes who is primarily an interpreter indulged in Aristotelian exegesis. The comparison, however, is incomplete

and unfair to Averroes unless we try to see the so-called dispute from their respective standpoints.

If Ghazali, who is primarily speaking from the position of a theological defense, aims to safeguard religious belief from speculative contamination of philosophers - specifically targeting Al-Farabi and Avicenna -, Averroes takes it as an attack on the whole Peripatetic tradition and appropriately rises to its defense. While Ghazali is justified in his objection to the notion of eternity of world as it conflicts with the omnipotent agency of God, Averroes is not entirely wrong in his notion of differentiation between temporal and eternal agents. Can we speak of qualitative aspect of time, or for that matter time itself, when ascribing action to God? Is it temporally sensible at all to utter that God suddenly created the world? Does God differentiate between this hour and next hour in terms of quality, since he is beyond a notion of temporality at first place? When Ghazali extends the analogy of a hungry man, sitting ambivalent in front of two similar dates, confronted with the choice, Averroes questions whether it's truly a choice between dates or between eating and not eating since there is nothing in the qualitative domain that differentiates one date from the other; as soon as we are forced to make a qualitative difference, it would not remain a choice between two similar options. While Ghazali is creating a space in natural philosophy for God as an active agent, Averroes keeps falling back to the problem of differentiating between God's will and His knowledge.

In the same manner, through juxtaposing their texts, we can visualize them debating complex issues related to agency, nominalism, contingency, causation, the nature of soul and cosmology. It is also important to note for the sake of completion that their exchange is not restricted to these two books but Averroes extensively quotes Al-Ghazali in his other works as well, sometimes questioning his theories and at other times presenting them in support of some contention. As a recent commentator on their interaction aptly notes, Ghazali gave birth to a new philosophy while criticizing philosophies of his predecessors. Averroes, on the other hand, never projects himself as someone too sure on his convictions. If all his literature is reduced to a singular contention, it would be an unassailable belief that

divinely revealed knowledge cannot be in contradiction with acquired knowledge through reflection and reason.

Lastly, in my humble opinion, if the underlying contention by religious intelligentsia is to call for submission of scientific discourse to a so-called Shar'i limits, it is not warranted, may it be through rational or theological justifications. One both these grounds, such a demand would remain questionable unless a curious soul is forced to submit in front of an ecclesiastical order, as in medieval Christianity. Quran incessantly calls man to search for truth within himself and outside in the universe. As Iqbal notes in the start of his celebrated lectures, the ultimate nature of this world, its permanence or extinction, our relationship to it and our conduct are important questions equally belonging to the domains of religion, philosophy and higher-poetry. And even though science can afford to ignore or forget the underlying metaphysics, religion can hardly function without an ultimate reconciliation of human experience with his environment.

Since the advent of modernity, most of these questions are now being increasingly thrown into the domain of science, or at least being equally commented upon from a scientific standpoint. In this respect, while a post-modern inclination towards scientism and the so-called new-age Atheism is unwarranted on purely intellectual grounds, arguing for a regulated or coerced compartmentalization of knowledge for theological considerations is equally unjustifiable. Science does have its metaphysical foundations and inherent in its spirit of enquiry is the resolve that it cannot simply remain indifferent to higher aspects of reality, restricting strictly to the questions of utilitarian domains. One thing we learn from Averroes, Ghazali and other Muslim philosophers is the spirit of enquiry and the resolve to defend their faith in an unseen higher reality when challenged by science or philosophy. Liberals as well as conservatives in Muslim societies must learn to look beyond the heresiographic aspects of medieval disputes and instead reflect upon the right questions of contemporary relevance.

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