

ON THE INTERSECTION OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION: A Critical Analysis of Abdulkarim Soroush's Thought

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Abstract: The idea of producing religious science is known not only in Iran and the Islamic world but also in the Western world. This idea has created movements in the Western world and the Islamic world in the field of science production, which are mainly divided into three perspectives. In the sources of science production, a group has given originality to *naqli* (narrative) knowledge, a group to human knowledge and experimental sciences, and the third group confirmed both views and considered the way to acquire knowledge to be both intellect and narration. Abdulkarim Soroush is among those who have given originality to experimental sciences and knowledge in this field. In this article, an attempt is made to explain the nature of religious science with a descriptive-analytical method, examine and explain Soroush's point of view, and state his bases and arguments in explaining this theory, and finally to criticize his point of view. Confusion of the two authorities of demonstration and confirmation, failure to provide a criterion for judging between religion and human knowledge in times of conflict, and the invalidity of generalizing historical evidence to all ages are some of the things that undermine the acceptance of Soroush's theory.

Keywords: Abdulkarim Soroush; Religious Science; Experimental Sciences; Science; Religion.

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Introduction

The "possibility of religious science" discussion has a history of more than two centuries; its roots grew from the beginning of the discussion of the separation of science and religion and the confrontation between human knowledge and Christian knowledge in the West, and the result was the marginalization of religion for a century.¹ During this time, science made significant progress, and this caused science and religion to be completely separated from each other; and even appear contradictory. For this reason, the discussion about religious science has caused challenges; because the atmosphere of emergence and appearance of contemporary experimental sciences has been mainly non-religious, and therefore the talk of combining science and religion becomes controversial. For this reason, some thinkers in the scientific and philosophical fields condemn any combination of science and religion as meaningless.

Three main views have been proposed about the possibility of religious science: first, a group has given the originality to narrated (*naqli*) teachings and they think that all sciences should be extracted from the source of narrated and revealed teachings; second, a group has also given originality to human knowledge and experimental science, and they place revelation teachings under human knowledge, and they believe in the separation of the field of discovery and judgment; and third, a group also believes in the combination of the two mentioned views and believes that the way to acquire knowledge is through both revealed teachings and experimental sciences.

¹ Francis Adyanga Akena, "Critical Analysis of the Production of Western Knowledge and Its Implications for Indigenous Knowledge and Decolonization," *Journal of Black Studies* 43, no. 6 (2012): 599-619. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23414661>.

Abdulkarim Soroush is one of the believers in the second point of view and has discussed and explained this in his numerous works. From Soroush's point of view, the criterion in science is experimental science, and the method of acquiring knowledge and validating and judging science is experience. Also, according to the statement of "*Qabẓ wa Bāst' Sharia*" in religious knowledge, religion is constant, but people's understanding in acquiring religious knowledge is variable and human expectations from religion are minimal.

The discussion about religious science was generally raised about two hundred years ago with the entry of western science into the Islamic world and caused reactions against the acceptance of new science in the Islamic world. In the past, the sciences enjoyed harmony and were all placed in a metaphysical framework. Still, gradually with the scientific stagnation of the Islamic world and the emergence of new science, the separation of the field of science and religion was proposed.

In the western world, the relationship between science and religion has a long history, and the turning point of this movement goes back to the most important dispute between Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) and the church.² In the 18th century, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) raised the issue of science and religion, which in the 19th century led to the formation of materialistic thoughts and opposition to the basis of religion.³ At the beginning of the 20th century, the two currents of Freudism and Positivism further weakened religion, but in the last few decades, due to reasons such as: clarifying the shortcomings of the negative effects of secular science, the weakening of materialism, the fact that science is

² Ronald L. Numbers (ed.) *Galileo Goes to Jail and Other Myths about Science and Religion* (Harvard University Press, 2009). <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjghtcb>. D. B. Wilson, "Galileo's Religion Versus the Church's Science? Rethinking the History of Science and Religion," *Physics in Perspective* 1 (1999), 65–84. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s000160050006>.

³ Christopher J. Insole, "Kant on Christianity, Religion and Politics: Three Hopes, Three Limits", *Studies in Christian Ethics* 29, no. 1 (2016), 14–33. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0953946815611111>. Douglas R. McGaughey, "Kant on Religion and Science: Independence or Integration?," *Zygon* 41, no. 3 (2006): 727–746. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9744.2005.00771.x>.

based on metaphysical assumptions, etc., we are witnessing the revival of religion and spirituality in various ways. While in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, religion was left aside in scientific societies, in the last few decades, the bad consequences of such science became an incentive for the tendency towards religious science; because it turned out that science, apart from ethics and spirituality, has endangered human life and created a separation between science and religion.⁴ Although science is a means of domination of power, domination over tools without direction is dangerous, and science itself cannot give this direction. At the same time, religion can create the right direction with its intellectual and value tools. It also became clear that science could not answer some of our fundamental questions. Reasonable questions such as the purpose of the universe, the nature of knowledge, etc.

Nourani and Parsania (2018), in the article “Comparative Comparison of the Views of Soroush and Shahid Motahhari Regarding the Conceptual Coordinates of Religious Science,” have examined and compared the views of Soroush and Shahid Motahhari regarding the coordinates of religious science. Moāyedi and others (2022), in the article “Criticism of the Relationship between Empirical Science and Worldview from the Perspective of Abdulkarim Soroush,” criticized Soroush’s views on the relationship between ontology and empirical sciences. So far, no research has been done that thoroughly explains the foundations, elements, and interaction between science and religion, and eventually offers the theory of Soroush and lastly criticizes it, and this research with such an aim strives to address these problems.

What are the coordinates of religious science from Soroush’s point of view? What are the basics of Soroush in authenticating experimental sciences in the production of religious science? According to Soroush’s point of view, what is the relationship between science and religion? What are the

⁴ David Riesman, “Freud, Religion, and Science,” *Chicago Review* 8, no. 1 (1954): 18–45. <https://doi.org/10.2307/25293007>. Brayton Polka, “Freud, Science, and the Psychoanalytic Critique of Religion: The Paradox of Self-Referentiality,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62, no. 1 (1994): 59–83. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1465556>.

solutions for the production of religious science from Soroush's point of view? What criticisms does Soroush's view face?

The Nature of Religious Science

According to one of the explanations, religious science does not mean sciences such as jurisprudence, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *Kalām* and ḥadīth science, although they are known as religious sciences; rather, today it means propositions and empirical knowledge, including human sciences and natural sciences, which are attributed to religion in a way; which is referred to as "religious science." Based on this, religious science consists of a collection of informative and descriptive propositions as well as recommended and prescriptive teachings, which, while having all the characteristics of science, also have religious factors and elements. These elements give science a religious identity, but what are the effective elements and factors in the religiousness of science and what is the role and contribution of each in the religiousization of science is one of the issues that have become the origin of different views and approaches.⁵

Regarding the definitions of "religious science," it should be noted that there are various interpretations of religious science among thinkers. Shahid Motahhari, in the definition of religious science, states: "the comprehensiveness and completeness of Islam require that we call every useful and functional science that is necessary and good for the Islamic society as religious science."⁶ Meanwhile, according to Golshani's view, he said: "If the study of nature, society and man is done within the framework of religious worldview, we call it religious science, and if it is done without religious worldview, we call it secular science."⁷

Khosrow Panah states in a definition that religious science refers to a science that is compiled to explain and

⁵ Hossein Bustan, *A Step towards Religious Science* (Qom: Howzā Research Center, 2005), 123-130.

⁶ Mehdi Golshani, *From Secular Science to Religious Science* (Tehran: Research Institute of Human Sciences and Cultural Studies, 2006), 33-34.

⁷ Mehdi Golshani, "Does Religious Science Have Meaning?" *Journal of the Howzab and University* 5, no. 16 and 17 (1998), 28.

interpret the Qur'ān and Sunnah.⁸ In other words, pure religious ideas, sciences and knowledge are obtained from fundamental principles and teachings and are obtained from the interpretation and explanation of the Qur'ān and Sunnah.⁹ In another definition, “sciences that have matured and grown in the culture and civilization of Islamic societies; like medicine, mathematics, astronomy and other Islamic sciences are defined as religious science.”¹⁰ In another definition, they state that religious science means a kind of connection between science and religion. In such a way that the fundamental teachings of religion are considered as the presuppositions of science, and by relying on these presuppositions and being inspired by them, thinkers provided hypotheses about the subjects under study.¹¹

These hypotheses have two dimensions; on the one hand, it is inspired by religious teachings and on the other hand, it is the result of scholars' processing.¹² According to the defenders of this view, science cannot be neutral and free from epistemological, ontological, metaphysical and ideological presuppositions; therefore, the process of science can start with religious contexts.¹³

After summarizing various definitions, it can be said about religious science: Religious science is a science that is either directly derived from religious texts or inspired by epistemological foundations and religious sources or that it is the result of human experimental and acquired activities on the condition of compliance with religious principles and foundations. Therefore, sciences that are produced by different methods incompatible with religious teachings or used to weaken religious teachings and beliefs cannot be considered religious science.

⁸ Abdul Hossein Khosrow Panah, *New Theology* (Qom: Qom Seminary Center for Cultural Studies and Research, 2000), 361.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 362.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Khosrow Bagheri, “Account of Religious Science in the Geometry of Religious Knowledge”, *Journal of Book Review* 69, no. 1 (2013), 34.

¹² Khosrow Bagheri, “The Reason for Naming Religious Science”, *Misbah* 35, no. 1 (2000), 53.

¹³ Panah, *New Theology*, 358.

According to this definition, all scientists, including religious and experimental scientists, must always look with two eyes; on the one hand, believe in the authenticity of the revelation teachings and adapt all sciences and their results to the revelation teachings, and on the other hand, they should pay attention to scientific achievements and human intellectual efforts and consider the requirements and needs of the time and elements, and consider these two bases in the engineering of the cultural and scientific system and the reconstruction of religious knowledge.

The issue of religious science should be considered as a possibility, and its necessity should not be a threat to push science out of its desired path or be considered as an opportunity for the expansion of the religion. Rather, it should also be given the possibility that religious science is a great opportunity to boast of science and a threat to religion's health.¹⁴

It can be acknowledged that religious science is a link between science and religion, and in the term, it can be said: "It is a religious science that is either inspired by revelation teachings or is compatible with religious propositions."

Religious Science from Abdulkarim Soroush's Thought

From Soroush's point of view, the issue of the Islamization of science can ultimately be considered identical to the ideological interpretation, and the relationship between science and religion and the possibility of religious science should be examined from this point of view. In terms of historical background, he returns this issue to the renaissance era and its developments. Of course, he considers this issue to be the same as the scholasticization of sciences in the former Soviet Union. He goes on to say that making religious thoughts or, according to him, schooling science is caused by various motivations.¹⁵ From his point of view, the first motivation for making science a school is the strong faith in

¹⁴ Khosrow Bagheri, *Identity of Religious Science* (Tehran: Publications of the Ministry of Guidance and Islamic Culture, 2003), 12.

¹⁵ Abdulkarim Soroush, *Islam and Social Sciences: A Critique on the Religiousization of Science, Collection of Articles on Religious Science, Views and Considerations* (Tehran: Sārāt Cultural Institute, 2011), 57.

one's school, which deals with human life, and everything is sacrificed in this way, even the individual's intellect and expertise. The second motivation is to consider one's own school and thought as the right school; and the third motivation is to consider one's school as comprehensive, so there is the idea of answering any question about anything in the mentioned religion or school.¹⁶ After expressing these motivations, he examined the relationship between science and religion based on the definition of science in terms of subject, method, or goal. He considered the possibility of reconciliation between these two categories to be impossible. He has examined this matter through three concepts and in two positions: proving the position of the soul and proving the realization and reality of that matter.¹⁷

Soroush considers science to be exclusive to experimental sciences and finally concludes that the effort to make science religious is futile, considering the historical record; therefore, from Soroush's point of view, the issue of religious science is paradoxical.¹⁸

Soroush has many works in which he deals with the issue of the religiousization of sciences or Islamization of sciences and universities. In this article, an attempt is made to defend the possibility of religious science, as one of the opponents of religious science, in the shadow of Soroush's concepts of science, religion, and the relationship between science and religion in his written literature, and to present a solution for the production of religious science.

The Elements of Abdulkarim Soroush's Theory

Soroush's thought is based on an element that can be considered mainly on the axis of his definitions of religious science, the theory of religious knowledge and the relationship between religion and science. After explaining the meaning of

¹⁶ Abdulkarim Soroush, *Expansion of Prophetic Experience* (Tehran: Sārāt Cultural Institute, 2010), 111.

¹⁷ Seyyed Hamidreza Hassani, et al., *Religious Science: Views and Considerations* (Qom: Howzā Research Center, Fifth Edition, 2011), 204.

¹⁸ Abdulkarim Soroush, *Tafarij Sunā: Discourses on Ethics, Industry, and Human Science* (Tehran: Sārāt Cultural Institute, Eighth Edition, 2009), 32.

Soroush from the mentioned concepts, we will explain his theory.

First is *epistemology*. Soroush offers two definitions of science (*ilm*) and states that: today, in Persian and Arabic, the word “science” is used in two different meanings, and neglecting this type of usage has often led to huge misunderstandings: first, the main and first meaning of science is knowing against not knowing. All things to be known, regardless of their type, are called knowledge, and a person who is not ignorant is called a scholar. According to this meaning, ethics, mathematics, jurisprudence, grammar, religion, biology, and astronomy are all sciences; anyone who knows one or more of them is considered a science; second, the word science in the second sense refers exclusively to knowledge that involves direct sensory experience in their judgment or collection. Here, science is not opposed to ignorance but to all knowledge that is not testable. Ethics, mysticism, metaphysics, *usūl*, etc., are all outside of science in its second sense, and all of them are non-scientific in this sense. The English word “science” is equivalent to this meaning of science in English and French.¹⁹

The growth of science in the second sense is from the beginning of the Renaissance period onwards, while science in the absolute sense of consciousness (the first meaning) was born with the birth of humanity.²⁰ Experience is the basis of science, but not every direct, universal, and repeatable sensory experience is the basis of science, not personal and unique internal experiences.²¹

Regarding the purpose of science, he says: I imagine that the only purpose of science is to find satisfactory interpretations for the phenomena that require interpretation that we encounter.²² In fact, part of the work of theoretical science is interpretation, and part of it is practical, forecasting and technical application.

¹⁹ Abdulkarim Soroush, *What is Science? What is Philosophy?* (Tehran: Sārāt Cultural Institute, Second Edition, 2008), 23.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

²² *Ibid.*

Finally, after dividing science into two positions of demonstration and confirmation, Soroush believes that in the position of demonstration, science has only one meaning, but in the position of confirmation, it is influenced by culture, religion, etc. He defines science as follows: "Science consists of inventing new theories and tirelessly evaluating their ability to show new experiences. The goal of scientists is not to discover absolute certainty but to discover better theories that can be subjected to more rigorous tests, and the meaning of all these words is that our theories must be falsifiable. It is only through their falsification that science progresses."²³

The second is *theology*. Soroush states: "When discussing religion, we usually have two meanings in mind. One is religion in the sense of religious activities and the other is religion in the sense of religious beliefs. Religion, as religious activities, is the face of religion that has been manifested externally and socially. People who pray, fast, engage in discussions and arguments with followers of other religions, etc., are all engaged in religious activities. Still, religion also has an inner face, which is related to the set of beliefs and faith of people towards religious teachings."²⁴

Third is *religious knowledge (ma'rifah)*. Another important pillar of Soroush's theory is his view on religious knowledge. In the field of religious knowledge, Soroush claims that religious knowledge is relative. He believes that religious knowledge is human knowledge, and human knowledge has a general relationship with each other, so religious knowledge, as human knowledge, is related and compatible with non-religious knowledge. Therefore, it is relative, complete, and contemporary. Soroush says: "What changes is people's understanding of Sharia, and what remains constant is Sharia itself."²⁵

Here, first of all, we point out the foundations and pillars of religious knowledge from Soroush's point of view,

²³ Ibid., 219.

²⁴ Abdulkarim Soroush, "Religion and Freedom" (Source: Speech of Dr. Abdulkarim Soroush, Shahid Beheshti University [1995/05/21], *Kiyān Magazine* 33 (1995), 43.

²⁵ Abdulkarim Soroush, *Theory of Qabẓ wa Bast' Sharia* (Tehran: Sārāt Cultural Institute, Second Edition, 1992), 181.

and in the next step, we discuss each of them separately and briefly.

Elements of the theory of “*Qabẓ wa Bāst*’ Sharia” (Evolution of Religious Knowledge) include: first, religion and religious knowledge are two different things; second, religion is a fixed thing and does not accept any changes; third, religious knowledge itself is a kind of human knowledge; fourth, human knowledge is related to each other; fifth, human knowledge is changing; and sixth, the evolution of human knowledge is evolutionary, not regressive.

Soroush has explained these elements in his various works. In short, it can be said that what he means by these elements are: the first element: religion and religious knowledge are two different things, religion is different from religious knowledge; and the second element: Religion is a fixed thing and does not accept any change: that is, what can change is religious knowledge, not religion itself.

According to the book *The Theory of the Evolution of Religious Knowledge*, in the explanation of these two elements, it can be said that religion and religious knowledge have distinct rules: first, religion is perfect, but religious knowledge is not perfect, and it can never be claimed that people’s understanding of religion and the Qur’ān has reached its final limit. Second, according to believers, religion is free from cultures and pure from the interference of human minds; but religious knowledge, without any doubt, is mixed with it.

As a result, according to the believers, the Sharia and religion are holy and perfect, have a divine origin, and there are no errors or contradictions in it, but the understanding of Sharia does not have any of these attributes. In no era of the ages, the understanding of the Sharia is neither complete, fixed, nor free from errors and disturbances, and it does not have a holy or divine origin.²⁶ Somewhere in the book, he says: “What changes is people’s understanding of the Sharia, and what remains constant is the Sharia itself.”²⁷

Therefore, from the sum of these two elements, we can conclude that religion and religious knowledge are two

²⁶ Ibid., 440.

²⁷ Ibid., 440-441.

different and separate things. Religion is a fixed thing, but our understanding of religion is relative.

The third element: religious knowledge itself is a kind of human knowledge. In the explanation of this element, he states: "Religious knowledge is human knowledge and like other branches of knowledge, it is in evolution and transformation."²⁸

The humanity of knowledge has at least two acceptable meanings: first, knowledge is cultivated by human minds; and second, man's attributes fall in his knowledge.²⁹ He says:

Man is deficient. So, when we say that knowledge is humanity, it means that knowledge is incomplete. Humanity is changing. Therefore, human knowledge means evolving knowledge. Doesn't all knowledge prove that no understanding is immune from change?"³⁰

According to the four, five, and six elements, religious knowledge is human knowledge. Human knowledge means incomplete, changing, variable, and evolving knowledge; it has a gradual growth and needs constant trimming.³¹ In other words, such knowledge has a human origin and is not heavenly, and such knowledge can never be considered definite and certain.³²

Fourth, *Religious Science*. Two views of religious science can be extracted from Soroush's collection of works, although he did not explicitly mention such a division.

The first argument: A science that is extracted from religious texts: in some of his statements, Soroush has considered religious science as a science that is extracted from religious sources by means of narration (*naql*). For example, he says: Accepting the perfection of religion leads to the logical conclusion that all sciences can be derived from religion.

²⁸ Ibid., 201-203.

²⁹ Ibid., 443.

³⁰ Ibid., 275.

³¹ Abdulkarim Soroush, *Science and Faith in the Supplement to the World in the Age of Faith* (Tehran: Motahhari Publishing House, 1980), 88.

³² Mohammad Mohammad Rezaei, "The Origin of the Theory of Religious Knowledge", *Journal of Reflexion of Thought* 11, no. 1 (2010), 21.

Making science religious means adapting and extracting it from religion.³³

Narrating humanities is the last bastion of resistance against secularization. In the compilation of human sciences, a quotation taken from religious texts should not be quarreled with religious scholars and speak of its refusal a priori.³⁴ We call this meaning the strong meaning of religious science because the science in question in this case is extracted from the religious texts of verses and Sunnah in the method of *ijtihad* and can be attributed to religion in the best way.

The second argument is science compatible with religious teachings. Some other expressions of Soroush have considered religious science as science compatible with religious teachings. In other words, the religious aspect of such a science is that it is not incompatible with the essential and definitive teachings of religion: The motivation of the followers of religious science calls them to at least respond to their concern that there is no conflict between their beloved science and the religion of their deity.³⁵ We call this meaning the weak meaning of religious science.

Soroush believes that today many supporters of religious science have turned a blind eye to the religiousization of experimental natural sciences and only think of the religiousization of humanities; because they believe that religion has come to guide man and manage human affairs, and human sciences have more compatibility with religion than natural sciences, and natural sciences do not speak positively or negatively about guiding and managing human affairs.³⁶

According to the motivations that Soroush enumerated for presenting and pursuing the idea of religious science, it should be said that if there is a conflict between human understanding of existence, nature, society or man and his understanding of religion, or if it is thought that religion has

³³ Soroush, *Islam and Social Sciences*, 205.

³⁴ Seyyed Mohammad Taqi Movāhed Abtāhi, "Voluntarism as a Basis for Religious Science", presented at the Philosophical Foundations of Human Sciences Conference, Published in the Collection of Conference Papers (Tehran: Imam Khomeini Educational and Research Institute, 2010), 120.

³⁵ Soroush, *Islam and Social Sciences*, 205.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 302.

commented on these issues, there will be a basis for proposing religious science in both strong and weak readings. This is why we see that despite the ideological dominance of Darwin's theory of evolution since Darwin's theory about the evolution of different types of living organisms was in conflict with the understanding of some Christians from religious texts about creation, some sages decided to criticize Darwin's evolutionary theory with the methods and experimental evidence used in biology and defend scientific creationism.³⁷

Although such an effort has few followers according to Soroush's interpretation, it can be considered as an example of an attempt to present experimental natural and biological religious sciences. Scientific creationists agree with a major part of Darwin's evolutionary theory and consider it correct, but they believe that evolution at the macro level, which is the result of common ancestry, is not empirically untestable.³⁸ As a result, it has no advantage over scientific creationism. On the other hand, even though natural and biological experimental sciences may not directly and outwardly have a role in guiding and managing human affairs, the assumptions of these sciences, or the philosophical interpretations made from them, or the practical results obtained based on those theories, can directly or indirectly play a role in guiding and managing human affairs. Based on this, religious people can still show sensitivity in the field of natural and biological experimental science findings and examine their relationship with their religious values and visions.³⁹

Fifth is *the relationship between science and religion*. In his theological discussions, where he talks about the category of human expectations from religion, Soroush puts forward two assumptions in this regard: the first assumption is a minimal expectation from religion; it means that religion does not provide information about many issues and needs of man and only seeks to fulfill his spiritual needs; and the second assumption is the maximum expectation from religion; that is,

³⁷ Ted Peters, *Science and Theology Towards Convergence, Collection of Articles on Science and Theology*, translated by Abolfazl Haghiri (Tehran: Contemporary Cultural Institute of Knowledge and Thought, 2006), 28-31.

³⁸ Hadi Samadi, "Is Evolution a Reality?" *Journal of Mind* 21 and 22 (2005), 46-49.

³⁹ Abtāhi, "Voluntarism as a Basis for Religious Science", 128-130.

the content of religion is aimed at all the needs and necessities of the individual and social life of man and answers all his various questions.⁴⁰

Soroush argues that since the second assumption is clearly wrong, we should turn to the first assumption and not expect so from religion. In the discussion of “religious science,” he has put forward such an argument and claimed that only two assumptions about the “relationship between science and religion” are conceivable: The first assumption is that if we refer to religious texts, we can infer and discover some scientific points and problems from them in a scattered and unorganized way. This assumption implies a “minimum” relationship between science and religion, and the second assumption is that the subject, method, and definitions of all sciences or many sciences can be extracted from religion; therefore, it is possible to receive and understand the “maximum” of religion.

Soroush believes that only the first assumption is justified: “At one time, we study the religious texts and extract some of the philosophical points that are mentioned in the Qur’ān, ḥadīths and religious teachings; there is no denying this, but once we say a science with a certain definition and method, for example, in the name of philosophy, which can be extracted from religious texts; first of all, this is not possible. Secondly, it does not make sense, and it is not desirable for a school to create a science with a definition and a method; because this is the same science that others make. Philosophy is not more than one philosophy. That is, the science of philosophy does not have two types, religious and secular, and if a school tries to make philosophy, it will make the same one that the other made”.⁴¹

The Discussion of Science and Religion

According to Soroush, based on the originality of the subject, method and goal, it is possible to discuss this, which is explained as follows:

⁴⁰ Abdulkarim Soroush, *Interview with Khosrow Qobadi: Different Views about Islamic University* (Tehran: Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, 2000), 34.

⁴¹ Soroush, *Islam and Social Sciences*, 323-324.

First, *Judging the issue based on the originality of the issue.* According to Soroush, every science has a specific subject. For example, ontology, botany, or anthropology has a specific subject, and whether we know this subject correctly or not has no effect on this matter. According to him, every science has certain complications and qualities that do not accept multiplicity. For example, a person cannot discuss physics separately from new physics and establish a new topic. From the logical point of view, no object can have two natures, and since nature is for definition, it will not have two definitions. Therefore, we do not have the foundations of Islamic sciences, and if we only refer to the sciences themselves, the truth of this issue is confirmed. For example, physics has its own definition, method, and issues. If someone wants to establish another science of physics apart from these things, that science will not be physics. Based on this, it can be said that not only will we not have Islamic physics, we will not have Islamic sociology or Islamic philosophy, not only we will not have Islamic sociology, we will not have Christian or Marxist sociology either. According to him, science has a single and international meaning that is independent of schools and ideologies. The fact that some of the physics topics are produced in Islamic countries and by Muslim sages does not harm its internationality in terms of subject matter; because these are necessary for the development and progress of any science and are related to the historicality and differences of opinion in it.⁴²

Second, *Judging the issue based on the originality of the method.* According to him, the scientific method, like its subject, is beyond the researcher and is considered optional. According to him, the method is to discover how to achieve the results. A logical theorem will reach its conclusion regardless of our will and has its own path. According to him, every science has its own method, and a person's desires or wishes should not be involved in choosing it, and a method should have authority. Therefore, the foundations of every science have their own method, and one should not expect a separate method from that method. For example, the method of philosophy is

⁴² Ibid., 330.

argument, but no one can arbitrarily determine what the argument is. There may be a mistake in its definition, but in any case, the argument method is not more than one method, and its result is real. The meaning of these premises is that the two categories of value and knowledge are separate from each other, and values should not be used in proposing issues and conclusions. In the end, there is a correct method in terms of conformation; if we discover it, there is no Islamic or non-Islamic method anymore.⁴³

Third, *Judging the issue based on the originality of the goal*. According to Soroush, the goal of science is subject to its subject and is not independent of it. According to his interpretation, if science does not have a specific subject, but if it has a goal, science is a tool. Therefore, depending on what a tool is used for and in what way, it can be said whether it is Islamic or non-Islamic, so in sciences that do not have a subject, it can be called school science.

Here, what is meant by science without a subject but with a purpose that pursues a specific goal is that we are facing several sciences with a specific subject that are used to achieve a goal. For example, a doctor uses sciences such as histology, physiology, and microbiology to treat a Muslim; but in each of these sciences, being Islamic or non-Islamic has no meaning. The final result is that science, at the conformation aspect, has an inherent independence from schools in terms of subject matter, goal and method, and the definition of scholastic and non-scholastic science is fundamentally wrong.⁴⁴ He later gave a more detailed explanation of the issue. In such a way, he accepted that science's nature and criteria are not exclusive to the method, but we can define science by the subject, the method, or the goal, and all three are useful for us. We can explain the relationship between science and religion based on each of these. Each of these has a position of self-realization and reality in terms of definition. So, there are six categories here and the issue can be discussed in each of these categories.

According to him, in terms of conformation based on any of the above three categories, the religiousization of

⁴³ Soroush, *What is Science?* 118.

⁴⁴ Hassani, et al., *Religious Science*, 203-204.

science is not defensible, and if we want to talk about religious science, this talk can only be possible in the position of demonstration and in the field of method, that is, in the part of compilation and not in the position of judgment.⁴⁵

Explanation of Abdulkarim Soroush Theory

After clarifying the foundations and assumptions adopted by Soroush, we can have a clear idea of his point of view. Soroush has proposed three stages of his thinking regarding the subject of religious science in three different periods, which we will discuss:

The first stage used *naqli* texts in the capacity of compilation: Soroush was one of the most important proponents of Karl Popper's views on the nature of science in Iran, and based on the same views, he also spoke about religious science.

In his first comments about the nature of religious science and the religiousization of science, since he completely diverted the meaning of "science" to experimental sciences, Soroush clearly stated that objectifying science means its neutrality. In the position of judging, not in the position of gathering, he says: "In my opinion, if these natural sciences had grown in Islamic societies and were nourished by Muslim culture, it was quite possible that they would be different from what they are now."⁴⁶ The reason for the difference is in tools that are different in divisions and formats, but these do not make us say that Western science is false; because what shows invalidity is not the position of hunting, but the position of arbitration. The falsity of an empirical matter must be shown in experience. Science is refuted by science, not by experience and metaphysics.⁴⁷

The second stage using defaults in compilation: in the second stage of his intellectual development, Soroush stated that religious issues, concepts, values, and goals can be used as a compilation of scientific hypotheses and theories.

⁴⁵ Hossein Sūzanchi, *Meaning, Possibility and Solutions for the Realization of Religious Science* (Tehran: Research Institute of Cultural and Social Studies, 2010), 229.

⁴⁶ Soroush, *Tāfaruj Sunā*, 54.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

The third stage negation of religious science even means the use of presuppositions in the capacity of compilation: Soroush later, probably because of the opinions that he adopted about the nature of revelation and considered the text of revelation to be influenced by the culture of the Prophet's time, he also disputed the same amount of religious knowledge.⁴⁸ He argued that although presuppositions influence the formation of science, a presupposition is a presupposition as long as it is unconscious, but as soon as they are noticed, it is best to leave them aside, not to interfere, because the presupposition is a non-cognitive and invalid thing because it is a presupposition.

Although there is no correct presupposition, Iranian and non-Iranian, Eastern and Western, etc., but in the real world, Westerners have a correct presupposition and Muslims have a presupposition. Therefore, Islamic science is something whose questions and presuppositions are influenced by Islam and religious and Islamic mentality. However, this Islamic science in this way and this content that was said, if the possibility of its existence is proved, it also opens the way to prove the possibility of the existence of many other competitors; that means, in that case, we will have Turkish science, Rashti science, Iranian science, etc. If there is Islamic and non-Islamic, Iranian, and non-Iranian science, the aim of scholars and scientists should be to abandon them in favor of an ideal science that does not accept Islamic or non-Islamic science. Therefore, while accepting that Islamic science is possible as it was said, it is not desirable, and therefore we cannot justify going to the side of the creators of Islamic science. Sciences should grow and expand naturally, and questions should be raised naturally.⁴⁹

Abdulkarim Soroush's Idea for Religious Production

Based on the principles adopted by Soroush, the separation of the position of discovery and judgment, and the theory of "*Qābẓ na Bāst*' Sharia" regardless of the many controversies that exist about it, two ways to produce religious

⁴⁸ Soroush, *Expansion of Prophetic Experience*, 21.

⁴⁹ Soroush, *Interview with Khosrow Qobādi*, 235-237.

science are presented according to his two views of religious science;

First, *how to produce religious science as a science extracted from religious texts*. According to the strong view of religious science, religious science is a science that is methodically extracted from religious texts.⁵⁰ He accepts the separation of the position of discovery from the position of judgment and considers the empirical nature of science to be related to the position of judgment, not the position of discovery.⁵¹ According to him, we do not have knowledge without a source.⁵² Now, according to Soroush's opinion of the theory of "*Qābẓ wa Bāst' Sharia*,"⁵³ in order to have religious knowledge, we should not go to religious texts with empirical science, and we should gain an understanding of religion by using extra-religious knowledge. Suppose someone describes the assumptions of the *ijtihād* method for understanding religion as follows: religion is a set of teachings and rulings that have reached people through revelation. The mediators of conveying God's word to humans are infallible. Many statements about existence, nature, society, and man exist in the Qur'ān and ḥadīths. Descriptive non-value propositions and narratives of religion have an opinion on reality. Narrative statements are stated for the purpose of understanding and discovering logical facts in it. The possibility and command of the revelation of verses and the introduction of narrations do not cause restrictions on their meanings unless there is a special reason against it. Religious texts are fixed, but human understanding is not infallible, gradual, and subject to transformation and change.⁵⁴

Also, familiarity with Arabic literature, logic, the *uṣūl al-istinbāt*, *'ilm al-rijāl*, the inferences of mujtahids close to the issuance of religious texts, sciences compatible with the science of *uṣūl*, the epistemological foundations, the cognitive and theological existence of *ijtihād*, which are non-religious teachings, are necessary for understanding religion. So,

⁵⁰ Soroush, *Tafarīj Sunā*, 49.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵³ Soroush, *Theory of Qābẓ wa Bāst' Sharia*, 51-54.

⁵⁴ Hassani, et al., *Religious Science*, 51-54.

according to the aforementioned presuppositions and extra-religious knowledge, go to the Qur'ān and the Sunnah of the sayings, actions, and interpretations of the Innocent and try to understand the contents of the descriptive statements of religion about existence, nature, society, and man. According to Soroush's opinion, the achievement of this realization is, for example, a religious understanding of nature, and in order for this religious understanding of nature, an example of the strong understanding of religious science, to be presented in the context of other scientific theories, it must also pass through the stage of empirical judgment. In other words, it should be able to be sensitive to empirical evidence like other natural experimental sciences; it means that it tries to use experimental evidence and other methods common in the scientific community to confirm its theory, criticize other theories, and attract the opinion of the scientific community, and it should be ready to take advantage of definite experimental evidence as an argument to correct its religious understanding of nature according to its arbitrary presuppositions, including the fallibility and gradualness of its religious understanding. The product of such a process is religious since it is derived from religion by the method of *ijtihad*, and since it has exposed its scientific theories to experimental tests and has been influenced by experimental evidence and attracted the opinion of the scientific community, it is scientific.

Soroush considers religious science as a paradoxical concept. Knowing that religious science is possible, we can ask what the way to reach religious science is. The answer that was given to this question based on the separation of the position of discovery and judgment is that if we gain an understanding of religious texts about man, society, history, nature, etc., based on extra-religious foundations and in a methodical way, this understanding can be considered according to the foundations of Soroush, religious understanding about man, society, history, nature, etc. If this religious understanding can satisfy the condition of being scientific, it can be an example for religious science; but the proponents of religious science should keep in mind that in terms of understanding religion,

they should act on the basis of the latest achievements in the methodology of understanding texts, and in terms of the experimental test of their religious understanding, they should pay attention to the latest methodological achievements of experimental sciences. Of course, as mentioned, Soroush considers the attempt to achieve such knowledge useless and doomed to failure.

Second, how to produce religious science through harmonizing the channel of beliefs. It seems that Soroush's theoretical theory of Sharia, regardless of its theoretical problems, has the ability to use it to produce a weak perception of religious science, a science compatible with religious understanding. It is important to pay attention to this point that in the theory of *Qabẓ wa Bāst'* Sharia, not only the understanding of religion and the understanding of nature interact with each other, any kind of understanding of existence, man, society, history, nature, religion, etc., interact with each other. According to Soroush, all human knowledge has an effect on religious knowledge and what is ultimately important is that it is compatible with our channel of beliefs.

The phrase "bilateral correction" in this sentence: the understanding that comes to a person from nature and Sharia can be reasonable and conflicting, and this conflict helps to correct them both. It refers to the mutual influence of extra-religious knowledge and intra-religious knowledge. They also state that the evolution of one's understanding leads to the evolution of understanding in the other.

After proposing the heliocentric theory, those who did not want to accept the new interpretation of the religious books, interpreted the scientific findings as an instrumental interpretation and gave their heart to a new school in epistemology, and anyway, they changed their knowledge system. Based on this, the acceptance of the heliocentric theory can change the understanding of religious texts and the acceptance of religious understanding can shape our understanding of the heliocentric theory. It is important to maintain compatibility among different types of beliefs and human knowledge about religion and nature should not be incompatible.

Criticism of Abdulkarim Soroush's Thought

Abdulkarim Soroush's point of view from the angle of theology, science, and especially his intellectual development regarding the issue of religious science, is faced with criticisms, which we will refer to some of these criticisms in this section.

The first criticism is the lack of preference criteria for religious understanding and scientific understanding during conflict. Soroush does not provide any criteria and rules in the theory of *Qabẓ wa Bāst'* Sharia. Based on that, it can be recognized that when there is a conflict between two types of understanding, which one should be changed and for what reason and in what way, in order to resolve the inconsistency in the channel of beliefs, and the only thing he does in this book is to show by providing various examples that the transformation in one understanding has caused the transformation in another understanding. So we need a criterion based on which we can distinguish when there is a conflict between the understanding of religion and the understanding of nature, man, society, etc., which of our beliefs should be changed and for what reason and in what way.⁵⁵

The second criticism is the influence of experimental judgment on culture and etc. Soroush considers human experiences, which also consider revelation, to be a kind of human experience (which itself has problems and is a subject of discussion in its own right), subject to being influenced by cultural and social issues. Suppose it is so and this statement is true about all human experiences. In that case, experience as a judge of science also faces the same problem and new sciences also suffer from the same problem. There is no reason to accept new sciences that are influenced by Western culture and not give space to Islamic culture to influence science.

The third criticism is ignoring the divisibility of science in the position of demonstration and referring to the unity of science in the position of confirmation. The most important point in criticizing this point of view is to examine the problem from a scientific point of view, and this discussion is

⁵⁵ Abtāhi, "Voluntarism as a Basis for Religious Science", 128.

divided into two positions: the position of demonstration and the position of confirmation. In terms of confirmation, on the one hand, it can be said that Soroush's point of view is acceptable, but on the other hand, some considerations should be added to it. What is acceptable is that science is not more than one confirmation. Still, when it comes to defining the subject of science, we are dealing with the authority of demonstration, not confirmation. Therefore, if all our definitions are from an anthropological subject, for example, which is derived from man as proof, then the existence of Islamic and non-Islamic definitions of the subject of man becomes serious. This critique is also raised in the mixing of demonstration and confirmation where the nature of science is defined by method or goal.

The fourth criticism is experimental judgment and breaking the boundary of compilation and judgment. The statement that religious teachings should only be present in the position of compilation and should not be included in the position of judgment is based on the recent premise of his theology, which considers religion and, in fact, authentic religious texts as containing errors, and more important are the controversies that can be raised in the discussion of the separation of the authority of arbitration and collection. If the meaning of the position of arbitration is the basic principles of the science of logic, which governs all arguments, then of course this is a correct statement and we do not have religious or non-religious arbitration in this position, but what emerges from Soroush's discussions is not this meaning, but empirical judgment; and if the foot of the experience is opened, the border of judgment and collection will really break, and according to the hermeneutic discussion of scholars such as Hans-Georg Gadamer, the view of Soroush in the theory of *Qabz wa Bast*' Sharia, it can be said that we do not have pure empirical judgment, rather, our empirical judgments are always filled with many presuppositions that even affect the interpretation of our experiences. If this is the case, then the statement that religion and religious teachings can be useful only in the capacity of gathering and raising questions and the

field of judgment is a special experimental method, will be an indefensible statement.

As stated, in Soroush's point of view, the position of demonstration and confirmation are confused and there is no fixed criterion for judging, and the historical evidences that he points to in the negative results of the religious thinking of science in the past ages cannot be cited in other ages and cases. And it is impossible to judge the futility of trying to make science religious based on past experiences.⁵⁶

Conclusion

From Soroush's point of view, the criterion in science is an experimental science, and the method of acquiring knowledge, as well as validating and judging science, is experience. Also, according to the theory of *Qabẓ wa Bast'* Sharia in religious knowledge, religion is constant, but people's understanding in acquiring religious knowledge is variable, and human expectation from religion is the minimum, the result of this view is that religion can finally and only fulfill the spiritual needs of people.

Therefore, Soroush firstly, according to the division of science into two positions of demonstration and position of confirmation, believes in the production of religious science in the position of demonstration; because he accepts the influence of culture, religion, way of life, etc., in the formation of science. Of course, he only acknowledges the influence of these cases in the field of collection and does not give validity to any of these cases in the field of arbitration. In other words, at first he believed in the direction of science in the field of collection, but gradually and during the developments that emerged in his theological theories, he gradually concluded that only experience is valid as a judge and religious science is not desirable. Finally, referring to the unity of science, he rejected religious science and rejected the production of religious science in general, and finally, he does not approve religious science even in the sense of using metaphysical presuppositions in the capacity of compilation.

⁵⁶ Sūzanchi, *Meaning, Possibility and Solutions*, 234-244.

Soroush does not provide any criteria and rules in the theory of *Qabẓ wa Bāst'* Sharia. Based on that, it can be recognized that when there is a conflict between two types of understanding, which one should be changed and for what reason and in what way, in order to resolve the inconsistency in the channel of beliefs, and the only thing he does in this book is to show by providing various examples that the transformation in one understanding has caused the transformation in another understanding.

Finally, considering empirical and humanizing revelation and ignoring the divisibility of science in the position of demonstration and referring to the unity of science in the position of confirmation, and experimental judgment and breaking the border of compilation and judgment are among the criticisms that face problems in accepting Soroush's theory and ultimately reject it.

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