

PART 1



Critique of Marxist Philosophy



XCP

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Chapter 1

The Introduction

The Social Problem:

Here the author spells out his main aim for writing the book. It is not philosophy for philosophy's sake. The purpose is to present Islam as an alternative system superior to capitalism and secular democracy on the one hand and to Marxism and socialism on the other.

Although devoid of an articulate worldview or ideology, capitalistic democracies are materialistic to the core. Dissociating themselves from all transcendental principles, they claim to promote the interests and rights of the individual and safeguard his economic, political liberties and freedom of expression and thought. The interests of the individual are regarded as primary and are emphasized at the cost of the interests of society. The assumption is that since all individuals seek their interests, the provision of individual freedom leads to the automatic fulfillment of the interests of society, which are regarded as the sum of individual interests.

However, due to the dominant materialistic outlook on life in capitalistic societies, the pursuit of individual self-interest does not transcend the purview of materialism. Nearly all moral values, most of which do not lie within the purview of materialistic self-seeking of individuals, are neglected, causing deep harm to society's welfare. The rights of the minority are neglected. Unlimited economic freedom permits a handful of capitalists to dominate the majority of people and to usurp their freedoms and rights. With the immense economic resources at their disposal, the wealthy capitalists take control of

the mass media, government, legislature and judiciary. Even foreign countries and peoples are not secure from their greed for cheap raw materials, cheap labour, and markets for finished products. Imperialism, hence, is a direct outcome of capitalistic democracy.

In this dehumanizing hell of materialism and pursuit of individual self-interest there is no place for love, mercy, self-denial or any other higher human value.

Dialectical materialism sees all evils of capitalism to be rooted in the institution of private property. If private property is abolished and all property becomes public, passing from the possession and control of the individual into those of the community, individual ambition will die.

All will voluntarily pool the fruits of their labour for the common benefit. The higher cultural values will be put within the reach of all alike through community support and the diffusion of education.

Although communism solved some of the problems of capitalism at the cost of immense human suffering, the remedy was only partial. Dictatorship, repression, deprivation of individual freedoms, constant fear of imprisonment, torture and execution for the dissidents, loss of economic vigour due to absence of individual initiative and motivation, the debasement of man's dignity these are some of the outcomes of the socialist solution.

In the view of Martyr al-Sadr, the evil of capitalism lies not in private property but in the neglect of the spiritual dimensions of man's being. Moreover, self-seeking is inherent in human nature; it is not a product of the institution of private property, as alleged by Marx. The failure of secular democracies lies in their emphasis on individualism and their inability to stimulate and promote the higher spiritual aspect of man's self-seeking nature, whose activation is vital for arising man's altruistic potentialities so significant for society's welfare. Marxism makes the mistake of abolishing private property while keeping intact capitalism's destructive materialistic world view. As a result, it

ends up substituting a handful of bureaucrats and party officials for a handful of capitalists who wield all power and control the society's wealth and resources.

Both capitalism and communism fail to present a correct world outlook and to formulate an ideology capable of solving the diverse problems of human society. This failure is rooted in their materialist world view and their inadequate understanding of man's nature.

Chapter 2

The Islamic Solution

There are no more than two alternatives for modern man to solve the basic problem of society. Either, he should somehow abandon his self-seeking character and become altruistic while keeping his materialistic world view; or, he should abandon his materialistic outlook and select a different metaphysical criterion and goal.

The communists select the first alternative because they do not believe that man is self-seeking by nature. They erroneously regard private property as infrastructure and man's self-seeking as its superstructure. This is putting the cart before the horse. The second alternative is chosen by Islam. It does not abolish private property but gives a new meaning to human existence. It does not consider human nature a mechanical artifact of social and economic conditions, nor does it put the society at the mercy of the individual.

The Islamic outlook is based in faith in a transcendent source of life and existence. This world is a prelude to another. The highest value and criterion of all human activities and pursuits is the attainment of God's good pleasure and His approval. All human history testifies to the innateness of man's self-seeking character. Had it not been for this self-seeking and self-love there would have been no motive for the satisfaction of human needs. No school of thought or ideology can offer an ultimate solution to man's problems without taking into account his nature and without establishing a harmony between that which is and that which ought to be.

Offering a transcendental interpretation of life, a perspective

in which this world is a prelude to the hereafter, Islam seeks to bring about a harmony between man's self-seeking nature and the good of society, by putting forward the criterion of the attainment of God's approval and good pleasure as the ultimate end in itself. As a result it eliminates the conflict between the good of the individual and that of society, and the individual is promised an everlasting reward in his struggle for the establishment of a prosperous and just society as a means for the attainment of God's good pleasure:

Upon that day men shall issue in scatterings to see their works, and whose has done an atom's weight of good shall see it, and whose has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it. (99:6-8)

Such a thing is not possible in the framework of a materialistic world view. The Islamic world view opens up an infinite vista before man's eye, and compensates his ephemeral losses with lasting benefits.

Apart from transforming human criteria through a transcendental world view, Islam offers a specific system of training for nourishing man's various spiritual, moral and emotional potentialities which lie latent in his being. Islam takes into consideration the welfare of both the individual and society, based as it is on a spiritual understanding and moral sense of life. Other systems either sacrifice the individual for society or society for the individual, and as a result they paralyze man's nature and expose social life to severe complications and perils.

Here, at the end of his introduction, the author spells out his objective, which is a comparative study of the philosophical viewpoints of Islam and other schools which confront it. Since the capitalist system lacks any philosophical basis, he proposes to examine in detail the philosophical foundations of dialectical materialism.

Chapter 3

Part One: The Theory of Knowledge (Chapter I)

Concepts

The first chapter in this section is devoted to the epistemological problem of the source of concepts and judgements. First the author examines the Platonic doctrine of Recollection, then the rationalist theory, and following that the empirical theory. The Platonic theory is false because soul does not exist in an abstract form prior to the existence of the body, being the result of substantial motion in matter. It is by means of this movement that it acquires an immaterial existence not characterized by material qualities and free from the laws of matter.

The rationalist theory that some concepts are innate or a priori is not refutable if interpreted to mean that innate ideas exist in the soul potentially, becoming actual as the soul develops.

The empirical theory, first propounded by John Locke, holds that there are no innate ideas; all our ideas without exception are derived from experience. It was adopted by Marxism. However, the empirical theory as admitted by Hume fails to explain how we form such concepts as that of causality; for that which is derived from the senses is succession, not causality. The rejection of the principle of causality by empiricists does not solve the difficulty, because the fact remains that we do conceive causality, which is not given in sense perception.

Al-Sadr then goes on to the Abstraction theory (nazariyyat al-'intiza') favoured by the Islamic philosophers in general. According to this theory, concepts are of two kinds: primary and

secondary. The primary ones are products of sense-perception. The secondary ones are produced from the primary concepts by the mind through the means of 'abstraction.' The secondary concepts although derived from the primary ones transcend them and are the inventions of the mind.

Judgements

Moving from concepts to judgements, al-Sadr selects here the rational and empirical theses about the source of judgements for discussion.

1. According to the rationalists, knowledge (in the form of judgements or propositions) consists of two kinds. The first kind is primary, self-evident, and intuitive. It includes such propositions as the principle of contradiction, and such statements as 'The whole is greater than the part', 'One is half of two', 'A thing cannot have contradictory attributes at the same time', and so on. The other kind is what the author calls 'theoretical' knowledge, whose truth cannot be established except in the light of the first kind. Among the examples given are: 'The earth is spherical', 'Heat is caused by motion', 'Infinite regress is impossible', 'The angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles'.

The author does not seem to be right here in putting two different kinds of statements in one class called 'theoretical knowledge'. 'The earth is spherical' is not the same kind of judgement as 'The angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles'. The former requires observation and inference for its proof, while the latter can be established by pure reasoning. The same distinction applies to the two statements 'Heat is caused by motion' and 'Infinite regress is impossible'.

All knowledge is based on previous knowledge, which in turn depends on knowledge preceding it. The a priori or primary knowledge is that irreducible remainder which does not arise from any previous knowledge. A part of primary knowledge, consisting of such general principles as the law of contradiction, constitutes the basic condition of all knowledge. Without

it no general proposition can be affirmed.

It is this knowledge independent of experience that makes metaphysics possible.

The progression of thought is from universal to more particular propositions. This is true even in the experimental sciences, which cannot dispense with the universal principles of causality and uniformity of nature. Experimentation also, without the application of necessary rational laws, does not lead to general scientific truths. The Islamic philosophers, including al-Sadr, espouse this theory.

2. According to the empiricists sense experience is the primary source of all knowledge. They do not admit the existence of any necessary rational knowledge prior to experience. There can be no knowledge of universal truths prior to experience. Their position makes metaphysics and deduction impossible.

The empirical doctrine has to be rejected for the following four reasons.

First, either the empirical doctrine is prior to experience or it is not. If it is, it refutes itself. If it is derived from experience, the validity of experience as a criterion of knowledge has not yet been established. Second, empiricism fails to affirm the existence of matter and the external world, which cannot be affirmed except by primary rational knowledge. Thus the metaphysical realities are not the only ones which depend for their affirmation on the rational method.

Third, experience by itself is not sufficient to assert the impossibility of anything. All that experience can affirm is non presence or at the most non-existence. The notion of impossibility can be accepted only on rational grounds, not on the basis of experience. If the notion of impossibility is denied, anything, including contradiction, becomes possible. The possibility of contradiction leads to the collapse of all knowledge and science.

Fourth, the principle of causality cannot be demonstrated by the means of the empirical doctrine. All that experience can affirm is succession and contiguity, not causal necessity.

The author then turns to the effort of Hume to show how the 'feeling' of necessary connection implicit in the concept of causality arises from experience: the theory of association of ideas. According to Hume, the habit of leaping forward to and expecting the sequent associated with the antecedent becomes so ingrained by continual repetition of their conjunction as to make the mind feel that when the one event occurs the other simply must follow it. Events so habitually conjoined and associated as to be accompanied by this feeling of must are called cause and effect, and the relation of simple sequence is turned into one of causation. Al-Sadr offers five reasons for rejecting this explanation. First, if it were true, no scientist would be able to confirm a causal relation between two things in a single experiment, where there is no repetition of the conjoined events to produce the feeling of necessity. Similarly, many times, belief in a causal relationship is not strengthened by further repetition of events involving a cause and its effect.

Second, when we take the associated ideas of two events regarded as being in cause-effect relationship, is the relation between these two ideas that of mere conjunction or necessity? If it is mere conjunction, the element of necessity implied in their association is not explained.

Third, the necessity of the principle of causality is not a psychological necessity but an objective one.

Fourthly, the mind distinguishes between cause and effect even when they are completely conjoined (e.g. the movements of the pen and the hand while writing).

Fifthly, it often happens that two events are frequently associated without producing the belief that one of them is the cause of the other (e.g. day and night). Empiricism cannot provide the basis for the sciences, which are based on some rational principles that are not subject to experimentation, viz., the

principle of causality, the principle of harmony between cause and effect, and the principle of non contradiction. The scientist, in framing his theories, passes from these general principles to particular hypothesis through a process of syllogistic reasoning.

Of course, experience has a high value, but it itself stands in need of a rational criterion. This criterion is primary rational knowledge.

The rational theory of knowledge also explains the quality of necessity and certainty that distinguishes the propositions of mathematics from the propositions of the natural sciences. This is because mathematics is entirely based on primary rational principles. Some empiricists have tried to explain this difference by stating that mathematical propositions are analytic (tautological). Yet even mathematical statements would not be certain had it not been for their reliance on certain rational principles, such as the law of contradiction. Moreover, all mathematical statements are not analytic, such as, 'The diameter is shorter than the circumference'.

How does primary knowledge emerge when it is not present at birth and in all men at all times? The answer is that the primary judgements proceed from the innermost being of the soul after it has formed the necessary conceptions, directly or indirectly, as a result of experience. As the soul develops through substantial movement, the primary knowledge, which exists in it potentially, becomes actual.

Chapter 4

The Marxist Theory of Knowledge

Here, the statement of the Marxist position by the author is, unfortunately, not based either on the original works of Marx or Engels or their authoritative interpreters. Perhaps due to the non-availability of translations, he bases his criticism on the writings of second-rate interpreters, such as Mao Tse-tung. The result is that the Marxist position stated is weak, weakening in turn somewhat the author's criticism of Marxist epistemology.

According to Marxism, all knowledge begins in experience. The next step is that of ordering of information, inference and application.

It does not accept that some knowledge is independent of sense experience. Denying that there exists some primary knowledge which enables the mind to move from the first to the second stage, it fails to explain how the mind can move from the stage of sense perception to that of theory and inference.

The conclusion is- drawn that only the rationalist theory provides an adequate explanation of how the mind is able to move from the first to the second stage of knowledge. It is only the knowledge of the general rational laws that affords the scientist to develop theories and to draw inferences in his endeavour to discover the reality that lies beyond empirical phenomena. The rejection of primary rational knowledge, which is independent of experience, makes it impossible to go beyond the stage of sense-perception.

Chapter 5

Empiricism and the Possibility of Metaphysics

Before the birth of empiricism, philosophy was considered responsible for discovering the general laws of being. Its tool was syllogistic reasoning and philosophic thought moved from general to more particular propositions. Not only metaphysics and ethics but also such sciences as physics and psychology lay within the sphere of philosophy. However, the experimental method and induction took the sciences, each of them devoted to a specific class of phenomena, out of the purview of philosophy, which was left to deal with issues which fell within the purview of pure reason. The empiricists claimed that there is no field of knowledge beyond the field of experimentation that the sciences have divided among themselves, leaving nothing for philosophy. The only scope that was admitted for philosophy by some schools was that of discovering the relations and links among the sciences and to postulate general scientific theories based on the outcome of experiments in various scientific fields. Foremost amongst them were the schools of Marxism and positivism.

The logical positivists were not satisfied with the empiricist attacks against metaphysics. They did not limit themselves, for instance, to the assertion that metaphysics was useless since its propositions could not be demonstrated by the scientific method. The positivists went on to assert that the propositions of metaphysics were meaningless. The criticism of the positivists against metaphysics can be summarized as follows:

1. Metaphysical propositions deal with matters that lie beyond the sphere of experience and experiment. Hence they cannot

be verified.

2. Their being true or false makes no difference so far as the world of experience is concerned.

3. Metaphysical propositions are meaningless because they do not give any information about the world.

4. It is inappropriate to ascribe truth or falsity to them.

The author suggests the following lines for answering this criticism:

1. If we refute the empirical theory of knowledge and affirm the existence of a primary knowledge prior to experience in the core of the human mind, we can demonstrate that the mind has the capacity to confirm the veracity or falsity of metaphysical propositions.

2. Although metaphysical propositions have no direct bearing on the data of experience, these data are not altogether irrelevant to metaphysical statements. Further clarification to be given later.

3. The logical positivists describe a proposition as 'meaningful' if its truth or falsity can be affirmed within the limits of sense experience.

This is equal to saying, "The content of metaphysical propositions lies beyond sense experience". With this, the positivists assert an indisputable truth, that the subjects of metaphysics are not empirical something which the rationalists have stressed all along.

What would the positivist say about such propositions as relate to nature but cannot be verified by sense experience, such as a statement about the existence of mountains and valleys on the other side of the moon? Positivism revises its original position to assert that that which is important here is logical possibility, not actual possibility. However, the notion of logical possibility

is a metaphysical notion, and thus positivism, in the last analysis, has to adopt a metaphysical criterion of 'meaning'. Metaphysical propositions are as meaningful as any other, in that they relate to realities independent of the mind and the logical possibility of being true or false holds in their case.

Chapter 6

Marxism and Metaphysics

The Marxist position regarding metaphysics is essentially similar to that of positivism. Marxism rejects a higher philosophy above and over the sciences and independent of them. Marxist philosophy calls itself 'scientific', yet soon trespasses into other fields to judge metaphysical issues affirmatively or negatively. In violating its self-set limits it contradicts itself a result of the Marxist mistake of basing its theory of knowledge on sense experience alone.

It is in the light of the rational theory of knowledge that philosophy and metaphysics rest on firm fundamental principles. The acceptance of primary rational knowledge relieves philosophy of bondage to the constantly changing theories of experimental science.

The link between philosophy and science is strong, for science furnishes philosophy with new facts that enable philosophy to obtain new philosophical conclusions. Yet in spite of this philosophy may at times not need any sense experience, nor is it necessary for philosophy to accompany the procession of science in its gradual march.

Chapter 7

The Value of Knowledge (Chapter 2)

The Possibility of Knowledge:

In this chapter Martyr al-Sadr is concerned not with the 'value' of knowledge but rather with the possibility of knowledge as such. To what extent does 'knowledge' (i.e. that which is considered to be knowledge) capture the essence of reality and the secrets of the external world?

Marxism believes in the possibility of knowledge of objective realities and rejects skepticism and sophistry. The world does not contain anything that cannot be known. But is it appropriate for Marxism to claim that definite knowledge is possible? Can it escape skepticism in the ultimate analysis?

In order to understand the Marxist and Islamic positions on this issue, the author considers it essential to review important doctrines formulated by philosophers, beginning with the Sophists.

Greek Philosophy: In the fifth century B.C. a class of teachers emerged in Greece that devoted itself to teaching of rhetoric and giving professional advice to their clients in matters of law, court procedure and politics. Protagoras (b.c. 500 B.C.) and Gorgias (fl.c. 427 B.C.), two major skeptics, were the products of this class. Gorgias, for instance, taught that the Real, about which the pre-Socratic philosophers had argued, does not exist. If a world-stuff existed we could never know what it was like; it is not what it appears, since the senses lie. Even if Reality could be known, knowledge is incommunicable; for, language, being mere noise, cannot convey the knowledge

of reality to other minds.

The Sophists rejected the possibility of knowledge and made truth a purely subjective and relative affair. Hence metaphysics is idle speculation and its results are worthless. There is no reality that reason can know except the ever-changing flux of sensible experience.

Sophistry wished to destroy what philosophy had built hitherto. They were opposed by Socrates (d.399 B.C.), Plato (428-347 B.C.) and Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), who tried to maintain reason on its throne. Aristotelian epistemology validated reason and recognized the value of experience, and posited the possibility of certain knowledge.

The skepticism that reemerged after Aristotle was a compromise in that it did not deny reality but denied the possibility of certain knowledge. However, skepticism could not prevail in philosophy, and reason mounted the throne offered to it by Aristotle, until skepticism emerged again in the 16th century in an atmosphere of doubt and rebellion against the authority of reason. Descartes emerged in this atmosphere and he tried to bring back certitude to philosophy.

Descartes: Descartes (1596-1650) began his philosophy with sweeping doubt. Ideas, he reasoned are susceptible to error and sense perception is often deceptive. The point of departure for philosophical certitude was the existence of his thoughts, which leads him to infer his own existence: 'I think, therefore, I am'. This statement is true because it is clear and distinct. He therefore adopts as a general rule the principle that all things that we conceive very clearly and distinctly are true.

Ideas seem to be of three sorts: (1) those that are innate, (2) those that are foreign and come from without, (3) those that are the mind's constructs. Descartes disposes of skepticism by first proving the existence of God, whose idea belongs to the first class. Since we as imperfect beings are not sufficient reason for the idea of perfection we entertain the idea of God being the idea of an absolutely perfect being the idea of God must

have been caused by Him. God is thus the first objective reality posited by Descartes. Now since God is good, the innate ideas (which include the ideas of external bodies) which we have such strong inclination to believe must be true. This is how Descartes posits external reality and the possibility of science.

Al-Sadr points out that 'I think, therefore, I am', contains a concealed syllogism: 'I think, every thinker exists, therefore I exist'.

Moreover as pointed out by Ibn Sina, this argument from thought to existence is invalid; for the thinking subject admits his existence in the first phrase 'I think'.

Secondly, Descartes confuses between the idea of a perfect being and the objective reality it represents. It is God, not the idea of God, which is more sublime than human beings.

Descartes bases the whole edifice of existence on the proposition:

"It is impossible for God to deceive". He confuses between 'deception is impossible', and 'deception is abominable', which is not a metaphysical (judgement of fact) but an ethical (judgement of value) proposition.

In any case, the author's purpose is not an elaborate criticism of Descartes' philosophy but to present his view regarding the possibility of knowledge. Descartes accepts the validity of innate rational knowledge.

Locke (1632-1704) is the founder of modern empiricism. While he claims that all knowledge is derived from experience there being no innate ideas or principles he divides knowledge into three types:

(1) by intuition, (2) by rational demonstration, (3) by sensation. Our knowledge of our own existence is intuitive, our knowledge of God's existence is demonstrative, and our knowledge of things present to sense is sensitive. This division of

knowledge into three groups is inconsistent with his empirical doctrine.

Locke makes a distinction between what he calls primary and secondary qualities. The primary ones are inseparable from bodies, such as solidity, extension, figure, motion or rest, and number. The secondary qualities are only in the percipient, such as colour, sound, smell, etc.

Since there is no way, according to Locke, of knowing the primary qualities except through the senses, this division is also inconsistent with his empirical doctrine.

The Idealists:

The Platonic theory of Ideas, generally called 'realism', is referred to as 'idealism' by the author. Whatever we may call it, it did not involve any denial or doubt about reality. In metaphysics, idealism is the theory that reality is of the nature of mind or idea. To al-Sadr, it is an attempt to shake the foundations of objective reality and to exterminate certainty. In order to study the role of idealism in the theory of knowledge, he proposes to examine three tendencies in idealism. These he calls 'philosophical', 'physical' and 'physiological'.

Philosophical Idealism: Its founder was Berkeley, who declared, 'To exist is to know or to be known'. He denies existence to objective realities existing independent of minds. Mind and its ideas exist. All we know of 'matter' are the qualities of our sense (the secondary qualities of Locke). Berkeley's idealism has been interpreted differently and al-Sadr has selected an interpretation that he considers best-known. He cites Berkeley's proofs in support of his doctrines.

The first one is intended to prove that all knowledge is based on and comes from the senses. The main criticism against Berkeley is that he takes for granted the law of contradiction in his proofs while denying that there is any knowledge not rooted in sense experience. The author interprets Berkeley as denying the independent existence of things and offers reasons

for rejecting this alleged denial of Berkeley.

The fact is that Berkeley's position is not understood clearly by the author. Berkeley does not deny the reality of external objects. What he denies is that such objects could exist by themselves and independent of the Divine mind. That is, existence for him is synonymous with being the object of consciousness. Things cannot exist except as ideas inside minds. Why does Berkeley deny what Locke calls primary qualities? That is because he is reluctant to recognize such qualities as extension, number, motion, solidity and figure as being attributes of the Divine mind, perhaps in accordance with the theological notions of the scholastics.

If external objects are to be conceived as ideas in the Divine mind, there is no place for matter and materiality in the external world, matter being the main obstacle in the way of conceiving external objects as Divine ideas. Hence he denies the primary qualities as representing attributes of material bodies, and thus he annihilates matter. In some ways Berkeley's thesis that existence is mental is similar to the theory of God's 'knowledge by presence' ('ilm huduri) propounded by some Muslim philosophers. In both the cases; things are conceived as objects of knowledge, not as things in themselves independent of a perceiving mind. On the whole, one may say that the reasons behind Berkeley's denial of matter and corporeality are mainly theological, because he regards the idea of material substratum as the base on which the concept of thing-in-itself rests. Since corporeality cannot be a quality of Divine ideas, Berkeley will not have any things-in-themselves. According to him everything that there is thing- in-consciousness.

The Nature of Judgement:

However, to return to al-Sadr's criticism of Berkeley, it is obvious that Berkeley's denial of the objectivity of thought leads to solipsism. Berkeley's proofs involve a misunderstanding of the nature of knowledge. Knowledge has two main divisions according to al-Sadr: conception and judgement. The forms of objects exist on three levels in our intellect:

(1) as percepts, on the level of sense perception, (2) as images, on the level of imagination (and perhaps memory), and (3) as concepts, on the abstract level of intellection. Mere concepts, in isolation from one another, do not ensure the mind's movement from the subjective to the objective realm. The presence of the form of an essence in our intellect is one thing, while the objective presence of that essence in the outside is something else (it is not clear whether this is true of sense perception or only of imagination and conception).

Judgement, however, is different from conception. It is the point of departure for the movement from conception to objectivity. 1. Judgement does not arise in the mind by way of senses. It is rather an act of the knowing mind.

2. Most importantly, it is an inherent property of judgement to reveal a reality beyond the mind. Although the mind has no direct conjunction with anything except its knowledge, it is inherent in judgement to be essentially disclosive (*kashfan dhatiyyan*) of something outside knowledge.

Berkeley's argument is based on a confusion between conception and judgement. The empirical doctrine that all knowledge arises from perception relates to the stage of conception. By failing to recognize the difference between concepts and judgements, it makes it impossible to move in the direction of objectivity.

Chapter 8

Answers to Objections

(1) It may be said that if it is inherent in judgement to essentially disclose reality lying beyond knowledge, then all judgements must be true, which is not the case. To solve this difficulty al-Sadr explains the meaning of 'essential disclosure'. It is inherent in judgement to point towards a reality independent of itself. Whether true or false, it discloses judgement is not detached other than itself. Thus essential disclosure of from judgement itself, even when there is error and ambiguity (the author uses the word 'knowledge' instead of judgement in this statement, which does not agree with the conception that knowledge is something always true).

(2) The second objection is that if judgement may be erroneous, its property of essential disclosure being unable to protect it from error, how can we rely upon it? The answer is that if human thought did not possess a number of judgements of indubitable certainty, no judgement would be free of doubt and it would be impossible for us to know any reality. It is here that the doctrine of necessary primary knowledge comes to our rescue. This doctrine asserts that there is a knowledge whose truth is secure and which is completely free from error. Error occurs in inferring secondary judgements on the basis of primary knowledge. Even Berkeley unconsciously believes in a store of certain knowledge, for no one can demonstrate anything unless he bases his demonstration on the fundamentals contained in primary knowledge such as the law of contradiction and the principle of causality and necessity.

This discussion of philosophical idealism enables us to draw two conclusions: (1) the acceptance of the essentially

disclosing nature of judgements, (2) the acceptance of basic principle of human knowledge whose truth is necessarily secure. Even Berkeley's belief in the existence of other minds and his proofs in favour of idealism assume the acceptance of these two notions.

Realism (which in metaphysics means that reality is not reducible to mind and thought, and in epistemology means the doctrine that objects of knowledge and experience exist independently of their being known or experienced) bases its arguments on these two principles.

Chapter 9

Idealism in Physics and Psychology

The nineteenth-century physicist explained nature in terms of mechanical laws involving material bodies, particles and waves. The developments in atomic physics abolished the classical conception of matter. Matter was no more indestructible; mass and matter became convertible to energy. As a result of this, the materialistic conception of the world became inconsistent with the findings of empirical science.

The discoveries in subatomic particle physics lead to an idealistic tendency among some physicists. The concepts and theories of science, they said, were only convenient ways of discussing reality, whose true nature escaped the categories of thought and knowledge. This idealism, or absence of faith in the objective value of knowledge was, according to Martyr al-Sadr, the result of a philosophical error. They perceived the debate between realists and idealists as revolving about the choice of one of these two alternatives: Either the world is attributable to mind and consciousness, or to a material reality existing outside them.

This is a fallacious formulation of the primary issue involved, that is whether the world has an objective reality independent of mind and consciousness (which in the last analysis may not be material).

As a result, when they failed to posit the fundamental reality of matter, they came to doubt the possibility of knowledge. However, realism and materialism are not synonymous. If science is led to discard the materialistic view of the world, or if any of its scientific axioms collapse as a result of experiments,

it should not lead us to reject realism and deny the objective value of knowledge.

The evaporation of matter as a fundamental reality existing independently of mind was a deadly blow to materialist philosophies, including Marxism. However, the Marxist ideologues, such as Lenin, tried to save face by insisting that the philosophical conception of matter is different from the matter of science. The only necessary quality of 'matter', they pleaded, was its existence independent of mind, not the corporeal qualities traditionally ascribed to matter.

This is a futile play with words, for it does not conceal the fact that Marxism has to abandon its philosophical position. If to exist independently of mind is the only necessary quality of matter, then theological metaphysics, according to this new definition of matter, is a materialistic philosophy!

The tendency towards idealism and agnosticism among the physicists was the result of a psychological crisis that came due to the collapse of certain scientific axioms. Materialism was such an axiom, but realism is not. Realism is not the result of empirical proof or experiments; its acceptance is inherent in human nature.

A similar skeptical tendency arose among the physiologists studying the physiology of perception and the causal processes related to it.

They suggested that the objects given in sense perception are symbolic, not representative of the external objects. This tendency was a complication of the materialistic notion that knowledge was purely a physiological act conditioned by the nature of the nervous system.

Chapter 10

Skepticism

Modern skepticism has its progenitor in the post-Aristotelian Greek school of skepticism headed by Pyrrho (b.c. 360 B.C.). It did not confine itself to showing the contradictions of sense perception but went on to an analysis of knowledge to assert the impossibility of certainty. Hume took Locke's and Berkeley's empiricism to its logical conclusion by throwing doubt on causality and induction and abolished the distinction between rational belief and credulity. Not only God but also the self, other minds and external reality fell prey to a skepticism based on the denial of the principle of causality, which was again based on the empirical theory of knowledge. Hume's explanation of causality, as pointed out before, is unsuccessful.

Relativism:

Relativism, in the context of metaphysics and epistemology, is, according to al-Sadr, a doctrine which asserts the existence of independent reality and the possibility of knowledge, but a relative knowledge that is not free from subjective attachments. Hence the author proposes to discuss certain main relativistic tendencies, beginning with Kant's philosophy.

Kant's 'Relativism':

Kant believes that propositions are of two kinds: analytic and synthetic. An analytic proposition is one in which the predicate is part of the subject; for instance, 'The triangle is three-sided'. The synthetic propositions are those which are not analytic; they give new information.

Propositions are also distinguishable into two other kinds: a priori and empirical. A priori judgements, though they may be elicited by experience, have a basis other than experience, unlike empirical judgements which are rooted in experience. Some a priori judgements are synthetic. All the propositions of pure mathematics are a priori in this sense. The propositions of sciences are synthetic and empirical. Kant believes space and time to be formal attributes of the perceiving subject which give a special and temporal structure to all experience. He agrees with Berkeley that matter is not given in knowledge and sense experience, but disagrees with him in holding that external reality cannot exist independently of mind. Things independent of mind, the things-in-themselves, do exist. Percepts are caused by things in themselves and are ordered by our mental apparatus in space and time. Things-in-them-selves, which are the causes of sensations, are unknowable; they are not in space or time, nor are they substances.

In addition to the subjectivity of space and time, Kant believes in the subjectivity of these twelve categories divided into four sets of three: (1) of quantity: unity, plurality, totality, (2) of quality: reality, negation, limitation, (3) of relation: substance-and-accident, cause-and-effect, reciprocity, (4) of modality: possibility, existence, necessity (of these, al-Sadr mentions only causality). These, like time and space, are subjective. i.e. our mental constitution is such that they are applicable to whatever we experience, but there is no reason to suppose them applicable to things-in-themselves.

Mathematical propositions are all a priori. These are the only synthetic judgements which are a priori, because they rest not upon the variable and contingent content of experience but upon the unchanging forms of space and time in which all experience is given.

The statements of natural science, which are empirical and synthetic, are composed of two elements, one of which is empirical and the other rational. The empirical aspect relates to the content or stuff of experience, whereas the rational element relates to mind and its forms and categories. The natural

sciences, according to Kant, do not describe the external order of things-in-themselves, but are valid and trustworthy within the realm of experience, i.e. the experienced order of 'things-in-us'.

Here al-Sadr does not appear to appreciate the depth of Kant's skepticism regarding the knowledge of the external world, which he interprets as a kind of relativism. Hence these statements of his: "Knowledge (in Kant's philosophy), therefore, is a mixture of subjectivity and objectivity", and "That is why relativity is imposed on every truth representing external things in our knowledge, in the sense that our knowledge indicates to us the thing's reality in us, and not the thing's reality in itself". He does not seem to notice that Kant's extreme subjectivism makes not only metaphysics impossible but so also natural science, which is reduced to some kind of phenomenology. Kant's subjectivism makes his realism altogether ineffectual. The things-in-themselves are shadows that lurk on the boundaries of his system, which is idealist and subjective through and through. His realism is as useless for science as his rationalism is useless for metaphysics and theology.

Al-Sadr's criticism, however, is addressed mainly to Kant's denial of the possibility of metaphysics. According to Kant, there can be no synthetic judgements relating to metaphysics. Empirical synthetic judgements, like that of the sciences, involve mind's formal modes and categories: space and time and the categories of quantity, quality, relation and modality. These finite categories apply to sense-experience and phenomena, not to things-in-themselves, the noumenal. God, soul, and the noumenal world lie beyond experience, and hence there can be no empirical synthetic judgements about them. Also, since the noumenal world transcends mind's a priori concepts, a priori synthetic judgements, like that of logic and mathematics, which are purely formal and empty of content, cannot pertain to metaphysics. Accordingly there is no room in metaphysics for anything but analytic judgements, which do not constitute any real knowledge at all.

Al-Sadr, it seems, does not notice that Kant has built the realm

of the mind and experience into an almost autonomous and self-contained world by itself (almost, we said, allowing for Kant's inconsequential belief in the unknowable things-in-themselves, which cause sensations).

This is shown by the 'two basic errors' in Kant's theory that he points out. Firstly, he points out, Kant considers mathematical science to 'produce' mathematical truths and principles, which are above error and contradiction, whereas every realistic philosophy must recognize that science does not 'produce' or 'create' truths. Science is revelatory of what transcends the limits of mind. The propositions of mathematics reflect an objective reality and are, in this sense, similar to the laws of natural science. Secondly, "Kant considers the laws that have their foundation in the human mind as laws of the mind, and not scientific reflections of the objective laws that govern and regulate the world as a whole. They are nothing but relations present in the mind naturally, and used by the mind to organize its empirical knowledge." Such a position, al-Sadr says, leads to idealism, "for if the primary knowledge in the mind'

Is nothing but dependent relations awaiting a subject in which to appear, then how could we move from conception to objectivity? Further, how could- we prove the objective reality of our various sense perceptions that is, the natural phenomena whose objectivity Kant admits?"

The fact is that Kant's position is already deeply steeped in idealism. In his system extreme rationalism leads to an inscrutable subjectivism. Kant, in the ultimate analysis, is not a relativist but a skeptic, if not altogether a sophist. Objectivity for him lies within the inner realm of experience. Knowledge, he would say in reply to al-Sadr, is indeed revelatory, but revelatory of that which is within this realm.

Chapter 11

Relativism in Philosophy and Sciences

After discussing Kant, Martyr al-Sadr directs his attention to other relativistic tendencies in philosophy and sciences. 'Subjective relativism' is such a tendency in philosophy (viz. in James, Schiller, Vaihinger), which asserts that truth is nothing but what is necessitated by an individual's specific circumstances and conditions of knowing. It is supported by physiological idealism which asserts that sense perception is symbolic, not representative, its quality being determined by the workings of the nervous system, not external reality. This kind of outlook makes all knowledge relative without exception, even mathematics, which was excepted by Kant. Also, unlike Kant, it makes truth vary with individuals.

In the field of science, there are some theories which lead to skepticism despite the intention of their proponents. These are behaviourism, Freudianism and historical materialism. Behaviourism, which regards external stimuli and physiological conditioning as preceding the mind and consciousness and as determinants of its contents, unavoidably leads to a denial of the value of knowledge. The author has discussed it elaborately in Chapter 5 of Part 2 of the present work.

According to Freud, the contents of the conscious mind are determined by the appetites, urges and instincts hidden in the unconscious, which rule conduct and the conscious mind and its ideas. The Freudian view of the mind as an instrument of the unconscious and its instincts leads to skepticism by denying its function of mirroring and reflecting objective reality. The author, here, promises to deal with Freud's views touching upon the theory of knowledge in a future book, *Our Society*,

which he did not succeed in writing.

Historical materialism, which may be regarded here as a sociological theory, also leads to skepticism by treating knowledge and ideas as part of social composition. According to this theory, economic condition, determined by the means of production, is the determining basis of society. Knowledge and thought are thus linked to social structure and the economic forces. Economic forces occupy the same position here as unconscious urges in Freud's theory; both lead to loss of confidence in the possibility of knowledge. The inevitable links between thought and the economic factor in historical materialism contradicts with the Marxist theory of knowledge which asserts confidence in the possibility of knowledge.

Here the author makes an important remark : All theories that argue against the objective value of knowledge involve a contradiction; by eliminating confidence in knowledge they destroy their own foundation and condemn themselves. In the light of this, behaviourism becomes a product of Pavlov's physiology and stimuli; Freud's theory a product of his unconscious urges; historical materialism also becomes a product of the economic conditions in which Marx lived.

Chapter 12

Knowledge in Islamic Philosophy

At this point Martyr al-Sadr again recapitulates the main points in the theory of knowledge of Islamic philosophers. These points are as follows.

1. Human knowledge is of two kinds: Conception and judgement (or assent). Conception, in its various forms, has no objective value (not in the sense that concepts are not derived from perception of reality, but in the sense that they by themselves are not sufficient to take hold of objective reality in the sense that judgements do). Only judgement has the quality of essentially disclosing reality.
2. All knowledge of judgement type can be attributed to necessary primary knowledge, whose necessity cannot (and need not) be proved and whose truth cannot be demonstrated (on account of its self-evidence). However, the mind is conscious of the necessity of accepting it. Examples of such knowledge are the law of contradiction and the law of causality. It is on these principles that all other judgements must be based. The objective value of judgements depends on the degree to which they rest upon these principles. It is possible in the light of these principles to acquire knowledge in metaphysics, mathematics and natural sciences.

In the natural sciences knowledge is acquired by applying the primary principles through the mediation of experiment, which is not needed in mathematics and metaphysics. This is the reason why the conclusions of metaphysics and mathematics are, for the most part, certain, in contrast to those of the natural sciences.

Sometimes the drawing of metaphysical conclusions may depend on experimentation. In that case a philosophical theory has the same value and rank as a scientific theory.

The concept we form of an external reality is two sided. One side is the form of the thing it represents. In the other respect, it is fundamentally different from the objective reality of that thing; it enjoys none of the effectiveness and activity of the thing represented. This difference between the idea and reality is the difference between quiddity and existence, as described in Part 2 of this work.

Chapter 13

Knowledge in Dialectical Materialism

Dialectical materialism asserts the possibility of knowledge and rejects idealism and relativism, as well as skepticism and sophistry. It is here that the author, for the first time in his book, takes up Marxist epistemology for a critical study. All that which was said hitherto on the theory of knowledge, about the views of the Sophists, Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume and Kant was a preparation for examination of the Marxist viewpoint on knowledge. Basing as it does its theory of knowledge on the empirical doctrine, on dialectical movement of thought and synthesis of contradictions, can it refute idealism and avoid relativism and skepticism? The author's purpose is to show that it fails in this venture.

Marxism and Refutation of Idealism:

Marxism fails to refute idealism by its stand that all knowledge is derived from experience. It fails to notice that in the dispute between idealism and realism sense experience cannot be a judge, for the idealist claims that things exist only in sense experience while the realist asserts that they exist independently of sense experience. The realist cannot demonstrate the objectivity of sense experience i.e. of its being representative of another independent reality by sense experience itself. So also arguments from science can be valid only if the objectivity of experience and experiment has already been posited.

The efforts of Marxist ideologues like Engels, Lenin, Roger Garaudy and Georges Politzer are naive in that they try to refute idealism with arguments from science, which are pointless as long as the objectivity of science has not been established on

philosophical grounds. Yet this is something that Marxism cannot do, because:

(1) It does not accept necessary rational principles. According to it, the principle of causality, for example, is an empirical principle. Therefore, it cannot be considered a basis for the validity and objectivity of sense experience.

(2) The dialectic explains external events by contradictions internal to matter: natural events do not require an external cause. The idealist can assert the same thing about phenomena and claim that knowledge and experience arise out of their inner contradictions without the need of any external cause in the form of an independent reality.

The author cites some naive arguments advanced by Marxists against idealism which are derived from science or common-sense, but which in fact side step the real issue or beg the question. Once again al-Sadr concludes that it is not possible to base a sound realism except on the basis of the rational theory of knowledge which asserts the presence of necessary rational principles independent of sense experience.

Chapter 14

Sense Experience and the Thing-in-Itself

Al-Sadr here quotes Marxist texts that state that there is no basic

difference between the thing-in-itself and the phenomenon, between outward reality and the manner in which it appears to consciousness. But there is a duality here, between appearance and reality, for according to empiricism the senses perceive only the phenomena. Can Marxism eliminate this duality and prove that external reality appears to us in our perceptions and ideas as it is?

The answer is, No, because knowledge according to materialism is purely a physiological act. Unlike mechanical materialists, the dialectical materialists claim that the idea of a thing is not its pure mechanical picture. Since qualitatively different forms of motion can transform from one to another, the physical motion of a thing changes into a physiological motion in our senses. Then the physiological motion changes into the psychological motion of the idea. To begin with such changes are not admissible, and even if they be admitted it means that Marxism does not succeed in revealing the relation between a thing and its idea except as a relation between a cause and its effect or at the most that of a reality and its reflected picture.

But why should we assume that this effect and cause differ from other effects and causes and are distinguished from them by a special characteristic, namely that the effect pictures its cause faithfully? Of course, there are many physiological events that are effects of external causes without having the capacity of picturing their causes. Even if such a thing were

admitted, how do we know that the idea (percept) fully corresponds to the objective reality?

The Marxists answer this objection by asserting that thought is a part and product of nature; rather its highest expression. Our knowledge is nothing other than a superior product of nature; it cannot but reflect the laws of the motions of matter. The products of thought, being the products of nature, are not in contradiction but in agreement with the rest of material nature.

Yet this is not sufficient for proving the possibility of knowledge. Aren't idealist thought and theological and metaphysical thought as much part of nature and products of it as dialectical materialism?

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*"Wisdom is the lost property of the Believer,
let him claim it wherever he finds it"*

Imam Ali (as)