Research Paper

Critical Approach to Non-Epistemic Theories Concerning Functional Language of Religion

Qodratullah Qorbani
*1

1 Associate Professor of Philosophy, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran

Abstract

Rapid developments of empirical sciences in recent centuries and incorrect policies of church leaders have led to different theories concerning the relations between science and religion, and their conflict, independence, and cooperation are some significant examples of them. Some contemporary thinkers, by paying attention to the separation of science and religion's realms, methods, and language, have tried to consider some special realms, methods, and language for religion as well as science. In this case, Wittgenstein, Braithwaite, and Stace have some notable theories, since they take into account some special functions regarding religion through their phenomenological and non-epistemic approaches. Wittgenstein pays attention to the language of religion in the life of believers and separates the religious realm from the scientific one. Braithwaite reduces religious propositions to moral ones, and Stace by emphasizing on mystical virtues of religious teachings and defines non-epistemic functions for them. All these thinkers agree with fideism, the impossibility of rational assessing and non-superiority of one religion to other religions, and non-epistemic virtues of religious propositions and teachings. These theories lead to a misunderstanding of religious teachings and relativistic and humanistic interpretations of religion's functions.

*Corresponding Author: Qodratullah Qorbani
Address: Associate Professor of Philosophy, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran

Email: qodratullahqorbani@khu.ac.ir

Qodratullah Qorbani. Critical Approach to Non-Epistemic Theories Concerning Functional Language of Religion

25
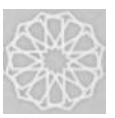
Extended abstract

1. Introduction

The expansion of various dimensions of scientific progress in recent centuries and sometimes incorrect stances of some members of the church in the West fueled the phenomenon of the conflict between science and religion. With the continuation of scientific progress and uncovering the secrets of the universe, some of these discoveries conflicted with the claims of the Bible and led to various views on the separation, conflict, and opposition of science and religion, and as a result marginalization of Christianity in the Western world. This scientific and religious progress reached its peak in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but from the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, due to the revelation of the invalidity of some extravagant claims of science and its limitations in answering the basic questions of mankind, not only the idea of conflict and opposition of science and religion lost its validity to a large extent, but the views of independence and even unity of science and religion found a chance to breathe and new activity. As a result, many thinkers tried to define specific functions for them by separating the realms, methods, and language of science and religion, and some tried to design a kind of unity or complementarity and cooperation between them.

The diversity and multiplicity of philosophical views in this regard cannot be examined due to the limitations of this research, therefore, an effort is made to consider some commonalities in views and their importance, focusing on the views of three famous and influential philosophers, i.e. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Braithwaite, and Walter Terence Stace. Therefore, some of this study's questions are: what are the nature and functions of religion in these philosophers' views in the present time, and to what extent do the functions they considered for religion have strength and rational validity? And what are their problems? The importance of the theories of the philosophers mentioned above is the invalidation of the claim of positivist attitude regarding the meaninglessness of religious propositions, their belief in the meaningfulness of those propositions, and their efforts to define some kind of function for religious propositions regarding their meaningfulness. In order to test the ideas of the aforementioned thinkers, this study tried to show that definition of the nature of religion, in terms of its functions, is only a picture of the reality of religion and cannot reveal its entirety to us. For this reason, the aforementioned functional views are unable to explain the functions of religion in a precise and rational manner and need more reconstruction. In addition, the phenomenological and functionalist attitude and influence of logical positivism among these philosophers in their view of religion, especially Christianity in the Western world, has prevented them from being able to provide a relatively comprehensive and generalizable view of the functions of religions. In facing the above problem, the common feature of the three discussed thinkers is trying to overcome the positivist claim that religious, metaphysical, and moral propositions are meaningless, but since all these philosophers are epistemologically influenced by the positivist discourse, their transition from that discourse is non-epistemological; that is, they try to provide non-cognitive explanations of how religious propositions work. In this approach, Wittgenstein emphasizes the functions of the language of religion in practical life, Braithwaite underlines the moral functions, and Stace emphasizes the mystical functions of religion and tries to provide the necessary authority and values for religious teachings by crediting these functions. However, their emphasis on the non-cognitive and
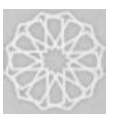
phenomenological nature of religious propositions makes it impossible to have a rational and epistemological evaluation of religious propositions and beliefs in order to recognize what is right from what is wrong. In fact, discovery is not intended for religious propositions, but its application in the religious life of believers is authoritative. As a result, one can have false propositions, such as useful legends intended by Braithwaite, or Stace's mystical experiences, which have no roots in fundamental reality and may be pure lies, but because they have their own religious application, they should be considered as true propositions and are used and believed.

Additionally, relying on the validity of religious propositions to various external functions and rejecting the possibility of their rational evaluation lead to epistemological, moral, and religious relativism, because each proposition can be used in different conditions, with different mentalities of religious people, and at different times; in other words, it has different uses and therefore different meanings. In addition, the differences between religions, for example, whether they are divine or non-divine, the type of their teachings, and the degree of truth and superiority of some over others, lose their place. In fact, such a view has led the aforementioned thinkers to fideism, in which our faith and attachment to God or the ultimate being is important; that is, a human being and his/her way of perceiving religion and its teachings are central and there is no need to evaluate it with other minds because everyone can have a different understanding from another and even without a real basis; what is important is the function of this understanding and personal faith.

2. Conclusion

Although the attitude of the mentioned philosophers towards religion is significant progress compared to the thinkers of the 18th and 19th centuries, especially as they try to define a kind of functional space for religion, the phenomenological, non-epistemological, anthropocentric, and relativistic beliefs in religion makes them unable to understand the fundamental nature of religion and its teachings and its epistemological, political, moral, social, educational, economic, and mystical functions, which are both the result of the dominance of Western scientism and human interpretation and are centered on religion, the most important result of which is the negligence of religions' divine origin.

Qodratullah Qorbani. Critical Approach to Non-Epistemic Theories Concerning Functional Language of Religion

27

Resources

Alizamani, A. A. (1996). *Language of Religion*. Qom, Islamic Propaganda Office.

Barbour, I. (2007). *Science and Religion* (5th ed.). Translated by Khorramshahi, B. Tehran, University Press.

Bartley, W. W. (1973). Morality and religion. *Tijdschrift Voor Filosofie*, 35(2).

Braithwaite, R. (1971). An Empiricist View of the Nature of Religious Beliefs. *Philosophy of Religion*. Edited by Mitchell, B. Oxford University Press.

Hick, J. (1963). *Philosophy of Religion*. London, Prentice Hall.

Horden, W. (1986). *A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology*. New York, Collier Book.

Mahdavinejad, M. H. (2006). *Religion and Knowledge*: *A Critical Study of the Conflict between Science and Religion*. Tehran, Imam Sadiq University.

Patterson, M., Hasker, W., Reichenbach, B., & Basinger, D. (2008). *Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*. Translated by Naraghi, A. & Soltani, E. Tehran, new design, 3rd edition.

Rhees, R. (1984). *Ludwig Wittgenstein Personal Recolections*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sajedi, A. (2005). *The Language of Religion and the Qur'an*. Qom, Publications of Imam Khomeini Educational and Research Institute.

Stace, W. (1960). *Mysticis and Philosophy*. New York: Macmillan.

Stace, W. T. (1960). *Mysticism and Philosophy*. Translated by Khorramshahi, B. Tehran, Soroush Publishing House.

Stace, W. T. (1999). *Religion and modern attitude*. Translated by Jalili, A. Tehran, Hekmat Publications.

Stiver, D. R. (1996). *The Philosophy of Religious Language, Sign, Symbol & Story*. Oxford: Mlackwell.

Wittgenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical Investigations*, Translated by Anscomb, G. E. M. New York: Macmillan

Wittgenstein, L. (1979). *Notebooks 1914-16* (2nd ed.). Translated by Anscomb, G. E. M., & Blackwell, O. University of Chicago Press.

Wittgenstein, L. (2009). *Philosophical Investigations* (4th ed.). Translated by Fatemi, F. Tehran, Central Publishing House.

28

Qodratullah Qorbani. Critical Approach to Non-Epistemic Theories Concerning Functional Language of Religion