
Khosrow Bagheri Noaparast and Islamic scholarship: a Calvinist appraisal

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Abstract

This article introduces and evaluates, from a Christian-Reformed point of view, the essential lines of Bagheri Noaparast's project concerning the establishment of an integral type of Islamic scholarship. After recommending his fundamental approach as preferable to other models for (Islamic) "religious" scholarship, the article moves to a few critical questions and suggestions, with the purpose of improving, if possible, Bagheri Noaparast's approach. In this section the main issues that are discussed are the nature and role of religion, religious scholarship, its philosophical foundations, the presumed neutrality of philosophical methods, the fields of study of the different scientific disciplines and the realism/nominalism dilemma

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel gee 'n inleiding en evalueer, vanuit 'n Christelik-Reformatoriese standpunt, die essensiële lyne van Bagheri Noaparast se projek oor die vestiging van 'n integrale tipe Islamitiese wetenskapsbeoefening. Nadat hierdie fundamentele benadering aanbeveel word as verkieslik bo ander modelle vir (Islamitiese) "religieuse" wetenskapsbeoefening, beweeg die artikel aan na 'n aantal kritiese vrae en suggesties, met die doel om te verbeter, indien moontlik, op Bagheri Noaparast se benadering. In hierdie afdeling is die hoofkwessies wat bespreek word die aard en rol van religie, religieuse wetenskapsbeoefening, die filosofiese grondslae daarvan, die veronderstelde neutraliteit van filosofiese metodes, die veld van studie van die verskillende wetenskaplike dissiplines en die realisme/nominalisme dilemma.

Keywords

Khosrow Bagheri Noaparast; Islamic scholarship; Reformational philosophy; Models for scholarship in the Islamic and Christian traditions; Nature and role of religion; Religious scholarship; Philosophical methods; Fields of study of academic disciplines; Realism versus nominalism.

1. Introduction

Khosrow Bagheri Noaparast is a professor of philosophy of education at the University of Tehran and president of the Philosophy of Education Society of Iran. His interests range from philosophy of science and religion to the social sciences and even to further territories. In this article I would like to provide an evaluation of his project concerning the desirability, possibility and even necessity of Islamic "religious education". My purpose is to provide an appreciation of Bagheri Noaparast's views and if possible also to "strengthen" them from a Christian (more specifically from a neo-Calvinist) point of view.

Calvinism is a branch of Protestantism related to the 16th century Reformer John Calvin. It is part of the Protestant section of Christianity and, ecclesiastically speaking, it finds its most typical expression in the Reformed

and Presbyterian churches. Neo-Calvinism is especially related to the Dutch statesman, pastor and scholar Abraham Kuyper and to the movements that he inspired in the Netherlands and worldwide since the 1880s. According to Kuyper, religion permeates the whole of life. He promoted a Christian view of state and politics, Christian art, agriculture, journalism and (like Bagheri Noaparast) he also promoted religious (in his case Christian) scholarship. In philosophy, neo-Calvinism is known especially through the school of “reformational” philosophy, established around the 1920s by the Dutch philosophers Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1967), and D.H.Th. Vollenhoven (1892-1978) at the Free University of Amsterdam. (I will sketch the main ideas of this philosophical school below.)

It might rightly be asked, however, whether or to what extent it may be legitimate to undertake the project that I have briefly sketched above, namely an evaluation of the project of Islamic scholarship from a Calvinist perspective. One set of questions seems particularly important: are Calvinism and Islam to some extent compatible or at least commensurable at a religious level? Do they have anything in common? It would be too ambitious, probably, to look for a sort of common denominator, but is there at least some common ground?

According to the neo-Calvinist philosopher Roy Clouser (2005:43-58), there are three main types of religious beliefs and they are distinguished by the type of relationship that each type posits between the divine and the non-divine. (We will return on his view of religion below). He distinguishes a pagan type of belief, a pantheistic one and a “biblical” type. In the latter type he includes Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In fact, the “biblical” type, according to Clouser, assumes (at least in principle) a clear-cut distinction between creation and its Creator. This is a fundamental feature that cannot be found in the pagan or pantheistic types of religious beliefs, as they both assume a sort of continuity between the divine and the non-divine.

Furthermore, Barbour (1990:306) notices a basic similarity between Islam and Calvinism by acknowledging that they both accept the full sovereignty of God. In this regard, Barbour speaks of a “monarchian model” of God. Calvinism and Islam, therefore, seem to share at least some fundamental ideas. These considerations have encouraged me to undertake the present project, in the hope that the existence of some fundamental common ground may become clearer as we proceed in our discussion. In addition, I think we should find further reasons for cooperation in our common endeavours

towards the establishment of a type of scholarship¹ that may be in line with our religious commitments and beliefs.

In this article I will first provide an appreciation of Bagheri Noaparast's general approach to what he calls religious scholarship. This is not to say that this is the only area in which I can foresee an agreement (or partial agreement) developing between us. I have already noticed several other ideas in his philosophy that promise to develop into moments of consensus.² But instead of dealing with these possible moments of agreement, I will proceed to asking a few critical questions regarding issues that, I feel, need to be further clarified in Bagheri Noaparast's project. These issues concern for example the nature and role of religion, religious scholarship, its philosophical foundations, the presumed neutrality of the methods of philosophy, the fields of study of the different academic disciplines and the realism/nominalism dilemma. The purpose of this critical interaction will be to strengthen Bagheri Noaparast's approach in some peripheral areas. Even though these "improvements" will be proposed from a Christian point of view I will try to show that in my opinion they are already hinted at, in Bagheri Noaparast's writings.

2. Islam and scholarship: Three approaches

Historically and systematically, Islamic scholarship was implemented, according to Bagheri Noaparast, on the basis of three different models or approaches. The third model is the one suggested by Bagheri Noaparast himself and is therefore the youngest of the three and one that does not yet know large applications. The two other models are described a bit differently by Bagheri Noaparast in relation to different disciplines (e.g. the humanities or the natural sciences).³ Nevertheless it seems to me that the two models

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- 1 In this article, terms like science and scholarship are used as synonyms. The same holds for scientific and theoretical. When speaking about "science" (unless further qualified), I don't refer only to a specific group of sciences (e.g. the natural sciences) but to all sciences (the humanities, social sciences and so forth). Again, all sciences are included when I speak of "scholarship" or when I use the phrase "science and scholarship". Finally, I regard all sciences as equally characterized by the use of scientific/theoretical thought.
 - 2 The similarities between our views seem to include, for example, the nature of the "heart" as the centre of the human personality (not only of its emotional life – cf. Bagheri Noaparast 2001:41-43; 54). I also strongly agree on creating a balance between individuality and community and on the need not to over-emphasize the one to the detriment of the other in our views of society (Bagheri Noaparast 2001:47-50).
 - 3 Bagheri Noaparast discusses the three paradigms or approaches in relation to natural science in his 2009 book *The Idea of a Religious Social Science*. He discusses the same approaches in relation to philosophy and education in his 2014 article on "the three approaches".

have specific characteristics that remain stable through their application to different fields of scholarship.

Each model implies a certain understanding of both religion and science. I will therefore discuss and compare these models even though I will avoid dealing extensively with them. I will also compare the “three approaches” to Islamic scholarship with Christian models that, in my opinion, are quite similar.

The majority of these models, in Christianity, entail a distinction (sometimes division or separation) between a sphere of nature and a sphere of grace (see Table 1 below). When arguing about scholarship, for example, reason, philosophy, science and so forth belong to the sphere of nature, while religion, faith, revelation and theology belong to the sphere of grace. The sphere of nature enjoys a certain degree of independence from the sphere of grace. When dealing with natural realities, reason is regarded as basically neutral with respect to religion.

It seems to me that something very similar happens within Islamic scholarship. As far as Christian scholarship is concerned, however, although the nature-and-grace- paradigms are by far the most endorsed, in the past century many have started arguing that they do not really fit the biblical “paradigm”. In particular, the basic dualism stemming from the nature-grace split was regarded as problematic, hence the necessity of providing a more integral paradigm. It seems to me that a similar concern characterises the work of Bagheri Noaparast.

3. The first approach

The first model for Islamic scholarship outlined by Bagheri Noaparast seems to me similar to the Roman Catholic model in Christianity. He calls it the “supplementary approach” (2009:92), based on a strategy of “inference on Islamic philosophical systems” (2014a:2). I would say that the keywords for this approach could be integration, control but also synthesis. This model aims at penetrating secular philosophical and scientific theories with Islamic perspectives, insights and teachings. While the purpose of this approach is to “edify” (2009:95) it could be argued that its main result seems to be a synthesis between pagan and Islamic scholarship, and this is precisely what Bagheri Noaparast complains about.⁴

4 Synthesis is also the result of Medieval Roman Catholic philosophy. The aim is also similar, as it proposes an elevation or bringing to perfection of “nature” (e.g. reason, philosophy, science) according to the Latin formula “*natura gratia non tollit sed perficit*” (grace does

This approach appeals to and “uses” established Islamic philosophical systems but, as Bagheri Noaparast observes, these systems are heavily indebted to the Aristotelian or the Platonic heritage. The result is a sort of compromise, which is nevertheless in line with the core-idea of this model. Pagan philosophy is “penetrated” or elevated by Islamic ideas and this is then called “Islamic philosophy”. This is conceivable because the rational part of pagan philosophies is supposed to be religiously neutral, and can therefore legitimately be incorporated in, supplemented or integrated by Islamic views and doctrines.

Bagheri Noaparast appreciates the fact that in this approach philosophy is not rejected (as is sometimes the case in the second approach). Yet his penetrating critique of the presuppositions of this model regarding both science and religion, leads him to question the synthetic attitude on which the whole project is based. Leaving apart issues related to textual exegesis of the Qur’an, what appears to me as the most interesting critique that he delivers, is summarised in the following quotation.

[The first approach] ignores the systematic structures of scientific theories and their presuppositions, on one hand, and those of religious texts on the other. This systematic characteristic of theories and texts prevents us from dismissing elements of a system and replacing them with elements from other systems without being trapped in to providing incoherent systems. (...) superficial similarities between two different systems are misleading. We might think that because of the similarity we have provided coherent systems, whereas this superficial coherence is shaky (Bagheri Noaparast, 2009:97).

To conclude this section, it could be interesting to mention that this model for Islamic scholarship was the model that was implemented during the Islamic revolution in Iran (Bagheri Noaparast, 2009:95).

4. The second approach

Bagheri Noaparast calls the second model “purely religious view” (2014a:6) when dealing with philosophy (of education) or the “inferential approach” (2009:86 ff.) when dealing with natural science. In this case theories, concepts and so forth are directly “inferred” from verses of the Qur’an. Pagan philosophy and scholarship are rejected in favour of pure religious scholarship based on the Qur’an. The most positive side of this model is that it strives

not eliminate nature but brings it to perfection – Aquinas 2006, 1,1,8). In addition to this similarity with the Roman Catholic approach, it can be noticed that this Islamic model does not appeal primarily to Qur’an verses but to a “tradition”.

for “originality and coherence” (Bagheri Noaparast 2014a:12). Unfortunately it implies an “encyclopaedic conception” of religion, in the sense that (in its “strong” version) the Qur’an is supposed to contain answers to the different scientific problems or (in its “weak” version) fundamental insights concerning all scientific disciplines (Bagheri Noaparast, 2009:87 ff.).

This approach is strikingly similar, in my opinion, to what has been identified, in Christianity, as the “Anabaptist” approach (see Table 1 below). Clouser (2005:111ff.) calls it the “fundamentalist” approach and agrees that at its core is an “encyclopaedic view” of the Bible. The keywords for this model are: opposition (between nature and grace) and sometimes substitution (of scientific theory by Scripture). It endorses a view of written revelation as a sort of “blueprint” to be applied to all situations. From a Christian point of view this model is often criticized on the basis that the purpose of the Bible (as declared in the Bible itself) is certainly not the revelation of scientific theories or of insights concerning scientific problems. The purpose is the conversion of human beings (Gospel of John 20, 31). This is not equivalent to saying that the Christian Scriptures have nothing whatsoever to do with science and scholarship. Yet the direct derivation of scientific insights from scriptural verses is regarded as improper by the majority of Christian traditions.

The same idea that the Qur’an does not contain scientific theories (cf. Al-Baqarah, 2), is argued by Bagheri Noaparast and this is his main critique concerning the religious side of this second Islamic model (2009:90). Concerning the scientific side, he argues that this approach presents a paradox.

On one hand, it must admit the dismissal of the hypothetical nature of experimental sciences. This is because what is thought to be the principles (the weak version) or details (the strong version) of the sciences must be accepted dogmatically as the contents of the Islamic texts. On the other hand, it must hold a hypothetical nature for the statements in the Islamic texts. This is because they are regarded as scientific claims that need to be verified by the method of science namely experiment (Bagheri Noaparast, 2009:90-91).

After exploring the first two models, we can now move to Bagheri Noaparast’s proposal of an alternative model.

5. The third approach

The third model is proposed by Bagheri Noaparast who calls it “establishment approach” (2009:101); perhaps it will be better grasped if compared with the two previous models. Bagheri Noaparast agrees with the first model on the proposal that Islamic scholarship should not reject philosophy (or other disciplines – as proposed by some radical supporters of the second model). On the other hand, he agrees with the second approach that Islamic scholarship should be sufficiently original and integral. In his opinion an Islamic philosophy of education, for example, is necessary; but it should not be dependent on concepts and ideas derived from Greek or modern humanist philosophy. Bagheri Noaparast is prepared to adopt from these philosophical traditions only the methods of philosophical inquiry. The methods, he argues, are sufficiently independent from the content of philosophy, to the extent that the same methods can be used by very different philosophers to attain very different aims. In this respect he (2014a:12) mentions the fact that Hegelian and Platonic methods were used by Gadamer or Derrida without importing the content of Plato’s or Hegel’s philosophies in their philosophical systems. (I will return later on this topic.)

But the *content* of Islamic philosophy, writes Bagheri Noaparast, should not be derived from non-Islamic traditions; such content should be in line with the Qur’an and with other authoritative religious sources. Here he comes close to the second model, without accepting, however, its central idea of inference from specific verses. The Qur’an, argues Bagheri Noaparast, does not contain scientific theories or answers to scientific problems. Nevertheless, it contains a “metaphysics” (2009:106). It is from this metaphysics that Islamic scholarship can be regulated and developed in the right direction. In Christianity one could say that, with this strategy, he avoids a “biblicistic” or fundamentalist position.

6. Models for scholarship: a few comments

I suspect that more models and sub-models could be distinguished within Islamic scholarship. My own preliminary attempt at classifying models for Christian scholarship is summarised in the following scheme.⁵

5 In the first column I have provided an attempt at identifying the “worldviews” (or “ground motives” – Dooyeweerd’s term) characterizing the different Christian traditions. It should be observed that these ground motives influence the basic attitudes of Christian communities in all areas of culture (e.g. in politics, art and so forth). These worldviews, therefore, are not simply models for scholarship. The latter are sketched in the 3rd column and should be regarded as consequences of the basic approaches identified in the 1st and 2nd columns.

Table 1: Christian models of the relationship between religion and science/scholarship

Type:	Key-ideas:	Sub-versions:
1) "Liberal" (grace equals nature)	Identification	1.a) Adoption of non-Christian paradigms / theories 1.b) Elaboration of non-Christian paradigms / theories
2) "Catholic" (grace above nature)	Integration/ synthesis	2.a) Integration of non-Christian theories and theology 2.b) Focus on religion, not on scientific theories
3) "Lutheran" (grace alongside nature)	Parallelism	3.a) Concordance between non-Christian scholarship and religion 3.b) Isolation between non-Christian scholarship and religion
4) "Anabaptist" (grace against nature)	Opposition	4.a) Conflict between non-Christian scholarship and religion 4.b) Biblical doctrines substitute non-Christian scholarly theories
5) "Reformational" (creation-fall-redemption)	Reformation	5.a) Establishment of integral Christian scholarship

Source: Coletto, 2012.

Bagheri Noaparast has already started distinguishing a weak and strong version within the second (Islamic) model. The latter seems to me quite similar to the "Anabaptist" model of Christianity (see Table 1, n. 4).

Moving to the first (Islamic) model, we can notice that it is remarkably similar to the Roman Catholic paradigm (see Table 1, n. 2), which is characterised by key-ideas such as integration or synthesis but does also contain a "mystical" sub-version (cf. sub-version 2.b). It is remarkable that Bagheri Noaparast too identifies (in the first Islamic model) a sub-version inclined towards mysticism, a trend that sometimes leads to rejecting philosophy because it is perceived as too rationalistic. Historically, within Christianity, the mystical trend has been adopted especially by the Orthodox Churches (Eastern Europe), but it has also been maintained as a minority position within the Roman Catholic tradition itself (see for example the monastic orders).

I wonder if a "Lutheran" approach of parallelism or concordance did develop within Islam as well, a model in which science and religion tend to be accommodated to each other, either as independent compartments or as partners in a dialogue. Hussaini might be a fitting example of this approach, when he tries to concord the Islamic threefold view of personality (*Aqle* or intellect, *Fitrah* or innate structure, and *Shahvah* or passions) with Freud's

Ego, Superego, and Id (quoted in Bagheri Noaparast, 2009:91-92). However, Bagheri Noaparast thinks that Hussaini's work fits better in the integration model, though retaining some commitment to the "encyclopaedic view" of Scripture (personal communication, 22/9/2016).

7. Bagheri Noaparast's approach: an appreciation

If we extend for a moment our comparison of Islamic and Christian models, Bagheri Noaparast seems to work with a sort of "reformational" model (which is the one I also support as the most consistent with the biblical revelation). I am not in a position to judge whether this model is the most in line with the Qur'an. I would say, however, that it is the most appropriate to reflect what happens within scholarship in general. In other words, this model does not only account for "religious" scholarship, but reflects on the structure of all types of scholarship. In this regard, Bagheri Noaparast seems to work with the basic themes of structure-and-direction.⁶ While the direction of scholarship can differ (Humanist, Jewish, Islamic) its structure must be the same for all. In other words, he realises that ancient Chinese, Greek or modern Western scholarship are not simply derived from the verses of holy books (the second approach) or from a compromise with previous paradigms (the first approach). Instead, they all seem to be rooted in something deeper: a "metaphysics". "Religious" scholarship, though following different "directions" is structured in the same way as all other types of scholarship.

Furthermore, in the approach suggested by Bagheri Noaparast religious insights are not externally accommodated to scholarship but *penetrate into* scholarship and work internally. It could be objected that religious beliefs penetrate into scholarship even in the first and second (Islamic) models. In the first approach they "Islamize" past philosophy (or recent theories); in the second approach scholarship is directly based on the Qur'an. It should be observed, however, that the result of the first model is not integral Islamic scholarship but a hybrid, a synthesis of Islamic and non-Islamic scholarship. In the second model, religious beliefs do not become relevant in all cases but only when the Qur'an seems to provide specific pronouncements on certain theories. For example, most probably the Qur'an has not much to

6 In Table 1 I have tried to define the basic approach of the reformational model by using the formula "creation, fall, redemption". I am now using a second formula ("structure and direction") but it is just a different way of phrasing the first one. In fact, "creation" constitutes the *structure* that can be used or developed in two *directions* (i.e. fall or redemption – positive or negative).

say about quantum physics or molecular biology. In such cases, the Islamic scholar following the second model will have little or nothing to say about such issues. These are further reasons to prefer the third model, a paradigm for the establishment of integral religious scholarship.

Having expressed my agreement with Bagheri Noaparast and my appreciation for his excellent suggestions on the relationship between religion and scholarship, I would like to move to a few critical questions and suggestions. Before doing that, however, I would like to outline a few basic tenets of reformational philosophy. This will hopefully help the reader to better grasp the background from which my questions and suggestions are formulated.

8. A sketch of reformational philosophy⁷

One of the most important “discoveries” of reformational philosophy is that theoretical thought is not neutral with respect to “religious ground motives”. Dooyeweerd (e.g. 1984, 1:169-566) has tried to identify the main ground motives regulating theoretical thinking in the history of Western culture. They are: the “matter and form” ground motive for Greek culture; the biblical motive of “creation-fall-redemption”; the Christian-Medieval motive of “nature and grace” and the “nature and freedom” motive of humanist culture (cf. Coletto, 2017).

From this point of view, all cultural achievements (including scholarship), are connected to religious ground motives, i.e. religious beliefs and choices. Ground motives inform, regulate or shape theories, paradigms, the choice of problems and so forth. This is not the case only for “religious” types of scholarship. Dooyeweerd (1984), Clouser (2005, 147-183) and Strauss (2009) are among the authors who have traced the influence of religious beliefs/ground motives through the history of mathematics, biology, physics, psychology, sociology, politics and other scientific disciplines. I will give a more detailed account of this facet of reformational philosophy when dealing with my first critical question, concerning the link between religion and scholarship.

The theory of religious ground motives, as I said, prompts especially my first critical question. The same theory, however, has implications that underlie

⁷ In the limited space of this section it is not possible to provide a full introduction to reformational philosophy. The interested reader should consult texts like Troost (2012) or Bartholomew & Goheen (2013).

some of my other questions. In fact, if each “paradigm” (or ground motive) provides a platform that is sufficient to develop each type of scholarship, it is not necessary (for the “religious” scholar) to be involved in a process of constant “borrowing” from other traditions, philosophies or paradigms. Without excluding scholarly dialogue, cooperation and mutual enrichment, the door is open to develop integral types of scholarship, in line with a specific metaphysics, paradigm or ground motive. This idea is already firmly imbedded in Bagheri Noaparast’s project. Nevertheless, I will question his view of philosophical methods, of post-positivist philosophy of science and of the realism-nominalism debate. (A brief introduction to these debates, for the reader who may not be familiar with philosophical issues, is provided in footnotes 9 and 10). In all these cases, my questions boil down to asking whether Bagheri Noaparast is not “borrowing” too much from non-Islamic scholarship.

A second important contribution of reformational philosophy is the theory of modalities or modal aspects (cf. Dooyeweerd 1984, 2:1-426). From an ontological point of view, created reality is constituted by 1) entities and by 2) laws, conditions and properties. These laws and properties can be grouped in different kinds; for example properties like weight, density and mass belong to the same “kind” of properties (i.e. physical). Modal aspects or “modalities” are kinds of laws and properties. They are not entities – what some philosophers call “things”. (Things or entities can be traditionally distinguished into subjects or objects⁸; I will make use of this distinction below). Modal aspects constitute, rather, the framework of laws according to which all types of entities function in concrete reality.

This has led to an attempt at identifying (and properly ordering) the kinds of properties and laws that structure our daily life. Nowadays it is accepted by most reformational scholars that, in order of increasing complexity, we can identify the following modal aspects:

8 In philosophy “the subject” often indicates the human knower, the person trying to interpret reality in which s/he lives. The “object” is the reality that is explored by a person (or community), the knowable object of one’s investigations. The distinction is admittedly questionable (human subjects can become an object of study e.g. in psychology). Yet it constitutes a traditional way to indicate the knower and the knowable.

Table 2: The modal aspects and their core-kernels

	Modal aspect	Modal kernel
1	Numerical	Quantity
2	Spatial	Continuous extension
3	Kinematic	Motion
4	Physical	Energy and matter
5	Biotic	Life and vitality
6	Sensory	Feeling, perception
7	Analytical	Distinction
8	Historical	Cultural formation
9	Linguistic	Symbolic representation
10	Social	Social intercourse
11	Economic	Frugality with resources
12	Aesthetic	Harmony
13	Juridical	Justice, retribution
14	Ethical	Love (self-giving)
15	Pistic/ certitudinal	Faith, certainty, trust

Source: Adaptation from Dooyeweerd 1979:214.

Modal aspects are not just mental categories that we project on an outside reality (see Kant's philosophy). As already said, they are also not simply properties or "sides" of the entities (including events and processes) that we may analyse. They are kinds of laws and properties. They are also points of view or "entry gates" for the (theoretical) study of reality. This means that if we observe reality from the point of view of one (or a few) of these aspects, we are busy with theoretical (i.e. scientific) thinking. By contrast, a pre- or non-scientific experience of reality is never "channelled" through a specific modal aspect, but occurs in the continuous inter-connection of all the aspects.

The theory of modal aspects prompts my questions and suggestions concerning Bagheri Noaparast's view of the field of study of psychology. In

fact, in my opinion this field of study is demarcated by a modal aspect (n. 6 in Table 2), not by an entity (e.g. the human spirit or behaviour). In addition, the theory of modal aspects informs some of my remarks about the realism-nominalism discussion. In this context, I will sketch the suggestion that the “universals” (that occupy a central place in this discussion – see fn. 10) could be understood as laws and conditions (i.e. the modal aspects listed in Table 2), thus opening new avenues towards an alternative and original position.

It is now time to move to the critical questions that I have already anticipated. My first question is about religion and its relation to scholarship. I just need to briefly prevent a possible misunderstanding. In table 2 above we have the faith-modality in the terminal position of the modal order (n. 15). Does that modal aspect correspond to religion? Are faith and religion the same thing? According to reformational philosophy this is not the case. Religion is not simply a modality, it is rather something that permeates all modalities. It is, so to speak, the direction given to all modalities. Religion, as Kuyper taught, is not limited to one aspect or sector of life, but permeates all its aspects. In fact, religion is a human response that is not limited to faith but includes justice, proper language, economic stewardship, love, feeling and so forth.

9. A few critical questions

I will start from a few remarks about religion. When speaking of “religious” scholarship, does Bagheri Noaparast imply that some types of scholarship are non-religious? He seems to have established that all scholarship is based on “metaphysics”, but Islamic scholarship seems to be based on a “religious” metaphysics, derived from the Qur’an. Will this not still maintain a gulf between religious and non-religious metaphysics, and as a consequence between religious and non-religious scholarship? Will the secular mentality not find a reason there, to regard the former as still “biased” (because based on revelation) and the latter as more objective, because based on a metaphysics developed in a scientific and religiously-neutral way?

Secondly, the approach indicated by Bagheri Noaparast implies a certain view of science, that he (2009:8 ff.) calls a “post-positivist” view⁹. This is certainly preferable to a positivist approach and is certainly more in line with contemporary philosophy of science. One could, however, object that Bagheri Noaparast seems to proceed to his project “on the basis”, or better, “with the permission” of contemporary (i.e. post-positivist) Western philosophy of science. Does this not bring him back to the first Islamic model, in which non-Islamic conceptions are first adopted and later Islamic views are brought in to “fill the gaps”? How will one avoid the possibility that the rather relativistic implications of post-positivist philosophy of science may have an impact on Islamic scholarship?

Thirdly, although the model adopted by Bagheri Noaparast is not designed to borrow ideas and concepts derived from secular philosophy, it is still supposed to use (all?) “the methods of philosophy”, irrespective of the context (secular or religious) in which they were originally designed, discovered or elaborated. Admittedly, this strategy does not imply a broad compromise with secular or non-Islamic philosophy, yet it still implies that methods can be somehow regarded as religiously neutral, and can be used only formally. This assumption is questionable, in my opinion, as some methods presuppose ideas that might be unacceptable from a “religious” (e.g. Islamic or Christian) point of view.

My fourth question concerns the field of study of psychology and of the academic disciplines in general. Does the Islamic notion of “action”, as proposed by Bagheri Noaparast, provide a plausible field of study for the project of an Islamic psychology?

9 In philosophy of science, positivism (founded by Auguste Comte around the 1860s) was a movement that (especially in its initial stages) emphasized scientific objectivity, the importance of facts, verification, the superior reliability of natural-scientific knowledge, trust in scientific progress and so forth. At the same time it praised the rationality of science, its exclusion of personal “prejudices” and the abandonment of speculation and “metaphysics”. However, starting from Karl Popper in the 1930s and continuing with the “historical school” (Kuhn, Hanson, Feyerabend), the positivist position was subjected to heavy criticism that eventually led to its (almost complete) dismissal. The “post-positivist” philosophy of science (starting from Popper) acknowledged the importance of the human subject in science. From this point of view, science is not only about facts but also about theories, interpretations and “paradigms” (discussed especially by Thomas Kuhn). Science is not simply a product of rationality, but is influenced by social, historical and even psychological factors. Scientific progress is not simply granted by “the right method” but is, for the post-positivist, more uncertain and questionable. By re-sizing the rationality and objectivity of science, one can say that the post-positivist view has introduced, together with many necessary correctives, also a larger degree of relativism.

Finally, I will discuss Bagheri Noaparast's adoption of constructive realism¹⁰ as the most fitting ontological and epistemological position from an Islamic point of view. I will ask whether this solution is not too tied to the premises and options that are typical of Western philosophy and if a more original solution should not be designed.

These are the main questions that I would like to pose in this context, and in the following sections I will try to propose a few suggestions, in view of strengthening the idea of both Christian and Islamic scholarship.

10. A few suggestions about religion

I will begin from my previous remarks about the nature and role of religion. How can we avoid maintaining a gulf between religious and non-religious metaphysics, and as a consequence between religious and non-religious scholarship? What can we reply to the secular mentality when it maintains that religious scholarship is still "biased" (because based on revelation) while secular scholarship is more objective, because based on a metaphysics developed in a scientific and religiously-neutral way?

In my opinion the best reply is that the gulf between religious and non-religious scholarship does not exist because no scholarship is religiously

10 The realism-nominalism dilemma is one of the oldest in the history of philosophy and is debated in different philosophical disciplines. In philosophy of science, for example, the realist assumes that scientific theories reflect real entities, laws and processes that exist "out there" (i.e. in the "real world"). The nominalist, however, assumes that theories are simply useful *tools* for our investigations; it doesn't matter if they reflect anything real – a position also known as instrumentalism. The original "setting" of the debate is ontology (the study of what exists) and epistemology (the study of knowledge). Here the conflict is about the status of the so called "universals". In concrete reality we meet, for example, many white objects; but can we say that (universal) "whiteness" exists? And if so, what kind of status does it have? For the nominalist, "whiteness" exists only in our thoughts and in our language (universals are simply names – Latin *nomina*, hence the term nominalism). Whiteness is an abstraction that we construct after encountering many (individual) white objects. For the realist, however, whiteness exists not only in our thoughts but "out there", in concrete reality. Without "whiteness" we would not distinguish white objects. There are of course many versions and nuances of both realism and nominalism. Yet in general, we can say that the nominalist is inclined to "place" the universal in the human (knowing) *subject* while the realist places it in the *objects* that are investigated. The nominalist is therefore more inclined to a certain degree of relativism. For example truth and values are always *related* (hence relative) to a certain culture, historical period or community – in other words to the human subject. The nominalist tends to be a subject-ivist, while the realist is inclined to object-ivism. In other words, they identify the source of the law/order, experienced in reality, either in the subjects or in the objects.

neutral. Stated more positively, all scholarship is rooted in religious beliefs. I am not trying to argue that there is no difference between religion and science. What I am arguing is that all scientific theories imply some or other religious choice. This position is based, of course, on a certain understanding of religion. To illustrate this understanding I will refer especially to the book by Roy Clouser *The Myth of Religious Neutrality* (2005), in which he refines arguments previously developed by Herman Dooyeweerd and the neo-Calvinist tradition.¹¹

In order to define religion we should try to discover what all religions and religious beliefs have in common. This inquiry will show that this issue is rather puzzling. As soon as we try to find this common denominator of all religions by referring to a “supreme being”, or to holy books, temples, ministers, prayers and so forth, we discover that not all religions imply a supreme being or gods, worship, or holy books, temples, rituals and so forth.

For example, not all the communities that are usually regarded as religious believe in a Supreme Being. Theravada Buddhism is perhaps the most remarkable example of a “religion without god”, but in all Buddhist traditions the divine is traditionally associated with a “Void”, or “non-being”. In Hinduism, Brahman-Atman is not considered a being, but rather “being-ness” or “being in itself” (Clouser, 2005:12).

Characterizing religion by relating it to specific practices is also quite problematic. For example not all religions include prayers or even worship among their practices. It could be suggested that, more generically, we have religion whenever we have “rituals”. Yet in many cases, the actions performed during rituals can be regarded as “religious” in that context but as non-religious (or even as crimes) in other contexts.¹² The question is: what makes such actions, practices or rituals “religious”? We seem to enter a vicious circle: as long as we don’t have a clear understanding of what is

11 It should be noted that Clouser’s view of religion is not unique to reformational circles. Its *basic* tenets are adopted by a rather large group of philosophers and theologians. Already in his 2005 work Clouser (2005:333-334 – fn. 23) provided a list of authors who shared the same fundamental understanding of religion. Among them are of course Dooyeweerd and other reformational authors, but also William James, Mircea Eliade, Paul Tillich and Hans Kung. In a forthcoming book (*Dark Matter*, ch. 2) the list is enlarged and at least 25 major authors are mentioned.

12 In Clouser’s (2005:11) list, examples of practices that may (or may not) involve religious beliefs include: “burning a house, setting off fireworks, fasting, feasting, having a sexual intercourse, singing, chanting, cutting oneself, circumcising, covering oneself in manure, washing, killing an animal, killing a human, eating bread and wine, shaving one’s head” and so forth.

“religious”, defining a religious ritual seems impossible. Besides, are “rituals” not performed also in courts, academies, parliaments and so forth? And yet, we would not regard those rituals as religious.

Furthermore, not all religious communities adopt sacred books, or acknowledge sacred places or gather in temples. As far as ethical codes are concerned, we meet the strange situation that while membership of certain clubs does require ethical standards, not all religions prescribe such codes.

In other words, none of the characteristics mentioned above (others are examined by Clouser, 2005:12ff.) seem to constitute the common ground that we are looking for, with the result that attempts at defining “religion” are nowadays often given up. Yet according to Clouser it is possible to identify a common denominator of all religious beliefs, one that is present in all religious traditions without exception. He proposes the following definition.

A religious belief is a belief in something as divine per se, no matter how that is further described, where ‘divine per se’ means having unconditionally non-dependent reality (Clouser, 2005:23).

In other words, all religions imply beliefs in a “divine per se”. And the only way to identify this “divine” in an inclusive way is to define it as what is regarded as independent from the rest of reality (Clouser, 2005:23). This is a primary type of religious belief. There are also secondary types, concerning how the non-divine is related to the divine per se or how human beings “come to stand in proper relation to the divine per se” (Clouser, 2005:23-24). However, the secondary types of religious beliefs are less important for the present enquiry.

If Clouser’s definition of religious belief is correct, we should note that such beliefs underpin not only the “classic” or most famous religions, but also ideas, philosophies or movements that we might not usually regard as religious. Religious belief is present, for example, whenever materialism identifies matter as the independent reality on which everything else depends. It is also present when rationalism identifies reason as the ultimate foundation of our theorizing; or when constructivism identifies social interaction as the ultimate ground of our life and thought. Can even an atheist have religious beliefs? The answer must be positive. An atheist is like a vegetarian: we know what s/he doesn’t eat but this doesn’t exclude that, to stay alive, one needs to eat something. In a similar way, we know what an atheist doesn’t believe (the existence of gods or a supreme being) but this doesn’t exclude belief in some ultimate ground of life and reality. From this point of view, all human beings have religious beliefs.

11. Religion and scholarship

If what has been briefly sketched above is correct, it implies that no scientific theories can be religiously neutral. This is the case because whoever develops scientific theories must have a general (pre-scientific) view of the connectedness of laws and properties and implicitly has to adopt religious beliefs to decide what is self-existent (i.e. independent or divine per se), what is dependent, and how the dependent relates to the independent.¹³ From this point of view, one can say that philosophical and scholarly theories, movements and so forth (though they may not be called religious), cannot avoid assuming this type of beliefs. What all types of science or scholarship have in common is not only that they are imbedded in some sort of metaphysics or philosophy, but also the fact that they are embedded in religious positions, choices and beliefs.

This position seems to me quite compatible with Bagheri Noaparast's Islamic standpoint on religion. In fact, he summarises the Islamic understanding of religion by saying that "the prophets' main concern was to show that any person, in fact, chooses a lord and acts according to its guidance and thereby determines his or her identity" (Bagheri Noaparast, 2001:89). The fact that this "lord" does not need to be a personal or supreme being is clarified when he (2001:72) mentions "low desires" as one example of these possible "lords" (cf. Al Jasiyah, 23). Finally, in a personal communication (22/9/2016) he grants that the Qur'an regards paganism as a religion when it reports the Prophet Mohammad as saying to the pagans: "you shall have your religion and I shall have mine" (Al Khafirun, 6).

If Clouser's view of religion is correct, all types of scholarship (not only Christian or Islamic) are on the same boat. This is not to mean that they should be regarded as equally true, valuable or even tenable. It only means

13 Christian or Islamic scholars will suppose that the connectedness of reality is given by God, the divine Creator, independent from creation/reality. Other theorists, however, adopting a pantheist or pagan type of religious position, will (more or less consciously) identify some part or aspect of creation itself as the Origin of the rest of creation and of the connectedness of its laws and properties. This is equivalent to attribute divine status to those aspects or parts of creation. In some cases those aspects/parts of reality will be regarded as the only true or genuine aspects or parts. In other cases they will be regarded as generating the rest of reality. In any case the theories developed on those or similar premises will tend to be reductionistic, in the sense that they will tend to "reduce" reality to one or some of its particular aspects, laws, properties and so forth (Clouser, 2005:185 ff.). Due to space-constraints, my presentation of Clouser's theses concerning the relationship of religious beliefs to scientific theorizing had to be rather contained and therefore simplified. For clarifications and replies to objections, the reader is invited to read directly Clouser's (2005) remarkable book.

that the times of discrimination based on the presumed religious neutrality of secular theories in all scientific disciplines should come to an end.

12. About post-positivist philosophy

On the basis of the above arguments, I suggest that Christian and Islamic scholars have the same right as all the others to develop a philosophical view of reality in line with their religious beliefs. This should include the development of an original philosophy and philosophy of science. This will avoid the impression that Bagheri Noaparast's project may proceed "with the permission" of post-positivist philosophy. The latter probably appeals to Bagheri Noaparast because it allows arguing that science is not simply about rationality and objectivity. No, we must acknowledge the influence of presuppositions, of paradigms, of a "metaphysics"; and all these factors play a role in scientific theorising. Post-positivist philosophy of science seems to make room for belief, for the role of the knowing subject and ultimately for a personal commitment that might not exclude religious orientations (see for example Polanyi, 1946).

The fact remains, however, that even the (limited) "discovery" of non-rational factors in theory choice and formation was enough to lead several post-positivist philosophers towards a considerable relativism (Coletto, 2007:584-595), which, I am sure, is not welcome into Bagheri Noaparast's project of scholarship. And what will happen when the fashion will change again and perhaps the humanist reflection will return to new forms of positivism? Will this mean that the project of "religious" scholarship will not be permissible anymore?

It would be better, it seems to me, while keeping in dialogue with humanist philosophy, to pursue the establishment of an own solid position in philosophy of science and scholarship. Among the aims of this philosophy should be the acknowledgment of the religious rooting of scientific theorising. Given his keen interest on dialogue, Bagheri Noaparast may be hesitant on this issue, perhaps thinking that this recognition may lead to a sort of "solipsism" and to the consequent impossibility of communication. I would say, however, that precisely the lack of recognition of the deepest roots of our philosophies often leads to superficial and in-conclusive dialogues. Furthermore, what constitutes our common denominator and grants the possibility of dialogue between different philosophical or scientific standpoints, is not our partial agreements but the common ontological reality in which we all live: God's creation.

13. About methods in philosophy and in science

It is not entirely clear to me what Bagheri Noaparast has in mind when saying that, for the establishment of religious scholarship, it is legitimate to use “the methods of philosophy” (2014a:12). To enhance the clarity of our communication I would like to spend a few words to argue that the idea of using certain philosophical methods (the same holds for concepts or ideas) only formally should undergo careful scrutiny. I will provide a few examples.

The fact that some philosophical methods are closely connected to philosophical views and orientations is quite clear. Deconstruction, for example, requires the acceptance of premises derived from Derrida’s philosophy and it makes little sense when such premises are rejected. The same can be said for Marxist dialectical critique or for phenomenological description. This is not to say that these methods have no value at all, but their (proper) use is normally supported by a philosophical back-up that is consistent with them.

Perhaps Bagheri Noaparast has in mind more “basic” methods; in contrast with Islamic approaches that reject the validity of philosophy entirely, his defence of the legitimacy of “the methods of philosophy” boils down to defending the legitimacy and validity of philosophy itself. Perhaps he has in mind simple methods like deduction and induction or the Aristotelian syllogism.¹⁴ Are they not used since antiquity by very different philosophers? I agree on this point, although I would add that even these methods reflect something of the specific inclinations of those who use (or don’t use) them. Aristotelian syllogism, for example, is embedded in the biotic¹⁵ orientation of Aristotle’s philosophy. While Plato’s philosophy was “at home” in the numerical aspect of experience, Aristotle’s philosophy is in many ways related to the biotic dimension of reality. In his syllogism, for example, the premises are like two “parents” that “generate” the conclusion (Dooyeweerd, 2008:76 ff., 79). This

14 For an initial explanation we can say that induction starts from the observation of many individual instances and on that basis reaches a conclusion, a theory or proposition. Deduction starts from a hypothesis or theory and then tests it by observing individual instances. A simple form of syllogism is the one that reaches a conclusion on the basis of two premises. If a) all human beings are mortal and b) Socrates is a human being, then c) Socrates is mortal.

15 The adjective “biotic” is preferable to “biological” whenever it is *not* related to the scientific discipline of biology but to entities, processes or realities that have properties or that function according to the fifth modal aspect (see Table 2, n. 5), whose core-meaning is “life and vitality”. For example, organisms have biotic (not bio-*logical*) properties, development and characteristics. Aristotle’s philosophy is orientated not by biological theories but by a pre-scientific experience of biotic realities; hence my choice of the term biotic.

orientation is one of the reasons why, during the Renaissance, Plato was preferred to Aristotle as the herald of the new scientific era (mathematics was elevated to the model for the new way of thinking).

When discussing induction and deduction, Bagheri Noaparast knows very well that Popper, for example, identified deduction as *the* scientific method, while he regarded induction as more or less useless for science (cf. Popper, 1963:52-59). This is simply one example in which one method is exalted to the rank of the only scientific method while others are banned. The South African philosopher H.G. Stoker, in this connection, used to speak of “methodism” or method favouritism (Stoker, 1970:195 ff.). He suggested a rather different approach to methods, one that avoids “divinising” some methods and demonising others. His attitude was that, provided they are suited to the purpose and to the field of study, we are entitled to use a broad variety of methods. But again, this was the result of his own (neo-Calvinist) philosophical orientation and such view of methods would not be simply adopted by Popperians or by positivists.

Feyerabend was only apparently open to a plurality of methods (cf. his motto: “anything goes” – 1975:28); he often spoke of the “anthropological method” (1975:252) as “the right method” (66), that is preferable to all the others (27), the most suited for science (190), the only method that would promote progress and so forth. His paradoxical position on methods, once again, was closely connected to his anarchistic worldview and cannot be endorsed if the premises of his philosophical system are rejected.

The few notes above are derived mainly from philosophy of science; we can, however, imagine that things can get even more complicated if we consider other fields of philosophy or other academic disciplines. If dialogue between philosophers depends on the acceptance of common methods, it would be necessary (e.g. for the “religious” scholar) not only to endorse all (or most) philosophical methods but at the same time (depending on the interlocutor) to recognise some of them as more valid than others, or even to exclude some methods. And this is obviously impossible.

However, it is not my intention to argue that each school, in philosophy, should use only the methods that it has discovered by its own. Perhaps we should distinguish between primary and secondary methods. Abstraction, identification, distinction and so forth can be regarded as primary or basic as they are engrained in the knowing attitude of all researchers; actually of all human beings. To use Strauss’ (2009:15 ff.) example children use entitary abstraction when they recognise a bird from the fact that it has feathers or wings. These primary methods are also not typical of philosophy; they are

used in all disciplines. By contrast, methods like the phenomenological one, dialectical critique or deconstruction have a specific philosophical character and have to be elaborated, proposed and learnt. In their case, the “weight” of the assumptions, presuppositions and beliefs underpinning them is particularly important and should be carefully considered.

The attitude of reformational philosophy has never been one of suspicion towards all types of method. Its general inclination has been to legitimise all primary methods, to oppose the elevation of a single method to the detriment of others and to favour method-plurality. When it comes to secondary methods, however, it seems clear to me that we cannot simply accept whatever method is proposed in philosophy (or in other disciplines) without considering its presuppositions.

What I am arguing here, I think, cannot be too far from Bagheri Noaparast’s own convictions. In fact, my perplexities about his attitude concerning “the methods of philosophy” are especially related to some of his recent texts (cf. 2014a:12). In some previous writings, however, he (Bagheri Noaparast 2001:14-15) did acknowledge the fact that methods are not totally independent from presuppositions in general and from religious presuppositions in particular. I am therefore confident that my reflections on this topic are to a large extent compatible with his approach.

14. The fields of study of academic disciplines

When Bagheri Noaparast (2006) explores the possibility of the project of Islamic psychology, he wisely starts by asking a few crucial questions about the field of study of this discipline. He examines a few proposals already presented by a few Islamic scholars. However, he puts forward several objections. He comes very close to reformational philosophy (cf. De Graaff, 1982) when he (Bagheri Noaparast, 2006:163) observes that some of the proposed fields of study exceed the scope of psychology and in fact can be regarded as the field of study of several other sciences. For example, the proposal of identifying the soul (*nafs*) as the field of study of an Islamic psychology meets the objection that the soul could also be regarded as a field of study of philosophy and theology (or of what he calls “mystical studies”) as well (Bagheri Noaparast, 2006:163). This is an excellent intuition.

Unfortunately, when proposing his own solution (i.e. “action” as a field of study of psychology), Bagheri Noaparast does not notice that the same critique could be raised against his proposal as well. It should be granted

that (as Bagheri Noaparast explains) the Qur'an's notion of "action" is not at all similar to the notion of "behaviour", identified by Skinner and others as the field of study of psychology. Behaviour is the response to external stimuli. Action, in the Qur'an, has an inner foundation on cognition, feeling and will (Bagheri Noaparast 2006, 167). One could therefore say that all actions are behaviours, but not vice-versa.

Nevertheless, we should note that such "actions" can be studied from a historical point of view, from a social or economic point of view, from an ethical or theological point of view and so forth. As a consequence, "actions" too exceed the scope of psychology and cannot be regarded as the specific field of study of this science. I think what is needed is a clear philosophical back-up concerning the fields of study of the scientific disciplines. It would be necessary to take a new approach, one that does not try to identify *entities* (including events, processes, institutions and so forth) as the field of study of a science. The fields of study are rather given by the specific points of view (i.e. specific modal aspects – see Table 2 above) through which a discipline studies the world. It would then become clearer, for example, that to delimit the field of study of psychology one should define it modally, for example in terms of "emotional life" or "feeling" (cf. Table 2, n. 6). Following this road we would discover that whatever is studied according to the emotional or sensory aspect (e.g. family-relations, dietary habits, entertainments) can be included in the field of study of psychology.

This approach can of course be extended to all the other sciences. It is often argued, for example, that the field of study of history is "the past". However, the fact that I yesterday bought a copy of a newspaper will never be recorded in history books. Obviously, not every single fact of the past is regarded as historical. It can be objected, if we follow an "entitary approach", that nevertheless history studies persons and events (i.e. "entities") like Julius Caesar, or let's say emperors, revolutions, tyrants, wars, armies, alliances ... Unfortunately, one has to admit that the list of these "items" can simply become infinite. It would be better to just say that history studies whatever has cultural relevance. In other words it studies reality from the point of view of the specific modality of cultural formation or formative power (see Table 2, n. 8). I am confident that this "modal" approach does not pose any particular challenge to Bagheri Noaparast's views and should therefore be fully compatible with his approach.

15. Realism or nominalism?

My last critical question concerns Bagheri Noaparast's preference of realism over against nominalism (see fn. 9). He argues in favour of a certain form of realism (constructive realism). He does so by discussing several verses from the Qur'an as well as several philosophers of science (Bagheri Noaparast, 2014b).

Now, it seems to me that this is a slight contradiction to the model for Islamic scholarship that he proposes. Did he not argue that "religious" scholarship should avoid adopting the basic categories, problems or content of non-Islamic philosophy and scholarship? Why then this rapid adoption of a realist position? I think what happens in this case is that he has a general feeling, an intuition that realism is "closer" than nominalism to an Islamic view of knowledge and reality. This intuition is based on the doctrine that the world "out there" is God's creation; it is not a mere "construction" of the human mind. He therefore sides with (a certain form of) realism. Constructive realism, moreover, does not try to deny the role of the subject in the knowing process. On the contrary, it makes room for the "construction" of knowledge. Of course knowledge is more than a mere construction, but we should admit that knowledge is to a certain extent "constructed" by people. Constructive realism contains traits of both realism and nominalism and can be regarded as a compromise between the two.

This solution is similar to those often adopted in Christian circles (where "critical realism", for example, is a frequent choice). While I am not competent to discuss the Qur'an's teachings about knowledge, I would like to express my concerns about the adoption of realism by Christians. It is usually not realised that the fundamental options (realism and nominalism) are basically set by non-Christian philosophy. It is too quickly accepted that one must choose between the two, or must adopt a middle position. Of course it is afterwards argued that realism is taught by the Bible itself and that pre-Christian realist authors just "stepped" on the truth. It can finally be argued that "all truth is God's truth" and we need not worry about agreements with non-believing philosophers. I cannot say that Bagheri Noaparast simply reads constructive realism *into* the Qur'an. He is certainly aware of the dangers of synthesis-thinking. Yet I think he will at least consider my question: is it not perhaps necessary to dig deeper to solve the realism-nominalism dilemma from an authentic Islamic (or Christian) point of view?

Are we not usually too quick to grant that the world is made up by subjects and objects? Realism builds on the objects while nominalism builds on the subjects. In other words, universality is treated as belonging either to the object or to the subject. For the realist the universality in our concepts is derived from universals existing in the external world. For the nominalist, there is no universality in the outside world, only individuality. We will find universality only in the knowing subject (in her language or concepts). One can find a compromise between the two, but nobody can escape this dilemma, which remains there since the beginning of philosophical thinking.

And yet, for many “religious” thinkers, the world is not only made up of subjects and objects. We live in a world regulated by (God’s) laws. What would happen if we shift from the subject-object scheme to an inclusion of universal laws? What would happen if we start regarding the universals as “nomic conditions”? (Hart, 1984:37 ff.). Surely we would not need to (mis) place anymore the universals either in the subjects or in the objects of knowledge. Without going into all the details here (Hart already did it in his 1984 book), I just would like to point out that alternatives are possible, and that such alternatives can be inspired by the religious traditions in which we are embedded.

Such alternatives do not necessarily need to be incommensurable with respect to secular philosophy, as Bagheri Noaparast (being a keen promoter of dialogue) might fear. For example, Hart has no problems in admitting that his ontological position on the issue of the universals shows similarities with both realism and nominalism (Hart, 1984:19). He also shows that, during the 20th century, several philosophers came close to the idea of regarding universals as related to laws, law-like behaviours, conditions and so forth. And yet his position remains an original alternative; it is not an accommodation of two views, both stemming from the depths of secular thinking. It is in this sense that I would like to encourage both Islamic and Christian scholars to “dig deeper” in this field.

16. Conclusion

In the previous pages, Bagheri Noaparast’s project concerning the possibility and desirability of Islamic scholarship has been outlaid and discussed. It is interesting to notice that the necessity of an integral philosophy and scholarship, in line with the religious commitments of a specific religious community (and of course with scientific standards) is emerging with force in the Islamic confessional tradition.

In this respect, Bagheri Noaparast is performing an excellent pioneering work. A few critical questions, aimed at strengthening his approach, have been discussed and a few alternatives have been suggested. I believe most of these suggestions are in line with Bagheri Noaparast's line of argument and with his basic commitments. Yet it is up to him to evaluate these proposals and to see to what extent they can be useful to his project. In the meantime, I would say that his alternative paradigm for the establishment of Islamic scholarship deserves careful attention from both Islamic and Christian scholars.

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