The Relationship between Reason and Revelation from the Viewpoints of Ayatollah Jawadi and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd

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Abstract

The relationship between reason, tradition, and revelation has always been a controversial issue in Islamic and non-Islamic thought. The stand one adopts concerning how they are related to each other and what epistemological status they occupy serves as an important criterion for categorizing Islamic schools and sects, having thus crucial consequences for Muslims' intellectual and social life. This article relates and studies the relationship between reason and revelation from the viewpoints of Ayatollah Jawadi and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd. Revelation, which, according to Ayatollah Jawadi, is accessible to prophets and imams, is related to the realities on the ground, and pure reason, which is of paramount epistemic importance, discovers only some realities. He is thus of the view that reason is faced with limitations, and hence it is irrelevant to talk of conflict between reason and revelation in place of conflict between reason and tradition. Abu Zayd, on the other hand, believes that revelation is beyond access and holds that a text follows the rules of language and cultural norms, and thus the reader and his temporal and spatial reason play a determining role in understanding and interpreting the text. He thus puts an end to the conflict by giving priority to reason.

Keywords: reason, revelation, tradition, Jawadi, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, conflict.

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Introduction

The relationship between reason, tradition and revelation and the controversy over their epistemic definitions is an old debate in Islamic and non-Islamic thought. With the acceptance of revelation as a reliable source of knowledge, Muslim scholars have always been faced with the question whether human reason can play a role as a reliable epistemic source alongside with revelation. If the answer is in the affirmative, how far does its epistemic domain extend? In case there is a conflict between reason and revelation, which is superior, reason or revelation? Questions of this kind have continued to attract the attention of Muslim thinkers in various ways from the advent of Islam (especially from the inception of the second/eight century) to the present day.

The determination of the epistemic status of reason, tradition and revelation plays a historic role in categorizing theological trends. In addition, it has a tangible impact on man's social life with many intellectual and social consequences.

The importance of this study can thus be illustrated by reviewing in a comparative way the relationship between revelation, tradition and reason from the viewpoint of Ayatollah Jawadi Amuli, a thinker and a Quranic interpreter who being a follower of transcendental theosophy is among the prominent representatives of rationalism in Shiite contemporary thought and Nasr Hamid Abuzayd, an outstanding modern Quranic scholar belonging to neo-Mu'tazilite trend.

Background of Discussion

The works such as *New Readings of Revelation from the viewpoint of Ayatollah Jawadi Amuli* by Mustafa Sulatani, *The Relationship between Credible Sources of Knowledge in Geometry of Religious Knowledge from Ayatollah Jawadi Amoli's Point of View* by Muhammad Ali Sawadi, *Challenge of Abu Zayd* (collected papers on understanding Neo-Mu'tazilite

trend) by Muhammad Arab Salihi and others, *A Critique of Abu Zayd's Account of Historicity of Quran* by Ahmad Wa'izi etc. do not overlap the discussions in this article undermining its new findings. This is because this article deals with new issues [different from those dealt with by mentioned works]. On the other hand, it treats the question of relationship between reason, tradition and revelation from a comparative angle.

Given the above-mentioned points, we will try here to find out what is the epistemic status of revelation, tradition and reason and what is the relationship among them from the viewpoints of Ayatollah Jawadi Amuli and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd.

Lexical and Technical Meaning of *Wahy* (Revelation)

As Ibn Manzur states, wahy means 'announcement in secrecy' (Ibn Manzur 1414 AH, under the root *w-ḥ-y*). According to Raghib Isfahani wahy is a 'quick reference' which is used as a code, hint, non-compound word, gesture or writing. (Raghib al-Isfahani 1412 AH, under the root *w-ḥ-y*)

The technical meaning of wahy, according to Ayatollah Jawadi Amuli is close to its lexical meaning implying a quick delivery of something secret. (Jawadi Amuli 1389a Sh, 139). Wahy/revelation has numerous instances (see, Ibid., 146) and (Jawadi Amuli 1388b Sh, 135). In the Quran, wahy/revelation means imparting the secret knowledge of monotheism, resurrection, prophecy, beautiful divine names and history of previous prophets and communities to the prophet's soul (Ibid., 143; see Jawadi Amuli 1389a Sh, 145). From his point of view, wahy/revelation is the understanding of all truths and sciences effective on human rational life through knowledge by presence. It is also the complete understanding of these items after their descent in the form of knowledge by acquisition. Its efficient cause is Allah who is pure knowledge having nothing to do with ignorance and forgetfulness. Their receiver is the heart of the prophet (a).

Whatever is thus certainly a revelation is certainly a truth on the basis of rational and philosophical arguments. (Jawadi Amuli 1389c Sh, 466-67).

Referring to Ibn Manzur (1414 AH, under the root *w-ḥ-y*), Abu Zayd, like Jawadi Amuli, takes wahy to mean 'proclamation in secrecy'. According to him, wahy implies proclamation, inspiration, reference [and] hint [in] writing or in speech though Ibn Manzur also considers these meanings to be the meanings of wahy (Abu Zayd 2008, 31).

Given that wahy means proclamation, it has two sides and given it is a secret proclamation it is codified and the code is known to the sender and receiver. The sender and receiver have the same ontological status in wahy in this sense which is also used in Quran and Arabic poetry. (Ibid., 32-3). Abu Zayd regards the inequality between the sender and the receiver in Quranic wahy as a basic challenge, something that separates him – as we will see later – from the traditional outlook concerning the Quran and its interpretation.

The Lexical and Technical Meaning of ʿ*Aql* (Reason)

'Aql/reason is lexically used in many senses. Khalil Farahidi contrasts it with ignorance. To understand, to grow, to bind, atonement and shelter are among other senses he considers for 'aql (Farahidi 1409 AH, under the root ʿ-*q-l*). Ibn Faris also refers the root 'aql to the root habs/to bind and other similar words. In his point of view, 'aql is called 'aql for it prevents one from uttering condemned words and doing condemned actions (Ibn Faris 1404 AH, under the root ʿ-*q-l*).

It seems that the lexical meanings of 'aql can be reduced to one general and common meaning that is 'to stop'. This meaning is available in one way or the other in each one of the above-mentioned senses. 'To understand' is also related to 'to stop' and 'to prevent'.

'Aql/reason is used in different sciences and thus it has numerous

meanings (see Mulla Sadra 1990, 332; Sajjadi 1379 AH: 338; Jahangir Mas'udi and Hushang Ustadi 1388 AH, 7; Qumashi 1384 AH: 37-8). We thus suffice here to determining the meaning of 'aql/reason in relationship to wahy/revelation within the framework of Ayatollah Jawadi and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's thoughts. First we need to take a look at Ayatollah Jawadi's works on the relationship between reason and revelation finding out the meaning and characteristics of the reason in question.

What we understand from his different statements determines the meaning of reason from his point of view. According to him 'reason is a pure cognitive faculty which has nothing to do with imagination, analogy and estimation. Before anything else, it understands the principle of non-contradiction as a self-evident truth. In the light of it, it cognizes other self-evident truths such as the impossibility of combination of two opposites, combination of two identical things, vicious circle and thing being not itself (Jawadi Amuli 1390 Sh, 31).

In addition to understanding the self-evident propositions, this kind of reason, relying on its axioms, proves the existence of God, necessity of [divine] unity, life, perpetuity etc. and continues to do so (Jawadi Amuli 1379 Sh, 57; 1384 Sh, 101).

As you notice, the above-mentioned definition of reason is to a large extent philosophical but his later statements show what he means is a comprehensive meaning for reason, a meaning that includes the different usages of reason. He pinpoints: "based on this, reason means knowledge or scientific certainty that is obtained from pure experimental or metaphysical argument or from a combination of the two (Jawadi Amuli 1390 Sh, 26). Though reason basically cognizes self-evident primary propositions, it enters, after completing this stage, the domain of practical reason [the instances of which are] ethics, principles of jurisprudence and law. Now it stands side by side with a reliable narrative (Jawadi Amuli 1390 Sh, 31-

32).

Now let's see how Abu Zayd defines reason. Abu Zayd defines the Mu'tazilite reason as under:

According to Mu'tazlites reason is a set of essential propositions which God creates in an adult man and which always accompany man and man does not doubt about their instances. These propositions are the means through which man attains knowledge through thinking and examining the arguments".[1]

Quoting Qazi Abd al-Jabbar's definition elsewhere of reason, he maintains:

"It is a set of especial propositions which if available in an adult man enables him to look into [the arguments], argue and do what he is obliged to do."[2]

As you note, according to this definition reason is the essential knowledge that constitutes the basis of man's acquired knowledge. The existence of reason and the understanding one obtains through it, is a condition for man to be obliged to learn about God and His attributes. On the other hand, as pinpointed by Abu Zayd, the reason, according to this definition, is, by extension, a substance, a tool, a sensor or a faculty; for each one of the said things undergoes changes (through increasing or decreasing) whereas Mu'tazilites are of the view that reason is a divine gift which all has equally (Ibid., 61).

But what are the essential propositions (knowledge) in the above definition? As mentioned by Qazi Abd al-Jabbar al-Mu'tazili understanding examples of good, bad or essential things are instances of the essential

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١. – والعقل عند المعتزله مجموعه من العلوم الضروريه التى يخلقها الله فى المكلف وهى علوم لاينكف عنها الانسان ولا يشک فى متعلقها. هذه العلوم الضروريه هى الاساس الذى يستطيع الانسان به الوصول الى المعرفه وذلک عن طريق التفكير والنظر فى الادله (Abu Zaid, ٢٠٠٧ A, ٢٤١).

٢. – عباره عن جمله من العلوم [ال] مخصوصه متى حصلت فى المكلف صح منه النظر والاستدلال والقيام باداء ما كلف (Ibid, ٦١).

knowledge (Qadi ʿAbd al-Jabbar 1962, 11:384).

Now the question is: Is the above quotation indicates that Abu Zayd accepts the said definition? Based on certain pieces of evidence the answer is in the affirmative. First Abu Zayd criticizes Qazi's definition after evaluating his criticism of his predecessors, saying that Qazi has confused between knowledge, reason as a tool of knowledge and the act of thinking for obtaining knowledge. According to him, this definition by Qazi is not in line with another definition by him in *Tabaqat al –Mu'tazila,* according to which reason is a tool for obtaining knowledge (Abu Zayd 2007a, 65). It seems that he accepts the definition of reason as a tool for obtaining knowledge after criticizing Qazi's definition.

Second, considering the remarks mentioned, Abu Zayd applauds Mu'tazilie rationalism (see, for instance, Abu Zayd 2007a, 240) and uses rationalism as a tool for reviewing revelation in his works (see Wasfi 1387 AH, 15-6). He continues the path trod by Muhammad Abduh and Amin al-Khuli.

As we will see in future, Abu Zayd gradually leaves the Aristotelian definition of reason making use of instrumental reason in interpreting religious texts ('Adalatnijad 1380 AH, 8). His theory of reason is sometimes a reminder of La Land's definition of reason and the distinction he puts between the formative and the formed reason.

Reason and Revelation or Reason and Tradition

The confusion between revelation and tradition is among things that causes ambiguity in the relationship between reason and revelation. Since the distinction between revelation and tradition shows the point of difference between the two thinkers therefore it is very important.

Ayatollah Jawadi Amuli always stresses on the distinction between reason and tradition and reason and revelation. He uses revelation in a sense

that includes both the meaning and the word of the Holy Quran. According to him, the words of the Holy Quran did not undergo any changes and are thus, like its content, divine revelation. Tradition has, according to him, a wider scope that includes Muslim scholars' understanding as well. It is important to stress on this distinction for from his point of view reason cannot be a counterpart for revelation (Jawadi Amuli 1390 Sh, 33, 181).

On the other hand, if we consider tradition as definite then it will have a place alongside revelation far above reason. This is because the infallibles, unlike ordinary people who deal with the words of revelation, have access to the reality of the Holy Quran (Ibid., 33-4).

As was mentioned in the definition of revelation, according to Abu Zayd the specific Quranic revelation involving two different parties namely God and the prophet who is a human, denotes a particular and complex type of relationship. The relationship between God and human being or the case of God speaking with a human being on the basis of Quranic texts (Quran 42:51) are of three types: revelation in the sense of inspiration, speaking from behind a curtain and speaking with a man through an angel. The third which is the revelation in question have two ambiguities that have caused basic differences among Muslim interpreters and thinkers. The first ambiguity refers to the relationship between God and angel and the code that is used in this relationship whereas the second ambiguity goes to the type of relationship between the angel and the prophet.

Despite the fact that we know that this code was in Arabic, the basic question is whether the Gabriel delivered to the prophet both the word and the meaning or only the meaning allowing the prophet to express it using Arabic.

By taking side with the second opinion, Abu Zayd makes his starting point in the discussion of revelation clear. Based on verses such

as " *...it is [none but] he who has brought the Qur'an down upon your heart"*[1], and *'The Trustworthy Spirit has brought it down, Upon your heart, [O Muhammad] - that you may be of the warners*[2], the Gabriel has revealed the words to the Prophet- not merely the content. This opinion does not accept that the Holy Quran has a written existence in the preserved tablet. This is because such an opinion exaggerates the holiness of the Quran making it something far above a language text having comprehendible implications. On the other hand, believing in the profundity of Quranic verses and layers of their signification and making a connection between these levels of meaning with the divine origin and the eternal existence of the Holy Quran, this opinion closes the way to understanding the meaning of Quranic verses (Abu Zayd 2008, 42-3; 1380 AH, 96-7).

Thus according to Ayatollah Jawadi Amuli, revelation includes both the meaning and the word of the Holy Quran. Revelation in this sense is accessible to the prophet and the infallibles. When there is revelation there is no need to discuss about the relationship between reason and revelation for revelation is superior to reason.

Based on Abu Zayd's opinion, revelation becomes humanly after being revealed to the Prophet's heart and therefore we are faced with a language text after the descent of revelation and there is no room for debating about the relationship between reason and revelation. Given this, the discussion will be mainly of the relationship between reason and tradition – something we will follow later.

Considering that understanding any thinker is indebted to understanding his intellectual principles, here we will mention some of the intellectual principles of these two thinkers.

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١. – فَإِنَّهُ نَزَّلَهُ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ ... (Baqara, ٩٧)

٢. – نَزَلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ لِتَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُنْذِرِينَ (Shu'ra, ١٩٣–٤)

Intellectual and Epistemic Principles

An assessment of Ayatollah Jawadi's works on the relationship between revelation, tradition and reason shows that the transcendental theosophy and its principles constitute the foundations of his thought. The attempts he makes to reconcile between philosophy, the Quran and mysticism and the importance he attaches to certain but different epistemic sources such as philosophy, mysticism and [religious] experience alongside with or under the supervision of revelation are clearly indicative of the perpetual presence of the elements of transcendental theosophy in his thoughts (Jawadi Amuli 1390 Sh, 25-6).

The principle of priority of existence, gradation of existence (see Mulla Sadra 1990, 9:121) and the fact that he regards knowledge as existence are examples that show very well Ayatollah Jawadi's dependence on the principles of transcendental theosophy. Based on the principle of the gradation of existence, one can make distinction between different degrees of knowledge allowing each person to have access to a specific degree of knowledge. Revelation, which according to him includes both the word and the content is the same as certainty and is accessible to the prophet and then to the infallible imams whereas reason and other epistemic sources, being at their heights depict but only parts of realities. Thus according to him, it is incorrect to compare other epistemic sources with revelation (Jawadi Amuli 1390 Sh, 34).

Thus, according to him, revelation supersedes other epistemic sources though he gives importance to other epistemic sources as well. As a source of absolute knowledge, revelation lies in the hand of the prophet (s) and the infallibles (a) with ordinary people having access but only to lower degrees of knowledge.

As far Abu Zayd's thoughts concerning the relationship between revelation, tradition and reason, one can allude to two prominent

principles. First [he endorses] Mu'tazilite rationalism which dominates all his thoughts. He uses Mu'tazilite epistemological principles in order to reach an intellectual understanding of the world, man, God and revelation ('Usfur 1388 AH, 12; Alikhani 1390 AH, 34). It is not thus possible to understand Abu Zayd's theory concerning the relationship between man's faculty of understanding and the revealed text without paying attention to his Mu'tazilite principles.

Mu'tazilte rationalism is so important in Abu Zayd that it leads him to adopt his second guiding principle which is modern linguistics and hermeneutics based on which religious texts [in general] and Quranic verses in particular are most importantly lingual and historical. Historicity, according to Abu Zayd implies that the Quran was revealed in a certain historical period of time and thus it is bound to [the degree] of the reason of its audience and the nature of the socio-cultural environment in which it rose (Abu Zayd 2007b, 287; 2007c, 204).

Now that we got briefly acquainted with the epistemic foundations of these two thinkers, it is time to study their views concerning the afore-mentioned topic.

Status of Reason as a Source of Knowledge

Importance of Reason

The religious validity of reason has caused reason to have as a divine authority a valid and an esteemed status in the domain of religious knowledge (Jawadi Amuli 1386 Sh, 51; 1384 Sh, 126; 1379 Sh, 2:409, 5:716), become, following the Quran and the infallibles' tradition, the third source for interpreting and explaining revelation and be a condition for it (Ibid., 57, 128; 1384 Sh, 17).

Among the arguments that give reason a better place compared to other epistemic sources such as sense and experiment is the fact that

demonstrative reason is the only source that can judge about the unseen which is the main domain of revelation. This is while sense and experiment cannot reach or judge about such domains (Jawadi Amuli 1379 Sh; 8:571).

Epistemic Role of Reason

Given the important status of reason, let's now see what the epistemic status of reason is, compared to revelation, from the viewpoint of this thinker.

The definition Ayatollah Jawadi gives of demonstrative reason introduces us to the first important application of reason. Relying on its principles and axioms, demonstrative reason proves the Creator of the world plus with His names and attributes (Ibid., 1:135, 170). Reason thus proves the religion's intellectual realities that are beyond the realm of sense and matter (Jawadi Amuli 1384 Sh, 364).

As we see, in order to understand the epistemic role of reason we need to separate two stages from each other. The first stage is prior to the acceptance of revelation. It leads man to the original source of existence. Here there is no such thing as the relationship between reason and revelation.

The second stage begins after the acceptance of revelation and includes things that are not actually among beliefs, ethical or legal issues but are practically useful for a believer. This kind of knowledge is valid and at the same time religious. Being the cause of certainty, the reason, in this case, whether experimental, metaphysical or semi-metaphysical is indicative of a religious ruling (Jawadi Amuli 1379 Sh, 1:210; 1390 Sh, 53; 1389 Sh, 112).

Naturally, the first application of reason that leads to proving the creator of the world plays an important part in determining one's outlook towards divine names and attributes and understanding the gist of revelation. It does not accept any disharmony in divine revelation due to the attention it

pays to divine attributes. Thus there are two levels for application of reason in regard with revelation. It has to be noted that revelation means revealed texts in the second application. Here reason acts sometimes like a torch shedding light on the meaning of a verse on the basis of other verses and traditions as internal and external pieces of evidence (Jawadi Amuli 1390 Sh, 52-53; 1379 Sh, 61, 68; 1389b Sh, 112). Here we find out that reason plays a significant role in understanding the revealed texts. Sometimes, however, we apply a higher level of reason in understanding revealed texts. Here reason being a [religious] source brings about intellectual interpretation. "intellectual interpretation includes cases wherein some assertive principle and hidden elements of a demonstration are deduced by reason and the verse in question is taken to mean what the reason indicates" (Jawadi Amuli 1390 Sh, 59).

Another role reason plays in understanding the revealed text is through the knowledge it gains over time. As was mentioned before, based on Ayatollah Jawadi's opinion, though the existential realities are accessible by revelation, human knowledge gets access but only to parts of them. If not imposed on the revealed text, human knowledge provides us with the principles of a sound understanding – the principles the lack of which can lead us to stagnancy (Jawadi Amuli 1379 Sh, 64-5; 1390 Sh, 197)

It is worth mentioning that human beings cannot make [religious] law even if they are perfect and infallible, for the belief they can do so with the permission of God ends up in two impossibilities (Jawadi Amuli 1390 Sh, 45-6). This means that reason whether serving as a torch or as a source (as put by Jawadi) can only explore and discover things, having no ontological weight.

Now let's have a look at the epistemic status of reason compared to revelation in Abu Zayd's thoughts. Here again we need to consider two roles for reason- the role it plays before accepting the revelation and the

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role it plays after accepting it in the form of understanding and interpreting it.

As for the first stage, Abu Zayd remains faithful to Mu'tazlies reiterating that Mu'tazilites, unlike Ash'rites, believe in the superiority of reason over revelation and thus give the first role to reason. They make revelation subordinate to reason basing it on it. Moreover, Qazi Abd al-Jabbar states that we need to procure attributes such as monotheism and justice through reason for inferring such qualities from divine words is tantamount to referring a primary issue to a secondary one (Abu Zayd 2007a, 59; Qadi ʿAbd al-Jabbar, ovl. 1, 154*).

The priority of reason over revelation in this stage is not something that is restricted to Qazi Abdul Abd al-Jabbar. All Mu'taziltes endorse it. Referring to Shahristani, Abu Zayd maintains: "They agree that it is necessary to know God and thank for a blessing even if there is no tradition available. Reason says it is compulsory to know what is good and what is bad. It is similarly necessary to abide by what is good and to shun what is bad" (Shahrastani 1425 AH, 1:40).

This means that reason can comprehend general things about God, His attributes (including monotheism and justice), necessity of thanking Him and what is good and what is bad in general.

According to Abu Zayd reason in Mu'tazilites can prove religion and make us abide by what is intellectually good and shun what is intellectually bad, but this is not an extremist approach towards the question of the relationship between reason and revelation (Yusufiyan and Sharifi 1383 AH, 100). This is because Mu'tazlites emphasize on reason in doctrinal issues. Though they accept the role of reason in secondary issues they do not negate whatever that escapes reason. They accept the authority of epistemic sources such as the Quran, tradition and consensus (Ahmad bin Yahya 1988, 1709 AH, 94-5). On the other hand, they even accept the

limitation of reason in doctrinal issues (Qadi ʿAbd al-Jabbar 1422 AH; 495; Abu Zayd 2007, 60).

What makes Abu Zayd's understanding of Mu'tazlites different, making thus a connection between Mu'tazilites and modern sciences and establishing thus neo-Mu'tazlisim is the belief in equal distribution of reason among all and the possibility of reaching an understanding by all. He also holds that understanding is relative and evolutionary. In addition to redefining reason, this will lead to the historicity of Quranic revelation.

Having undergone certain changes, this opinion consists of three common elements which are: historicity of the Quranic revelation (Abu Zayd 2007, 287; 2006, 75), close relationship between revelation and reality (Abu Zayd 2008, 25) and the denial of abrupt descent of the Quran (Abu Zayd 2007, 203; 2006, 25).

These three common elements which are in need of somewhat more explanation (see Wasfi 1387 AH, 41; Abu Zayd 2007c, 204; Guli 1399 AH, 53-4) are nothing but the first element namely the belief in the historicity of Quranic revelation. According to Abu Zayd historicity means that the Quran was revealed in a historical period of time and thus it is bound to [the degree] of the reason of its audience and the nature of the socio-cultural environment in which it rose (Abu Zayd 2007b, 287; Abu Zayd 2007c, 204). He also says that the Quranic text after being revealed in an historical period of time was able to bring about a new culture. Based on this outlook, the revelation after being revealed, was in interaction with the culture of its time in the form of a language text following certain language rules.

The important consequence of this outlook is the distinction Abu Zayd makes between the two levels of 'meaning' namely signification (al-dalala) and implication (al-fahwa/al-maghza). The first aims at putting the text in their social context in order to discover their real meanings. This

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includes the historical context and the particular language of these texts.

The second consists of their present social and cultural context which requires the reinterpretation of the texts under discussion. We must make the distinction between these two levels of meaning in order to distinguish the historical signification of a text from its implicative meaning (Abu Zayd 2007, 121). As we will explain later while comparing these two opinions, we will see how Abu Zayd tends to interpret Quranic texts on the basis of this very distinction.

Limitation of Reason

A key point in Ayatollah Jawadi's view is that reason has, compared to revelation, a limited authority. To explain it, we can use 'limitation' in two senses. Sometimes reason is limited in the sense that it is a human faculty of understanding, compared to revelation which is a divine word. Reason is a lamp and revelation is the straight road. A lamp-road is meaningful when there is a road (Jawadi Amuli 1388a Sh, 56). Thus after endeavoring continuously, human reason can unveil but only trivial parts of existential truths and there will remain domains beyond the reach of reason. The essence of God, His attributes and particular religious rulings are among things reason cannot reach (Jawadi Amuli 1390 Sh, 56-60; 1383 Sh, 148; 1379 Sh, 7:106; 1387 Sh, 3:199).

Sometimes ordinary human reason is described as limited when it is compared to [the reason of] those who are blessed with divine especial effluence and are connected to the source of revelation. It is because of this privilege that the infallibles have a better position when it comes to understanding the revelation or say the existential realities.

The first limitation is another word for the dominance of revelation over other epistemic sources such reason and sense.

That is the reason why reason being immediately aware of the seen

and unseen realities informs man of the events of the Day of Judgment and even of the rules and regulations on the basis of which human reason acts. This is how revelation fertilizes human reason (Jawadi Amuli 1386 Sh, 351).

The second limitation is based on a Quranic principle. The Holy Quran maintains that the degree of knowledge varies from creature to creature and even from prophet to prophet *(Those messengers - some of them We caused to exceed others)*[1]and (*but over every possessor of knowledge is one [more] knowing.*) [2]. It pinpoints that knowledge increases unless it reaches the divine absolute knowledge.

On the other hand, this limitation is in harmony with transcendental theosophy's philosophical principles such as the gradation of being on which Ayatollah Jawadi relies.

By accepting the gradation of human understanding of the existence in general and revelation in particular (Jawadi Amuli 1379 Sh, 54; 1390 Sh, 53) and by accepting the fact that the infallibles have access to revealed truths, Ayatollah Jawadi holds that the infallibles gain access to the existential truths through the revealed truths. That is why he assumes that the infallibles' understating is better off qualitatively and quantatively than that of the ordinary people (Jawadi Amuli 1386 Sh, 163). This is because, unlike the infallibles, the ordinary people do not have access to the superior epistemic source of revelation and that is the reason why they do not or cannot know about many of the truths.

The infallibles gain access to the above-mentioned truths through heavenly emanations. Since revelation and inspiration are gradated from Ayatollah Jawadi's point of view, therefore the infallibles are, depending on their proximity to God, under divine supervision and maintenance.

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١. – تِلْكَ الرُّسُلُ فَضَّلْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ (Baqara, ٢٥٣)

٢. – وَفَوْقَ كُلِّ ذِي عِلْمٍ عَلِيمٌ (Yusuf, ٧٦).

They are thus the language of God and the content of their words is divine inspiration (Jawadi Amuli 1390 Sh, 48).

Despite having a high epistemic status and religious authority, reason thus interacts with revelation and confesses to its weakness. Any exaggeration in the definition of the epistemic status of reason may lead to the situation that after improving reason will serve as the criterion for accuracy or inaccuracy of religious issues not needing revelation (Jawadi Amuli 1390 Sh, 52).

If free from imagination and analogy, reason will have an equal status with tradition or a religious text. They both are epistemic sources for discovering the truth. It has to be, however, noted that being equal in status does not imply conflict or confrontation; it instead means coordination and harmony (Jawadi Amuli 1390 Sh, 61).

Given his Mu'tazilite thought, particularly his second intellectual principle, Abu Zayd's stand is clear in regard with the fact whether or not reason is of limited authority compared to revelation and tradition. His intellectual principle requires him to consider as limited the epistemic domain of reason. Mu'taziltes emphasized on the important epistemic role of reason but in the domain of beliefs not religious rulings. They accepted the role of reason in deduction but they did not deny things that escaped their reason. They accepted the Holy Quran, tradition and consensus as other epistemic sources (Ahmad bin Yahya 1988, 94-5). On the other hand, they did not refuse to accept the limitation of reason in some doctrinal issues (ʿAbd al-Jabbar 1422 AH, 495; Abu Zayd 2007, 60; Yusufiyan and Sharifi 1383 Sh, 102).

He did not, however, accept the limitation of the reason of the ordinary people compared to the reason of the infallibles as posed by Ayatollah Jawadi. He lays stress on the equality of reason among human beings (Abu Zayd 2007a, 241). Apart from this, he does not consider imamate as

the continuation of prophethood, not believing in imam's knowledge and infallibility in the sense accepted by Shias.

Now the question is: Does Abu Zayd remain faithful to his Mu'tazilite principle concerning the status of reason? Based on the investigations the author has made, there is not any piece of evidence that proves that he is not loyal to this principle. His hermeneutical principle, however, - as we will see in future – indicates that he is not loyal to this principle. The acceptance of the historicity of a text indicates that it is in cultural and historical interaction with the realities of the period of its formation. In addition, it shows that the reader and his interpretation play a prominent role in understanding the text. This is because according to this principle revelation is reduced to a literary text and tradition.

Conflict between Reason and Revelation or Reason and Tradition?

Given the epistemic limitation of reason compared to revelation, it is clear that according to Ayatollah Jawadi there is no conflict between reason and revelation. As was mentioned before, revelation has access to the entire existential realities. Having a high status, revelation has supremacy over intellectual and sensual perceptions. It confirms reason when reason reaches the truths and it helps reason when it confronts things it does not understand and lie beyond its scope (Jawadi Amuli 1386 Sh, 351; 1388c Sh, 127-8).

Accordingly, not only are the intellectual perceptions under the dominion of revelation, but the rules and regulations that guide human reason are also supervised by revelation and are part of the existential truths it studies. Thus, there is not any real conflict between reason and revelation (Jawadi Amuli 1386 Sh, 351; 1379 Sh, 6:96; 1390 Sh, 53).

As was, however, mentioned, one must not take the relationship between reason and revelation for the relationship between reason and tradition. Reason and tradition are two divine authorities for discovering

the truth. They lead to correct religious knowledge when they stand side by side with each other. Just as tradition unveils divine word and action reason is also engaged in understanding divine word and action through contemplating over nature and divine texts (Jawadi Amuli 1390 Sh, 62, 71). It is natural for one to come across conflicts between reason and tradition, but Ayatollah Jawadi solves the problem through analyzing the different branches of it (Ibid., 74-9).

As for Abu Zayd, he also does not see any conflict between reason and revelation whether at the stage he is more loyal to Mu'tazlite principles or at the stage he links between Mu'tazilite thought and linguistics and hermeneutics. If there is, however, any conflict between the two, this will end up according to him in favor of reason.

According to Abu Zayd, albeit Mu'taziltes give priority to reason over revelation, they do not seen any conflict between the two. Qazi Abd al-Jabbar says: "There is nothing in the Quran that contradicts reason. If we consider this as a reason that the Quran is a heavenly book, it will be something closer to reality. (Abu Zayd 2007a, 60).

In order to create harmony between reason and revelation, Mu'tazilites have defined reason such that it ends up in understanding divine obligations [instead of conflicting with them]. The creation of human beings is in the interest of human beings. Obligations make human being aware of this interest. As a faculty of understanding, reason is a condition for obligation (Ibid., 60-61).

Thus reason works out a solid epistemic principle accepts and proves the epistemic source of revelation and is in harmony with it. That is why Mu'tazilites use knowledge in order to learn about God and His attributes of monotheism and justice and to understand divine commandments and prohibitions (Ibid., 242; Musawi Khalkhali 1387 AH, 313).

It has to be noted that though Mu'tazilites tried to regard reason as the

basis of understanding revelation and revelation as something confirming reason and in harmony with it, they, however, accepted that reason had limitations. That is the reason why they separated the epistemic domain of reason from [the epistemic] domain of revelation (Abu Zayd 2007a, 60). This is something that removes apparent conflict between reason and revelation. On the other hand, the belief that the Quran contains metaphors and it is possible to interpret them removes the possibility of apparent conflict between reason and revelation (Ibid., 244).

When Abu Zayd, however, gives importance to linguistics and hermeneutics in the second part of his thought, he naturally tends to give superiority to reason as man's faculty of understanding over revelation and in case of possible conflict between the two, the conflict, according to him, will end up in the interest of human reason.

It seems that Abu Zayd here mainly relies on the opinions expressed by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), a Swiss linguist and semiotician, and Eric Hirsch (1928-), a German-American philosopher and hermeneutician in studying a text and dealing with revelation.

According to Abu Zayd, Ferdinand de Saussure put an end to the traditional conception of relationship between words and the external world. Based on this opinion, the relationship between the words and the external world was subject to the domain of words and subjective and cultural imaginations. Thus the word or language does not give an account of the external world. This is because this world is, even if it supposedly exists, reconstructed by words and conceptions (Abu Zayd 2006, 79-80).

Accordingly, as a lingual text, religious text undergoes changes parallel to the horizon and domain of words and mental concepts of a reader, though Abu Zayd does not see texts as merely passive for he accepts that texts can bring about new cultures.

Based on this approach and in line with new interpretation circles, Abu

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Zayd proceeds with emphasizing on the role of the reader, implying that a text consists of numerous semantic relationships independent of the intention of the author and gets understood only by particular readers. The readers' epistemology and their awareness which is in turn affected by their time and place have a say in shaping these semantic relationships (see Waezi 1389 AH, 49). Thus the meanings of texts multiply changing with the spatio-temporal alterations of a reading. Every reading is considered as a new layer or a fresh discovery of a text. This is what Abu Zayd calls continuous interpretation which is caused by human reason as the main audience of revelation and leads to relativity and a semantic change in revelation (Abu Zayd 2007c, 99).

On the other hand, Abu Zayd, as was mentioned, divides the Quranic text into three parts: historical pieces of evidence (which do not accept intellectual or metaphorical interpretation), texts that admit interpretation and texts that can expand based on their contexts. It can thus be concluded that now that Abu Zayd highlights the role of the reader in understanding the revelation accepting thus multiple readings alongside with dividing the texts into three kinds, there is no room for conflict between reason and revelation in his thought.

Comparison between the Two Opinions

As we compare between the said two opinions, we find out the most fundamental differences between the opinions of the two thinkers in regard with reason and revelation. Though these differences go back to [the differences in] the epistemic principles of these two thinkers, they are the root of the differences on the epistemic role of reason and revelation and the limitation of reason.

According to Ayatollah Jawadi the words and content of the Quran are revelation and the Quranic words refer to permanent realities accessible to the prophet (as) and the imams (as). Revelation in this sense includes the

inspiration the imams (as) receive. Not needing to appeal to abstraction to reach general concepts, the imams have thus access to super-rational and super-sensual conceptions about rational and sensual truths (Jawadi Amuli 1386 Sh, 350) and their ruling refers directly or indirectly to divine revelation or inspiration (Ibid.). Though the intellects of the prophets and the heavenly souls of the infallibles are the manifestation of divine legal will this does not mean that the right to legislation is given to them. Like the ontological aspect of a religion, the right to legislation is confined to God (Jawadi Amuli 1390 Sh, 50).

Unlike the prophets', human reason has access but only to the words of revelation. It reaches parts of realities through correct interpretation (for further information, see Jawadi Amuli 1379 Sh, 35; 1390 Sh, 50, 350-1).

The limitation of reason and the imperfect knowledge of an ordinary human being and his involvement with the lower stage of knowledge are the cause of differences among Muslim scholars (Jawadi Amuli 1390 Sh, 34, 182). It is thus clear that the attempts Muslim scholars make to reach the absolute religious reality are not tantamount to divine words as long as they do not reflect divine words and are of a human character (Jawadi Amuli 1386 Sh, 345).

Abu Zayd's analysis which is based on linguistics and hermeneutics give a new image of revelation and human reason and its role in interpreting revelation and revealed texts. The main parts of his opinion are as under:

Revealed texts are among linguistic and literary texts (Abu Zayd 2007c, 204; 2008, 10, 19) language is a human affair (Abu Zayd 2007a, 73). If revelation is a linguistic and literary text then it is a subject matter for grammar, semantics and rhetoric. In one word, since revelation is based on human language rules we need to understand it on the basis of these rules. That is the reason why Abu Zayd gives high importance to the question of metaphor in the Quran saying that the root of this discussion can be traced

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back in Mu'tazila (see Ibid., 243).

The idea that revelation after being revealed and recorded is something lingual and cultural opens the way to the intervention of human reason in understanding and interpreting [revelation]. According to him, Mu'tazlites consider human beings as the audience of the Quranic text and believe that this text is created (Abu Zayd 2007a, 71). They did not make any clear distinction between human and divine words (Abu Zayd 2008, 153). In their point of view, language is the product of human reason and divine revelation or Quranic text follows language rules. As a result, there a strong relationship between revelation and human reason (Abu Zayd 2007c, 210).

He believes in equal distribution of reason among all human beings and consequently in the equal possibility of gaining knowledge by all (Abu Zayd 2007a, 241). He [also believes that] knowledge is relative and evolutionary. This is because human knowledge and its tools are subject to change (see Abu Zayd, 2008, 18).

By making distinction between the meaning of a text and its context he shows the epistemic role of reason in regard with revelation as under: We need to make distinction between three kinds of revealed texts. The evidential texts such as those about slavery and ransom which must be put aside, the texts that are interpretable such as the concept of servitude which can be taken to mean 'proximity' and 'love' (Abu Zayd 2007c, 215-6) and the texts that can be contextually expanded such as the concept of inheritance. A scholarly reading and giving importance to context indicate that religious discourse, given the condition of women among the Arabs of pre-Islamic age, has not dealt with certain issues and this is what is meant by context (Ibid., 232-3).

If we assume that Abu Zayd, following Mu'tazilites, believes that reason [compared to revelation] has a limited authority he will accept it, though

based on his neo-Mu'tazlite linguistic and hermeneutical tendencies there is no room for the epistemic limitation of reason. According to Abu Zayd reason can reach the truth and there is nothing beyond the reach of reason (Usfur 1380 AH, 12).

As mentioned before, there is no room for conflict between reason and the revealed texts or tradition when the reader and his concerns and historical and cultural contexts matter. If there ever arises any conflict between the two, it will end up in favor of reason.

Conclusion

According to Ayatollah Jawadi and similarly Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd revelation is the descent from God, the Sublime, of a hidden thing to the heart of the prophet with the difference that the former assumes that both the words and the content of revelation are divine and immune from distortions and human interventions and that the infallibles have access to both the words and their contents dominating thus the existential truths. This is while according to Abu Zayd the Quranic text after being revealed to the heart of the prophet (as) appears in the form of human language following lingual and cultural rules.

Defining reason as a faculty of understanding which proves the origin of revelation and plays a pivotal role in understanding it, Ayatollah Jawadi believes that human reason has access but only to a limited number of existential realities and truths whereas revelation has access to the entire existential truths including human being and his epistemic sources. Given that revelation has supremacy over human epistemic sources there is no room for conflict between reason and revelation. Evolution of human being and his scientific progress introduce him only to new dimensions of existential truths. Considering that reason and revelation are equal in rank, it is not thus possible to find any conflict between the two.

Given that human beings are the audience of the Quran, Abu Zayd

regards revelation as inaccessible, but since he considers the revealed texts as a lingual text he believes that there is a mutual interaction between the words of revelation and human culture and history. It goes without saying that we cannot reach the meaning of revelation whether it is the Quran or definite tradition except through words. That is why we have variety of understating. Based on this attitude, reason as human faculty of understanding and indicator of cultural and social concerns interprets a text. Thus if there is any possible conflict between reason and revelation this will end up this time in favor of reason.

Footnote

See 'Reason' in Andra La Land's Encyclopedia of Philosophy. 'Constructive reason' refers to those mental activities which reason performs in any argument or inquiry. These activities formulate concepts and make grammatical rules. More obviously, they are the disposition through which man deduces general principles and rules from the relationships existing among things. This kind of reason is the same with all. 'Constructed reason' on the other hand refers to a system of rules that is acceptable in a particular historical period but has gained absolute value (Jabiri 1984, 15).
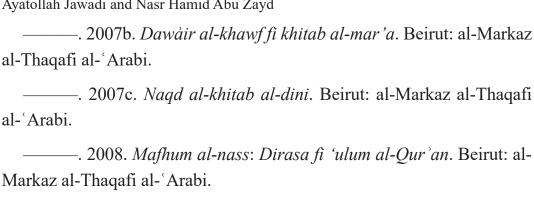
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