lopsidedness in this regard. But research is available on religious coping, aggression among students of religious schools, spiritual attitude and well being, on perception of God and its relationship to depression, and on effect of parental loss on Coping with Stress. to quote a few only from Pakistan.

Naumana Amjad


For many religious observers, modern society is virtually immoral. Over the past hundred years, under the rubric of libertarianism, utilitarianism and capitalism, people have been encouraged to follow their own desires and pursue their own selfish goals to whatever extent they deem possible, referred to as the “pleasure principle”. On the other hand, many religions, especially Islam, encourage people to control their desires (nafs), in order to be God-fearing and pious. Thus, practices such as sexual promiscuity, homosexuality, drinking, pornography, etc., are just some of the many current social norms that are, understandably, considered immoral by Mehran Banaei and Nadeem Haque. *From Facts to Values* is a critique of any ideology that accepts, tolerates or encourages the “pleasure principle” as the guiding principle for moral affairs.

Banaei and Haque’s chief target of criticism is relativism. Clearly, the intellectual ideology of the day, relativism certainly poses a severe threat to any religious ideology, and vice versa. On the ethical plane, the standard

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5 Rukhsana Kausar, “Effect of Parental Loss and Gender of Adolescents on their Coping with Stress”, a paper presented in the Fifth International Muslim Psychology Conference held in Lahore on February 16-18, 2001.
arguments against relativism — lack of a cross-cultural foundation to prevent mass atrocities such as the Holocaust, racial killings, hate-crimes, etc. — are cleverly used by the authors to debunk it as a genuine alternative for social theory (pp. 126–134, 143–150). At the same time, on the epistemological plane, the self-referential and contradictory nature of the statement: “All truth is relative”, is used to denounce it as a sound philosophical position (pp. 15–24). Instead, in both cases, Banaei and Haque argue for an absolute system, built on certainty and determinable facts.

The authors lay out a methodological programme upon which they believe they can construct a system that is absolute, universal, and a true reflection of the reality of nature. Once the laws, or facts about nature are discovered, the authors believe that they can then establish a social system that reflects the workings of nature — the balance and equilibrium that they perceive in nature, termed the Equigenic Principle (p. 162). Finally, once they describe some of the details of this absolute, universal, natural, value system, developed using absolute facts about nature, they then proceed to show that Islam is exactly that universal system, and hence the best of all social systems, and the only system that could solve our current problems. The methodological program is based on three propositions, of which the most important one is Proposition 1: “Any proposition which is internally inconsistent is neither a fact nor a theory. It is pure nonsense” (p. 51). These propositions are then used to discard all other ideological systems, en route to establishing Islam as the absolute, universal, natural, value system.

The book is an emotionally charged attack on every ism or ideological position that tolerates or encourages the current, moral degradation of society, i.e. that encourages anti-Islamic practices. Unfortunately, as much as I would like it to be otherwise, the emotional element in the book seems to predominate the rational element. My use of the term “rational” here is intentionally vague, as I am still waiting for Banaei and Haque to provide me with their definition of “rationality” and “rational behavior”. They certainly do not espouse the neo-classical doctrine of “rational behavior” as that which is utility-maximizing, and any Kuhnian notion of rationality embedded in paradigms is ruled out, a priori, due to its relativistic tendencies. Moreover, if rationality is intertwined with logic, then the authors have a serious problem as they themselves claim that logic “is a matter of construction” (p. 221). That is, a “conclusion is deemed ‘logical’ only because participants agree that the premise and the middle term (the assertions) of a proposition have a necessary relationship” (pp. 221–222). And, this agreement “of course depends on one’s experiences and desires, and as such is necessarily limited” (p. 222). Thus, even by making rationality dependent on logic we still need a way of determining
what agreements are acceptable, and hence, rational, bringing us back to our initial problem.

However, the authors can allegedly move out of the vicious circle by appealing to the external, natural world as the source of all objectivity and rationality. That is, observations of the natural world provide us with the facts upon which a proposition in logic becomes absolutely true and not just true for a group of people in agreement about their experiences (pp. 223–24). In fact, “facts” about the natural world, and the possibility to acquire them objectively, are the linchpin around which Banaei and Haque’s entire critique of modern society is based on. Contrary to the relativists, Banaei and Haque believe that we can discover facts about nature and through them, the true, universal and absolute laws of nature. If they could have provided a good argument for the absolute objective determination of scientific laws and facts, then their book would have been the most significant published work of all time, and the rest of their arguments would easily have followed. Unfortunately, their argument fails miserably for a variety of reasons, of which a few are listed below.

The method by which Banaei and Haque denounce the many different systems and theories of rights and justice is by illustrating their circularity and internal inconsistency, i.e. by appealing to Proposition 1. For example, they sum up Jeremy Bentham’s argument for legal right in the following way:

Moreover, Bentham does not establish as to what exactly are the valid sources of legal rights, which is the primary concern at the core of the issue of justice. Any legal legislation requires justification, and if justification ought to be based on legal law, then what are the sources of legal laws? This is indeed a classical example of a circular argument or a tautology . . . (p. 141)

Another example is the authors’ criticism of positivist or conventionalist ethics (pp. 143–150). Here too, the positivist definitions are referred to as “tautological”, “arbitrary construction[s]” and characterized as suffering from “the fallacy of begging the question” (pp. 143, 147, 150). In both cases the systems are denounced because of their circularity and lack of foundations. On the other hand, the absolute system of natural rights, based on the Equigenic principle, is presented by the authors as a system based on facts observed in the natural world (pp. 151, 155–156, 159, 162–163). However, their own system suffers from the same “fallacy of begging the question”, circularity, self-contradiction, problem of reference, or, in other words, fails too according to Proposition 1.

Banaei and Haque claim that the “Equigenic Principle resolves the fact and value issue, since facts are determinable and the notion of value or good becomes precisely definable and achievable as being based upon the balance of
nature and the structural and functional processes that comprise the whole” (p. 162). But are facts about nature really, objectively determinable, independent of any value system, desires or self-interest? If Banai and Haque truly believe all they have written in this book, then the answer to this question has to be an emphatic “No”! To say that facts are determinable is identical to saying we can acquire true knowledge about the natural world and its processes. But, according to the authors, knowledge “can only be acquired by the proper usage of our mind and senses”, i.e. “the usage of the faculty of reason” (p. 34). However, our faculty of reason is a subset of, if not identical with, human cognition. Yet, human “cognition is . . . very much influenced by desires. Therefore, unwanted facts, despite their clarity are often suppressed or ignored by desires” (p. 252). Whence are the facts objectively determinable?

The authors have one way to tentatively escape the embarrassing self-contradiction in their argument, though unfortunately, that itself leads to another self-contradiction. Probably recognizing early on that scientific investigations and observations can be influenced by selfish desires and ideological values (some examples from the book are provided below), they proclaim that “scientific methodology is effective only so long as the proper prerequisites of ethical, political and social conditions are present”. That is, science “must always remain married to values, in order to avoid any deviation towards purely reductionistic, mechanistic, positivistic and opportunistic trends, lest it becomes impaired” (pp. 116–117). Thus, to get values from facts, we first need the values to get the facts. Is this not tantalizingly circular?

The authors’ lack of providing basic criteria to distinguish true, objective facts from value-laden facts is all the more obvious in some of their discussions specific to some scientific issues. For example, they proclaim that Spinoza’s “erroneous perception of nature” leads him to see “nature as merely being driven by power” (p. 135). Why is Spinoza’s perception of nature erroneous, or why is his “model of nature as being based on power relations” incorrect (p. 136)? Well, because “two contemporary philosophers, Robert Augros and George Stanciu, in their fascinating book . . . have elegantly illustrated that . . . there indeed exists harmony, balance, order and cooperation among flora and fauna in nature”, far from the erroneous Spinozian and Darwinian conceptions of nature (p. 136). Why should we accept Augros and Stanciu’s findings over those of Spinoza? Similarly, the authors claim that any study showing homosexuality as being natural is imbued with the “experimenter’s inadvertent biases, especially if he or she happens to be a homosexual” (pp. 207–209). Whereas, any study conducted to show homosexuality as unnatural or non-biological is cited as the truth, as conducted by a “specialized researcher in the area of homosexuality”, and not as one imbued with heterosexual or homophobic biases (p. 209).
Although these two examples provide good reason to believe that Banaei and Haque must always be using some pre-accepted values to pick out some “facts” as true and discard others as fictitious, there is actually a much stronger argument to show that they cannot do otherwise. At the beginning of their book, they claim that “in order to seek the absolute foundation of knowledge, we are left with only one viable option, which is, to set aside all our biases and preconceptions and start from scratch, using what is available to our faculties” (p. 33). In fact, as mentioned earlier, their goal is: to develop a methodology that will allow them to objectively determine facts without any biases, base a value system on those discovered facts, and show that Islam is in perfect concordance with that absolute, objectively determined, universal system. Since their methodology requires them to set aside all biases, one must determine how one can set aside all biases. Since they do not provide a way to do that, I shall take the liberty to assume a standard and obvious way of removing biases: by doubting the validity of all of one’s beliefs. But to doubt all that one believes is to take the route of the skeptic, and Banaei and Haque are quite clear that the skeptic’s mode of argument is “self-referential”, and hence, nonsensical (p. 46). Thus, it seems that this book’s project is a non-starter based on the criteria laid down by the authors themselves.

I hope I have not misled the readers into believing that the book has a glaring, evident inconsistency in its major premise. The problems that plague the book are all the traditional problems in foundationalism. Though Banaei and Haque’s three methodological propositions\(^1\) are not at all internally inconsistent, I hope the readers and the authors recognize that these propositions are, by themselves, not enough to pick out true facts about nature from myths and fictions. More rules and propositions are implicitly, or explicitly, assumed prior to the sifting process. For example, the law of universal causation is explicitly stated to be “undeniable” for “a truly knowledgeable and intelligent person” (p. 38). However, even if we grant that there are true causes in nature, there is still a problem with defining a method for distinguishing false correlations from true causes. That is where, I believe, the Equigenic Principle is actually assumed by the authors prior to finding it in nature. That is, they already assume symbiotic relations and interconnections in nature, prior to labeling these symbiotic relations and processes as the true causes observed in nature. Otherwise, what is it that guides Banaei and Haque to accept the researches of biologists arguing for

\(^1\) Proposition 2 states, “An explanation of the way something in nature works remains a theory only so long as there is no external inconsistency, given that its internal inconsistency has already been established” (p. 54), whereas Proposition 3 states, “A theory is either rejected by at least one external inconsistency, or is proven to be true by one or a series of interconnected evidences, and thus is a fact” (p. 65; my emphasis). Clearly the third proposition has its own major problems that have been elucidated enough by philosophers and historians over the ages for me to repeat them again.
symbiotic relations in nature, over those of say, Edward Wilson or William Provine, that argue for selfish and power relations in nature, not too dissimilar from Spinoza, Hobbes or Darwin’s treatment?

On a similar note, the authors’ notion of observation is quite naïve in some sense. They clearly believe that desires can influence one’s cognitive abilities, yet they want to maintain that still, somehow, if one is being honest, one can escape those desires and cultural values to see the truth. Now I certainly do not wish to imply that we can never escape our biases — although I believe that a non-self-referential argument can be made to support this claim with respect to empirical statements — but I would not want to make the opposite claim either, that we can escape our desires and values in all cases. In fact, their use of negations of paradoxical statements to validate their claims is slightly misguided. For example, just because we can’t be all out relativists does not immediately prove that we can, in principal, discover the absolute truth about everything; or, just because the statement, “We can never judge independently of our desires and values” is paradoxical, does not imply that we can always remove our desires and values from our judgments of truths and facts. All we need to claim is that there is at least one absolute truth, or at least one instance of forming a judgment independent of desires, and then we are on reasonably stable ground. Thus, Popper’s claim that all empirical statements are only tentatively true is not self-contradictory, contrary to the authors’ claims (p. 58), if it is embedded within a system that allows for the absolute truth of logical statements of that kind.

Furthermore, the authors claim that they arrive at Islam as the absolute, true, universal system via their unbiased methodological program. This claim is of course identical to the current trend of proving the divinity of the Qur’ân via reading contemporary scientific theories into it. Apart from the problem of establishing an absolute truth via contingent facts or theories, these studies are marred by a greater problem, what one may call, a means-ends problem. Can we truly arrive at absolute Qur’anic truths via un-Islamic means? Wouldn’t the end-results be marred with the same ethical and spiritual problems that the means adopted to achieve the end were imbued with? Thus, I believe, contrary to the authors’ claims, that there is some reason to believe that to prove the Qur’ân as an absolute, universal truth, one must already subscribe to a belief in the Qur’ân and Islamic values to begin with.

Thus, given the problem with foundationalism, perhaps it is time Muslims moved away from proving the validity of Islam from ground zero, and instead, moved towards pursuing scientific inquiries within an Islamic moral and spiritual framework. After all, since Muslims accept Islam as one, true, absolute system, the science conducted under that system would also
necessarily retain some of that flavor. Thus, given that the means at arriving at truths about nature would be Islamic, the concordance of the results with Islamic concepts and values would also speak fairly well for the internal, if not external, consistency of the system itself. As for trying to prove the divinity of the Qur’án for missionary purposes, what could be better for that purpose than following the footsteps of the Prophet (peace be on him) himself — to lead by example.

Nahyan Fancy

Point-Counter Point:
On Nahyan Fancy’s Review of From Facts to Values

Nahyan Fancy’s review of From Facts to Values triggered a chain of response that is both interesting and intriguing. Here we present the counter point by the authors of the book. In their discourse, they have only discussed those points with which they were at odds. – Guest Editor

Misunderstanding Our Position on ‘Science’ and ‘Religion’

Contrary to Fancy’s impression, we do not start the book with a discussion of religion, nor in fact, end it with that. There is, consequently, an inordinate impression that is cast upon the reader, at the very outset of his review, that may lead to a misperception. In point of fact, ‘religion’ and ‘science’ are being redefined in this book on a unitary basis. That is what the whole book is about. Indeed, we stated at the very beginning of the book that many people, being confronted with the lugubrious problems in society and the environment, are seeking a solution — a ‘new humanism’. In effect, we attempt to illustrate that if the ‘new humanism’ (call it A) is based on the law of cause and effect (call it B), and Islam (call it C) is based on the same law (B), whose properties are described in the book, then the new system that is being

\[2\] Within that framework Muslims could then perhaps define a new notion of objectivity and rationality, as something related to the soul, and thus escape the self-contradictions of notions of objectivity that take either facts or values as primary (categories whose intricate interconnections continuously create problems for foundationalists in general). For example, the soul could be seen as the arbitrar for what should be rationally accepted as a fact or true value. Of course, Islamic theology demands that this reasoning ability, if it lies in the soul, is still capable of being misled, depending on the piety of one’s soul. Yet, I think there would still be enough of a foundation to build the rest of the program of Islamic science upon.