

Structural Development of Science and Philosophy in Iran: Lao Tzu Approach

Amirali R. Davoudpour

Iranian Canon of Medicine and Law, Administrative Wing of Law and Healing Association, Iranian Watchdog of Medicine and Law, Tehran-Iran

Email of the corresponding author: davoudpour@canmedlaw.org

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Abstract

The expansive nature of sciences today renders it practically impossible to fully master or completely differentiate between all disciplines. This article seeks to provide an overview of the structural development, evolution, and interconnection of science and philosophy throughout history with a practical outlook to advance the development in contemporary science and education in the Iranian and Islamic universities with a Laozi approach. This article delves into the fundamentals of education and learning in Science and also criticizes the standards in which academic progress is entangled in the limits of Islamic assets. This article criticizes the limitations laid in the context of Islamic governance despite bringing examples of transcendental wisdom in the Islamic sacred texts. The religion downplays such allegories in the form of narratives without fully grasping the elements of wisdom and therefore mere religious governance is emptied from the fruits of transcended wisdom.

Keywords: Education, Philosophy, Science, Lao Tzu, Islam, Wisdom, Governance

Introduction

The development of science and philosophy has spanned thousands of years, evolving word by word, sentence by sentence, and concept by concept. The interwoven nature of these fields makes it challenging to entirely separate one from the other, especially as they have both influenced and shaped human understanding and civilization.

The historical progression of science and philosophy has been extensively documented, illustrating their inseparability over time (Boyce, 2001). The ancient Iranians, as part of their religious practices, revered knowledge as sacred, which is evident in the teachings of the Avesta (Nasr, 2006). The philosophical underpinnings that guided scientific inquiry in the Islamic world played a crucial role in the preservation and expansion of knowledge during times of cultural and intellectual stagnation in other parts of the world (Gutas, 1998). In Persian literature like *Shahnameh* by Ferdowsi (940-1019/1025) is often venerated as the form of Wisdom. Throughout the *Shahnameh*, wisdom (*kherad*) is portrayed as a guiding force, enabling kings and heroes to govern with justice, protect their people, and achieve greatness.

One of the key examples of the veneration of wisdom is the character of Jamshid, a mythical king credited with bringing advancements in civilization, including architecture, agriculture, and medicine. Jamshid's reign is depicted as a golden age of prosperity and scientific achievement, emphasizing the importance of knowledge in the progress of society. Although Jamshid eventually succumbs to pride and loses his throne, his contributions to human knowledge remain celebrated.

Similarly, the sage Zal, the father of the hero Rostam, exemplifies wisdom and diplomacy. Despite his fearsome appearance, Zal is revered for his intellect and advice, often counseling kings and heroes in times of conflict. His wisdom serves as a counterbalance to brute force, underscoring the idea that knowledge and insight are as important as physical strength in achieving success.

Additionally, in Persian literature, Naser Khosrow (also Nasir Khusraw, 1004-1088 CE), the Persian poet, philosopher, and traveler, holds wisdom (*kherad*) in the highest regard throughout his writings, particularly in his poetry and philosophical treatises. As a prominent figure in the Ismaili

branch of Islam, Naser Khosrow's works often intertwine religious devotion with a deep respect for knowledge, intellect, and spiritual wisdom and vows that the Wisdom may change the turn of the universe¹.

The interruption of this progression in Iran during the European Renaissance marked a significant turning point, leading to challenges in maintaining scientific and philosophical advancement (Corbin, 1993). In this article we try to lay foundations for philosophical learning with our in our innate capacity, to start the procedure of revival of the self as the raw model for the whole society. With an argument that "a person who cannot change himself cannot change the world" which is attributed to Laozi (Lao Tzu)

The Integration of Science and Philosophy

The historical convergence of science and philosophy is evident in various civilizations, particularly in ancient Iran, where wisdom and philosophy were extensively debated and refined over millennia. For instance, religion, as a symbol of divine wisdom, existed in Iran long before the advent of Islam. The Magi (Matthew 2:1), who traveled to Jerusalem to present gifts at the birth of Christ, exemplify the advanced level of wisdom and philosophy at that time, capable of recognizing and responding to global shifts.

However, the evolution of sciences in Iran was abruptly halted during a period of significant transformation. While the Renaissance sparked scientific, economic, and industrial growth in Europe, Iran lagged behind. Today, although Iran has achieved a certain degree of scientific growth and self-sufficiency, it is evident that Iranian scientists and students often struggle to navigate the vast ocean of global scientific knowledge. This is primarily because the current academic systems lack the foundational support needed to develop complementary philosophies and advanced sciences.

The Divergence of Science, Wisdom and Intellect

We previously emphasized that in the human conflicts a divergence between different categories of science may occur (Davoudpour, A.R.,

درخت تو گر بار دانش بگیرد¹
به زیر آوری چرخ نیلوفری را
<https://ganjoor.net/naserkhosro/divann/ghaside-naser/sh6>

2024a) with regards to the distinctive features which embody themselves in the realm of Wisdom (*hikmet*), the science falls short of the judgement of its long term endeavors to overcome the borders of the development while ethical and moral considerations are not a scientific topic.

Scientific and financial progress can not comprehend to use scientific advances in the terms of justice and other transcendental virtues. However, denial of the fruits of the science are not permitted in the context of wisdom. The wisdom tries to warn or change the path of science before the reach of a deadline, because the transcendental wisdom as explained in the allegory of Khidr and Mosses (Davoudpour, A.R., 2024b) and also as mentioned earlier in the narrative of the Magi, has the potential to foresee the long term obstacles arising from a common practice. This also confirms the stance of Naser Khosrow regarding the life changing aspects of the Wisdom.

The Foundations of Scientific Development

In this article, we explore how the fundamental principles of science were established and expanded. Basic sciences are crucial as they provide the necessary foundation for extending theoretical frameworks and achieving practical outcomes. The ultimate goal of science, and even philosophy, is to eventually attain a form of pragmatism, where knowledge is applied effectively to address real-world issues.

Sciences that do not lead to practical application must either be passed down to future generations, in the hope that they may become useful, or they must be pursued with greater dedication to ensure their relevance. This highlights the importance of a strong foundational base in scientific disciplines, which enables the growth of theoretical and practical knowledge.

Challenges in the Progression of Science and Philosophy in Iran

Despite thousands of years of philosophical and scientific discourse in Iran, the country experienced a stagnation in the development of these fields, particularly during the time when Europe was experiencing its Renaissance. This disparity led to a situation where Iran, once a beacon of wisdom, struggled to keep pace with the rapid advancements in science and technology occurring elsewhere.

Today, Iran possesses a degree of scientific knowledge and self-sufficiency, yet the global scientific landscape has expanded to such an extent that Iranian scholars find it challenging to establish themselves as leaders in the field.

The existing academic frameworks in Iran do not provide the necessary support for developing comprehensive philosophies and advanced sciences. For instance, research in computer science is often conducted without a thorough understanding of the technology and philosophy underlying microprocessor design, leading to incomplete forays into hardware innovations.

The Role of Philosophy in Scientific Development

Philosophy, particularly Islamic philosophy, has played a significant role in shaping the scientific discourse in Iran and the broader Islamic world. As the mother of material and vital sciences, philosophy provides the intellectual framework within which scientific inquiry takes place. Although closely related to philosophy, wisdom transcends it by encompassing metaphysical and unseen aspects of reality, offering a more holistic approach to understanding the world. The Islamic philosophy requires a swift response to all the problem arising in the course of the universe, while the best options are to adhere with self-progress and esteem to become the changing element of the universe.

Lao Tzu's philosophy of change, as articulated in the Tao Te Ching, revolves around the concept of the Tao, the natural way or flow of the universe. He observed that change is an inevitable and constant force, a fundamental characteristic of existence. Rather than resisting change, Lao Tzu advised embracing it, understanding its rhythm and adapting to its flow.

He believed that everything in the universe is in a state of flux, a continuous cycle of transformation and renewal. He used the metaphor of water to illustrate this idea: water is soft and yielding, yet it can wear away even the hardest stone over time. This signifies the power of gentle persistence and adaptability in navigating the ever-changing world.

Lao Tzu cautioned against rigid adherence to fixed ideas or structures, as they inevitably lead to conflict and stagnation. Instead, he advocated for flexibility and non-action (wu wei), allowing things to unfold naturally and harmoniously. This does not mean passivity, but rather acting in

alignment with the Tao, responding to change in a way that is effortless and effective.

His philosophy of change highlights the importance of acceptance, adaptability, and harmony with the natural order. By understanding and embracing the inevitability of change, individuals can navigate life's challenges with grace and resilience, finding balance and tranquility even in the midst of chaos.

Conclusion

The evolution of science and philosophy is a testament to the interconnectedness of these disciplines and their collective impact on human civilization. The stagnation of scientific progress in regions such as Iran highlights the need for strong foundational frameworks that support the growth of both scientific and philosophical knowledge. By revisiting the roots of scientific inquiry and embracing the contributions of philosophy, it is possible to foster a more robust and holistic approach to the development of knowledge. While current foundations of law, financial systems, international relations and even science are laid upon Islamic concept, a different approach is theoretically necessary to speed up the progress and ensuring its practical application and relevance for future generation from both scientific and philosophical insights. For this, we need to envision the community in another dress, while keeping our old dress in the shelves and respect it with honor.

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