



The Role of Religion in the Formation of Knowledge from the Perspective of Abul Hasan Ameri

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Abstract

Original Research



Ameri believes that knowledge is formed through matter and form. This matter either originates from religion or does not. If the matter comes from a religious source, it constitutes religious sciences in the specific sense, including disciplines such as hadith studies and similar fields. However, since religion requires not only matter but also form, and since the general form of all sciences is shaped by the universal intellect that is the source of religion—namely, the intellect of the Prophet—while their details are discovered by ordinary human intellects, it can be said that the true form of all sciences is religion and knowledge takes shape under a form called religion. In this sense, all real sciences, inasmuch as they correspond to reality, are religious, and it is religion, through its teachings, that leads to the existence of real sciences. In other words, since the combination of religion and human intellect, which is called wisdom, forms the structure of real sciences, it can be said that the main paradigm for the formation of real sciences is wisdom.

Keywords

religion, science, knowledge, religious knowledge, true sciences, wisdom, Abul Hasan Ameri.

Received: 2025/12/20; Received in revised form: 2025/02/19; Accepted: 2025/03/07; Published online: 2025/04/19

□ Fazeli, S.A. (2025). The Role of Religion in the Formation of Knowledge from the Perspective of Abul Hasan Ameri. *Journal of Philosophical Theological Research*, (Special Issue on Islamic Epistemology: Challenges & Opportunities), 27(1), 95-118, <https://doi.org/10.22091/jptr.2025.12641.3270>

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Introduction

The present article discusses the topic of “Analyzing the role of religion in knowledge” from the perspective of Abul Hasan Ameri. To analyze and examine this subject from Ameri’s viewpoint, it is necessary to understand his general perspective on religion, knowledge, and certain specific aspects of it, such as moral knowledge. It is worth noting that Ameri is both a philosopher of religion and a moral philosopher, and he does not approach these subjects solely from the prevalent theological perspective or a purely textualist viewpoint. Therefore, it is clear that to properly grasp Ameri’s stance on the issue at hand, it is essential first to explore the various dimensions of this philosopher’s intellectual persona (such as his philosophical and theological views) since understanding these dimensions is influential in comprehending his final analysis on the matter.

Ameri’s intellectual persona encompasses the following dimensions:

1. Theology (*kalām*): In this field, he was a student of Abu Zayd al-Balkhi, a connection he explicitly acknowledges (Ameri, 1979, p. 20). It is worth noting that Abu Zayd al-Balkhi was widely recognized for his expertise in Islamic theology, as reflected in the statement: “The scholars of theology unanimously agree that there are three leading theologians in the world: al-Jahiz, Ali ibn Ubaydah al-Lutfi, and Abu Zayd al-Balkhi” (Hamawi, 1993, vol. 1, p. 279). This understanding has also been accepted by other researchers (Safdi, 1981, vol. 6, p. 412). It is also worth noting that Ameri has some fierce opponents among theologians, such as Ibn Taymiyyah.

2. Philosophy: One historian of Islamic philosophy writes: “One of the major philosophical events in Khorasan in the years leading up to Ameri’s death was the emergence of Ibn Sina (Avicenna)” (Rowson, 1988, p. 28). It is understood from the context of this statement that Ameri’s philosophical standing was so significant that some historians of philosophy considered Ibn Sina to be among his intellectual contemporaries. His influence was profound enough that many encyclopedic works after him included entries on him. Notable scholars such as Sajistani, Bayhaqi, Qifti, Shahrazuri, and Qutb al-Din Shirazi each referenced him in various ways. Further evidence of Ameri’s prominence comes from the biography of Abul Faraj ibn Hindu, where it is recorded that he studied philosophical texts from past scholars under Ameri’s tutelage (Ibn Khalkan, n.d., vol. 3, p. 13).

Miskawayh refers to Ameri as “the complete philosopher” in his book

(Miskawayh, 2003, vol. 6, p. 277). Two centuries after his death, Ameri became known as “The Master of Philosophy” (Sam‘ani, 1962, vol. 12, p. 491), and was sometimes even called “The Master of Philosophers” (Ibn Asakir, 1994, vol. 71, p. 91). It is notable that this title had previously been given to a personality such as al-Farabi (Ibn Imad, 1986, vol. 4, p. 209; al-Dhahabi, 1993, vol. 1, p. 233), highlighting Ameri’s importance in the history of philosophy.

3. Wisdom (*ḥikmah*): In addition to his philosophical stature, biographers have referred to Ameri as a *ḥakīm* (sage). Al-Shahrastani counts him among the Seven Sages (Shahrastani, 1994, vol. 2, p. 374). However, Ameri himself, following his teacher Abu Zayd al-Balkhi and his teacher’s teacher al-Kindi, regarded wisdom as far too exalted a status for him to claim the title of a sage for himself (Ameri, 1979, p. 20).

4. Sufism (*taṣawwuf*): Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi described both himself and Ameri as Sufis (Halabi, 2007, p. 185). Additionally, Kulabazi and his commentator Mustamili Bukhari mention Ameri in their works (see: Kulabazi, 2001, pp. 60, 106; Mustamili Bukhari, 1999, vol. 4, p. 1720), further supporting his connection to Sufism. Ameri himself references Sufi figures in his writings, among them Abu Bakr al-Warraq (Ameri, 2019, p. 153). His works also contain mystical expressions; for example, in one of his treatises, he speaks of the servant’s union with his master and explains human happiness in this context (Ameri, 1998, p. 480), which clearly indicates mystical matters.

5. Ethics (*akhlāq*): One of the most significant aspects of Ameri’s scholarship is his ethical thought. Ibn Miskawayh dedicated a separate chapter to Ameri’s ethical sayings. Ameri has authored an ethical work titled *al-Sa‘ādah wa al-Is‘ād* (Happiness and the Means to Achieve It), and he is considered one of the founders of the science of education and upbringing (Qazi, 2003, p. 27). Additionally, Baba Afzal al-Din Kashani drew upon Ameri’s ethical ideas in his writings (Khalifat, 1989, p. 248).

6. Jurisprudence (*fiqh*): Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi also recognized Ameri’s expertise in Islamic jurisprudence, reporting that he was among those who integrated the science of jurisprudence with philosophical literature (Tawhidi, 2011, vol. 2, p. 15).

There are differing views regarding Ameri’s religious affiliation. Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi described him as adhering to the Zaydi branch of Shiism (Tawhidi, 2011, vol. 2, p. 15). However, Asqalani considers him to be a Shia who later aligned himself with the Sunni denomination (Asqalani, 2002, vol. 8, p. 278).

Considering the aforementioned discussions on Ameri’s scholarly and religious personality, it can be said that in terms of rational sciences, he belongs

to the Kindi school of thought. One of the key characteristics of this school is that its scholars, in their extensive research, do not limit themselves to Greek culture or Arabic-Islamic culture alone; rather, they integrate both traditions, benefiting from each while also adding new insights (Ghurab, 1967, p. 10). It can be said that Ameri does not confine himself even to this approach and consistently presents broad and foundational philosophical explanations that are shaped by an independent rational and religious perspective and can potentially lead to transformations in prevalent philosophical and intellectual principles. Shahrzuri narrates the outcome of this broad intellectual outlook within the Kindi school of thought's philosophical discourse as follows: "Al-Kindi, in some of his writings, combined religious law with rational sciences" (Shahrzuri, 2007, p. 305; Ashkewari, 1959, vol. 2, p. 34).

One of Ameri's central views as a philosopher of the Kindi school of thought is the unity of religion and philosophy: "Abul Hasan Muhammad al-Ameri states: Knowledge is divided into two types, one is religious, attained through revelation and derived from the prophets. The other is philosophical, extracted through reason, and acquired from the sages. Every prophet is a sage, but not every sage is a prophet..." (al-Riyadhi, n.d., p. 14). Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi also reports Ameri's view, saying: "He claims that philosophy is the supporter of religion, and religion is of the same nature as philosophy—one [religion] is the mother, and the other [philosophy] is its offspring" (Tawhidi, 2011, vol. 2, p. 169). In other words, Ameri sees the essence of religion as rational (Ameri, 2006, p. 24), which is why he considers religion to be a coherent and balanced system (Ameri, 2006, p. 24). This view is also explicitly found in his teacher, Abu Zayd al-Balkhi, who believed: "Religion is the supreme philosophy" (Shahrzuri, 2007, p. 308).¹

The Nature of Science and Knowledge from Ameri's Perspective

Ameri believes that, at times, the general public equates science and knowledge with professions, while those who deal with experiential sciences use the term in relation to empirical experiments. However, from Ameri's perspective, knowledge is defined as "comprehensive awareness of a thing as it truly is, without error or deviation" (Ameri, 2006, pp. 12-13). Here, knowledge is understood as an all-encompassing awareness of a thing in reality, exactly as it exists, without any mistakes. After defining knowledge, Ameri uses the term

1. It is for this reason that Ibn Taymiyyah, as a textualist theologian and opponent of Ameri, believes that Ameri connects philosophy to religion to impart to philosophy the sacredness of religion (Ibn Taymiyyah, 2005, p. 382).

sciences to refer to academic disciplines and structured systems of knowledge (Ameri, 2006, p. 12). In other words, it can be said that scientific results, with the above definition, if they are transformed into categorized findings with a specific subject and goal, give rise to disciplines in science. We will see that Ameri takes this concept of science seriously.

It is worth noting that a common interpretation of such statements by Ameri and some other philosophers that was prevalent in his time is that knowledge lacks a practical orientation. However, Ameri argues that the tool of the abovementioned knowledge in human beings is reason, emphasizing that “what distinguishes the human reason is its ability to recognize the truth and act according to it” (Ameri, 2006, pp. 8 & 14). Furthermore, while rejecting the separation of knowledge and action and enumerating the viewpoints that have theorized this distinction, he emphasizes that these two are, in fact, one entity that encompasses both the knowledge origin and the practical goal: “Knowledge is the origin of action, and action is the completion of knowledge” (Ameri, 2006, p. 9).

Although knowledge as the starting point and action the ultimate goal implies that despite their fundamental unity, knowledge holds a higher rank than action: “The relationship between knowledge and action is similar to the relationship between cause and effect, or between a beginning and its end. When the cause of something is corrupted and its origin is disturbed, it will never reach its perfection, and when the completion of something is invalidated, its beginning was inevitably imperfect” (Ameri, 2006, p. 39).

The integration of theory and practice is clearly evident in Ameri’s statement. He argues that if something is flawed at the level of knowledge, its corresponding action will also be flawed. More importantly, if an action is corrupt, it indicates a flaw in the underlying knowledge as well. In other words, he rejects the idea that knowledge can be correct while action is flawed. As evidence, he points out that if a moral agent performs actions that appear correct but is mistaken at the level of knowledge, he is not considered just (Ameri, 2006, p. 39).

The Classification of Sciences from Ameri’s Perspective

He classifies sciences as academic disciplines based on their epistemic origins and sources of knowledge: “Knowledge is divided into *millī* (religious) and *hikmī* (philosophical) sciences” (Ameri, 2006, p. 12). In another similar statement, he uses the term “*al-‘ilm al-dīnī*” instead of “*al-‘ilm al-millī*” (Ameri, 2006, p. 24 & 27).¹

1. Ameri is the first thinker in the Islamic world who has used the term *al-‘ilm al-dīnī* (religious

Ameri further explains this knowledge is acquired through prophets, while the philosophical sciences are obtained through sages (Ameri, 2006, p. 12) and as we will see, he considers revelation (*wahy*) to be the source of the first and reason (*'aql*) the source of the second. Thus, in Ameri's view, religious knowledge is knowledge in which the main source of understanding is religion and revelation, acquired through the prophets and with their guidance and direction, while philosophical knowledge is that in which the main source of understanding is reason, acquired through philosophers and their guidance.

In the above perspective, although replacing *millī* knowledge with religious knowledge may suggest that *millah* (nation/creed) and *dīn* (religion) are synonymous (Ameri, 1988, pp. 61 & 136), Ameri himself distinguishes between the two terms. He believes that the word *millah* originates from a root word meaning stretching or extending, which is why the leaders of nations extend their laws to revelation. In contrast, *dīn* refers to submission to divine authority. Thus, the relationship between *millah* and *dīn* is similar to the relationship between "*ma'khūdh*" (that which is received) and "*mu'tī*" (one who gives and grants something). Ameri states:

"When knowledge is attributed to the one who conveys it on behalf of God Almighty, it is called *millah* (creed), and when it is attributed to the one who accepts it for the sake of God, it is called *dīn* (religion)" (Ameri, n.d., p. 7 & 8).

Furthermore, Ameri classifies *millī* or religious sciences as follows: 1) The first is attainable through sensory effort and is called the science of *Ḥadīth* (narration); 2) The second is acquired through intellectual effort and is known as the science of *Kalām* (theology); 3) The third is obtained through the combined effort of both the sense and intellect and is referred to as the science of *Fiqh* (jurisprudence).

From Ameri's perspective, philosophical sciences can be classified as follows: 1) The first is the knowledge of sensible/perceptible objects, which is the domain of the natural philosophers; 2) The second is the knowledge of the intelligibles, which belongs to metaphysicians; 3) The third lies between the two (being both sensible in one respect and intelligible in another) and is called the science of mathematicians (Al-Riyadi, n.d., pp. 30-31).¹

knowledge).

1. It is noteworthy that Ameri also uses the term "*al-'ilm al-tajrubī*" to refer to knowledge derived from experience and experimentation (*ikhtibār*), which includes sciences dealing with concrete instances, such as practical sciences (Ameri, 1996, p. 512). Additionally, he refers to a "*al-rajul al-ṭabī'ī*" as a scientist specializing in the empirical sciences (Ameri, 1996, p. 266).

The Origin and Essence of Religion

Both religion and religious knowledge, according to Ameri, are accessible through revelation and can be acquired through the prophets (Ameri, n.d., pp. 30-31). However, he believes that the nature of religion is rational (Ameri, 2006, p. 24), because revelation itself is the intellectual reception and perception of the truths bestowed by God upon a prophet. He explains: “[Religion is rational], but our individual [and imperfect] intellects are incapable of comprehending its full scope and details. This incapacity makes us dependent on the One to whom creation and command belong, especially considering that the form and extent of benefits and harms vary across different eras” (Ameri, 2006, p. 24).

For this reason, Ameri states: “Every prophet is a sage, but not every sage is a prophet” (Ameri, 2006, p. 12). In other words, since religion is inherently rational, the person entrusted with conveying it from God to humanity must always be endowed with intellect and, beyond that, must be a sage so that they can receive and communicate this truly rational matter. Consequently, while every prophet is a sage, due to the aforementioned weakness, not every sage is a prophet, as not all rational individuals, even sages, reach the intellectual level necessary to grasp revelation and religion through their own reason.

Since according to Ameri religion consists of beliefs (*i'tiqādāt*), acts of worship (*'ibādāt*), transactions (*mu'āmalāt*), and legal penalties (*ḥudūd shar'ī*) (Ameri, 2006, p. 37), it can be said that, in his view, beliefs are profound and universal insights regarding existence and humanity and these beliefs form the main foundations and bases of the entire religion. Since such insights align with reason, through which general, comprehensive, and profound knowledge is attained, religion, therefore, exists at the level of rational certainty. This explains why and how Ameri considers religion to be rational. It is worth noting that a central focus on reason and a maximalist view of it can also be seen in another student of Abu Zayd al-Balkhi and a contemporary of Ameri, Muhammad Zakariyya al-Raza. Al-Razi viewed reason as the supreme authority, which is neither subordinate to nor dependent on any other matter, including religion (Razi, 1978, p. 36).

It is worth noting that Ameri's emphasis on the aforementioned view (the maximalist view of reason) is so strong that he explicitly accepts its implications and consequences: “Everything that reason testifies to as being reprehensible is forbidden (*munkar*)” (Ameri, 2019, p. 162). He also states: “Everything that reason rejects is to be discarded and condemned” (Ameri, 2006, p. 25). These two statements indicate that if reason deems an action objectionable, it is considered religiously prohibited, and there is no justification for refraining from it other than reason's rejection. In this way, Ameri sees all religious

obligations as rational, either comprehensible by the intellect of the general public or by the intellect of prophets and divine saints. As a result, there is no religious duty, command, or prohibition that reason cannot grasp or that contradicts reason and is rejected by it. However, if non-infallibles fail to understand a particular matter, its rationality should not be denied because their inability to comprehend it stems from the deficiency or weakness of their intellect, not because the matter itself is beyond reason or in opposition to it.

It is also essential to emphasize that the rationalism of Ameri and similar Islamic philosophers, which is directed toward the intellect of prophets and divine saints (Imams) in many instances and has always been seen as a moderation of the apparent extremism of the abovementioned idea, indicates that not every intellect, with just any level of understanding, can claim to comprehend all divine obligations, commands, and prohibitions independently, without the aid of religion or a divine prophet. The need for religious scripture has virtually always been present for humanity. For example, Qazi Hamid al-Din Kirmani, a contemporary and critic of Muhammad Zakariyya al-Razi, modifies or clarifies Razi's claim by stating: "The intellect that Razi speaks of is not our intellects but rather the intellects of the prophets" (Razi, 1939, p. 19). This interpretation demonstrates that extending the scope of the intellect in this view to the intellect of prophets and imams reduces its extremism or at least challenges the absolute authority that some ascribe to reason. Similarly, as previously noted, Ameri himself acknowledges that ordinary intellects are in need of divine religion. He further clarifies that the intellect he refers to is an immaterial intellect untainted by material influences, and he stresses that this distinction helps temper the extremism of an overly rationalist stance (Ameri, 2019, pp. 163-164).

Another key indication of this perspective is that Ameri, when providing an example of the proper use of reason in theological discourse, provides examples of the responses of al-Imām al-Ajall Ali ibn Abi Talib (Ameri, 2006, p. 32). His specific mention of Imam Ali (especially with this honorific title) shows that Ameri attributes to him a rank comparable to that of the prophets (the rank of infallibility (*iṣmah*)), though without considering him a prophet.¹

1. These very views of his have led many scholars of philosophy and experts in the history of philosophy to consider Ameri a Shiite thinker. It is noteworthy that Abu Zayd al-Balkhi, Ameri's teacher, has strong affiliations with Shiism (Hamawi, 1993, vol. 1, p. 77) and was even accused of heresy by some (Ibn al-Nadīm, n.d., vol. 1, p. 135). It can be argued that his Shiism was among the primary reasons for this accusation (Namah, 1987, p. 134). However, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani ultimately classifies Abu Zayd as belonging to the Sunni denomination (al-Asqalani, 2002, p. 480). Yet, many scholars do not accept this claim because the environment in which Abu Zayd lived was highly intolerant and prone to accusations of disbelief (*takfīr*), making it very likely that he practiced *taqiyyah* (dissimulation).

The Role of Religion in Knowledge according to Ameri

The Actualization of the “Matter” of Knowledge through Religion

From Ameri's perspective, the science of narration holds the position of matter in relation to other religious sciences (Ameri, 2006, p. 29). Given that the other religious sciences, namely theology and jurisprudence, share in the utilization of reason, it can be concluded that reason plays the role of form (in contrast to matter) in relation to *Hadīth* (the science of narration). This idea becomes clear within the framework of Peripatetic philosophical literature, which considers the concepts of matter and form in many beings.

Ameri considers religion to be responsible for providing general principles rather than addressing specific applications, expansions, and details (Ameri, 2006, p. 26). He sees the task of applying and scrutinizing the details of these principles as belonging to reason (Ameri, 2006, p. 34). His analogy in this regard is noteworthy: “Just as God has sources of nourishment for His creatures and then guided them to distinguish these sources from one another so that, through their diligence, they may extract the beneficial properties of compatible substances for their bodies, similarly, He has legislated comprehensive principles for their religion and bestowed upon them sound intellects so that they may use them to refer secondary matters back to those fundamental principles” (Ameri, 2006, p. 34). The condition of “sound intellect” in this statement is due to the fact that, following the completion of the era of revelation and its cessation with the passing of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his household), and prevalence of the notion of reason's primacy among certain thinkers of that time, such as Muhammad Zakariyya al-Razi, the misconception that reason could replace *Naql* (the Quran and *Hadīth*/narrations) became serious, such that the works attributed to al-Razi describe reason as sovereign and not subject to any higher authority (Razi, 1978, p. 36), and made it the foundation of his ethical theory. The generality of the statements ascribed to al-Razi, which reject anything beyond reason, extends to religion as well, leading to the conclusion that religion cannot restrict reason or alter its understanding. It is these views, attributed to Muhammad Zakariyya al-Razi, that have historically led to serious opposition between him and groups such as the Ismailis and the Ikhwan al-Safa.

Qazi Hamid al-Din Kermani, in his critique of Muhammad Zakariyya al-Razi, explicitly states that the judgment of every intellect does not dominate; rather, it is the judgment of the sound intellect that prevails, and the sound intellect encompasses only the intellects of the Prophets (Razi, 1939, p. 19).

He views the soundness of intellects as gradational and explains that the forms present in more complete intellects are more general than those in weaker

intellects, and this generality is due to the unity of the more complete intellects. In other words, the more complete intellects are more general and more real because they possess greater unity (Ameri, 1998, p. 368). While Ameri's clarification here includes the external, hierarchical intellects, all of which ultimately converge in the Absolute One and are thus rooted in unity, these ideas can also be attributed to the inner human intellects. This is because the inner intellect too shares in that same truth and is nourished by the same hierarchical intellects. He further clarifies that "The more disconnected forces come together and attain unity, the greater and more intense they become, and the stronger they are in performing actions... and the more they are disconnected and multiplied, the smaller they become and [seemingly, gradually] disappear... The intellect is the same" (Ameri, 1998, p. 369).

Therefore, the sound intellect plays the role of giving form to matter in the process of knowledge formation, and it must be noted that it is the form that carries out the specific actions of that being, not the matter (Ameri, 1998, p. 374). Ameri states: "And from the measures of intellect is the production of sciences from primary information" (Ameri, 1998, p. 376). Thus, it is the intellect that performs the act of generating and producing knowledge, and this is due to the intellectual being the form. He further clarifies that existence, which has a unified reality, is understood only intellectually (Ameri, 1998, p. 433). Therefore, the essence of the human soul is intellect, and this essence is worthy of a goal that is unity, which is why the soul inherently avoids multiplicity and seeks, through its strategies, to move towards unity, accepting anything that aids in achieving this goal (Ameri, 1998, p. 513). Thus, knowledge, although derived from matter like narrations and transmissions, is not knowledge unless the narration itself reaches unity of understanding, and the giver of this unifying aspect is also the intellect, which generates knowledge by giving form to the matter derived from transmission.

It is worth noting that the intellectual formation that leads to the production of knowledge has another role, and that is happiness. Ameri says: "Happiness is the perfection of the human form, and the human form is only perfected through knowledge..." (Ameri, 2019, p. 83). Therefore, the intellect is the aspect of the human form that plays the role of unification and formation for the matter of knowledge, and it paves the path to human happiness by creating knowledge and sciences. To explain, every soul seeks what is in accordance with it: "Each of the souls loves what is in harmony and agreement with it... the practical rational soul loves virtue... the theoretical rational soul loves truth and veracity... the appetitive soul loves whatever brings pleasure, and the irascible soul loves whatever brings superiority" (Ameri, 1939, p. 135). That which constitutes the human essence of a person is the rational faculty, which, with its two aspects—theoretical and practical—operates in both theoretical and practical dimensions.

This occurs through the pursuit and love of what corresponds to these two aspects of rationality, leading to the collection of relevant matter, and since love, according to Ameri, is a unifying force (Ameri, 2019, p. 134), this matter takes on a collective and unified form and the process is essentially the intellect's act of shaping, which is accompanied by the unification of this matter. In other words, the desire and love that intellect has in its theoretical and practical aspects for things that are compatible and in harmony with it causes these things to unite upon entering the soul, and this state of true unity occurs alongside the very form that the intellect creates.

Ameri believes that the true pleasure of the soul and what is truly in harmony with the human soul as such (rationality) is knowledge, and other seemingly pleasurable things are not considered true pleasures in light of the rational nature of the soul (Ameri, 1939, p. 78). Therefore, it is clear why the human soul, and especially its essence, that is, the rational faculty, is inclined toward and loves knowledge.

The Role of Religion in the “Form” of Knowledge

Ameri also sees religion as playing a part in the formation of knowledge. It has been explained that the matter derived from religion or other sources is given form by the sound intellect. Emphasizing Ameri's understanding of the sound intellect is a key aspect of this view. Ameri considers the sound intellect to be the one that engages in its primary and intrinsic function—the purpose for which it was created, which means the sound intellect is one that possesses virtues, balance, equality, and, in general, perfection. This is because the intellect is designed for a just and virtuous function and requires the aforementioned qualities to express such a function. It is evident that this idea applies to both the theoretical and practical aspects, as both are aspects of the human rational soul. Therefore, the perfection, virtuousness, and balance mentioned apply to both the theoretical and practical rational soul. As a result, each of these two aspects has its own distinct form, which together leads to the perfection and virtuousness of the human being. The form of the theoretical aspect is called reason (in the specific sense of intellect, distinct from the general sense of the rational soul), and the form of the practical intellect is known as practical reason (Ameri, 2019, p. 52).

Thus, the sound intellect is one that, in conditions of virtuousness, equality, and balance, provides forms in both the theoretical and practical aspects. Its theoretical form is called reason (in the specific sense of intellect), and its practical form is called reasoning/intellection. However, the key point here is that the intellect, in this process, encounters weaknesses that require assistance

and help and it suffers from deficiencies and gaps that need to be addressed and completed from external sources, and nothing is better for this than the divine law (*sharī'ah*): “The beginning of the effort to achieve steadiness [i.e., balance]¹ is the recognition of the method and approach that is most healing and remedial for both souls [i.e., the theoretical and practical aspects]... and whenever an individual keeps these two from equality,² in such a way that their intellect fails to establish rulings in these two areas, they turn to the divine law for refuge and no longer rely on the individual intellect in these matters” (Ameri, 1998, p. 425). According to Ameri, *istiqāmah* (uprightness or steadfastness) means moderation,³ which he defines as a state of the soul resulting from the balanced integration of the three faculties (the rational (*‘āqilah*), the appetitive (*shahwīyyah*), and the irascible (*ghadabīyyah*)) (Ameri, 2019, p. 289).

In other words, steadfastness and justice are states intertwined with unity and harmony: “Justice is the unification of these faculties and their uprightness” (Ameri, 2019, p. 151; 1998, p. 509). This statement from Ameri indicates that *istiqāmah* (uprightness or steadfastness) is synonymous with justice, as both involve the integration and unity of the faculties. Thus, moderation or equilibrium plays a unifying role, bringing together the extremes of excess and deficiency within the soul’s faculties, and as previously mentioned, the intellect’s formative function is this very unification, or in other words, these two are two aspects of the same reality, occurring together. In conclusion, moderation, form, and unity are, in essence, one and the same, all realized through the intellect.

This process can also be illustrated as follows: with the attainment of moderation, the integration of faculties and their extremes occurs, leading to true unity. This unity, in turn, brings about a new existence. Consequently, this unity, compared to the primary matter, is considered a form that shapes a new being. Ameri emphasizes that the state of each faculty or soul being in moderation between excess and deficiency does not constitute the virtue of justice. Rather, moderation is the result of avoiding excess and deficiency (and not itself the act of avoiding them and taking a middle course) (Ameri, 2019, pp. 71 & 99). Notably, many centuries after Ameri, Mulla Sadra reiterates the same point.

After explaining the reasons and manner of the realization of the form of

1. Straightness or steadfastness (*istiqāmah*) refers to the Quranic term “*Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*” (the Straight Path).

2. Equality, from Ameri’s perspective, also means justice.

3. The conceptual relationship between steadfastness (*istiqāmah*) and justice (*‘adālah*), considering the etymological roots of these two words, is well expressed in this statement by Abd al-Razzaq Kashani: “General steadfastness is the middle position between excess and deficiency” (Kashani, 2004, p. 67). The middle position is justice, and in another instance, he explicitly explains that the position of steadfastness in ethics is similar to the position of justice (Kashani, 2012, p. 112).

knowledge through reason, it is worth noting that religion, by balancing reason, completes or reinforces its function of shaping and unifying. In this process, religion provides teachings and guidelines to balance human beings and foster greater unity of the internal faculties. With the attainment of unity or a higher degree of unity in human beings, the aforementioned form, whether in relation to human existence or the realization of knowledge, becomes more manifest, leading to the further fulfillment of human happiness and knowledge. Ultimately, this process reaches its final goal, which is unity with the Absolute One (the Almighty) (Ameri, 1998, p. 509).¹

It is also important to note that by religion in this discussion, Ameri refers specifically to Islam. Islam has the characteristic of recognizing reason, endorsing it, and considering its rulings as part of itself. This selfsameness exists both in terms of the essence of religion—which was previously discussed in the context of the nature of religion—as the realized intellect (*'aql mustafād*), from which the Prophet receives religion—or he himself becomes identical with this source—and as a result, religion, in terms of reality, is of the same nature as reason. Additionally, it aligns with the rational propositions of non-prophetic human intellects, which, according to Ameri, fall under the general principles of religion and serve as its interpreters and elaborators. For this reason, both explicitly within religion and from a rational perspective, reason is considered part of religion (Ameri, 2006, pp. 26 & 34). To further clarify this point, Ameri refers to Zoroastrianism and believes that because this religion does not validate reason or regard it as an integral part of religion, it has not expanded (Ameri, 2006, p. 34).

The Role of Religion in the Formation of Social Knowledge

The preceding discussion focused on types of knowledge perceived by individuals. However, Ameri introduces another form of knowledge that originates from society, is developed within and through society, and is not from individual reason. In this article, we refer to this as social knowledge. In this section, we examine the role of religion in shaping such knowledge.

The concepts of virtue, moderation, unity, and form, which were discussed in relation to the individual and individual knowledge, also apply to society and social knowledge. A prosperous society is one that possesses virtue, and a necessary condition for this is the virtue of its individuals, just as moderation in an individual requires the moderation of their internal faculties, and, in other

1. These types of statements by Ameri clearly indicate the mystical dimension of his personality, which was discussed at the beginning of this article.

words, for society to be virtuous, its members must also be virtuous. However, just as individual virtue is defined by the unity of faculties and the emergence of a unified entity encompassing all virtues, social virtue also emerges from the establishment of a unified and just entity which is not merely an integration of individual justice but a singular, overarching justice that encompasses and harmonizes all individual justices within itself while preserving its unity. In other words, social justice is not simply the sum of individual justices: “A wretched city... is not truly a single city but rather many scattered cities” (Ameri, 2019, p. 215).

Ameri equates a wretched or non-prosperous city with the absence of unity, indicating that, in his view, achieving social virtue, defined as collective justice, is only possible through the realization of unity in society. However, he does not see this collective virtue as independent of individual virtues and believes that without individual virtues, social virtue cannot emerge (Ameri, 2019, p. 215). Quoting Plato, he states: “A prosperous city is one that is wise, courageous, and chaste. It should neither be overpopulated nor excessively wealthy... and it must be a single, unified city” (Ameri, 2019, p. 217). This means that while a prosperous city must possess all perfections (such as wisdom, courage, and chastity), it must be unified and possessing those perfections in a scattered manner—or in other words, among different individuals in society—is not sufficient. These perfections can be considered a necessary condition for the realization of a prosperous society.

Considering this, it can be said that just as individual justice creates a unity within a person that constitutes their form, and the perfection of this form leads to the individual’s ultimate happiness, social justice similarly leads to a unity within society that serves as its form. Without this unifying form, a society cannot truly be considered a society in the proper sense of the word.

This act of unification—a process unique to human beings—is, from Ameri’s perspective, a product of reason at the individual level (Ameri, 2019, p. 52). It has been established that it is reason, as the distinguishing characteristic of humans from animals that actualizes justice and unity, serving as a form itself or a generator of new forms. In society, this role is carried out by an individual known as the *Sā’is*—the ruler of the society (Ameri, 2019, p. 187). The *sā’is* is the one who unifies the members of society, and without such a figure, a society would essentially not be unified and could not be considered a real society. Rather, without him, society is merely a collection of diverse and disconnected elements (Ameri, 2019, p. 71). As an example of the necessity of a *sā’is* (ruler) in realizing social justice, Ameri refers to Amirul Mu’mineen Ali (peace be upon him), who advised Malik al-Ashtar to refrain from injustice, warning that the oppressor will face destruction in both this world and the Hereafter (Ameri, 2019, p. 200).

Ameri lists the causes of unity (convergence and unity) and disunity (separation) and believes it is the ruler's duty to work towards unity and the causes that promote it. This unity is so strong in his view that he believes it leads to a situation where it is as though the possessions of one individual belong to another as well: "It is obligatory that what is in the hands of each individual be considered as belonging to the other... until they become like a single body" (Ameri, 2019, p. 201). He compares this unity to the unity of the parts of a single body and, in explaining this unified body, he describes it as a multiplicity within unity—one entity that, while being unified, encompasses diversity within itself (Ameri, 2020, p. 36). This unity, by forming a new shape, gives identity to society and new social aspects, including new forms of knowledge that emerge as social knowledge. He refers to this idea in a phrase he calls "the cooperation of divine philosophers in wisdom" (Ameri, 1998, p. 508), indicating that one of the new developments in society is the emergence of new wisdom and knowledge.

Thus, the different sections and components of society, through the role of moderation and unity provided by the *sā'is*, acquire a new form, identity, and existence. Just as the matter of knowledge at the individual level produced new individual knowledge through the shaping power of reason, society, through the shaping influence of the *sā'is* or ruler, produces new knowledge that is considered socially generated knowledge. This knowledge is not merely a collection of the knowledge of the individuals of society; rather, it is a unified and new form of knowledge.

The role of Islam in the midst of this unification and shaping among social aspects, including knowledge, is to guide and manage the process of social unification. In other words, Islam, by presenting individual virtues and personal justice, and through the progression from these virtues and justice to collective virtues and justice, provides a framework where, through the acquisition of individual virtues and justice on a planned path, social virtues and justice—not merely the sum of individual virtues and justices but the generation of those individual traits in the process of forming a unified, moderate, collective identity—are achieved. Society naturally contains classes such as noble and base, strong and weak, friends and foes, etc. Islam provides individuals in each class with guidelines that, if followed, result in the attainment of individual virtue. At the same time, these actions are designed to have an impact on others as well (Ameri, 2006, pp. 62-63).

For example, Islam instructs the wealthy class to free themselves from monetary attachments through generosity and giving to the poor as a means of personal refinement and attaining individual happiness. At the same time, this liberation plays a significant role in relation to others. Thus, in Islam, through the command to give charity, alms, etc., both individual virtues arise and a

collective virtue (proximity of wealth at the societal level) also prevails, ultimately leading to social balance and justice (Ameri, 2006, pp. 63-64). In fact, just as religion initially uses promises and warnings to guide individuals onto the path of righteousness and truth, and then works to transform this guidance into internal virtues and qualities, in the case of society as well, it begins with individuals so that at the basic level, society enters into the path of guidance and then strives to transform these individual virtues into a unified collective virtue (Ameri, 2020, p. 76).

In relation to our discussion on knowledge, he emphatically explains that if balance is not achieved in society and a new form does not emerge, with the formation of matters such as false propaganda, racial prejudice, discrimination, etc., the conditions for the formation of incorrect perceptions occur, and new and unified knowledge will not emerge (Ameri, 2006, pp. 81-82). Religion plays a role in preventing or eliminating wrongdoings and injustices, and it provides numerous individual propositions that prevent error and falsehood at the level of the matter of social knowledge and provides the correct matter. Additionally, it offers solutions and teachings to prevent individuals from falling into epistemic error, and with serious theoretical and practical guidance, it helps the *sā'īs* (ruler) to moderate, unify, and shape correct individual knowledge, those that serve as the matter for social knowledge.

Comparison

It is appropriate here to briefly compare the view of this predecessor, Ameri, with that of Farabi regarding the relationship between religion and science, in order to clarify the significance and innovation of Ameri's perspective on this matter and to elucidate his position on this issue. Firstly, it should be noted that Farabi, like all Islamic philosophers, classifies the sciences within the framework of philosophy and wisdom in its broad sense, and thus, all true sciences, according to Islamic philosophers, are considered philosophical sciences. Therefore, to understand Farabi's view on the relationship between religion and science, one must explore the connection between religion and philosophy from his perspective.

An examination of the intellectual system of this philosopher, who preceded Ameri, that is, Abu Nasr Farabi, reveals that the Second Teacher (Farabi) generally considers religion to be of a lower and later rank compared to demonstrative philosophy (Farabi, 1970, p. 131). However, although at first glance it may seem that he is speaking of temporal precedence and succession and seemingly believes that in human civilization, philosophy began first and

religion emerged thereafter (Farabi, 1970, p. 131), it ultimately becomes clear that he believes philosophy, reason, and the true sciences—which employ philosophical and rational methods—hold a higher rank in terms of validity and logic than religion and imagination. It is as though the method and discourse of philosophy are rational, while those of religion are imaginative because, after the Prophet's direct connection with the Active Intellect and the reception of truths in their rational form from that source, these truths are then embodied in the Prophet's imaginative faculty, mediated by the Realized Intellect (*al-'aql al-mustafād*) and the Passive Intellect (*al-'aql al-munfa'il*) of the Prophet so that they may be comprehensible to the general public and the product of this process is then given to the people as religion (Farabi, 1973, p. 125).

In reality, the essence of religion, which is revelation, is rational, and that too, intellect at its highest level (the acquired intellect). However, revelation itself does not constitute religion, and religion must ultimately reach the masses. Since the general public cannot perceive these rational truths, they must necessarily be clothed in imaginative forms—hence religion is imaginative in nature and its arguments dialectical in character. This is unlike philosophy, which faces no such obstacle and therefore remains purely rational and demonstrative. Consequently, Farabi holds that if a religion is true, it follows and aligns with demonstrative philosophy. However, this correspondence is that of the secondary to the primary, or of dialectic to demonstration. In other words, when truths that are proven and understood through demonstration in philosophy are proven and understood through non-demonstrative methods in religion, this gives rise to a true religion.

He considers religion to be a part (component) or an extension (subordinate branch) of philosophy. Farabi justifies this by arguing that when the demonstrative proofs of one science are found within another, the first science can be regarded as a component or subordinate to the second (Farabi, 1991, p. 47). The same applies to religion: since the demonstrative proofs of religious truths are found within philosophy, religion can be considered a part or an extension of philosophy. According to Farabi, the universal principles of the theoretical aspect of religion fall under theoretical philosophy, while the universal principles of its practical aspect come under practical philosophy (Farabi, 1991, p. 47). The relationship between these theoretical and practical dimensions of religion and theoretical and practical philosophy is that of the specific to the absolute. It is evident that in Farabi's view, religion itself is not responsible for expounding demonstrative propositions (Farabi, 1991, p. 52) because, according to him, the religion conveyed to the people ultimately adopts a non-demonstrative or imaginative method (Farabi, 1995, p. 85).

Ultimately, although Farabi considers the Prophet to hold the rank of the

highest philosophers, that is, possessing the Realized Intellect (*'aql mustafād*) and regards the primary truth of revelation and religion as rational, and believes in the correspondence between the religion conveyed to people and reason, he nevertheless positions religion as inferior to, a part of, or subordinate to philosophy and the true sciences. This is because religion must come in the form of imaginative forms to benefit the general public. However, this demotion pertains only to the communicated religion (not religion in terms of its source and origin). Were it not for this necessary adaptation of religion into imaginative forms, people would not attain guidance. Thus, in his view, religion remains the sole or superior path to human felicity.

Through this brief overview of Farabi's perspective, we discern that Ameri's view, despite some similarities, differs profoundly. It is evident that Islamic philosophers regard the Prophet as possessing the rank of the "Realized Intellect" as well as being illuminated by the Active Intellect, and consider religion, in terms of its origin, an intellectual matter, and both these philosophers also share this common ground.

However, as previously discussed, Ameri, contrary to Farabi, maintains that religion holds a higher rank than philosophy in terms of its rationality. This is because religion is the product of the highest rank of the intellect or the Realized Intellect possessed by the Prophet, whereas philosophy (at least in most cases) stems from the intellect of non-prophetic humans, which is of a lower rank than the Realized Intellect. Consequently, philosophy and the true sciences, in terms of their epistemic truth and value, occupy a subordinate position to religion. By contrast, as noted earlier, Farabi holds the opposite view. This is because he considers religion not merely as a product of the Prophet's Realized Intellect, but as shaped by engagement with ordinary human beings, who cannot grasp rational propositions and deal primarily with imagination and senses, resulting in religion's subordination to philosophy.

Furthermore, Farabi regards religion and religious sciences as having an imaginative and non-rational structure, though consistent with reason, and employing a non-demonstrative, dialectical method, albeit aligned with demonstration, and considers philosophy and the true sciences to possess a rational structure and demonstrative methodology. Ameri, however, views religion as having the most complete rational structure and as being endowed with a demonstrative method. Since philosophy and the true sciences share this same structure and method, he ultimately regards them as a single unified reality—a perspective that stands in stark contrast to that of Farabi.

In the difference between these two views, it is also important that the role of philosophy for Ameri is the completion of religion by elaborating and expanding its details, making philosophy a component within religion. For

Farabi, however, religion's function is to particularize the universal truths of philosophy, and thus, at the very least, according to him, religious sciences can be considered part of philosophy, or even its instrument and servant.

Evaluation

It has become clear that Ameri's perspective is novel compared to some other philosophers and, in the author's view, more profound in its analysis of religion's status. Through his intellectual independence, Ameri was able to disrupt the intellectual trajectory regarding religion that began with the Greeks and was adapted to Islam by Islamic philosophers like Farabi and Avicenna, instead depicting the position of a comprehensive religion like Islam contrary to prevailing views.

However, although Ameri has mentioned love (*hubb*) and its role in the actualization of knowledge, it is noteworthy that he does not clarify the epistemic relationship between love and religion. In other words, is love, alongside religion, a unifying force that shapes the form through which knowledge comes into being? Or does religion itself have some sort of influence over love, serving as the very means through which love is actualized? In other words, it remains unclear what relationship exists between the unifying and form-giving effects of religion and love.

Another point is that it remains unclear whether, in Ameri's view, religion plays any role in the formation of knowledge beyond providing its material and formal aspects because naturally, in addition to its constitutive role in knowledge, religion could also have an efficient and teleological role in its formation because by refining the heart and intellect and preparing the ground for the realization of a suitable path of knowledge, religion could play an efficient role in the formation of knowledge. Similarly, by encouraging and motivating individuals to pursue true knowledge and outlining its purpose and benefits, religion could play a role in the actualization of the final cause of knowledge.

Likewise, considering the epistemic constructivism it can instill in the perceiving subject's understanding, religion may have another effect on the formation of knowledge.

Considering the absence of any mention or attention to these types of effects of religion in the formation of knowledge, it appears that although Ameri's perspective in this regard is more complex and novel compared to his predecessors, it still has serious flaws. Ameri's perspective could have

encompassed multiple dimensions, such as the efficient, final, material, formal, and structural aspects, and potentially others, with detailed examples explaining how each of these influences operates. However, apart from the formal and material dimensions, it does not incorporate other aspects or considerations.

Conclusion

From Ameri's perspective, knowledge consists of both matter and form. The matter of knowledge may come from any source, and in terms of source, sciences are divided into two categories: religious and philosophical. In religious knowledge, the matter of knowledge is derived from the Quran and narrations, while in the philosophical sciences, the matter is derived from reason, which in this context includes all of the human cognitive faculties. In all sciences—even in religious sciences other than the science of *Hadīth* (narrations)—the form of knowledge is reason, and without this form, true knowledge cannot be realized. Reason, through the equilibrium and moderation of the faculties and their perceptions, unites and consolidates them. Under the shadow of this unity, it provides a new form and a new existence, and knowledge, being a function of the faculties of the soul, is united and consolidated by reason (in the case of dispersed knowledge of the faculties), acquires a new form and a new knowledge emerges which is the true knowledge.

Religion plays a fundamental and unique role in providing the matter for religious knowledge through narrations. In other words, all the sciences that are involved in the theoretical and practical principles and generalities of public life (the nation) derive their matter from religion. Although some propositions in these sciences may be rational, the reason involved in this context, according to Ameri, is the individual reason, which can only serve as an interpreter and elaborator of the specifics of religious propositions in religious sciences. Since this type of reason, according to both religion and the ruling of reason itself, is part of and subordinate to religion, thus these rational propositions in religious sciences are not considered as being outside of religion. In other words, it can be said that, from Ameri's perspective, all the propositions of religious sciences, in terms of their matter, are religious and are derived from narrations (in generalities) and the intellect that explains and submits to narrations (in details).

Although it was previously mentioned that reason is responsible for unifying the matter of knowledge and giving it form, religion also plays a role in shaping the form of true knowledge. This is because the ordinary human intellect is an individual and incomplete intellect, which does not have sufficient capacity for

the aforementioned moderation, unification, and perfection, and in many cases, it cannot actualize knowledge. Religion, through its teachings, guides the intellect in both theoretical and practical dimensions on the path to perfection, enabling the intellect to attain the necessary perfection and capacity to give form.

Similarly, in the formation of social knowledge, where the *sā'is* or leader of society plays the role of reason and shapes the knowledge of individuals, religion, through its teachings and instructions, facilitates a path by which the ruler of society is able to moderate and give form to both society and social knowledge.

Thus, it becomes clear that, according to Ameri, religion plays a complete and exclusive role regarding the matter of religious knowledge, and it also influences and shapes both individual and social knowledge.

Ameri's view on the role of religion in the realization of knowledge is considered a new and deeper view than that of Farabi—and philosophers such as Ibn Sina, who are more followers of Farabi in this regard—and his view on this subject is more consistent with and, of course, more sympathetic to Islam—as a comprehensive and profound religion—than most Islamic philosophers. However, his view also has important shortcomings, as it neglects various aspects of the effects of religion on the development of knowledge.

▣ **Conflict of Interests**

- ▣ The author declares no competing interests..

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