

## Zarathustra's Ideas

### The Beginning of the Philosophical Worldview in Iran

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**Abstract.** It is believed that there are three phases in the evolution of mankind's thought: Mythical period, philosophical period and scientific period (Kazzazi, 1993: 9-23). These various ideas have given birth to various outlooks on the world, human being, and God and have formed different worldviews. Mythical period and worldview was dominated in Greece from the very old time to the onset of philosophical thought period, but in 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. with the appearance of different philosophers with miscellaneous ways of thinking this worldview went into the unconscious. The result was the evolving of a new worldview which was in turn known as philosophical thought. Thales of Miletus is the pioneer in this thought period. Introducing the notion of substance, he put the first step forward in bring down the mankind's thought. This way of thought had lasted until Renaissance when we witness the birth of scientific thought period to the time being.

The main important characteristics of philosophical thought cycle is the possession of heaven-earthen worldview. It is to say that human being feels that there is a Meta look or control over his life. He thinks his fate is pre decided and the natural disasters like floods and earthquake are the result of God's anger in skies. But he is also determined to find the earthen causes of diseases here on earth. He intends to know the causes of natural disasters; therefore he is after the earthen cause.

The purpose of the present paper is to study Iran's passage into the philosophical worldview which was carried out by Zarathustra. By an inductive method, the present study introduces Zarathustra's ideas as the starting point of an essential change in the worldview and living of Iranians. With the dawn of these ideas, subjective thought and questions and knowledge of God raised in people's minds gradually and this caused the mythological worldview to be pushed to the margins. Later, Zoroastrian priests, based on this new worldview, made Zoroastrian rethoric and defended Zarathustra's achievements. These discussions gathered its own fans and eventually gave birth to the philosophical worldview.

**Keywords:** Mythical Worldview, Philosophical worldview, Zarathustra, Iran

#### 1. Introduction

According to Will Durant's *The History of Philosophy*, (2000: 6-18 & 61-65) it can be interpreted that, based on ancient Greek civilization, he observes a variety of ideas, among the Greeks, which are based on the different tendencies in interpreting the world, human being, and God. These various ideas have given birth to various outlooks on the world, human being, and God and have formed different worldviews that can be classified into three worldviews or thought cycles: Mythological worldview, Philosophical worldview, and scientific worldview (Kazzazi, 1993: 9-23).

In mythological worldview, man's view is completely heavenly. In this thought cycle, which lasted for thousands of years and so is regarded as the longest period in the knowledge of the world, human being and God, man regards heavenly forces as effective in his own fate. People earn their life by hunting and the government system is tribal in which the chief of the tribe is, also, the leader, the sage, and the doctor and the

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decisions over the fate of the tribe, its settlement, and its migration, therefore, are based on the chief's decisions.

In philosophical worldview, man's look comes down to the earth and a heavenly- earthly view is formed. Man, in this period, in one hand regards heavenly forces as effective in the controlling of himself and the universe, while, on the other hand he, gradually, learns to take hold of his own fate and dominate the nature. He tries; therefore, to make use of his own forces and hold some views on decoding the natural events and his own rationalism. Since the Sophists and philosophers, by putting forward their questions and their various outlooks, were the pioneers of this worldview, this thought cycle is known as the philosophical worldview. People's life, in this period, is based on agriculture and the government system is city-state; each government has a territory whose official residence is in the capital.

Following the philosophical worldview, there came the scientific worldview in which man's thought was cut from the heavens and became completely scientific. In this thought cycle, man takes hold of his own life and his environment. He, no longer, believes in a pre-determined fate, and rather than giving in to the fate, fights it back and changes it for his own benefit. This thought cycle was born, in Europe, by the Renaissance (sixteenth century) and slowly reached all over the world. Today, the dominant outlook in the world is the scientific worldview whose start is different in different countries because of their different approaches to the modern worldview. People's living, in this period, is based on industry and the government system is based on nationality. It can be said that most of the nations of the world have their own government and except the Kurds, who are the world's biggest nation without a government, other nations have enjoyed this blessing by this new worldview.

**The beginning of the philosophical worldview:** Thales of Miletus (640-550 B.C.) who is known as the father of philosophy was the first person who presented an amazing theory "notion of substance". According to this theory, the creation was started from the earth and then went to the heavens. Thales said that the primary substance from which the creation was started was "water". He regarded "water" as "the notion of substance" and believed the universe to have been derived from this essential substance (Zaimoran, 1999: 87). The interesting point of this theory was that, up to that time, the creation was regarded as a process which had been started from the heavens; that is, the heavens were created first and then the creation was slowly brought down until it reached the earth. The second point of this theory was that, in the pre-philosophical worldview, God is the absolute power in the process of creation and all the stages of creation takes place by God's order. Thales' theory, however, was in sharp contrast to what the masses held in their mind and tongue. He not only regards the creation as happening from the earth to the heavens, but also considers it as having taken place without God's interference. Thales surprised his contemporary people with not only this theory but also his other theories of astronomy (Durant, 2000: 61-63). It seems that the Ionian people were the first people who dared to search the natural causes of the events in physics and explain the whole existence in philosophy by physical theories (ibid: 61).

After Thales, the Sophists came to the stage and, for three centuries, fought against people's superstition and guided them towards Wisdom. Though Sophists didn't achieve a pleasant result because philosophers ideas were the dominant force and the masses' mind was not ready for a fundamental change. Sophists, however, with their intellectual rising, took an important step towards Wisdom and, after a millenium, their ideas were the source of inspiration for the scientist in their passage into the scientific era.

**The characteristics of the philosophical worldview:** Philosophical period has some unique characteristics which distinguishes it from other periods as it is showed in the following table:

period \ item	Mythological	philosophical	scientific
Government system	tribal	City-state	nationality
living	hunting	agricultural	industrial
worldview	Heavenly	Heavenly-earthly	earthly
theology	polytheism	polytheism+ monotheism	monotheism+ atheism

The most important characteristic that can be inferred from the above table is that most of the people's common ideas and concepts became abstract by the Sophists and philosophers. These concepts, which were later classified as metaphysical in philosophical classification, are treated in different manners in this thought cycle which is explained in what follows. Nonetheless, philosophical worldview tends in subjectifying the metaphysical concepts and also the knowledge of the universe, human being and Gods.

Regarding the treatment of the metaphysical concepts in this cycle, there are two separate groups: first are the sophists who denied metaphysical concepts and regarded them as superstition (Durant, 2000: 10), and second are the philosophers, outstanding among them is Socrates, who accepted metaphysics but tried to reform people's views (ibid: 10-11). The result of the both tendencies, however, was to subjectify the beliefs. In the mythological period, people had a materialistic and physical treatment of the gods and the deities. They worshiped the gods and goddesses in the form of idols. Sophists, however, introduced these concepts as superstition and denied them and by that took the most important step in the denial of superstition and making Wisdom (Logos) the ruler of the universe. Though, as history gives evidence, it was too soon for that and people's divinely beliefs were not ready to accept these intellectual interpretations. Unlike the sophists, philosophers took a different attitude; they accepted metaphysical concepts but tried to reform them (Zaimoran, 1999: chap: 7-8). It can be claimed, therefore, that with the dawn of the philosophical cycle, a big process of development started in people's worldview and this developments, at last, led to a better understanding of human being and the universe and paved the way for the advent of the following cycle which rendered this understanding completely earthly.

**Zarathustra, the starter of the philosophical worldview:** Like Greece, Iran, too, has passed these thought cycles and now is in the period of transfer into the scientific cycle. There are abundant writings on the beginning of the philosophical cycle in Greece, here, therefore, the advent of this cycle in Iran is discussed. According to all the evidences, Zarathustra, who caused an essential change in Iranians' worldview and led it into the philosophical period with his religion and the mission he define for himself, should be regarded as the starter of the philosophical period in Iran. In what follows, there are mentioned those gifts which were dedicated to Iran and the Iranian's worldview by Zarathustra's mission:

**Monotheism:** Zarathustra's religion is based on the worship of the God. By announcing his own religion, Zarathustra denied those various gods and goddess which were previously presented in Iranians' mind and tongue (Boyce, 1998: 108-109). He argued that only the single wise God (Ahuramazda) is worthy of worship and believed that the whole existence has been created by this single Being. Those gods and goddess who were worshiped before his arrival, therefore, met two fates: they were classified as Sepnataminoo (Holy Immortals) which, at last, were divided into two groups of six "Amshaspands" and thirty Izads. The names of these Amshaspands have been mentioned in the part 24 of the Yasht 57 of Avesta. The gods, too, who are called Yazata in Avesta, are praised in the Yashtas. These two groups are in Ahuramazda's court. 2. They were classified as "Angeraminoo" (damned and devilish gods) whose job is to make riots and to destroy and kill Ahuramazda's creations. These groups, who are commanded by the Evil, were entitled as "Diw" (demon). The word "Diw" is an old word meaning god, but, with the arrival of Zarathustra, this word got a changed connotation and came to mean Satan and devil. Up to that time, Diws were immortal gods controlling the human beings' and the world's fate. Zarathustra, however, took back this holy meaning from the Diws and announced them as devilish creatures who should be kept away from the territory of mankind's good thought (ibid: 111). According to Zarathustra Ahuramazda is the only creator of the light, the dark, the heavens and the earth. He is the father of Asha (justice), Wahumana (good thought), Armaiti (sacrifice), Sepnataminoo (good soul), and Angeraminoo (destructive soul) (Duchesne-Guillemin, 2006: 195).

It should be mentioned, however, that up to our time, this precious aspect of Zarathustra's religion, that is monotheism, was unknown; rather people have regarded this religion as a religion of dualism and atheism. Today's researchers and theologizes, however, by reflecting on Zarathustra's own words in Avesta which is known as Gatha, recognized monotheism in this religion and showed it to the world and thus rubbed off the dust which has covered Avesta, and especially its first part, Yasna, for a long time (Razi, 2002: 91). In Zoroastrian theology, it is considered as an important discovery which disclosed the true face of this religion to the world.

**Ahurmazda's attributes:** the God whom Zarathustra introduces is Ahuramazda meaning the "wise god" who has created the universe based on wisdom. This God is pre-existent and immortal (Awesat /Yasna, chap: 8-31), is creator (Awesta /Yasna, chap: 11) and unseen; this God, therefore, cannot be imagined and worshiped in an earthly embodiment (Mehr, 2001: 17) subjectifying the notion of God was an important step towards the philosophical worldview.

**The growth of rhetoric:** Knowledge of rhetoric is a knowledge which defends the methodology and the doctrines of a religious worldview or theory. The growth and the spread of this knowledge mean the growth of scientific arguments to verify or disqualify a theory. Zarathustra, himself, was taught religious principles and medical instruction and appeared in the society as an educated and eloquent individual (Boyce, 1998: 99). This eloquence shows itself in the rhythmical text of the Gathas in Awesta. This tradition of eloquence and prudence was, also, set among the Zoroastrian priests who were needed to learn and memorize all the holy texts and "Manthra", the gods' names, and all the elegant prayers and transfer them to Zarathustra's followers (ibid). When Zoroastrianism spread, the priests in different corners tried to defend it and defined a framework for it. It wasn't easy to persuade the masses to accept the new religion in a land where the missionaries of the old religion known as "Kawys" (the rulers) and Karapans" (religious priests and leaders) had a conspicuous spiritual presence among the masses. It is enough to know that before Zarathustra, the notion of the resurrection day has not been mentioned and Zarathustra is the first person in the history of humanity who stated this notion (ibid: 118). This attempt of them is regarded as a big step towards the philosophizing of religion. Though besides these verbal and propagandist attempts, there were some priests like priest Kartir in Sasanid period who tried to impose this religion violently, other priests tried to make their way into people's hearts and persuade their minds. It should be mentioned, however, that though Zarathustra's instruction is based on logical and intellectual bases, he is a prophet and not a philosopher (ibid: 113) and his duty is to define a new mission for his people and not to put forward profound intellectual questions as philosophers did. His instruction, nevertheless, is based on wisdom and reasoning. Wisdom, which is the basis of philosophy, has been praised in Gathas (the first chapter of Awesta) and has been introduced as the first ray of Ahuramazda; Zarathustra's followers, too, have been advised to consult their wisdom in everything. The name Ahuramazda itself means "the wise God" who created the universe based on wisdom (Mehr, 2001: 13-14). According to Awesta (Yasna, chap: 1-2 & 4), Zarathustra, even before appointing as a prophet, had consulted his good wisdom (Vahumana). This rationalism in Zarathustra's ideas make us regard his advent as the dawn of the philosophical period, even if we don't view him as a philosopher though a historian like Plutarch regards Zarathustra as a philosopher and mentions his name, besides Plato, as the greatest philosophers (Benveniste, 1998: 8).

**Territorial unity:** Until the arrival of Zarathustra, disunity, instead of unity, had dominated Iran. Every one stuck to his own gun and, in each corner, a specific power was ruling which seemed more like a tribal government. The advent of Zarathustra, however, put an end to this disunity. His arrival unified Iran (Boyce, 1998: 44 & 167) and the spread of his religion was determining the realm and the borders of Iran since wherever his religion went, it was considered as a part of Iran's territory and was obliged to follow the king of Iran. This unwritten rule included the subject governments, too. Though they were not Iranian by race, they were subject of Iran because of their religion and their territory was Iran's territory. The best example of these subject governments is the small empire of Hira which was the subject of Iran and a part of its territory because its people were Zoroastrian though they were Arab by race. The advent of Zoroastrian religion, therefore, had a political function and gathered all its followers under a single federal government. Persuading the king of Iran not to pay tax to the king of Turan (Razi, 2002: 40) shows the political role of Zarathustra in the Iran of that time. By determining such duties for himself, Zarathustra sets himself in a superior place to Buddha whose religion is based on the salvation of the religious individual (ibid, 38).

**Agricultural living:** According to what Zarathustra has said in Gathas (Boyce, 1998: 47-48 & 64), there were some holy animals in that time which made an agricultural life possible. These animals included: cow, sheep, goat, horse, and camel. The presence of these animals and the existence of water supply denote that the flourish of the Zoroastrian religion was, also, the prosperity of agriculture. His resurrection was, also, a revival in the people's life since people followed his orders of reconstructing the land and making use of the cows to exploit the land (Razi, 2002: 66-68). People, therefore, following Zarathustra's spiritual instruction,

flourished their material life too. Taking a look at "Gatha" and "Vendidad" in Avesta, illustrates the fact that practicing agriculture was one of the moral rules of this religion (Duchesne-Guillemain, 2006: 173-174). The people whom introduced in Avesta have wintry houses and use the flood water and the rivers to irrigate their farming lands (Christenson, 2003: 22). In Zoroastrian religion, six agricultural feasts known as "Gahenbar feasts" are held each year in commemoration of Amshaspands. The part of "Wisperad" in Avesta is about the customs of these festivals and their special prayers. This kind of life illustrates people's passage from a hunting-based life to an agricultural life which, in the classification of the civilizations, is superior and more developed than a hunting-based civilization. With his religious and moral instruction, Zarathustra managed to pave the way for the Iranians to pass from a violent pastoral nomadic life to the calm rural life of farming and flocking (Dustkhah, 2006: 36).

The existence of other mottos, such as the equality of men and women which appears in Gathas and Zarathustra recognizes it in this world and the world to come (Boyce, 1998: 49 & Mehr, 2001: 36) or the matter of respecting other religions (Mehr: 66), illustrate the fact that Iran, at that time, was peeling and undergoing a process of change which is not observed in that time's civilizations like China, India, and Mesopotamia (Razi, 2002: 161).

## **2. A comparison between Iran and Greece in their passage into the philosophical period:**

The passage of Iran and Greece into the philosophical period didn't occur contemporaneously. The philosophical period started in Greece in the sixth century B.C.; but in Iran, it began by the rise of Zarathustra. Though Zarathustra's life is still ambiguous and there is no exact account of his time and place, what is more certain and more accepted is that he appeared about 1100 B.C. presented his religion, and endowed the society with his new ideas (Boyce, 1998: 43 & 64, Razi, 2002: 54). These new ideas, therefore, caused the old religions to go to the margins slowly and to extinguish completely in some places. Though in some parts of the Kurdistan there remained traces of this old religion (Mithraism) which can be observed, even today, in the two religions of **Yarsan** (in Kermashan region, in the south of Kurdistan) and **Izadi** (in Barzan region), these religions, nevertheless, remained in the margins and in some cases adopted to the new conditions; this subject, however, is beyond the scope of this study and it suffices here to mention the fact that by Zarathustra's new religion Iran entered into the philosophical period much earlier (five centuries earlier). This precocity led the Iranians to an early acceptance of abstract and subjective ideas and therefore monotheism and the rays of these new ideas reached far lands and especially Greece.

As India has been the land of wonder for the Iranians, so has Iran been to the Greeks. From the early times, the Greeks have followed Iran's news greedily and have learned secret knowledge and intellectual movements from communication channels (Benveniste, 1998: 3). The eminent theologize, Duchesne-Guillemain, writes: "The Greeks had many reasons for their attention to Iran. Apparently in Achaemenian period and by the way of Ivani, there have been some communication between the Iranian's religion and the (Greek)'s rising philosophy. Borrowing ideas from Iran has, probably, originated from the time of the school of Milet. (Duchesne-Guillemain, 2006: 277) Plato, as Rezi expresses, has been influenced by Zarathustra's utopian ideals when presenting his own theory of utopia. In "First Alcibiads", Plato mentions the name of Zarathustra explicitly; Plato's students, too, following their teacher, talked about Zoroastrian priests' beliefs, (Benveniste, 1998: 8) as Aristotle repeats these priests' idea of dualism.

The second point of this comparison is that, in Greece, the philosophical period began with one man (Thales) but there appeared various schools of thought and so many sophists and philosophers who, from the sixth century B.C. up to the beginning of the Middle age in the third century A.C. tried to develop rationalism. A caravan of sophists and philosophers, therefore, undertook this task in Greece while in Iran, the philosophical period was initiated by just one man, Zarathustra, and was done exclusively by him. His faithful followers, however, undertook this task when his holy mission began and found its way into people's heart. In other words, passage into the philosophical period was a religious act in Iran while in Greece it was the result of critical thought and the development of ideas in the crucible of criticism. It is natural, therefore, that the rule of wisdom in Greece should last a long time and in the time of the passage into the scientific

period and after a millennium of the despotism of religious government (church), the same wisdom blossom and help Europe, which is based on Greek civilization, in its passage into the scientific period.

**The end of the philosophical worldview:** In Europe, the philosophical era feel into a decline with the dawn of the Renaissance and the scientific period rose gradually. European renaissance had some features which were based on making people's experiences earthly. In Iran, this cycle appeared with constitutionalism revolution which happened in the last century with that the Iranians, gradually, made their worldview earthly. Though this passage from the philosophical view into the modern view has been accompanied by its own ups and downs, which still continues, it can be said that the philosophical period in Iran has been going into its decline inevitably.

In Kurdistan however, the scientific era started with the declaration of the republic of Kurdistan by Ghazi Mohammad. It was during this short life government that the Kurds entered a new era which was based on making the experiences earthly which didn't exist before. This experience can be studied and discussed in two areas: first is the preparation to make the mind scientific. This preparation can be seen in the laws and statements of that short life government; publishing newspapers in Kurdish, respecting the freedom of religions and accepting the principal of plurality, and especially in the Middle east of which, other nations are afraid, giving people the freedom of educating in their own mother tongue which included the minorities like the Jews, and so many other laws are the examples of this preparation. Second is the preparation to create and develop industrial infrastructures. So many books can be written on these two points. All these good works in the short period of a year are the examples which illustrate the passage of Kurds into the scientific era. The parallel of these examples cannot be observed among any of the nations of the Middle East in a set together.

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