

النسبوية قيمة بعد حداثة إبستمولوجياً وثقافياً

أ.د. يمنى طريف الخولي (*)

لئن كان النقيض يُستبان بالنقيض؛ فإنه من سُبُل المقاربة الفلسفية المثمرة الواعدة بشيء من الإحاطة، تلك المقاربة الجدلية للأطروحة ونقضها، للقضية والقضية المضادة، وللمفهوم في ضوء المفهوم المقابل. وبناءً على هذا تُطرح النسبوية هاهنا من حيث هي سلب ونقض للمطلقة، لتكون بدورها تمثيلاً لقيم ما بعد الحداثة، من حيث كانت المطلقة بشكل ما تمثيلاً لمعايير الحداثة.. إبستمولوجياً وثقافياً.

في الإبستمولوجيا العلمية الحداثية تمثلت وتجسدت المطلقة بشكل صريح مباشر متعين، وذلك في: الزمان المطلق والمكان المطلق والكتلة الثابتة كحدود للفيزياء النيوتونية، التي مثلت بدورها النموذج المطلق المؤتمل لنسق العلم الواحد والوحيد، العلم الموضوعي الحتمي اليقيني ذي القوانين الضرورية مطلقة الصدق، المُستبعد لتأثير الذات العارفة وكأنها ترقبه بحياد مطلق من وراء ستار.

مع مطالع القرن العشرين بدأت النسبوية تشق طريقها إلى سويداء الإبستمولوجيا العلمية مع ثورة الفيزياء الكبرى: ثورة الكوانتم بمتوالياتها والنظرية النسبية لآينشتين. هذه الثورة جعلت كل مطلق علمي أطلاقاً دوارس، وانهارت تحت وطأتها الحتمية الميكانيكية والموضوعية المطلقة ودعاوي اليقين العلمي. دخلت الذات العارفة بمواقعها وسرعاتها وأدواتها للرصود كمتغير في معادلة الطبيعة، وكان هذا إيذاناً بدخول النسبوية، من حيث كان محققاً للمطلقة. وفي النصف الثاني من القرن العشرين، انطلقت ثورة فلسفة العلم الكبرى، تحديداً في العام ١٩٦٢ عام ظهور كتاب توماس كون «بنية الثورات العلمية» الذي مثل منعطفًا حاسماً

(*) أستاذ فلسفة العلوم ومناهج البحث - جامعة القاهرة.

في مسار فلسفة العلم انتقلت معه إلى رؤية بانورامية شاملة لظاهرة العلم، ليست كمنسق مؤتمثل منبت الصلة بما عداه، بل كما ينبغي لها تكون: فعالية إنسانية حميمة تتآزر في خلقها أبعاد شتى لا تقتصر على الأسس المنطقية والمنهجية، فثمة أيضاً العوامل السوسولوجية والسيكولوجية والقيمية والحضارية والتخطيطية... إلخ. بعبارة موجزة: أنسنة الظاهرة العلمية. وكل ما هو إنساني لا مندوحة له عن النسبوية. بفعل ثورة توماس كون ونموذجه الإرشادي احتل مفهوم النسبوية موقعا مرموقا في ملحمة تفهم ظاهرة العلم وآليات تطورها الصاعد دوماً، لا سيما بعد أن لحق به مفهوم اللامقايسة. ولا ننسى في هذا الصدد الدور الإستمولوجي الكبير لتحليلات ويلارد كواين الثابتة التي مكنت للنسبوية. وقام بول فيرآبند بدوره المشهود في إذكاء حدة النسبوية واللامقايسية. ويمكن اعتبار فيرآبند رائد ما بعد الحداثة في فلسفة العلم والإستمولوجيا العلمية. هذا فضلاً عن أن مايكل بولاني (١٨٩١-١٩٧٦) كان قد سبق وأرهص بمعالر ثورة توماس كون حين أكد على دور المعرفة الضمنية، وأن أي نسق معرفي، مهما كان صورياً، يحتوي على عناصر إنسانية لا صورية حميمة.

وتظل حركية العلم والإستمولوجيا العلمية أبلغ تمثيل لروح القرن العشرين وتوتراته. فلا تنفصل هذه المتغيرات الإستمولوجية، عما كان يواكبها آنذاك، في النصف الثاني من القرن العشرين من إرهابات ومقدمات الولوج إلى حقبنا الراهنة حقة ما بعد الحداثة التي تصادر على أن قيم الحداثة والتنوير من عقلانية شاملة ووضعية راسخة وواحدية مادية وحتمية ميكانيكية وعلمانية فجّة.. قد استنفدت مقتضياتها، وباتت مستحقة للتقدّمهيدا لإغلاق دائرتها والصعود إلى مرحلة حضارية أرحب وأثرى وأكثر عدلاً، تتجاوز قصورات مرحلة الحداثة، فضلاً عن جرائمها المتمثلة في الاستعمار والسيطرة على الآخرين، وقهر ثقافات الشعوب الأخرى، وتدمير البيئة واستنفاد مواردها. ما بعد الحداثة تعني ما بعد الاستعمارية.. ما بعد المركزية الغربية.. وما بعد الوضعية وما بعد التنويرية. كانت مطلّقة العلم الغربي الحدائي النيوتوني هي التمثيل الإستمولوجي العيني لمطلّقة الحضارة الغربية كمثل أعلى واحد ووحيد للتقدم وكل ما عداها دوائر للجهالة والتخلف بقدر ابتعادها عن المركز الغربي. انسحقت هذه المطلّقة/ المركزية في عصر ما بعد الحداثة. وقد شهد مراكز حضارية وتجارب نهضوية عديدة مبهرة جديرة بالاحتذاء، في تعددية ثقافية تصنع تنوعاً خلاقاً. في القاموس الثقافي يمكن اعتبار المركزية الغربية الاستعمارية كانت هي المطلق وما حل محلها من تعددية

ثقافية بعد حداثة هو النسبوية.. التي تعني أن القيمة الماثلة والدرس الحضاري يكون بالنسبة لثقافة معينة.. تتجاوزها قيم ودرس حضاري بالنسبة لثقافة أخرى.. وكل الأطراف تتحاور معاً في عالمٍ ينبغي أن ينبذ المركزية والتهميش؛ ليكون أكثر عدلاً وقبولاً للآخر، أكثر خصوبة وثراءً.

الإنسان هو الكائن القادر على صنع التقدم، كل مرحلة من مراحل استيعاب وتجاوز للمرحلة الأسبق؛ لتكون أكثر تقدماً. فكانت ما بعد الحداثة تقدماً وتجاوزاً لقصورات في الحداثة. وبفضل النسبوية المرتبنة بها، أو بالنصف الثاني من القرن العشرين وما تلاه، تأتت إبستمولوجيا علمية أكثر ثراءً وإنسانية، ونسيج ثقافي أكثر ثراءً وعدلاً، ولعلمها وجهان متكاملان أو على الأقل لا ينفصلان.

وفي هذا ليست النسبوية مطروحة هنا كمذهبية.. بل فقط كقيمة معيارية ضابطة، مجدية حقاً إبستمولوجياً وثقافياً.

Relativism as Postmodernist Value In Epistemological and Cultural Contexts^(*)

Dr. Yomna T. Elkholy^(**)

Primarily or methodologically, I claim that it is so fruitful to deal with the philosophical concept through its opposite, such as the case in the dialectical approach of the thesis and its antithesis, then the synthesis. For example, it is not appropriate or it is insufficient to deal with the concept of truth without falsehood, or democracy without totalitarianism and despotism. Indeed, we gain more comprehensive understanding of the concept, in the light of its contrary. So, relativism is conceptualized and approached herein definitely as being the opposition, the denial, the negation of Absolutism, or as it were as rebellion against Absolutism.

Absolutism in any field claims the one, the constant and invariable for all terms, and all parties; so that it can be considered as monopoly of the truth in the given field. This matter is so as long as epistemological absolutism claims and entails objectivism, therefore it means not to take into account the subject /the knower, to deny and refuse any effect of her/him on knowing and in the knowledge.

In fact, absolutism is a monopoly of a deficient truth, of weak truth, as the feminist philosopher of science Sandra Harding (1935-?) has illustrated in her demarcation between weak objectivity and strong objectivity, to render modernist absolute objectivism into weak objectivity, whereas the objectivity which takes into account the standpoint of the knower and subsequently some relative dimensions is the strong objectivity. It is well known that feminism is in the first class of the

(*) Has been presented in:

The First Annual Conference of The Middle East Society for Analytical Philosophy: Pluralism, Relativism and Skepticism, The American University in Cairo, 19-21 March 2019.

(**) Professor of Philosophy of Science - Cairo University.

fighters against absolutism and the carriers of the banner of relativism. In the same time feminist philosophy is a representative of the post-modernist philosophy.

The issue herein is not feminism, but relativism which may be considered as representative of the post-modernist values and criteria, in so far as absolutism was somewhat representative of the modernist values and criteria, both epistemologically and culturally. I intend to deal with scientific epistemology: definitely because of the interrelation between science and culture. We can take modern science as the supreme factor and the activist actor in the modern culture and the most effective of all its constituents or institutions, both intellectually and factually. Consequently, we have not to deal with German Idealism for example, in spite of the fact that it was another top of the modern absolutism, which has been achieved during the nineteenth century, to be another representation of modern mindset. However, I think that all types of modern absolutism, whether metaphysical, scientific, epistemological, cultural or otherwise, have shaken highly or even broke down due to the winds of postmodernism.

Let's show briefly the journey of absolutism and the advent of relativism, epistemologically and culturally.



Since the seventeenth century absolutism has been actualized obviously in the modern science through essential terms of Newtonian deterministic physics, such as the terms of absolute time, absolute space, also the concept of absolute motion versus relative motion, and the constant mass. This absolutism has been reflected in the scientific epistemology which was the characteristic spirit of the modernist mindset. The Newtonian physics in its turn became an idealized model or paradigm of science which is unique, of universal validity, isolated and immunized from social or historical explanations to be purely Western. Its truth is absolute, as it is independent of the knower, eliminates any effect of the subject who observes the world absolutely neutral observation. It is the absolute objectivism.

During the first decade of the twentieth century, relativism began its first faint steps toward the scientific epistemology. It was through the great revolution of physics, of Relativity Theory and Quantum Mechanics. Its consequences, which heighten the rate of the scientific progress, ruled out absolutism, as long as they quashed the mechanical determinism with all its claims of absolute objectivism

and certainty. Physics replaces absolute space and absolute time with the spatio-temporal continuum and replaces objectivism with inter-subjectivism. Mass becomes variable, and no absolute motion at all. The observer/knower/subject enters equations of nature through the effects of her/his instruments, velocity and position. So relativism as the contrary of absolutism is actualized. It is attending and doing in the realm of science and scientific research, since the absolutes and the absolutism have been ruled out, since the status and the role of the subject/the knower has been taken into account, since scientific epistemology has dealt with varying of terms and concepts, and the varying itself, in order to get more objective and more progressed knowledge. All this is due to the revolution of Relativity and quantum.



In the year 1962, the revolution of the philosophy of science emerged through Thomas Kuhn's masterpiece 'The Structure of Scientific Revolutions'. The most significant is that he introduced the concept of **Paradigm**. Generally a paradigm is a network or a distinct set of postulates, theories, method, standards and also values, all of them together shape the perception of reality and the contributions shared by a particular community, namely the scientific community in a given period. Kuhn argues that the considerable developments of science come through the successive transition from one paradigm to another via scientific revolutions, therefore paradigms change along the history of science and they are incommensurable. Kuhn insists that paradigm shifts cannot be brought about by the force of logic and methodic rules alone, there are several other factors. So, if scientific developments indeed come through the discovery of new evidence and the falsification of old theories, what counts as evidence or as falsification will never be absolutely objective. It is a matter of interpretation and judgment according to the dominant paradigm. So there is no neutral form of observation or a determinate set of scientific criteria. All these vary from one era to another that is from one paradigm to another.

What a severe attack on the notion of objectivism! Simply it undermined all scientific absolutism.

The concept of Paradigm looks like an explosion in the realm of philosophy of science, so that it divides it into the pre-Kuhnian and the post-Kuhnian. Thomas Kuhn renders philosophy of science an holistic view to the phenomenon of science

in a given period holistically, i.e. not not limited to logic and methodology of science, but also encompasses the socio-psychological factors, values, and the relations to other cultural institutions, taking into account the history of science and the related cultural dimensions. In a nutshell, this revolution has humanized the phenomenon of science and its philosophy. All what is human must be relativistic. So, relativism has taken a center stage in the philosophy of science, and in scientific epistemology.

It is familiar to attribute relativism in philosophy of science and in scientific epistemology to the impact of Thomas Kuhn and Kuhnian philosophies of science such as the feminist one. However, the matter is wider than the realm of Kuhn and the Kuhnian albeit much vast and vivid. Before Kuhn and after him there are other strong efficient contributors. They are prominent figures, who gave their philosophical achievements during the second half of the twentieth century. They do much to stabilize epistemological relativism. I will refer to a few examples.

Firstly, I must mention the genius scientist and creative philosopher Michael Polanyi (1891-1976) who based his epistemological theory upon the concept of the personal knowledge: its role, denotation, and dimensions. Before Thomas Kuhn, Polanyi refuses entirely all claims of logical positivism and especially its reductionism. Positivistic reductionism means that physics or physical theories can be reduced to observational statements and the principles that relate them to theoretical entities and to laws, and that every primitive or basic term is a physical term, all other terms must be defined by means of physical terms, i.e. can be reduced to them. So, all branches of science including human sciences up to psychology must be reducible to physics, otherwise it is a pseudoscience and will never be science or even meaningful. All this have been disproved by Polyani. Furthermore, he refused and refuted all forms and all types of any reductionism. Reductionism explains a thing in terms of its components, no other dimensions, and no difference between characteristics of a part and characteristics of the whole, and as if the subject/knower has no real existence. Reductionism is another type of absolutism.

In his way toward relativism, Michael Polanyi launched an overwhelming attack on the extreme empiricism of logical positivism and on reductionism. In his work *Personal Knowledge: Toward a Post-critical Philosophy* in the year 1958, he gave an anticipation of the contents of Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

There is also his *The Tacit Dimension* in 1966. These two works of Polanyi try to eradicate epistemological objectivism.

In fact, Polanyi has challenged the mainstream account of scientific knowledge, whether positivist, instrumentalist or even Popperian, because of their alleged objectivism. As a contrary of objectivism, Polanyi insisted that all knowing is personal. So, he asserted and emphasized the decisive attendance of the knower/of the subject. He argued that scientific knowledge relies upon personal commitments. It is not subjective, not confined in the subjective realm of the knower; rather it is personal, due to those commitments.

It may be said that Polanyi did not gain what he deserved, did not gain great fame or sufficient influence in the philosophical medium. But we may agree that the analytical philosopher Willard Quine (1908-2000) is outstanding and one of the most influential epistemologists in the second half of the twentieth century. It is also easy to agree that his famous paper "Two dogmas of Empiricism", which has been published in his "From a logical Point of View- 1953" in addition to other works of Quine, are manifest of relativism in the epistemology, according to logical analysis, as well as his *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays- 1969*. Concisely, Quine analyzed language through its relation to reality in order to reject the fundamental distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions, according to the role of experience. Then, according to the role of belief he rejected reductionism. Both experience and belief are of relativistic sense. So his naturalistic epistemology, which tends to be a scientific approach to the epistemology, is a strong stabilization of relativism. According to Quine, relativism is based upon logical bases. What stabilization!

Furthermore, there is an attractive relativistic contribution in the philosophy of science and in the epistemology. It came subsequently through *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge - 1975*, by Paul Feyerabend (1924 - 1994) who is extremely ardent and enthusiastic for relativism. He insisted on incommensurability and emphasized it as a huge gate to enter inclusive and extensive relativism epistemologically, and to attack - culturally - taking western science as a tool and as justification to the superiority of white man, his modernism and colonialism. Feyerabend defended the role and value, not only of the Western but also and perhaps previously, the role and value of the multiple systems or

patterns of knowledge, in past or in present, in the East or in the West. So, he highlights the importance of the theories that lie in the history of science and its ability to fertilize the current science, to confirm the plurality of methods and relativism. He declared that modern science is not a sacred system that requires infidelity of all other patterns and traditions; rather it is a rational system that must grow and flourish among other systems and institutions. Modern science is not an excuse to impose the Western model and to eliminate all other cultural traditions, depriving mankind of fertility and multiplicity. Briefly speaking, Feyerabend can be considered as the pioneer of post-modernist philosophy of science.



On the other hand, scientific epistemology cannot be separated from its contemporaneous socio-political changes, that led in the second half of the twentieth century to the era of postmodernism, which means or embraces post-colonialism, post-Eurocentrism, post-positivism, post-enlightenment, what Jürgen Habermas (1929 -?) called post-secularism, and, as it were, other post-s. The prefix “post” is put before a correspondent modernistic term, to denote that this term came to an end, and we are in a period of revisiting it, so that it is possible to reconstruct a new one, i.e., a postmodernist alternative, which should be better or more advanced.

Post-colonialism is the most significant, so that it is the other side of the same coin, which is called post-modernism, because the Western colonialist enterprise is what marked the history and the world of the modernist epoch. However, as I have mentioned earlier, Postmodernism asserts that the modernist values and criteria have come to an end, and must be criticized in order to get rid of their offenses and dysfunctions such as the crimes of colonialism, subdue of the cultures of what so-called the Third World, destroying of non-Western traditions, refusing all other or all non-western knowledge systems, and environmental destruction...etc. Such aspects or phenomena must be replaced with what are better, more elaborated, more developed and humanist, that is, more relativist.

We should assert that Western colonialism depended upon absolutism, as long as it depended upon some kind of scientific and political dysfunctionality of the universality claims for modern science as being purely Western, tending to ignore the Arab Muslim heritage in mathematics and science and its essential role in paving the way toward the great scientific revolution in the seventeenth century. This role

is somewhat acknowledged in philosophy and history of science nowadays, in our post-modernist era.



The cultural conclusion of the above epistemological discourse is that Modernism had viewed what so-called the Epistemological Absolutism of modern science, as well as the cultural absolutism of Eurocentrism as unique model of progress. Both absolutisms, the epistemological and the cultural, declined in the age of postmodernism which is post-colonialism. Nowadays, we can say that there is no one center or centrism, rather several successful models of advanced culture to affirm the value of Multiculturalism, which means relativism. Nowadays, the international cultural relations and interactions are no longer guidance or instruction from the Center to the peripheries. They have, rather, become dialogue between parties, collaboration and participation: or at least must be so because of relativism which affirms the identity of each party in a more fair multicultural world, without marginalization or exclusion. The multicultural postmodernist world is an eccentric one, according to the positive sense of the term Eccentrism which means the emancipation from center and centrism. Centrism in its turn was a concrete representation of some aspect of cultural absolutism.

Finally, I claim that absolutism like any other thesis has its pros and cons. It was suitable and effective strategy, or might be so, for the modernism era, i.e. from the beginning of the seventeenth century till the mid of the twentieth century. Respectively relativism may have its pros and cons: however, it seems the suitable and effective strategy for our post-modernism era. It may be said that absolutism was doctrine, or at least take forms through some rigid doctrines, while relativism as being its contrary and as it is exposed here, is not a doctrine but rather mere fruitful norm-criteria, epistemologically and culturally.

