ALI FANAEI

Religious Tax as a Source of Income for Religious Study: A New Approach towards the Problem and Its Solution[1]

Objectivity and honesty constitute the core of academic integrity and are central virtues in any kind of study, including religious study in seminaries. Like other scholars, religious scholars should be objective and honest if their research is to be epistemically valid and reliable, and their findings authoritative and binding for their followers. In other words, the epistemic authority of religious scholars is dependent upon their objectivity in discovering religious truths and their honesty in disclosing the results of their research to laypeople.

To be objective means to be free from bias by having an impartial attitude towards all possible conclusions and not to have any personal or group interest favouring a specific outcome without sufficient evidence. Objectivity requires that one's research is conducted with an epistemically suitable motive, such as finding the truth as it is. The adage 'We are the sons of evidence, and hence we are inclined to whatever our mother is inclined to' refers to this sense of objectivity, and the right reason for conducting research.

Honesty in this context means revealing to others the outcome of the research as it is, when there is no more important moral duty, such as saving the life of an innocent or reducing the sever suffering of others. A morally virtuous scholar is someone who does not hide or manipulate the findings of his research to protect his own personal or group interest. Although honesty in this sense is a 'qualified' moral duty, the qualification by which a moral duty is qualified is itself another moral duty, which is of more importance from a moral point of view. Therefore, we should acknowledge that there is a morally significant difference between hiding the truth from others for the sake of a more important moral reason, such as saving the life of innocents, and hiding it from them for the sake of an immoral reason, such as personal interest or an even less important moral reason.

1 I would like to express my gratitude to the participants of the 7th Contemporary Fiqhī Issues Workshop (Al-Mahdi Institute, 4–5 July 2019) for their useful questions and comments, and to my colleague Dr Wahid M. Amin for reviewing my article and suggesting improvements.

However, there are some obstacles in conducting research responsibly, and these obstacles are not peculiar to research about non-religious issues. Perhaps one of the most pervasive and widespread of these obstacles is what is called 'the conflict of interest'. The literature on the conflict of interest as an ethical and legal issue is quite extensive, especially in domains such as medical research.[2] I employ the term in a technical sense, by which I mean a situation where the personal or group interests of a scholar conflict with his academic virtues and obligations. One obvious instance of such a situation is the case in which finding the truth and/or disclosing it to others is in conflict with the financial interest of the researcher or his academic institution. Conflict of interest prevents scholars from maintaining their integrity, following academic virtues and discharging their academic duties. It is very difficult, if not impossible, for a scholar to remain objective and honest when his own personal or group interest is at stake, and it is quite reasonable to not trust the judgement or testimony of someone who is in such a situation.

2 See, for example, P. L. Romain, 'Conflicts of Interest in Research: Looking Out for Number One Means Keeping the Primary Interest Front and Center', *Current Reviews in Musculoskeletal Medicine* 8, no. 2 (2015): 122–27; D. F. Thompson, 'Understanding Financial Conflicts of Interest', *New England Journal of Medicine* 329 (1993): 573–76; C. R. MacKenzie and B. N. Cronstein, 'Conflict of Interest', *HSS Journal* 2, no. 2 (2006): 198–201; D. B. Resnik, 'Institutional Conflicts of Interest in Academic Research', *Science and Engineering Ethics* 25, no. 6 (2019): 1661–69; M. J. Field and B. Lo, eds, *Conflict of Interest in Medical Research, Education, and Practice* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2009); J. E. Bekelman, Y. Li and C. P. Gross, 'Scope and Impact of Financial Conflicts of Interest in Biomedical Research: A Systematic Review', *Jama* 289, no. 4 (2003): 454–65; B. A. Goldrick, E. Larson and D. Lyons, 'Conflict of Interest in Academia', *Image: The Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 27, no. 1 (1995): 65–69; S. Lipton, E. Boyd and L. Bero, 'Conflicts of Interest in Academic Research: Policies, Processes, and Attitudes', *Accountability in Research: Policies and Quality Assurance* 11, no. 2 (2004): 83–102; P. J. Friedman, 'The Troublesome Semantics of Conflict of Interest', *Ethics & Behavior* 2, no. 4 (1992): 245–51; P. J. Friedman, 'The Impact of Conflict of Interest on Trust in Science', *Science and Engineering Ethics* 8, no. 3 (2002): 413–20; H. Brody, 'Clarifying Conflict of Interest', *The American Journal of Bioethics* 11, no. 1 (2011): 23–28; and R. S. Saver, 'Is It Really All about the Money? Reconsidering Non-financial Interests in Medical Research', *The Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics* 40, no. 3 (2012): 467–81.

1. Conflict of Interest in Religious Studies

Regarding religious studies, we are faced with a more specific instance of the conflict of interest when religious taxes, such as the share of the infallible Imam in *khums*, is being relied upon as the source of income by scholars. The central question of this article is whether relying upon such a source of income undermines the objectivity and honesty of religious scholars. That is, is it possible for religious scholars to sustain their academic integrity and remain objective and honest whilst relying on religious tax as the source of their income? In what follows, I will explore, compare and critically examine two answers to this question put forward by two contemporary religious reformists in Iran, namely, the late Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari and Dr Abdulkarim Soroush.

Motahhari and Soroush provide different answers to our central question.[3] According to Motahhari, the answer is no, provided that the religious tax is collected and distributed *indirectly*. According to Soroush, the answer is yes. They both agree that something is wrong with the current situation of religious studies in Shiʿite seminaries. They disagree, however, about the exact cause of the problem and its proper solution. Both agree that the source of income would have a huge influence upon the moral integrity of religious scholars and may undermine their objectivity and honesty. This common assumption is based on their realistic anthropology, according to which religious scholars are no different from other scholars and average laypeople in that they are not infallible, and therefore may harbour ulterior motives that lead to misconduct in research. If in some cases personal virtues such as piety prevent religious scholars from misconduct in their research, it is quite accidental and extraordinary. Therefore, they both agree that we need a more effective and systematic solution. In the following, I will elaborate on their solutions respectively and will try to show that their solutions are not effective and why.

3 M. Motahhari, 'The Fundamental Problem in the Clerical Establishment', in *The Most Learned of the Shiʿa: The Institution of the Marjaʿ Taqlid*, ed. Linda S. Walbridge (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001 [1962]), 161–82; A. Soroush, 'Ḥorriāt va Roḥaniyyāt', *Kian* 24 (1995): 2–11; A. Soroush, 'Sāqfe Māeishāt bar Sotoune Shāriāt', *Kian* 26 (1995): 25–31.

2. Motahhari on Populism in Religious Studies

Motahhari developed his diagnosis and solution in an article called 'The Fundamental Problem in the Clerical Establishment', originally published in 1962.[4] Although clerical establishments in Iran have undergone major reforms since then, if we accept his analysis, we must conclude that the problem still exists, and is possibly worse than it was at that time. His main concern in that article is to provide a sympathetic criticism of clerical establishments and suggest his plan for reform.

Motahhari begins his discussion by noting some advantages of traditional seminaries over modern academic institutions, and continues:

> One night in Qom about 13 years ago [1949], I had the good fortune to attend a friendly gathering of the religious authorities and scholars. Our discussion gradually turned toward the issue of the problems and deficiencies of the clerical establishment. We discussed why it was that, in the past, our centers of spiritual and religious learning offered diverse scholarly topics from Qur'anic commentary to historiography, hadith, fiqh, usul, philosophy, theology, literature, and even medicine and mathematics, whereas now the subject matter has become very limited. In other words, in the past such centers were comprehensive, having the form and function of universities. Today, they have declined into schools of jurisprudence and other fields of study that have lost their importance. [...] Indeed, I ask you why there is such silence, serenity, and macabre morbidity among us, instead of freedom, mobility, and vitality? And why is it that whoever wants to preserve his position and status is forced to keep silent and be inactive? Why is it that our educational programs are not designed to fit contemporary needs? Why do we not have enough books, essays, journals, and periodicals? [...] Why is it that as soon as our righteous and enlightened leaders have ascended to positions of authority, they lose their ability to reform, seeming to forget their previous convictions? These are only some of our many problems and deficiencies.[5]

4 The English translation of this article is partially incorrect. So, occasionally I refer to its original version, the latest edition of which was published in 2003, with my own English translation.

5 Motahhari, 'The Fundamental Problem', 164–65.

He summarises his analysis of the source of these problems as follows:

> After a while we [i.e. attendants gathered in that meeting in Qom] decided that each person would express his opinion as to what he thought was the main reason for these problems. Everyone expressed an opinion, and I, too, expressed mine. But one of the colleagues expressed an opinion that I found superior to all others, including my own. I still hold that opinion. He said that the administration of the financial affairs of the clerical establishment, along with the way in which the clergy obtain their daily livelihood, were the fundamental reasons for the defects and problems of the religious establishment. The phrase that he used was this: 'The main cause of all our problems is *sahm-i-imām* [lit. "the share of the Imam"].'[6]

Motahhari goes on to give a more comprehensive list of the problems and deficiencies in seminaries and then summarises this part of his discussion: 'Yet the gravest deficiencies in our clerical organization are the clerical budget, salaries, financial organization, and the means of obtaining a livelihood.'[7] He insists that the mere existence of such a religious tax in the Islamic legal system is not problematic. Rather, it is 'one of the wisest instructions that one can imagine'.[8] His point is that 'over time, traditions and practices concerning the implementation and uses of *sahm-i-imām* have become prevalent and have shaped our clerical institution in a particular fashion. The resulting institutional configuration has become the source of many problems and defects'.[9]

A more systematic presentation of his diagnosis would be to say that, in his opinion, the current *method* of collecting and distributing the share of the Imam has led to populism within Shi'ite seminaries, which in turn generated the other problems that he lists. 'All the corruption,' says Motahhari, 'results from clerics obtaining their livelihood *directly* from the populace, and they need to ingratiate themselves with lay contributors and to draw attention to themselves in order to meet their financial needs.'[10] 'Corruption occurs,' he adds, 'because the clerics of various cities have no choice but to turn their clerical profession

6 Ibid., 165.
7 Ibid., 169.
8 Ibid., 165.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 176 (emphasis added).

into trade and use the mosques as their business offices.'[11] Thus, the natural prescription for solving the problem is to change the method of religious tax collection and distribution. All we need to do, according to Motahhari, is to collect and distribute the share of the Imam *indirectly*. He wrote: 'If this situation is correct, no one will be in *direct* contact with the populace. The eminent *marāji' al-taqlīd* will be freed and the mosques will not serve as business offices and trade centres anymore.'[12] And again, 'To correct these defects and problems, we must create a collective [bank] account and keep an exact tally of all transactions in the clerical centers so that no cleric can obtain his livelihood *directly* from the populace.'[13] Finally, he says: 'In our opinion, the weakening of Iran's clerical establishment is not caused by the reliance of its budget on the people's religious beliefs, but rather, it is the disorganization of this budget that has created this huge deficiency, and we can rectify this great deficiency by putting this budget in order so that the Shi'ite clerical establishment will have both power and liberty.'[14]

Comparing the clerical establishment of Iran with that of Egypt, and the religious leadership of al-Azhar, Motahhari maintains that the advantage of the latter lies in the fact that it is financially independent from religious laypeople, and, therefore, is not vulnerable to populism and enjoys freedom of thought.[15] It is easy for al-Azhar scholars to go against popular orthodoxy and issue novel and revolutionary fatwas, as is the case with Sheikh Shaltut and his famous verdict by which he acknowledged the legitimacy of following the Shi'ite legal school of thought.[16] Motahhari does not think that 'a Shi'a clerical leader is able to issue a fatwa like [this] regardless of how openminded, reform-minded, and pious he may be'.[17] He continues: 'Even a less significant decree cannot be issued by a Shi'a clerical leader.'[18]

The disadvantage of al-Azhar seminarians, according to Motahhari, is that, due to their financial dependency on the government, '[t]he clerical leader of Egypt will never have enough power to match that of the government, as

11 Ibid.

12 M. Motahhari, 'Moshkele Asāsi dar Sāzemāne Roḥāniyyat', in *Dah Ghooftār*, 19th ed. (Tehran: Sadrā Publishing Company, 2003), 309 (emphasis added).

13 Motahhari, 'The Fundamental Problem', 176 (emphasis added).

14 Motahhari, 'Moshkele Asāsi', 302.

15 Motahhari, 'The Fundamental Problem', 172.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

occurred in the case of the tobacco issue'.[19] Motahhari states: '[w]hen a cleric relies on the populace, he gains power but loses his freedom. If he relies on the government, he loses power but maintains his freedom.'[20]

To summarise his position, Motahhari believes that the major deficiency in Shi'ite religious studies seminaries is populism, which prevents reformist leaders from making any progress. But this populism is not occasioned by using the share of the Imam as the source of income as such. Rather, it is caused by the current method of collecting and distributing that share. Based on this diagnosis, he advocates the *indirect* collection and distribution of religious tax as the solution.

However, one concern with this solution is that it shifts the problem of the conflict of interest from individual religious scholars to the organization responsible for collecting and distributing religious tax. When it comes to conflict of interest, legal persons are the same as natural persons in that they are both subject to the conflict. Nevertheless, his proposal can be seen as part of the solution if we understand it as prescribing the establishment of a regulatory body – an issue I will return to later.

3. Soroush on the Freedom of Expression in Religious Studies

As we saw earlier, Soroush agrees with Motahhari that the source of livelihood would have an enormous impact upon the objectivity and honesty of religious scholars, and, therefore, it should be avoided. His solution, however, is more radical, for his diagnosis of the source of the problem is deeper than that of Motahhari. According to Soroush, the problem at hand has nothing to do with the share of the Imam in particular. Rather, it has to do with relying on religion as a source of any worldly advantage, including financial gains. In his well-known and controversial article 'Ḥorriāt va Roḥaniyyāt' [Liberty and

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., 172–73. He continues: 'This is true because the majority of people are faithful believers; but they are also ignorant, decadent, and uninformed. As a result, they oppose reforms. In contrast, governments, while usually openminded, are also oppressive and encroaching. The clerical establishment that depends on the populate is able to fight the oppressions and encroachments of the government, but it is unable to fight the ignorant beliefs and opinions of the people. When it depends on the government, the clerical establishment is powerful when trying to counteract the ignorant customs and thoughts of the public. It is powerless, though, when fighting against the encroachments and oppressions of the government.' Ibid., 173.

priesthood], originally published in 1995, he agrees with Motahhari that the source of income in seminaries is the root cause of all problems, but rejects the latter's proposal as insufficient, suggesting his own radical solution.

He begins by defining the 'clergy' in terms of 'those who rely on religion as the source of income'.[21] A cleric, in his definition, is someone who earns money from religion and religious activities and this common feature unifies all clergy around one axis rendering them into a social class with a particular collective identity and common professional interests.[22] Like other social groups, 'this group talks about a collective-*self* and defends this *self* against the external threats'.[23] A religious scholar, on the other hand, is someone who has an independent source of income, so that if he were to leave his religious activities, there would be no detriment to his livelihood. Unlike the clergy, religious scholars do not constitute a social class with a collective identity and common interest, and, therefore, have no fear of financial loss when expressing their academic and professional opinions.[24]

Soroush believes that Motahhari's solution is not effective 'because whenever defending the truth is tied to meeting the [legitimate or illegitimate] interests and demands of a group of people, that truth will definitely be damaged'.[25] In such a situation, 'it would become extremely difficult to separate between defending the truth and defending personal and professional interests'.[26] Therefore, Soroush concludes, '[i]t doesn't matter whether clerics earn their salary from people, or government, or a central [bank] account, because the problem is still there. In all of these cases one is making money through religion'.[27]

Based on his diagnosis, Soroush's solution is to completely separate religious affairs from financial affairs. So, religious scholars should divide their time in two: in one part, they must engage in some type of economic activity to earn their livelihood; in the second, they can devote themselves to religious study. In this way, the outcome of their research would become free from bias, because they do not need to hide or disguise religious truths in order to protect their source of income. Free and reliable religious enquiry is one in which the enquirer is not motivated by personal or professional interest.

21 Soroush, 'Ḥorriāt va Roḥaniyyāt', 2.
22 Ibid., 2–3.
23 Ibid., 3.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 4.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.

Soroush anticipates some objections to his analysis and solution and tries to reply to them. The first objection is that 'a just and pious person is able to protect himself from falling into such a fatal trap'.[28] He replies that '[t]his is a sweet but an unfulfillable wish, because only exceptional people can practise such self-restraint, and the world is occupied and governed by average people. The history of religion supports this point'.[29] The second objection is that '[t]his is a popular way of earning money, and all experts make money from their expertise'.[30] A good example is medicine and medical experts. Physicians earn money from their profession, and this does not impair their practice or impede the progress of medical science.

Whilst accepting this last point, Soroush highlights that there is an important difference between religious and non-religious scholarly activities. The latter, says Soroush, is subject to two types of oversight that together prevent misconduct: expert and lay. However, religious scholarly activity is only subject to the expert oversight; lay oversight is impossible here, because it is based on observing the tangible consequences of the scholar's opinion, and the consequences of religious beliefs and practices only become tangible in the afterlife. According to Soroush, expert oversight is not enough by itself, since members of the relevant community of experts have a common interest that may motivate them to overlook each other's misconduct.[31]

Be this as it may, Soroush concludes that since lay oversight is impossible in religious studies we need to find another solution, and the only alternative is to completely isolate religious study as the mission of religious scholars from their source of income, so that they are not forced to follow popular opinion out of fear of losing their livelihood and their status and displeasing the clerical community.[32] In other words, religious study should be conducted for the sake of God, not for the sake of money. One cannot harbour both intentions at the same time.

I disagree with Soroush's analysis here for several reasons. First, when it comes to the conflict of interest, there is no difference between religious and non-religious scholars. The problem is the same and hence the solution, if any, would be the same.

28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., 4–5.
32 Ibid., 5.

Second, lay oversight is in fact not possible in many areas of scholarly research. The average person has little understanding of quantum physics, pure mathematics, nuclear medicine, economics, engineering, and so on, since the topics are so specialised, and the language incredibly technical. In fact, one could argue that for the layperson, the language of religious research is often much more accessible. And indeed, laypeople constitute the final court of judgement when it comes to understanding textual evidence, or the subject matter is something in which ordinary people are, in fact, the experts.

Third, one could argue that lay oversight is not necessarily a good criterion to judge scholarly research by, and, in fact, could have detrimental effects as the average person lacks the necessary knowledge to properly understand such research. The populism that Motahhari warned against is precisely the result of lay oversight.

Fourth, some religious practices have tangible consequences in the here and now. For example, we can measure whether religious punishments are effective in reducing crime levels, or whether the project of the Islamisation of banking has succeeded in eradicating usury, reducing the interest rate to 0 per cent, and reducing the gap between rich and poor, and so forth.

Fifth, as we saw, Soroush tries to draw a sharp distinction between the clergy and religious scholars by appealing to their definitions. But definition does not change the relevant facts. In reality, each of these two groups has its own collective identity and common interests, and both are vulnerable to conflict of interest, albeit in different ways.

And finally, Soroush's solution has been anticipated and rejected by Motahhari as an unrealistic way out. According to Motahhari,

> [W]e must consider the expansion of knowledge and the changes that have come about in the lives of people since the beginning of Islam. It has become essential that a group of people devote their entire lives to the education and administration of people's religious affairs. As a result, there is a need for a special budget to be spent wisely toward this purpose.[33]

CONCLUSION

To summarise, both Motahhari and Soroush agree that the current situation

33 Motahhari, 'The Fundamental Problem', 169.

in Shi'ite seminaries in which religious scholars depend on religious tax for their livelihood is not acceptable. Also, they concur that an internal safeguard, namely, reliance on personal virtues such as piety and abstinence, is not enough to prevent the negative impact of relying on religious tax upon the quality of religious research. They disagree, however, over the external solution.

According to Motahhari, we have no choice but to use religious tax for this purpose, though we can avoid the problem by establishing an organisation as an intermediary between the payer and the recipient of religious tax. In this way, we can prevent the opinions or inclinations of taxpayers having any influence upon the research conduct of the tax receivers.

Soroush, however, believes that Motahhari is wrong in identifying the real source of the problem, which, according to him, is relying on religious research as a source of income per se, not just direct reliance on religious tax. Therefore, the only proper and effective solution is to cut off any relationship between source of income and religious enquiry.

In my opinion, Motahhari and Soroush faltered in the first step of their endeavour, in which they were supposed to identify the nature of the problem, and the discipline to which it belongs. It seems obvious that they talk as if the problem at hand is peculiar to religious research. However, when we examine literature on 'the conflict of interest', we can clearly see that we have the exact same problem in every discipline. So, as stated before, if the problem is the same, the solution for it, if any, would be the same. The question is how to minimise or eliminate such conflict in any discipline, not just the financial conflict of interest in religious studies.

The problem under discussion is a genuine *moral* problem that has *epistemic* consequences and should be dealt with in 'research ethics'.[34] Conflict of interest arises when a person or a group has multiple interests that are mutually exclusive, so that serving and protecting some of those interests requires sacrificing the other(s). One of these mutually exclusive interests is that the person or

34 For an excellent exposition of the problem and its possible solution(s) in business, law, medicine and public policy, see D. A. Moore, D. M. Cain, G. Loewenstein and M. H. Bazerman, eds, *Conflicts of Interest: Challenges and Solutions in Business, Law, Medicine, and Public Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). See also M. Davis and A. Stark, eds, *Conflict of Interest in the Professions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), for the conflicts of interest in law and governance, journalism, accounting, engineering, corporate boards, academic disciplines – such as anthropology, financial services, film studies – the film industry, medical practice, correctional health services and physical therapy, and for a comparison of the conflicts of interest across professions.

group involved has an overriding professional obligation to serve and protect. The other could be financial or otherwise. The moral obligation to serve as a professional agent aims at fulfilling the ultimate end of that profession and may vary from occupation to occupation.

In academic institutions, including seminaries, the ultimate end is the integrity of research, which requires objectivity and honesty. This end will generate two moral obligations: the first is the obligation to be objective, and the second is the obligation to be honest. These moral obligations arise from the commitment that is made by taking up this occupation, but it may be followed by parallel legal and religious obligations as well as academic regulations. Therefore, misconducts of scholars are immoral behaviours that are committed when the integrity of research that they are supposed to serve and protect is unduly influenced by another interest, namely, anything that is incompatible with that interest.

The criticism that can be levelled at both Motahhari and Soroush is that the source of income is just one of multiple factors that can create a conflict of interest for all scholars including religious scholars. Other factors include social status, security, political power, and so on. So, by focusing on religious taxes or any other source of income in general as the source of all evil in Shi'ite religious activity, they have ignored all these other important factors, and overlooked the rich and longstanding literature about the conflict of interest and its proper solution, and thus tried to reinvent the wheel.

I agree with Motahhari and Soroush that the current circumstances in religious studies in Islamic seminaries are not satisfactory. Also, I agree with them in that some of these issues are rooted in religious tax being the source of income. Nevertheless, in light of the objections that I mentioned earlier, their diagnoses and hence their solutions are problematic. In my opinion, they have failed to correctly identify the nature of the problem. The problem at hand is an instance of conflict of interest that belongs to the field of practical ethics. However, moral theorising is not enough for solving the problems of practical ethics; what we need, in addition, is a combination of various legal, cultural, educational and regulatory instruments. Putting the problem at hand in its proper place has many implications, which are, however, beyond the scope of this article. Nonetheless, and to conclude, some of these may be listed as follows:

(1) Academic misconduct is a moral problem, and like other moral problems does not have a simple solution. The most we can do is to reduce the level of misconduct. We are not able to eradicate it. Moral education is part of the solution; another part is to create an economic, social, political environment that weakens the motive for misconduct. Also, the existence of an independent

regulatory body is a necessary part of any solution.

Of course, by itself, a regulatory body is not sufficient for completely eliminating the possibility of the conflict of interest, because this body itself consists of human agents, and they themselves are vulnerable to conflict of interest. However, in tandem with other partial solutions, such as moral education, financial transparency, openness to critical review and mechanisms for professional accountability, we can hope to reduce the impact of non-epistemic factors on the process and result of one's research and study.

(2) When discussing conflict of interest we should distinguish between *immediate* and *ultimate* concerns or interests. Conflict of interest occurs when one has to choose between two immediate or two ultimate concerns that are mutually exclusive. In scholarly endeavours, to be objective and honest means that one's *immediate* concern should be to find the truth as it is and to reveal it to others, no matter what one's *ultimate* concern is. For example, one may be interested in pleasing God or reducing human suffering or even making money in searching for the truth and revealing it to others. If pleasing God or making money is one's *ultimate* concern and searching for the truth and revealing it to others one's *immediate* concern, then there is no conflict at all.

(3) From a moral point of view, we have to distinguish between two cases of conflict of interest. The first is when one of the mutually exclusive interests is immoral in itself, or it becomes immoral in the context of conflict. The second is when both mutually exclusive interests are morally significant. For example, when revealing the truth puts innocent lives, including the researcher's life, in danger. Here, the moral obligation to be honest is in conflict with the moral obligation to save innocent lives, and the former obligation is overridden by the latter. The same is true when revealing the truth increases the suffering of the audience hearing that truth so that the price they would pay for knowing that truth is too high. In such a case, one would not have the obligation to reveal the truth. In one of his interesting articles, Mostafa Malekian talks about two conflicting moral obligations that intellectuals carry, namely, revealing the truth and reducing suffering.[35] He calls this a tragic aspect of intellectual life.

(4) Sometimes the conflict is between two moral obligations that we have concerning two different aspects of religion. These are 'religion as a source of truth' and 'religion as a source of identity'. Here again it is not clear that the moral obligation of religious scholars to reveal the truth should always override

35 See M. Malekian, 'Tāghrire Ḥāghighāt va Tāghlile Mararāt: Vaghe Akhlaghi va Tragic Zendeghiye Roshanfekri', *Aftab* 13 (2002): 44–47.

their moral obligation to protect the religious identity of their community. Radical and revolutionary reforms in religious beliefs and practices under the banner of revealing the truth can put people's religious identity at risk. For many people, religion is the primary, and sometimes the only, source of moral motivation, so that their religious and moral identity overlap to a great extent. Thus, loss of religious identity can lead to a weakening of moral identity and commitment, and eventually to loss of social cohesion, and the result would be social collapse. Therefore, one may say that religious scholars should try to strike a proper balance between revealing religious truths to their audiences, on the one hand, and preserving the religious identity of their community, on the other.