

Domains of Belief

An Interview with Prof. K. D. Irani

(Transcribed By: Hooshang Jozavi; February 2022)



Several years ago, I watched a series of interviews conducted in 1998 by Mr. Shahriar Shahriari with the late Professor Kaikhosro D. Irani (1922-2017). The interviews were over a period of four days and can be found online or on Mr. Shahriari's website (Zarathushtra.com). In days 3 and 4 of the interviews, Prof. Irani discussed his thesis of our collective belief system which he called Domains of Belief. He defined four main domains of belief which are driven by or originate from four areas of intrinsic demands of our human psyche as summarized below:

| <u>Domain of Belief</u> | <u>Originating Human Psyche Demand</u> |
|-------------------------|--|
| Technology | Demand to influence and control our environment (physical/ social) |
| Scientific Knowledge | Demand to explain physical/observed phenomena |
| Ethics | Demand to justify our own actions and those of others |
| Religion | Demand to seek significance in our existence |

According to Prof. Irani, each one of these domains has its own unique rules, methods, and areas of application. In the ancient times, all these domains were lumped together in the form of myths or stories that passed on from one generation to the next. As human civilizations advanced, the various specific demands listed above gained importance, separated from the collective, and formed their own distinct domain of belief. The major aspect of Prof. Irani's thesis is that tremendous confusion and intellectual transgression occurs when we use the rules and methods of one domain to the application of another domain. Conversely, utilizing the rules of a specific domain to the applications within the same domain, will result in disappearance of much of the confusion and conflict in discussion and debate as well as in our daily lives.

The interviews of days 1 through 4 are only available in audio format. This article is a transcription of the interviews of days 3-4.

Day 3 Interview

Shahriari: As a human being, it seems that we tend to want to believe in something. Is this an intrinsic need? Do we need to believe?

Prof. Irani: Belief is a natural state of our consciousness. Primitive beliefs are related to those of our perception and experience and beliefs about what we experience from what we are doing in the world. When we move something, we believe that we have done something. If your question is whether we need to believe in something other than what we experience here and now, the answer is yes, mainly due to another aspect of our human nature which is driven by certain internal demands of our psyche. Belief is fundamentally an element of thought. Our nature is such that we are constituted of beliefs and values. This applies not only to humans but also all conscious beings including animals. The difference between humans and animals is that they do not have the machinery i.e., spoken language, to articulate their beliefs and values like we do.

Shahriari: Could you tell us about your thesis on four domains of belief?

Prof. Irani: This is a thesis that I proposed some time ago. It starts with a major assumption that there are four intrinsic demands which are made by human psyche. The first one is the demand to explain. This demand produces an enormous array of beliefs which we call scientific knowledge. The other demand is to control and influence our physical and social environment by developing techniques by which we can transform things to suit our needs which leads to technology. The next demand is to justify our own actions and ask for justification of actions of others. For example, “what have you done? Why have you done it? Did you do the right thing?” etc. This forms the whole field of ethics which can be applied to individuals or the society. The last demand is to seek significance in our existence. For example, “What is the point of my existence? We are born into this life without an option, we live for a while and then we die. What is the point of all this?” This demand leads to religion. Therefore, we have these four enormous domains of belief. Today we can separate them.

The thesis I am offering is that in the early history of humanity there was no clear understanding of the separation of these domains. Instead, there was a complex set of beliefs most of which were imbedded in stories which the local wise men developed and gradually crystallized in the small communities and became part of the tradition. The stories would pass on from one generation to the next from the older to younger people as it is done even at the present time e.g., in children’s books. And although the children know, by the age four or so, that the stories may not factually be true e.g., Santa Clause, to them the stories still have a feeling of reality. This type of belief is a peculiar nature of the religious acceptance. It is a reality as if it were true. This is also referred to as an “as-if reality” based on the work by the German philosopher Hans Vaihinger (*Die Philosophie des Als Ob, 1911*) who developed the theory of “As-If”. So, we believe in something as-if it were true knowing, in fact, that it is not. This as-if belief has a very powerful attitudinal commitment to it.

These four domains are distinctly different from each other and as it was mentioned earlier, they were originally directed by a demand. Each domain has its own unique methodology. For example, in science the methodology is very clear cut i.e., we formulate a theory, deduce consequences, set up and perform an experiment with pre-determined conditions and then determine if the results of the experiment agree with the theoretical predictions. If so, the specific theory is accepted. This is scientific belief.

Shahriari: In the ancient times, was the scientific belief merely myth making?

Prof. Irani: The myth structure encompassed all the different domains.

Shahriari: And there was no differentiation between these four domains.

Prof. Irani: That is right. This is the great insight that occurred around the 4th or 5th century BC when people began to realize that they had to have reliable knowledge independent of these stories. The great example of these people was Plato who separated mythology from the knowledge he identified as mathematics. Before that Zarathushtra separated mythology from ethics.

As an example of lack of separation of the four domains of belief in the ancient times, let us discuss an old Egyptian mythical story. Egypt was a highly refined civilization in ancient times, but it was dominated by mythology. For them agriculture was religion. Osiris was the divinity of the land identified with the life of Egypt. His deceptive and ambitious brother Set killed him and put his body in a coffin and threw the coffin into the river Nile. The coffin floated on the river and ended up on the riverbank by a tree somewhere in Lebanon. The absence of Osiris, the life of the land, in the countryside is felt in the form of withering of all plants and death of vegetation at the beginning of summertime. Note that Egypt lived on the vegetation fed by the Nile. The wife of Osiris, Isis, went out to search for the body of Osiris and finally found the coffin containing the body of Osiris. After the coffin was opened, she saw the dead body of Osiris. Isis was known as the goddess of rejuvenation. So, she decided to bring Osiris back to life using a plant of life that she had called Tanna leaves. She prepared the leaves and fed them into Osiris' mouth and Osiris gradually was revived. It is worth noting even at the present time, there are still people in Egypt who believe this is a beneficial plant and has special properties. Set found out about Osiris' revival and comes back and found him and cut Osiris into fifty-one pieces and throws them all over the Nile valley. Isis found them all and put them together magically again and Osiris was revived again. Once again, Set gathers up a navy army and tried to attack Osiris. By this time, Isis had given birth to a son called Horus. Horus grows up fast and gathers a navy, fought with Set and defeated him and became the king of Egypt. This mythical story of Osiris can be seen in numerous Egyptian tombs and scrolls. The significance of various aspects of this myth are as follows: The first death of Osiris corresponds to the shortage of water and drying of the land; the second killing of Osiris and spilling his blood into the Nile is associated with the reddish color of the Nile water after the rainy season; the spreading of the body pieces of Osiris on the land signifies the proper timing for sowing because the body of Osiris was believed to have fertilized the land; The battle signified the flood of the Nile river after which a time of peace and stability would rule over the Nile for another year. Therefore, this myth was a story that explained an agricultural cyclic event. The ancient Egyptians would not question why various events happened with regards to Osiris and their own agricultural livelihood for quite some time. Therefore, for Egyptians this type of mythology formed their science, technology, ethics, and religion all combined. Obviously, there were many mythical stories. However, sometimes the stories would contradict each other in some way or another. As the time went on, people became more curious and started to question the validity of some aspects of the stories. For example, they would go to the source of the Nile and see that the reason for the red color of the Nile was not the blood of Osiris but simply the soil that had been washed off into the river that had changed the color of the Nile. This type of realization resulted in shaking of the people's myth-based beliefs. According to Ernst Cassirer (German philosopher 1874- 1945), mythology is never refuted, it dies because it performs no function anymore and becomes irrelevant. We do not know at what point in time the Osiris myth and agricultural changes of the land around Nile became irrelevant. In general, for most of our human existence, we have lived with many mythic beliefs.

Thales of Miletus (623-545 BC, Greek mathematician, astronomer, and philosopher) explained the solar eclipse of May 28, 585 BC not by some dragon trying to swallow the Sun but by shadows or a body interfering with the light coming from the Sun. By doing so, he was introducing a change from a mythical thought to a scientific thought. People did not believe him because they did not understand him and his

explanation was viewed as an act of sin. He was challenging something in which the lives of the people were rooted.

Shahriari: How were the four domains of belief i.e., scientific knowledge, technology, ethics, and religions separated and in what order?

Prof. Irani: This is primarily speculative. But I think technology separated first because people started to find more efficient ways of doing things. One of the key methods of technology is efficiency. You keep trying different techniques and you adopt the most efficient one no matter what the mythical stories are. Over time the stories become irrelevant although people may not talk about them as such.

Shahriari: How do you explain the views of Joseph Campbell (American writer and scholar 1904-1987) on what we need to explain next i.e., after discovering that there are no dragons in the forests, we go to the next unexplored region e.g., outer space and try to figure out if there are any aliens there and how to deal with them and so on? Therefore, we tend to bring back to life the myth but in a different form. What happens that makes us revive the myth in a different form even though the previous form became irrelevant after we adopted the technology?

Prof. Irani: Although some aspects of the myth may evaporate because of technological advances, the myth may still survive because it may serve other functions as well. For example, it makes the distinction between good and evil, it may somehow explain the purpose of our existence etc. According to Immanuel Kant (German philosopher, 1724-1804), toward the end of his life, he was reviewing philosophical thinking and started asking himself “What do I perceive? What can I know? What should I do? And What may I hope for?” These types of questions are very similar to intrinsic demands that we have been talking about. He believed that our minds are constructed such that we need to develop a belief structure in order to answer these types of questions. As time passes, science, technology and ethics separated out but not without enormous conflicts. I think the separation of technology from the unitary myth was the first and relatively simple. Much later, however, the separation of science from the unitary mythical knowledge was not so simple. I also believe ethics separation was alongside the separation of science where people started to say that they can decide between right and wrong and do not need to rely on religious instructions. I believe the separation of ethics is due to significant contributions from Iran, India and Greece during the critical period 1000 – 500 BC.

Shahriari: So, sometime in the early part of the agricultural age (around 12000 years ago also known as Neolithic Revolution), technology separated out and science separated around 500-1000 BC. Correct?

Prof. Irani: Yes, at that time Zarathushtra separated ethics from ritualistic religion although it is rooted in religion. His notion about Ahura Mazda creating the ideal good (Asha) is a nominal mythological position. By nominal I mean there was no great story connected with it. But the assertion itself is something beyond reason and we are asked to observe it and make a judgement. The judgement is not for us to obey what this divinity said. We do not go to the temple and ask here I am with this difficulty, what should I do? Instead, we must bear the responsibility of figuring out what to do ourselves.

Shahriari: The story no longer prescribes a plan of action. Correct?

Prof. Irani: That is right. It no longer gives us a recommendation. We must seek one on our own. Because there are no stories, we must think and determine the right thing to do based on our own judgement. Therefore, we are responsible for our path forward. Later on, historical narratives were made to illustrate the good and the evil as a replacement for the mythical stories.

Shahriari: So, in some sense the myth is revived in the form of history.

Prof. Irani: Yes, in the form of ancient legendary history. For example, in Iranian culture, we tell the story of king Jamshid and other epic heroes in Shahnameh and our children learn about them. The book of Genesis is a creation myth. But the Old Testament contains the legendary historical material which functions in the same manner. In fact, the traditional Hebraic wisdom was that history will tell us what the will of God is. That is to say that God manifests his will in history.

Shahriari: And then you get the idea of the promised land and the lost tribe that was always in pursuit and search even though they were doing the right thing.

Prof. Irani: Yes, and the devout believers would say (to God) this was your promise and we anticipate it and will work to achieve it. So, the relation between religion and ethics was close, but the separation did take place. The separation was not complete in the western civilization. What happened in Christianity was that scholastic philosophy rejoined ethics and religion. This was the major attempts by the scholastics (A member of the medieval philosophical school of scholasticism 1100 -1700 AD). The western scholastics would identify some notions revealed by reason and some notions prescribed by God. The prescribed notions would then have a higher standing as compared to the moral truths revealed by reason. And Saint Thomas made the point that the two are not in conflict and the prescriptions by God are superior. Therefore, if you want to know your purpose in this life, you must go to the mind of God and find out why God created us.

Shahriari: So according to Zarathushtra, ethics was separated out of mythology completely, but in the West, it was not so. Correct?

Prof. Irani: Initially ethics did separate during the Greek period by Plato who raised concerns that the Gods were irrelevant to the moral judgements. The final crystallization took place with the Stoic (Stoicism was a school of Hellenistic philosophy founded by Zeno of Citium in Athens in 3rd century BC) philosophy. The Stoics were Greek philosophers and when Greece became part of Rome, many of the Stoic moved to Rome and established schools there. They taught individual liberal education but also taught law. The Roman law was influenced by the Stoic theory. When the Roman provinces became part of the Christian Roman empire, the separation was gradually overcome where religion became the preceptor of moral values. The Scholastic philosophy during 11th to 15th centuries was a major experiment in the rejoining of ethics and religion. During that time, enormous philosophical insight and many eminent thinkers were produced. Many of them made significant scientific contributions e.g., Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 AD) and Roger Bacon (1220-1292). The Church then introduced a notion that it exercised complete authority not only on morals but also on metaphysics. According to the Church, only God can tell us the purpose of our existence and only theologians know what God says.

Shahriari: There seems to be a resurgence of that mentality today in the sense that the drive for this wholistic understanding of the world is driving us back to rejoining of the morality and religion together and trying to connect science to it as well. Why? Is this a natural progress?

Prof. Irani: The point is if any discipline which makes a claim going beyond its own disciplinary limits and tries to become a global discipline, it produces an instant backlash and sabotages itself. During late 1930's, there were people who said that the complete view of the world is obtained by science and there is only one truth and that is the scientific truth. People naturally soon realized that science alone cannot answer the questions that legitimately belonged to the other domains. The thesis of the domains of belief is that once we go beyond our current domain to explain phenomena, then we can generate mental confusion. This is constantly happening. Notice the independence of science coming through at the time of Galileo (1564-1642, an Italian astronomer, physicist, and engineer). He was persecuted by the Church not for what he did in science but because he claimed certain propositions, which were

established by science, were in fact the truth about the world. However, the metaphysicians claimed that they are the ones who knew the truth about the world and insisted that if Galileo's claims contradicted those by the metaphysicians, he must take those claims back. Galileo intelligently rebutted the metaphysicians by saying that it is not the business of religion to tell us about how the world is. The business of religion is to tell us how we should save ourselves. He said, it is not the business of religion to tell how the heavens go, but how we can go to heaven. Then the metaphysicians told Galileo that he was claiming the right to interpret the religious texts and they would not allow that. Essentially Galileo was trying to separate religion and science domains and he was not permitted to do that and was put under house arrest for that. Despite what happened to Galileo, the world view in the intellectual European minds changed and Galileo was in fact successful after all in separating science and religion. As we know today there are many people of all religions making scientific developments regardless and independent of their religious beliefs. This is mainly because people have realized rationally that the science and religion are two distinct disciplines with their own different purposes.

Shahriari: So, reason won over dogma?

Prof. Irani: That is correct eventually despite many difficulties. After the separations occurred, the classic statement of the separation is the Enlightenment philosophy (intellectual movement that dominated Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries) which is the justifiable use of reason. This itself became mythologized. After the French revolution, the revolutionaries proclaimed a goddess of reason. There was a woman called the goddess of reason who was crowned, carried around in a chariot in Paris and so on. They mythologized their own position. Then they said here is the world machine and many people especially in Germany and England negatively reacted against the French claims. The idea is that world view is the world view. But when we make the world view a basis for answering questions like "what is the significance of our existence?" then the people would tend to reject it. And that came to be known in the 20th century as the Scientism. This type of absolute position of one domain to address issues in all other domains of belief tends to re-integrate the domain at a higher level.

The real challenge at the present is for us to determine how to reconcile different domains of belief which respond to different demands and have different methodologies which make different claims

Shahriari: Maybe we need a story for that reconciliation.

Prof. Irani: I think what we must do is to get the people to have the right insight. Rather than having a myth or a story, I am inclined to think of a certain kind of refined sensibility. You might call this wisdom to integrate these domains in our consciousness so that we can keep them together without permitting them to invade the other domains and living a satisfactory life. It is the training of the highest sensibility of human existence. I hope I am explaining myself properly. I am trying to express a deep feeling I have on this subject.

Most of the conflicts are essentially worthless and are conflicts arising from misunderstanding. I have tried to raise this issue with many people. They think I am trying to refute them where in fact I am not. I am trying to tell them they have committed a certain type of intellectual trespassing i.e. crossing one domain to another domain improperly e.g., by using the wrong criteria or methods. If you recognize the border lines, your problem will disappear.

Shahriari: So, if I am a scientist concerned with the nature of quantum, I should not worry myself with the technology of how my car should operate.

Prof. Irani: Yes. Or do that by adopting its methodology. Now what happened is that technology makes use of the information derived from science and develops techniques for achieving certain goals. These

techniques will transform the environment and social structure. So, it must take into consideration various value problems which come from the domain of ethics. Science is neutral. But when we apply science, it loses its neutrality and influences our lives in some way therefore may affect our moral values.

Shahriari: So, if I am a nuclear scientist and I am doing pure research, it is fine. But as soon as my findings are used to make a nuclear bomb or even work on problems leading to the application of bomb making, then we must consider the moral values concerns as well.

Prof. Irani: You need to ask yourself what you are doing as a human being in a human society.

Shahriari: Let me ask you a moral question. Was Einstein right to develop the theory of relativity even though it led to the nuclear bomb?

Prof. Irani: At that time no one could foresee such application at all. And even when we saw that relation between mass and energy and realized that by destroying the mass we would release enormous energy, no one could see how this would be conceivably done. But when they saw that a chain reaction can occur after splitting the atom resulting in an enormous amount of energy, they had to think. In fact, some people did think about that while others chose not to work in that area because they thought that work was potentially destructive. That was a difficult judgment to make. These days anyone familiar with the technology can make a bomb even in their garage.

Shahriari: Is that why we have this need for reconciliation of the domains of belief because things are somewhat out of control?

Prof. Irani: Yes, very much so. We do not know exactly how to structure moral demands upon highly refined technological advances. We really do not know how to work that out. How to change the transportation system to affect life in a city and how to control these destructive forces because of their inherent danger. How to control the technology of DNA research which may affect life in totally unpredictable ways in the future. We need to do it. Everyone realizes that we need to do it. We just do not know how. I believe to some extent, the reason we do not know how is because of the institutional turfs which are protected and reserved. So, what we need is a cooperative effort. Some of the major failures of our current society are that we have not created a proper network of exchanges and information to evaluate this.

Shahriari: And the role that ethics can play here is to bring responsibility.

Prof. Irani: That is right. It is to identify appropriate values and show what possible consequences there might be which would violate these values one way or another and where is it that we must take responsibility for controlling the consequences better.

Shahriari: So, what you are saying is that the role of ethics is to bring some responsibility in our approach into other domains, namely science and technology.

Prof. Irani: Yes. So that what we do is justifiable, it is worthy of human aims and does not cause harm to social structures or individuals. Various things can happen. For example, freedom can be eroded by technological changes e.g., techniques by which one can invade the privacy of other individuals can be extraordinary which is already happening. Techniques which can change the nature of social interaction e.g., these computer technologies are making the presence of people in the work environment less important. In the old days proximity was extremely important. So, we must consider what kind of social

structure we may have in the future when we implement new technologies and the implications of that for human life.

Shahriari: Let's go back to the mythic era. We had the mythic era which encompassed all the domains, then technology evolved first followed by ethics and science. So, we are left with the fourth domain i.e., religion. Is religion the remnants of myth?

Prof. Irani: Historically it is. But it is a domain of belief by itself. It is a set of beliefs which gives significance to our existence. Most of us belong to traditional religions and accept profound visions provided by the founders of various religions. But there is no reason why we cannot reformulate them to make them more acceptable in our daily lives. By the way this idea of domains of belief came to me because of the damages I have seen caused by using the criteria of one domain and apply them in another domain. For example, the standard late 19th to early 20th century materialist would say to the religious person: "According to your scriptures, God said in the book of Genesis that the world was created in six days and the sun was created on the third day. How could there be the first two days if there was no sun?". When someone takes the religious statements as scientific facts it would be equivalent to apply the methodology of science (one domain) and apply them to propositions made in religion (another domain). The composers of the book of Genesis were not interested in the specifics of six days of creation and whether the sun was created on the third or another day, instead, their message was to view the reality as the creation of the creator. If you take that stand, you will have an appropriate religious justification.

Shahriari: Do you mean that we are the creators of our own reality?

Prof. Irani: Yes, but first, we must accept that we are the creatures of a greater reality and then we can accept the responsibility for what we create ourselves and act appropriately.

Shahriari: Just as the creator accepts the responsibility for us?

Prof. Irani: That is right. I discussed this once in a course of philosophy of religion. I would say, "Look we have these diverse positions. The materialist would say to the religious person that he has scientific proof that the world was not created in six days, but it took millions of years for our world to get to what it is today. Therefore, the religious claim about the creation of the world in six days is inaccurate and false. The traditional religious person would respond back that this is the word of God, it cannot possibly be doubted. Therefore, this is true and if your science does not agree with it, it is irrelevant.

Shahriari: Which is what they told Galileo.

Prof. Irani: Yes, and it is also what some people i.e., the creationists do today in the theory of evolution who say "God created the world in six days, and you (the scientists) claim it took millions of years (Darwin's theory of evolution) for various creatures to turn up. Maybe your findings are useful for your research and can be used as a hypothesis, but what we say is the truth". I have told one of the creationists that I knew personally that he was making a mistake by treating a religious vision as if it were a scientific theory. And he was not convinced at all. Both views take methodologies of one domain to apply to another domain. This type of mistake is very common, and a widespread philosophical disease and I usually use this distinction as a kind of preventative therapy i.e., to clean up this kind of trouble. I had a student in a course of philosophy of religion, where I had made this suggestion many years ago, who said to me "You mean God did not create the world in six days?" I would say "No I am not saying that. What I am saying is that it is unimportant whether he created it in six days or seventeen days. The important thing is the religious message that underlies it i.e., the relation between the creator and the creatures and so on". So, he would say "No, if this is false, then I am not bound by anything in

the Bible". I would say to him "You are not bound. You make an act of commitment". He replied, "If this is false, why can I not murder or bear false witness etc.?"

Shahriari: And this is why we call them domains of belief because we choose to believe.

Prof. Irani: That is right. And in religion we must choose them. I was really surprised at the views of this student who viewed me as a danger in teaching philosophy of religion and actually wrote a letter to the president of the school claiming that I should not be permitted to teach this course because he believed that I was undermining his faith. Unfortunately, the teachers of science or religion themselves are imperialistic because they tend to claim that their beliefs cover everything. And that is the real danger.

Shahriari: And the domains have no way of intermeshing into each other i.e., bringing them together?

Prof. Irani: If we can, this is the task for the future. We cannot combine them. But we can arrange things in such a way that there is no conflict.

Shahriari: And are there areas of commonality?

Prof. Irani: Yes, there will be overlaps here and there. Particularly in technology where we have some overlaps. Religious rituals are frequently viewed as technology. In the old days this was in fact the case. For example, if there was no rain, people would perform a prayer to have rain to end a drought.

Shahriari: So, it was a technique to apply which was supposed to result in rain.

Prof. Irani: Yes, and to end the drought.

Shahriari: Isn't that what people do a lot of times in prayers? That is to pray for things to happen or not to happen etc.?

Prof. Irani: Exactly. In that case they have extended religion into technology. In which case we need to look at them i.e., the prayers as technology and ask ourselves if they do work or not.

Shahriari: So, the proponents of William James's (1842-1910 American philosopher, historian, and psychologist) Mind-Cure movement claim(ed) that their prayer technology works and that is why they support it.

Prof. Irani: Yes, but they have accepted the criteria to be applied which is whether it works or not. I believe in some cases it does work based on what I have heard from some people where they believe the prayers can create a kind of calmness resulting in a physical comfort in their state of illness. I think if it does result in an actual physical comfort, then I would accept it as a viable technology. But we should be clear about what it is.

Shahriari: So, of the four domains of belief, there is more merging of other domains into that of technology. By the way, if a scientist is asked by a creationist assuming the Big Bang is the beginning of creation, what happened before the Big Bang?

Prof. Irani: In the Big Bang theory, that question is not valid because the Big Bang provides a definition of the beginning of the creation. In the case of the previous example on the creationist six-day creation of the world and that the sun was created on the third day, we have no definition of a day to be applied to day one or day two. Regarding the Big Bang as the beginning of creation, some scientists have claimed that there is a small probability that the world was created by chance, but that claim is not widely accepted. Regarding the religious beliefs, we do not claim literal truths. There are a few exceptions. The ancient people did believe there was a queen of the animals and there was a goddess

of the rivers and so on, but I think after the 2nd millennium BC onward, people did not take those beliefs quite literally anymore because, we believe, they were prepared to look at the world differently. Zarathushtra's message was to ask us to look at the world as a moral conflict. As an ideal and perfect world (initially) which became flawed, and we see conflict all around us. Zarathushtra then asked people "Are you prepared to look at it that way?". It is certainly very easy to look at the human life's social existence that way. I have made my personal commitment, and after many years, I do view the world that way. I also believe it is possible to minimize the conflict we see in the world. This is what I presented at the World Parliament of Religions in 1993. There, I came across a Parsi gentleman who wrote a paper saying Irani does not know what he is talking about and that there are many miserable people and asked where is the perfect world? I responded "I am not saying the world is perfect, I am saying that the world is perfectible. What we must recognize is that it is not perfect".

Shahriari: So, if we recognize these domains, we can work towards perfecting this perfectible world. Right?

Prof. Irani: Yes, only if you take this religious view i.e., Zoroastrianism. If, on the other hand, you take the Christian view that we are imperfect because of the original sin and that contamination has entered our nature, there is nothing we can do about it. We can only transform ourselves to accept that we, sinners, are children of God and that God loves us and is prepared to forgive us, and, in this way, we become each other's brothers. In other words, the forgiveness will come by the grace of God not through any effort we make in this world. I know people who have accepted this view. In fact, I knew a great Christian thinker who believed that way. When I asked him during a meeting if he really believed that all of us sitting around the table are sinners, he said of course we were. He really was not passing on a judgement. For him, this was the perspective about people of the world i.e., "you cannot be in this world, unless you are a sinner otherwise you would be in heaven". I must say I greatly respected the way he lived and his way of life which essentially was one of universal consideration. He was a kindhearted and pleasant person. This was his religious way of life and made sense to him. He saw each person as an object of respect and love.

Shahriari: So, he saw his significance in bringing the divine love into this world. Right?

Prof. Irani: That is right.

Shahriari: Let's talk more about this religion domain, in which one of our demands is to seek our significance in life. Why?

Prof. Irani: That I don't know. I am postulating that it is an aspect of human nature.

Shahriari: So, it is in our nature that we want to believe that we are important.

Prof. Irani: That we have some significance for being here. Otherwise, it would leave us with a feeling of emptiness. I do think this is universal, but I have met people who articulate no such claim about feeling of emptiness. I had a student who did not have any religious beliefs and said to me he was just here in this world and did not care about the feeling of significance. To me that is the view of a non-religious person for whom the religious system never functioned in him. Similarly, there are some people who are totally unscientific i.e., they are not interested in the explanation of anything. For example, my mother had an aunt who never cared about why anything happened anywhere. She was free of science!

Shahriari: But not free of technology?

Prof. Irani: No, I don't think so. I think it is impossible to be free of technology for anyone. I think technology and ethics are grounded into our simplest consciousness, that we cannot escape them.

Shahriari: But these days we come across many people who seem to be totally free of ethics. Right?

Prof. Irani: I doubt that. Perhaps totally free of the kind of ethics that we would like them to have, but I think they do tend to pass judgment upon others and themselves. Once the methodology of each domain is developed, e.g., in ethics we would have to formulate the ultimate values, which for me, are self-realization, freedom and justice. We would look at each context, that we are in the community, the level of technology, the level of our human efforts whether we are in the world of business, in the market, in education and then see what norms of behavior are appropriate. That results in social conditioning of one sort or another. The society crystallizes the norm and, if we have a political structure that imposes certain norms for certain goals, which is what we live by. As times change, we must re-evaluate them and this is the methodology of ethics. Often there is resistance in there. There is resistance to change in every domain. In science, this resistance is generally less than those in the other domains.

Shahriari: Why is that? inertia?

Prof. Irani: There is a kind of mental inertia there. In science, the practice of verification cleans out old beliefs. In technology, non-efficient methods perish unless they are deeply rooted in part of the society. In that case, the specific social group will maintain the non-efficient techniques instead of adopting the most efficient ones.

Shahriari: So, in that case functionality is more than pure efficiency. You had mentioned that everybody has some sense of ethics and that everyone judges others as well as themselves. That is quite a claim. Are you then saying that the maxim "Thou shalt not judge" cannot work?

Prof. Irani: Oh, I am saying thou shalt not judge in some final sense, thou shalt not judge that a person is unworthy of being a human, unworthy of salvation. That is what you should not judge. But otherwise, one does judge. No matter what, people do judge. Children judge each other from the age of two or even before that. My grandnephew and niece at a very young age used to come to me and complain what the other person did and wanted my validation that their judgement was correct. We live by this. Without judgement, we would have a conception of human life so different from what it is now that we would not be able to recognize it.

So, these are elemental beliefs that belong to various domains. My function is to identify them by their goals, by their methodology, by the process of validation and separate them so we do not use the methodology of one to judge the methodology of the other domains. This removes almost all of the standard philosophical confusions, not just in the minds of low-level philosophers, but also in the minds of ordinary people.

Shahriari: So, if I approach my life thinking well in this area, religiosity applies more than science because it deals with my significance in this life, let's not use the scientific method to deal with this. It is important to me that I feel I am important in this case, and this is my contribution to life.

Prof. Irani: Yes, and whatever commitment that comes through the religious beliefs. An articulated religious belief is a combination of two things: A view of the world and a way of life. A religious teacher always does this i.e., he/she gives the view of the world, usually given by the divinity, and tells you, if you agree to this view of the world then follow this way of life. And if you do, you are religiously worthy.

Shahriari: So, if the view of world is that we all have fallen from paradise and are sinners here in this world, then this is the way to live.

Prof. Irani: Yes, then you are in a state of readiness to receive the grace of God.

Shahriari: And if your view of the world is that we are all co-operators of God to take this world towards perfection...

Prof. Irani: That might be viewed as act of pride to transform the world and thereby justify your existence.

Shahriari: We talked about these four domains and how each branch separated in the Middle East and in the West. What about the East particularly India and China?

Prof. Irani: In India there was a separation of science that took place, mainly astronomy. It grew up as science but carried religion in it to some extent. Full separation was never achieved in India, largely because religion became philosophized i.e., instead of a divinity or a clear source of authority, it became a universal consciousness. So, it did not impose upon the other domains.

Shahriari: So, unlike the West where science became philosophized, in India religion became philosophized.

Prof. Irani: Yes, very much so. And therefore, it had to produce a way of life, but it could not. So, the way of life was produced from early traditions where divinities had established a social order. Ethics came to be derived from Dharma. Dharma means the ideal rule of social existence. That became rooted in the tradition. So, Indian ethics shows a polarity i.e., one is a tremendously rigid traditionalist system i.e., the caste system and its associated requirements and the other one is a kind of detachment from this world and moving towards a universal consciousness in which smaller issues become unimportant.

Shahriari: So, non-life became the way of life and equanimity (mental calmness) became the path to it.

Prof. Irani: Yes. If you ask for a straightforward Hindu ethics, you cannot get it. You always get a highly traditionalist social structure and a highly detached personal way of life.

Shahriari: What that creates is a tremendous mental inertia and resistance to change. But the Indian civilization has been noted in history to be one of the most influential and not just on the religious points.

Prof. Irani: Yes, it produced extraordinary thinkers, mathematicians, literary figures, dramatists and so on.

Shahriari: Can this sort of transformative agents come out of such a region?

Prof. Irani: These are people who worked on their own in a totally detached way whereby society provided no great support. Also, most of these people were highly educated priests whose food and lodging were supported by the temple. So, they did not have to make a living and so dedicated their lives to these things with the idea that any study about any aspect of nature is an act of worship.

Shahriari: What about China?

Prof. Irani: I found it very difficult to track it down. I wish I knew but I do not. I have tried to see how the development of technology took place. How it was reconciled to the life of the "Dao" which is "the Way". And the Way is not a prescribed way but to follow the way when you have removed all internal

resistance and confusion. Then you are in the Way. And how this interacted, I would have to look at the literature in a very subtle way which I have not actually done. So, I cannot give you an answer.

Shahriari: What about the aboriginal religions or ways of thinking especially North and South America.

Prof. Irani: There you find a constant mixture of religion, technology and ethics. I do not see an explicit movement in the direction of science. Here and there probably the Maya did produce astronomical science. My study in that area is very limited to provide a more detailed opinion.

Shahriari: And is part of the attraction of those cultures in today's world the cause of its somewhat detached way of life?

Prof. Irani: Yes, I suppose it is attractive to some people. You see if you look at a civilization, it is a group of people who are gathered in a certain location. The word "civilization" comes from the Latin word "civitas" which means "city". In other words, these people who gathered in one general location are in close social interaction and there is a notion of a social structure which is supported by a resource base e.g., river civilization, oasis civilization or pastoral civilization etc. And this is all organized by some kind of belief, partly scientific, partly technological, certain moral rules rooted in the social structure and a vision which is the religious vision. This group then not only lives in this way, but if their beliefs are deeply held, then these beliefs get expressed. And they get expressed in art forms. All civilizations produce art form mainly in architecture e.g., ancient China, India and Egypt, Babylon, Syria and so on. Ancient Iran was very pastoralist and it produced minor architecture until it became an imperial power and then it produced vast architectural monuments.

The expression took place in art which was part of the living system. When the system becomes very sophisticated, then you have individualized art e.g., poets, painters. When you want to see how these domains are interacting, what you would like to see is how the expression of these various beliefs get transformed and appear in art form. Sometimes art is detachment, sometimes it is gross attachment, and sometimes it is the expression of human spirit. So, there is great deal more to look at, before can answer the question you are asking.

Shahriari: So, you are telling me that this innate human need to comprehend has led humanity to this place where it has separated various aspects of comprehension, developed methodologies for those and then has ended up in conflict between these aspects of comprehension. Now again that innate need to comprehend is driving those branches, at least through you, to be reconciled and brought back together.

Prof. Irani: Yes, we cannot do much more than reconcile them, construct them, and become clear about what they are so that we do not engage in internal or social conflict. I think that is what is happening; in some cases, through art and in some cases this disparity or loss of a unitary system is expressed as in modern art as a kind of scattered representation and the kind of loss of object and loss of purpose. These artists are manifesting social and a deeper spiritual discomfort. I think we are not, at the moment, the intellectual products of our thought. They (artists) are saying "do not force us into conflict i.e., scattering of our intellectual focus".

Shahriari: The path of reductionism?

Prof. Irani: Yes, that would be an extreme outcome.

Shahriari: For example, I am focusing on science and nothing else.

Prof. Irani: But we are looking at the world, not through a clear-cut glass, but through pieces of glass through which we have different focuses, different pictures, which cause a certain discomfort. At the moment, we understand what the situation is, we can be rendered comfortable. I think philosophic insight ultimately will do that.

Shahriari: And that understanding is that these are different pieces of glass?

Prof. Irani: That is right.

Shahriari: Not that the world is incomprehensible.

Prof. Irani: No. My assumption is that we are capable of understanding the world. When, how, to what extent, I do not know. It presents grave difficulties to us. In science or in ethics, can we construct a society in which all the significant values will be maximized? I hope so, but I do not know. Do we have the intelligence to do it? And if we have some grasp, do we have the will to do it? I do not know.

Shahriari: And that is what wisdom is.

Prof. Irani: Yes.

Shahriari: Based on what you are saying about the arts, is it fair to deduce that at any given time, the art is the representation of the state of the collective mind?

Prof. Irani: I suppose an expression of the tranquility or distemper of the social world.

Shahriari: And this goes for any form of art, music, performing arts...

Prof. Irani: I think so. And if that is the case, then this is a period of acute distemper. I mean look at the art and our music! I do not know what to say, but I think at the moment, we are in a period of serious transition. I mean transition from the clarity of the enlightenment vision, which was that science is going well, that we are aware of what we should do morally, and that reflective religion is reasonable and becomes what is frequently called liberal Christianity or liberal Zoroastrianism- always at war with the deeper traditionalist. Based on the enlightenment vision, we are moving, reason is advancing, and very shortly greater insights will be available, greater organizations will emerge. However, I have a very strong general feeling that we are NOT actually moving in that direction. That the advancement of science, which is leading to the advancement of technology, is not altogether a happy situation. That the various social structures which we are building for our moral advancement, for actualization of our values in the social structures are not working. And that the religious beliefs which gave us solace, now progressively, seem to be merely mythological lenses through which we look at the world and now we no longer feel happy through that.

Shahriari: So, we started with myth, then branched off the myth and now we are going back to myth. And we are not happy with this myth.

Prof. Irani: No.

Shahriari: And that is the cause of this spiritual discomfort?

Prof. Irani: I think of it as spiritual disorientation and I do not know what we can do about it. Look at this century (i.e., 20th century), two world wars, large groups of people killing each other. For what? There are some immediate articulations you have but, generally, for what? How have we become, after all this realization, so barbaric. I think this disturbs people. It disturbs me. I think its manifestation is in this

scattered form of art, meaningless pictures which the artists proudly declare as worthy art because it is meaningless.

Shahriari: So, because our world is meaningless, our art is also meaningless. But because it is the only form of art, it is worthy because it reflects our world.

Prof. Irani: I do not know if it is the only form, but that is what I see around.

Shahriari: Are the revelations in the arts have all been towards less and less meaning?

Prof. Irani: The manifestation of our finding has been towards less and less meaning.

Shahriari: Does art imitate life?

Prof. Irani: No, it expresses, in aesthetic form, the inner conditions of our consciousness. If you go to a museum of modern arts, you may walk out disappointed unless you have trained yourself to be a contemporary aesthete. Listen to a contemporary opera, it is a jagged music of discontent and conflict and so on.

I may be just expressing my surface reaction to the problems of our times. How reliable this is I do not know. Please do not take this as a serious judgment. I have a long life and thought about this a long time, and this is what emerges at this time.

Shahriari: Is there hope?

Prof. Irani: Oh, yes, I think so. Look at the tremendous of achievement of science, of technology, of our moral refinement and of our religious vision, which the traditionalist will not permit to be articulated because they want to hold it down to a tradition. But once this discomfort is overcome, and we are free to exercise our spirit then we will reach a more pleasant situation.

Shahriari: How can we free our spirit? Is it an individual choice?

Prof. Irani: Yes, it is, for us to exchange with each other, in rational and kinder terms, and be aware of the domains of belief. I guess that is as far as an ordinary rational human being can go, and that is what I am.

Shahriari: So, what I am hearing, really, is that you are saying "Be human, and there is hope".

Prof. Irani: Yes, be human without getting yourself committed to a fixed ideology or tradition. Be open, be rational and accept the humanity of others and be human. It is not difficult. But we have been drilled into all kinds of things from which we must escape.

Shahriari: And this is the purpose of philosophy.

Prof. Irani: One of the purposes, yes.

Shahriari: To tell us to be human.

Prof. Irani: Yes.

Shahriari: Thank you professor. Professor let me ask you a question of a very personal nature. What is that thread that runs through your life?

Prof. Irani: The seeking and hoping to formulate with sufficient accuracy the results of this search. I knew that I was not going to get a final answer, but I am happy that I have obtained a certain kind of

insight into these domains and their interrelations. At this stage, I would say that significant part of my striving has received sufficient satisfaction.

Shahriari: Do you have any regrets in your professional life?

Prof. Irani: I would have liked, if I had the opportunity, to study certain aspects of mathematics at a younger age which was not available to me when I was a student. And I would have liked if I had the opportunity to study the functioning of the brain which, I think, gives us a great deal of insight into human existence and which I have been reading on the side. But reading on the side does not get you there, you must know the anatomy and physiology. These are two things I would have liked to do if I had all the insights and opportunities.

Shahriari: Are there any regrets in your personal life?

Prof. Irani: No.

Shahriari: Which aspects of your life are you most pleased with?

Prof. Irani: I think the fact that my struggling for philosophic insights bore some truth and I could integrate my vision of Kantian philosophy with philosophic analysis and with the philosophy of human nature and civilization with the articulation and interrelation of domains of belief which enabled me to interpret a great deal of human life and its intellectual history. I used to read these things and I read an enormous amount, and it was all scattered. I tried to relate this with that and so on. I have a stack of papers which I made various attempts and are all useless now. But I think in the last four or five years, I have had the satisfaction of gaining an insight clearly telling me this is what I was looking for and I found it and I can apply it. It is, by no means, a final answer. But it is something that has made me quite satisfied.

Shahriari: Professor how would like to be remembered?

Prof. Irani: As a good man, a thoughtful man, one who was not reluctant to serve his fellow human beings in the area in which he could contribute, to reflect and to expound the teachings which I have received and thought about. And if in doing this, I made people happy, let them remember that I did make them happy.

Shahriari: A true member of human race.

Prof. Irani: I hope so. Because humanity is something that is institutionally dear to me.

Shahriari: Professor Kaikhosro Irani, a true human being. It has been a privilege.

Prof. Irani: Thank you. I was happy to be here.

