

Lesson 18: The Role of the Intellect and Sensation in Affirmations

[Points about Affirmations](#)

Before speaking about the role of the senses and the intellect in affirmations (tasdiqat) it is necessary to make some points about affirmations and propositions, points which are related to logic. We shall discuss them here briefly and to the extent necessary.

1. As was indicated in the definition of idea, each idea has no more than a capability to show that which is beyond itself, that is, imagining a specific matter or a universal concept does not mean that what corresponds to it actually takes place. This capability for real representation becomes actual when it takes the shape of a proposition and affirmation, which consists of judgment and represents belief in its purport.

For example, the concept of ‘man’ by itself does not denote the occurrence of man in the external world. But when it is combined with the concept of ‘existent’ and the relation of unity, it gives it the form of an affirmation, whose actuality is to be discovered in the external world, that is, one can consider this proposition, “Man exists,” as a proposition which describes the external world.

At least two concepts are obtained even from simple presentational knowledge, which is never compound or multiple (such as the feeling of fear), when reflected in the mind: one is the whatish concept of fear, and the other the concept of being, and by their composition they are reflected in the form of “There is fear,” and sometimes by adding other concepts, it takes the form of “I am afraid,” or “I have fear.”

It must be noted that sometimes an idea which seems to be simple and without judgment really breaks down to an affirmation, for example, the purport of this proposition, “Man searches for truth,” is this, that man, who is an existent in the external world, has the property of searching for truth.

So, in reality, the subject of the proposition, 'man', which apparently is a simple idea, breaks down into this proposition, "Man is an existent in the external world," and so the predicate, 'searches for truth' applies to this. This sort of proposition which breaks down into implied components is called by logicians 'aqd al-wadh'.

2. The subject of a proposition sometimes is a particular idea which refers to a specific existent, such as "Everest is the highest mountain in the world," and sometimes a universal concept and applies to an infinite number of instances.

In the second case, it is sometimes a whatish concept, such as "Metals expand when heated," and it is sometimes a philosophical concept, such as "An effect without a cause does not come into existence," and it is sometimes a logical concept, such as "The contradictory of a universal negative is a particular affirmative."

3. In classical logic, propositions are divided into two forms, predications and conditionals. Predications are composed of subjects and predicates and the relation between them is 'unity', such as, "Man is a thinker." Conditionals are composed of antecedent and consequent, and the relation between them is either necessary, such as, "If a plane figure is triangular, then the sum of its angles is equal to that of two right angles," or it is one of exclusive disjunction (ta'anud), such as "A number is either even or odd," that is, if a number is even, it will not be odd, and if it is odd, it will not be even.

However, other forms also may be imagined for propositions, and all of them may be returned to predications. [All propositions are composed of predicational propositions.]

4. The relation between subject and predicate sometimes has the attribute of 'contingency' (imkan), such as in this proposition: "One human individual is bigger than another individual." Sometimes the attribute is necessary, such as in this proposition: "Each whole is larger than its parts." Logicians call these attributes 'the matter of the proposition' (maddah qadhiyyah). When these attributes are explicitly mentioned in a proposition, they are called the 'mode of the proposition' (jahat qadhiyyah).

The matter of a proposition is usually mentioned implicitly, and is not an element of it, although the predicate may be assimilated to the subject, and the matter or mode of the proposition takes the form of a predicate and an element of the proposition.

For example, in the above proposition one may say, "One human individual's exceeding the size of another is possible," and "A whole's exceeding the size of its parts is necessary." This kind of proposition is really a representative of the quality of the relationship of the subject and predicate of another proposition.

5. The unity considered to be between a subject and predicate sometimes is a conceptual unity, such as, "Man is human," and sometimes it is a unity of instance, such as, "Man searches for truth," in which the subject and predicate do not have a conceptual unity, but they are united by instance. The first kind is

called “primary predication” (haml awwali) and the second kind is called “common predication” (haml shayi’).

6. In common predication the predicate of the proposition is ‘existent’ or the equivalent, and the proposition is termed a ‘simple question’ (halliyyah basitah) whereas in other cases it is termed a ‘compound question’ (halliyyah murakkabah).¹ The first is like, “Man is an existent,” and the second like, “Man searches for truth.”

The acceptance of simple questions depends on this, the concept of “existence” must be accepted in terms of an independent concept which may be predicated (predicative concept). But most of the Western philosophers accept the concept of existence only as a nominal concept which is not independent. Discussion of this may be found in the part on ontology.

7. In compound questions, if the concept of the predicate is obtained through analysis of the concept of the subject, the proposition is called ‘analytic’, and otherwise it is called ‘synthetic’.

For example, the proposition, “All children have fathers,” is analytic, for when the concept of child is analyzed, the concept of father is obtained from it. But the proposition, “Metals expand when heated,” is synthetic, for from the analysis of the meaning of ‘metal’ we cannot obtain the concept of expansion.

In the same way, the proposition, “All men have fathers,” is synthetic, for from the analysis of the meaning of ‘man’ the concept of ‘having a father’ is not obtained. Also, “Every effect requires a cause,” is analytic, and “All existents require a cause,” is synthetic.

It must be noted that Kant has divided the synthetic propositions into two kinds, a priori and a posteriori, and considers mathematical propositions to belong to the former. However, some positivists attempt to reduce them to analytic propositions.

8. In classical logic, propositions are divided into self-evident and theoretical (non-self-evident). Propositions are self-evident whose affirmation does not require thinking and reasoning, while theoretical propositions are those whose affirmation requires thinking and reasoning.

Self-evident propositions are divided into two subdivisions: primary self-evident propositions, whose affirmation does not require anything except the exact imagining of the subject and predicate, such as the proposition of the impossibility of the unity of contradictories, which is called ‘the mother of all propositions’.

The other is secondary self-evident propositions whose affirmation depends on the use of sensory organs, or things other than the imagination of the subject and predicate. They are divided into six groups: those pertaining to the senses, to conscience, to speculation, to innate constitution, to experience, and to testimony.

The truth of the matter is that not all of these propositions are self-evident. Only two groups may really

be considered to be self-evident. First, the primary self-evident propositions, and second, those pertaining to consciences, which are the mental reflections of knowledge by presence.

Those pertaining to speculation and innate constitution are merely close to being self-evident propositions. The other propositions must be considered theoretical and in need of argument, and they will be discussed in the [following] lesson on “The Value of Knowledge”.

Inquiry about a Problem

Although the problem of the priority of sense or intellect is not usually discussed independently, we can discover the views of the rationalists and empiricists by considering the origins of these schools.

For example, the positivists, who limit real knowledge to sensory knowledge, are naturally, if stubbornly, on the side of the priority of the senses with regard to this problem, as well. They consider every non-empirical proposition to be either meaningless or of no scientific value. Some empiricists place more moderate emphasis on the role of sensory experience, and they more or less accept a role for the intellect.

However, the rationalists emphasize the importance of the role of the intellect, and they more or less believe in propositions independent of experience. For example, Kant, in addition to considering analytic propositions to be without need for experience, also considered one group of synthetic propositions, including all the problems of mathematics, to be prior to experience and without need of it.

In order that our discussion not become too lengthy, our review will not include discussions of every empiricist and rationalist scholar, and we shall simply explain the correct view of this problem.

With regard to the fact that in primary self-evident propositions precise imagination of the subject and predicate is sufficient for a judgment of their unity, it becomes quite clear that this kind of affirmation does not require sensory experience, even if the imagination of the subject and predicate requires sensory experience.

The problem is that after the subject and predicate are imagined exactly—whether this imagination depends on the use of the sense organs or not—does the application of the predicate to the subject require the use of the senses or not? It is assumed that in primary self-evident propositions that the mere imagination of subject and predicate is sufficient for the intellect to judge their unity.

The same judgment applies to all analytical propositions, for in these propositions the concept of the predicate is obtained from the analysis of the concept of the subject. Obviously, the analysis of a concept is a mental affair and without need for sensory experience. The application of predicates which are obtained from their subjects is also necessary, and is like “*thubut al-shay’ li nafsih*” (the attribution of the thing to itself).

The same judgment also applies to primary predications, and requires no further discussion. Likewise the propositions which are obtained through reflection in the mind of presentational knowledge (inner experiences (wijdaniyyat)) have no need for sensory experience at all, for in these propositions even imaginative concepts are also obtained from knowledge by presence, and sensory experience is not relevant to them at all.

With regard to the fact that mental forms in whatever shape—whether sensory, imaginary, or intellectual—are understood with knowledge by presence, affirmation of their existence, as actions and reactions of the soul, is a kind of inner experience and does not require sensory experience, even if without obtaining sensory experience some of them, such as sensory forms, would not be acquired.

However, after acquiring them, and after the mind analyzes them into existential and whatish concepts, does the judgment of the unity of these concepts which include the subject and predicate of a proposition require sensory experience? It is obvious that the judgment of simple questions which are related to matters of inner experience does not require the use of the sensory organs, but it is a self-evident judgment, and signifies infallible presentational knowledge.

As to affirmation of the existence of instances of sensible things in the external world—although according to some it is obtained at the moment of the occurrence of sensory experience—with attention it becomes evident that the fixation of judgment requires intellectual proof, as the great Islamic philosophers, such as Ibn Sina, Mulla Sadra, and ‘Allamah Tabataba’i have explained, because sensory forms do not guarantee correctness and complete correspondence with instances in the external world.

Therefore, it is only in this kind of proposition that sensory experience plays a role, but not a complete and definitive role, but rather an indirect and preparatory role.

Likewise, in universal sensory propositions, which in the terminology of logicians are called “experiences” or “experienced things”, in addition to requiring the mentioned intellectual judgment for affirming their external instances, there is another requirement for an intellectual proof of the generalization and proof of their universality, as was mentioned in lesson nine.

The reconfirming of knowledge in every proposition and science, due to the necessity of its purport and the impossibility of its contradictory, requires the ‘mother of propositions’ (umm al-qadhaya), that is, the proposition of the impossibility of bringing two contradictories together (ijtima’ naqidhayn).

In conclusion, no certain affirmation is obtained merely by sensory experience, but there are numerous certain propositions which do not need sensory experience. By attending to this truth, the poverty of the thought of the positivists becomes quite clear.

1. The term ‘question’ here does not indicate an interrogative. Simple and compound questions are merely two kinds of propositions. Simple questions are propositions that posit the existence of something, as in “A exists,” or “A is.” Compound questions are statements in which one thing is affirmed of another, e.g., “A is B.” (Tr.)

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