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Lesson 23: Entified Reality

The Self-evidence (Badahat) of Entified Reality

The subject of philosophy is considered to be the ‘existent’, as was explained in the two previous lessons. Now, we shall present the explanation of the self-evidence of the belief in the entified reality of being.

The truth is this that existence is like ‘ilm (knowledge) both with regard to its concept and with regard to its objective reality and just as that concept requires no definition, its entified reality also is self-evident and without need of proof. No intelligent person imagines that the world of being is nothing but nothing, and that no person exists or any other existent. Even the Sophists who considered man to be the measure of all things, at least accepted the existence of man!

There is only one sentence from Gorgias who is considered to be the most extreme of the Sophists, which apparently is an absolute denial of all existence, as was mentioned in the discussion of epistemology. However, it does not seem that his intention—assuming that it has been correctly narrated—is that of the apparent meaning of his words, such that it would include his own existence and that of his speech, unless he was severely afflicted with mental illness, or uttered the words out of spite.

In Lesson Twelve about doubts leading to the denial of knowledge, we said that these doubts themselves presupposed knowledge, to which we may add here that this same doubt requires the acceptance of some existents which correspond to the mentioned knowledge. However, if someone would deny his own existence and the existence of his denial, he would be like the one whom, in the previous problem, denies the existence of his own doubt, and he must be treated practically to make him accept reality.

In any case, an intelligent person whose mind has not been polluted with the doubts of the Sophists and skeptics, not only accepts his own existence, the existence of his perceptive powers, mental images and concepts, and his own psychic activities, but also is certain of the existence of other people, and the external world, and for this reason when he becomes hungry, he eats food of the external world, and

when he becomes hot or cold, he decides to make use of things in the external world.

When he faces an enemy, or feels himself to be in some other danger, he thinks about defense and seeks some solution for it, and if he is able he will rise up and fight, and if not he may prefer to escape. When he has feelings of friendship, he decides to become intimate with a friend in the external world, and establishes friendly relations with him, and similarly with other facets of life. And do not imagine that the Sophists and idealists behaved any differently, for otherwise they would not have lived very long; they would either die of hunger or thirst, or some calamity or disaster would afflict them.

For this reason it is said that belief in entified existence is self evident and natural. But this discussion must be expanded and elaborated in more detail, and we will do this to the extent required. But before presenting this subject, it is worth giving an account of the ways in which reality is denied, so that we can take an appropriate position regarding each of them.

Ways to Deny Reality

The denial of entified reality appears in various forms, which can be divided into five categories:

1. The absolute denial of being such that for the concept of existence which is the subject of philosophy, there remains no instance, as required by the apparent words of Gorgias which were narrated.

It is clear that with such an assumption there not only remains no place for philosophical or scientific discussions, but also the door to speech and hearing must be absolutely closed. And for such claims, a logical response is inapplicable, and they must be treated practically.

2. The denial of the being of anything but “I, the perceiver”, such that only one instance of “existent” remains. This position is not as silly as the previous one, but on the basis of it, its proponent has no right to speak or debate, for he does not accept the existence of another person with whom to converse or debate.

If such a person is in a position to be debated, he must first be charged with having violated his own claim, and this violation requires the rejection of his assumption.

3. The denial of being beyond that of humanity, as has been reported of some Sophists. On the basis of this position, instances of “existent” will be limited to humans. This claim, which is relatively more moderate than those mentioned above, opens the door to discussion and debate.

There is room for asking the proponent for reasons in favor of his own existence and that of other people which will oblige him to accept some self-evident propositions. Then, on the basis of the self-evident propositions, some other theoretical points may also be proven.

4. The denial of the being of material existents, as is understood from the words of Berkeley, for he considered being an existent equivalent with being a perceiver or something perceived, and perceivers include God and non-material existents. So, it is decided that perceived things are to be limited to perceptible forms (essentially known (ma'lumat bil-dhat) which are realized within the perceiver himself, not outside him.

In this way there is no room for the objective existence of material things. Other idealists, like Hegel, may be joined to those mentioned above, for they imagine the world to have the form of thoughts for absolute spirit, which are considered to be subject to the laws of logic (but not of cause and effect).

5. There is room to include along with the idealists, who deny a part of reality, that is, material reality, the materialists, who are also deniers of reality, and they truly deny the greater part of reality.

Moreover, the idealists are more logical than the materialists, for their position rests on knowledge by presence and internal experience which have absolute value, however much their inferences may be erroneous. However, the position of the materialists rests on that which is given by the senses, which is the source of most perceptual errors.

By attending to the various types of denial of reality, we reach the conclusion that only the first hypothesis implies an absolute denial of reality, and each of the other hypotheses implies merely a denial of a part of reality and a limitation of its circle.

On the other hand, for each of the five kinds of hypothesis, there is another hypothesis which appears in the form of doubt in absolute reality or with respect to specific realities. If these doubts are mingled with a denial of the possibility of knowledge, that is, if in addition to presenting his own doubt he claims that logically no one can have knowledge, this sort of claim is related to epistemology, and the answer to it is given in its own place.

However, if the presentation of doubt is not mingled with a denial of the possibility of knowledge, the answer to it may be found in ontology. Basically, the clarification of philosophical questions is to remove doubts and to provide defense against them.

The Secret of the Self-Evidence of Entified Reality

As we indicated at the beginning of this lesson, the absolute denial of reality, the view that the world is nothing, is not something which would be claimed by any conscious intelligent person without some ulterior motive, just as it is regarding the absolute denial of knowledge and apparent doubt about everything, even about the existence of the doubt and doubter. Assuming that someone expresses these sorts of claims, one cannot reason with him logically; rather he must be given a practical response.

On the other hand, the existence of every particular reality is not self-evident, and proof for many of them requires reasons and arguments, and, as has been indicated, one of the most important duties of

philosophy is proof of the specific kinds of realities.

Now the following question will be raised: What is the mystery of the self-evidence of the basis of reality?

Perhaps an answer will be given for the affirmation of the existence of entified reality by way of summary, and the affirmation of material reality will be definitive and specific, corresponding to the nature of the intellect, and evidence for this is the existence of such beliefs in all men, as is confirmed by their practical behavior. In this way, four of the methods of denying reality, with the exception of the fifth way, are shown to be invalid.

But this discussion is not sufficiently logical, for, as was mentioned in lessons seventeen and nineteen, for in this way the correctness of this subject cannot be guaranteed, and there is room to ask whether our intellects would not understand in some other way if they had been created differently. Moreover, to seek confirmation on the basis of the views and behavior of men, in reality is a defective method of inductive inference, which is of no logical value at all.

Perhaps it will be said that these affirmations are primary self-evident truths (*badihiyyat awwaliyyah*), for which the mere imagining of their subjects and predicates suffices to produce assent.

But this claim is also incorrect, for if we assume that a proposition is in the form of a 'primary predication', it is clear that its purport will not be anything but the conceptual unity of subject and predicate. If we suppose that it is in the form of a 'common predication' and we consider its subject to refer to external instances, and we consider it to be what in logical terminology is called essential necessity (*dharuriyyat dhatiyyah*), then the truth of such a proposition will be conditional on the existence of the subject in the external world, while this means that its objective existence would be proved by this proposition.

In other words, propositions about reality are like conditional propositions in that their purport is that whenever an instance of the subject obtains in the external world, the predicate for it will be proven. For example, the famous self-evident proposition, "Every whole is greater than its own part," is not able to prove the existence of whole and part in the external world. Rather, its meaning is that whenever a whole obtains in the external world, it will be greater than its own part.

The invalidity of this claim in relation to external reality is clear, for it is not forbidden to imagine the non-existence of the material world. If God had not had the appropriate will, such a world would not have come into existence. Likewise, after its creation, whenever He willed, it would be destroyed.

The truth is this: the self-evidence of reality first takes shape regarding things in consciousness and which are understood by infallible knowledge by presence, and then with the abstraction of the concepts of 'existent' and 'reality' from their subjects they take the form of a proposition called *qadhiyyah muhmalah*¹ which refers to the principle of reality as such [without quantification], and in this way the

principle of entified reality summarily (ijmalan) takes the form of a self-evident proposition.

The Source of Belief in Material Reality

The conclusion of our last discussion was that the source of belief in the basis of entified reality is just knowledge by presence of the realities of conscience, and hence knowledge of other realities, including 'material' realities, cannot be considered self-evident (badihi).

For, as was said in Lesson Eighteen that which is really self-evident and can be known independently of any sort of argument are objects of consciousness and primary self-evident propositions, while the existence of material realities belongs to neither of these two groups. Therefore, the following question may be posed: What is the source of the dogmatic belief in material realities? And how is it that every person automatically accepts their existence, and that the behavior of each person is firmly based on this?

The answer to this question is that the source of a person's belief in material reality is an 'spontaneous' (irtikazi) but half conscious argument, and it is really a proposition which is close to being self-evident, which is sometimes called 'innate' (fitri).

This may be explained by the fact that in most cases, on the basis of the awareness which it has acquired, the intellect of a person reaches a conclusion very quickly and almost automatically without the process of inference being reflected clearly in the mind. Especially in the period of childhood when the self-awareness of a person is not yet developed, this mental process is rather obscure and close to being unconscious.

Therefore, it is considered that this knowledge obtains its conclusion without a process of thought from its premises, in other words, it is innate and automatic. But as the self-awareness of man develops, and one becomes aware of the activities within one's own mind, the obscurity decreases, and gradually it assumes the form of conscious logical reasoning.

The propositions which logicians have called 'innate' (fitriyyat) and which have been defined as propositions which accompany deductions, or whose middle terms are always present in the mind, are really of this very sort of 'spontaneous' (irtikazi) proposition, reasoning about which takes place very quickly and half-consciously.

Knowledge of material reality really is obtained by this very 'spontaneous' inference, which, especially during the period of childhood, is far from the level of awareness. When we want to explain it in the form of exact logical reasoning, it takes the following form:

Perceptual phenomena (for example the burning of the hand when it comes into contact with fire) is the effect of a cause, and its cause is either it itself (= I, the perceiver), or something other than it. But I myself have not brought it into existence, for I never wanted to burn my hand; therefore its cause will be

something other than my existence.

Of course, in order to strengthen our belief in material things with material properties, and to refute the probability of the direct effect of something non-material there is a need to supplement this with other arguments based on knowing the characteristics of material and non-material existents.

But God the Almighty has put such power in the mind of man so that before acquiring mastery of exact philosophical reasoning, he is able to obtain conclusions which are 'spontaneous' and are half-conscious. In this way he is able to secure the needs of his life.

¹. This is a kind of proposition whose quantity is indeterminate, e.g., "Metals expand when heated," in which it is unclear whether the proposition is intended to apply to all metals or only some. According to traditional logic, this is a proposition whose quantity is unspecified, but it is treated like a particular rather than a universal proposition. [Tr.]

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