

Part 2: Epistemology

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Lesson 11: Introduction to Epistemology

[The Importance of Epistemology](#)

There is a series of fundamental problems that confront man as a conscious being whose activities spring from his consciousness; and if man becomes negligent and remiss in his efforts to find correct answers to these problems, he will find instead that he has crossed the boundary between humanity and bestiality.

Remaining in doubt and hesitation, in addition to the inability to satisfy his truth-seeking conscience, it will not enable man to dispel anxieties about his likely responsibilities. He will be left to languish or, as occasionally happens, turn into a dangerous creature. Since mistaken and deviant solutions such as materialism and nihilism, cannot provide psychological comfort or social well-being. One should look for the fundamental cause of individual and social corruption in aberrant views and thoughts.

Hence, there is no alternative but to seek answers to these problems with firm and unflagging resolution. We may spare no effort until we establish a basis for our own human lives and in this way assist others as well, and arrest the influence in society of incorrect thoughts and the deviant teachings which are current.

Now that the necessity of an intellectual and philosophical endeavor has become clear and no room has been left for doubt or uncertainty or hesitancy, it remains for us to take the first step in the mandatory and unavoidable journey upon which we have resolved by facing up to the following question: Is the human intellect able to solve these problems?

This query forms the nucleus about which the problems of epistemology are centered. Until we solve the problems of this branch of philosophy, we will neither be able to be arriving at solutions to the problems of ontology nor to those of the other branches of philosophy. Until the value of intellectual knowledge is determined, claims presented as actual solutions to such problems will be pointless and unacceptable. There will always remain such questions concerning how the intellect can provide a correct solution to these problems.

It is here that many of the well-known figures of Western philosophy, such as Hume, Kant , Auguste Comte , and all of the positivists have blundered. With their incorrect views they have misled the cultural foundations of Western societies, and even the scholars of other sciences, especially the behaviorists among psychologists, have been misled by them.

Unfortunately, the battering and ruinous waves of such teachings also have spread to other parts of the world, and apart from the lofty summits and unimpregnable cliffs that rest on the stable and firm grounds of divine philosophy, all else more or less has come under their influence.

Therefore, we must endeavor to take the first steady step by laying the foundations of our house of philosophical ideas solidly and sturdily until, with the help of Almighty God, we are worthy to tread through other stages and arrive at our desired goal.

A Brief Overview of the History of Epistemology

Although epistemology as a branch of philosophy does not have a long history as a separate science, it may be said that the problem of the value of knowledge, which forms its central axis, has been somehow raised since the most ancient periods of philosophy. Perhaps the attention of thinkers was first drawn to this problem by the discovery of the flaws and defects in the disclosure of external events by the sense organs. This very matter prompted the Eleatics to distrust sensory perception and to rely more heavily on rational knowledge.

On the other hand, differences among thinkers pertaining to rational problems and the contradictory proofs set forth by each group to substantiate and corroborate their own ideas and views provided the

Sophists with the opportunity to deny the value of rational knowledge. They go so far in this way as basically to doubt and even to deny external realities.

After that, the problem of knowledge was not raised seriously until Aristotle compiled the principles of logic as standards for correct thinking and for evaluating proofs. After twenty some odd centuries, these principles are still useful. Even the Marxists, after battling for years against it, have finally accepted the human need for a part of this logic.

After the centuries during which Greek philosophy flourished, oscillations appeared in the evaluation of sensory and rational knowledge. There were two other occasions when Europe was faced with the crisis of skepticism. After the period of the Renaissance and the development of the empirical sciences, empiricism gradually came to prevail.

At the present empiricism is still the dominant school of thought, although in the midst of this prominent rationalists do appear from time to time. Virtually the first systematic investigations in epistemology were performed by Leibniz on the continent of Europe, and in England by John Locke.

In this way an independent branch of philosophy took shape. Locke's investigations were followed by those of his successors, Berkeley and Hume. Their philosophy of empiricism won fame and gradually the position of the rationalists was weakened to such an extent that Kant, a rationalist, was actually very deeply influenced by the ideas of Hume.

Kant declared the evaluation of knowledge and the ability of reason to be one of the most important duties of philosophy. However, he only accepted the value of the conclusions of theoretical reason within the limits of the empirical sciences, mathematics, and areas subordinate to them. The first blow from among the rationalists was struck against metaphysics, although earlier Hume, a prominent figure amongst the empiricists, had begun a severe attack which would later be followed in a more serious form by the positivists.

In this way the precise influence of epistemology in the other fields of philosophy and the reasons underlying the decline of Western philosophy come to light.

Knowledge in Islamic Philosophy

In contrast to the oscillations and crises that developed for Western philosophy, especially in the field of epistemology, such that after the passage of the twenty-five centuries of its lifetime it not only has not acquired a firm and sturdy foundation, but rather it can be said that its support has become ever more unsteady, Islamic philosophy, to the contrary, has continually retained its strength and stability, and has never become the victim of shakiness, upheaval or crisis.

Despite some contrary tendencies which have occasionally posed a challenge for Islamic philosophers, they have maintained their doctrine that the intellect is fundamental for the solution of metaphysical

problems. Without underestimating the importance of the experience of the senses or denying that of the experimental method in the natural sciences, they have persisted in the application of the rational method to philosophical problems.

Confrontation with those of opposing views and wrestling with critics, far from making Islamic philosophers weak, has only served to strengthen and increase their abilities. For this reason, the tree of Islamic philosophy has flourished and become more fruitful daily, and has even become resistant and immune to the attacks of its enemies. It is now completely capable of defending its rightful positions and defeating its competitors.

The trends that have more or less been opposed to philosophy have had two main sources. From one quarter there are those who have considered some current philosophical views to conflict with literal interpretations of Scripture and Tradition (Sunnah), and fearing that the propagation of philosophy would weaken religious belief among the people, have opposed such views.

On the other hand, the 'urafa (gnostics) have emphasized the importance of the spiritual way, and have feared that philosophical tendencies would lead to the neglect of the path of gnosis and lack of progress on the way of the heart. Hence, they ignored it, claiming that rationalists had wooden feet. [1](#)

One must realize that a true religion like the manifest religion of Islam will never be threatened by the thoughts of the philosophers. Despite whatever shortcomings or deviations they may have, with philosophical development and maturity and after passage from a raw and naive phase, the verities of Islam will come to the fore and its truth will become ever more manifest. Philosophy turns out to be a worthy and an irreplaceable servant [of Islam] on the one hand by explaining its lofty teachings, and on the other hand by defending it from perverse and hostile schools of thought, as it has done and shall continue to do in an ever improved manner, God willing.

Spiritual and gnostic wayfaring is by no means in conflict with divine philosophy; rather it has been assisted [by such philosophy] and has also profited from it. It must be admitted that on the whole this sort of conflict has been useful for preventing one-sidedness and extremism, and for demarcating the bounds of each of them.

Because of the sturdy, steadfast and unshakable position of the intellect in Islamic philosophy, no need has arisen for a detailed examination of the problems of knowledge in a methodical and systematic form as an independent branch of philosophy.

Merely a few scattered issues pertaining to knowledge, addressed in various chapters of logic and philosophy, have sufficed, for example, in one section pertaining to the teachings of the Sophists where their invalidity is pointed out, and in another section where the divisions of the sciences and their principles are explained. Even the problem of mental existence, which is one of the topics germane to the problems of knowledge, was not advanced as an independent topic until Ibn Sina. Even after that, all angles and sides of the issue have not been comprehensively examined and researched.

Now, considering the current conditions, when Western thought has almost penetrated our cultural environs raising questions about many of the axioms of divine philosophy, philosophical questions can no longer be limited to their former framework, and the discussion can no longer be carried on in the traditional manner.

Since this manner has not only prevented the development of philosophy through interchange with other schools of thought, but also has made our intellectuals, who inevitably have become and will continue to become familiar with Western thought, pessimistic about Islamic philosophy, bringing about the illusion that Islamic philosophy has lost its effectiveness and is unable to compete with other philosophical schools. Hence, day by day, their tendency toward foreign culture increases, with disastrous results. This situation could be seen during the previous regime in our universities.

To repay our debt to the Islamic Revolution and the sacred blood which has been shed for it, and to fulfill our divine responsibility we should increase our efforts to explain the foundations of philosophy and propagate them in such a way that they may answer the doubts posed by the perverted and atheistic schools of thought, and we should support the current needs for belief and make it available to young seekers of truth and investigators, so that the education of Islamic philosophy can spread, and so Islamic culture may be insured against the encroachments of alien ideas.

The Definition of Epistemology

Before we begin to define epistemology (shinakht shinasi) it is necessary to comment on the word shinakht (knowledge).²This word, which is equivalent to ma'rifah in Arabic, has various usages. Its most general meaning is knowledge in general, awareness and information. Sometimes it is used for particular perception, and sometimes for recognition. Sometimes it is employed for science which corresponds to reality with certainty. There are some debates in philology and etymology about the foreign synonyms which need not be mentioned here.

Knowledge as the subject of the science of epistemology may be understood as having any of these meanings or any other. In fact, it is based on convention. But since the goal of surveying epistemological problems is not particular to any specific kind of knowledge, it is better to use that general meaning which is equivalent to knowledge in a general sense.

The concept of knowledge is one of the clearest and most self-evident concepts, so that it not only is in need of no definition, but its definition is impossible, since there are no more obvious terms by which to define it.

The phrases and statements which are used in philosophical and logical books as definitions of knowledge and science are not genuine definitions. The purpose of mentioning them is to specify its instances in some specific science or field of study. For example, logicians define knowledge as "the obtaining of the form of something in the mind," and the purpose of this definition is to specify their

intended instance which is “acquired knowledge”.

Or it refers to the view concerning certain problems of ontology of some philosophers who define knowledge as “the presence of a non-material being to another non-material being,” or “the presence of a thing to a non-material existent.” The purpose of these definitions is to state their view about the non-material nature of knowledge and the knowing subject.

If we are to explain knowledge, it is better to say that it is the presence of the thing itself or its particular form or its general concept in a non-material existent. In addition, we should say that it is not necessary for knowledge that the knower always should be other than the object known. It is possible, as in the case of awareness of one’s own self, that there be no difference between the knower and the object of knowledge.

In fact in such cases unity is the most perfect instance of presence. By the definition we have presented of the word knowledge we may define epistemology as ‘the science which discusses human knowledge and the evaluation of its types and the criteria of their validity.

[1.](#) The way of the rationalists, according to the sufis, such as Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207–1273), is artificial, like that of one who would walk with crutches, or like that of the blind man who walks with a cane. See the Mathnavi, Bk. 1, 2128. (Tr.)

[2.](#) The Farsi word used for epistemology in this text is shinakht-shinasi, both halves of which are derived from the verb shinakhtan, which means ‘to know’ in the sense of being acquainted with, as in the German kennen, as opposed to wissen. Today, the term ma’rifat shinasi has gained wider currency in Iran. (Tr.)

Lesson 12: The Self-Evidence of the Principles of Epistemology

The Nature of the Dependence of Philosophy on Epistemology

Understanding the concept of knowledge in a broad sense which includes every kind of awareness and perception, many topics of epistemology could be presented, some of which do not formally come under this science, such as those concerning revelation, inspiration, and the kinds of mystical disclosure and intuition.

However, one problem which is usually included for discussion in this branch of philosophy pivots about the senses and the intellect. But we cannot discuss all of these issues here, for our principal aim is to explain the value of intellectual perception and to affirm the truth of philosophy and the validity of its rational methods.

For this reason, we shall only present those topics which are useful for metaphysics and theology, and incidentally for some other areas of philosophy such as philosophical psychology and philosophical ethics.

At this point it is possible to raise the question of what are the basic premises which support epistemology, and in what way they can be confirmed. The answer is that epistemology is in no need of borrowed axioms for its subjects, for its issues can be clarified solely on self-evident primary grounds (badihiyyat awwaliyyah).

Another question which may be raised is this: If the solutions to the problems of ontology and other sciences which are arrived at by rational methods depend upon whether or not the intellect has the capacity to solve these sorts of problems, doesn't that imply that first philosophy [metaphysics] also is in need of the science of epistemology to provide the basic axioms of philosophy, although it is said that philosophy has no need for any other science?

Elsewhere we have indicated the answer to this question. Here we present a more precise answer. First, the premises directly needed by metaphysics are really self-evident judgments and have no need of proof, and the explanations regarding these judgments given in the science of logic or epistemology are in truth expository, clarifying rather than argumentative.

That is, they are a means to direct the attention of the mind toward a truth which the intellect understands without need for reasons. The reason for discussing this kind of judgment in these sciences is that misconceptions have arisen about them which turn into doubts, as in the case of the most self-evident of judgments, that is, the impossibility of contradiction, leading some even to imagine that contradiction is not only not impossible, but that it underlies all reality.

Doubts which have arisen about the value of rational knowledge are cut from the same cloth. It is to address these doubts and to remove these misconceptions from the mind that these discussions are undertaken. Really, the inclusion of these judgments among the topics of logic or epistemology is a digression, an indulgence, or condescension for the sake of those who harbor suspicions. If someone did not accept the value of rational knowledge, albeit unconsciously, how could one argue with him on the basis of rational proof?! Even the arguments advanced in favor of such doubts would be of a rational nature (note carefully).

Secondly, the need of philosophy for the principles of logic and epistemology is an application of knowledge to knowledge. To explain, someone whose mind has not been poisoned by doubt can reason to a certain conclusion with respect to most topics, and his reasoning would be in accord with logical principles without the need for attending to them and without knowing, for instance, that his reasoning accords with the first form of the syllogism and the conditions that govern it, or without being aware that there is an intellect which understands these premises and which accepts the validity of the conclusion that follow from them.

On the other hand, it is possible that some, in order to refute rationalism or metaphysics may employ reasoning and be unaware of the rational metaphysical premises they use, or in order to refute the rules of logic they may base their reasoning on the rules of logic, or even in order to invalidate the inviolability of the law of contradiction, they may resort to this very principle without being aware of it, and if they were told, 'This reasoning of yours is both valid and invalid,' they would become annoyed and regard this as mockery.

Thus, in reality, the dependence of philosophical reasoning on the principles of logic or the principles of epistemology is not the sort of need that the sciences have for the posited principles of their subjects.

Rather it is a secondary need involving the dependence of the principles of these sciences upon themselves; that is, it is the need for reconfirmation in science, for acquiring further confirmation for these judgments, as in the case of the self-evident propositions concerning which it is said that they depend on the impossibility of a contradiction.

It is clear that the dependence of self-evident propositions on this principle is not of the same kind as the dependence of speculative propositions on self-evident propositions, otherwise the difference between self-evident and speculative propositions would not remain, and at least one proposition, the principle of non-contradiction, has to be accepted as being self-evident.

The Possibility of Knowledge

Every rational person is of the belief that he does know things, and that he can know things. Hence he makes an effort to acquire information concerning matters of his needs or interests, and the best sign of this sort of effort is what scientists and philosophers have done by bringing about the various fields of the sciences and philosophy.

Hence the possibility and actuality of science is not something that any rational person whose mind has not been confounded by doubt would deny or even have reservations about. That which is open to discussion or examination and which it is reasonable to disagree about is identification of the frontiers of human knowledge and specification of the means of acquiring certain knowledge, and the way to distinguish correct from incorrect thought, and matters of this kind.

As has been indicated in previous discussions, in Europe, dangerous waves of skepticism have repeatedly appeared, and even great thinkers have been swallowed by it. The history of philosophy remembers schools of thought which absolutely have denied knowledge, such as sophism, skepticism, and agnosticism.

The best explanation of the absolute denial of knowledge (if this charge is correct) is that its victims were afflicted by a severe form of over scrupulousness, a state which affects some people with regard to various other matters as well.

Actually it should be considered a kind of mental illness. In any event, without going into a historical investigation concerning the existence of such people and inquiring into the motivation behind such views or the verity of their ascription to those who are claimed to have held them, we take them as doubts or questions that require an answer suitable to philosophical discussion, leaving the subject of historical fact to be decided by historical research.

A Survey of the Claims of the Sceptics

That which has been reported of the statements of the sophists and the skeptics may be divided from one angle into two parts: one having to do with what they have said about existence and being, and the other concerning what they have expressed about science and knowledge. That is, their statements have two aspects: one aspect concerns the subject of ontology, while the other pertains to epistemology.

For example, the remark is attributed to one of the most extreme of the sophists, Gorgias: "Nothing exists, and if there were anything, it could not be known, and even there were knowledge of being, this knowledge could not be communicated to others." The first phrase of this remark is about being, which must be discussed in the section on ontology, but the second phrase is relevant to the present discussion, epistemology, and so, naturally, it is this second phrase which we shall proceed to discuss, while the first phrase will be examined in the discussions of ontology.

First, this point must be mentioned: all who would doubt everything will not be able to doubt their own existence, the existence of their doubt, nor their perceptual faculties, such as the power of sight and hearing, and the existence of mental forms and their own psychological states. If someone even expresses doubts about these cases, he is either sick, and must be cured, or he is lying and expresses evil intentions, and so must be corrected and reprimanded.

Likewise, someone who speaks and discusses or writes books cannot doubt the existence of a party to the discussion, or the existence of the paper or the pen with which he writes. At the extreme it might be said that I perceive all these things within myself but I doubt their existence in the external world. As would appear from the statements of Berkeley and some other idealists, they accepted all objects of perception as mere forms within the mind, and denied their external existence.

However, they accepted the existence of other people who have minds and perceptions. This view is not an absolute denial of knowledge and existence, but a denial of material existents, and their doubt amounts to one in relation to some of the objects of knowledge.

Now, if someone claims that no certain knowledge is possible, the question will be put to him as to whether he knows this, or whether he also has some doubt about it. If he says that he knows it, then at least one thing that is certainly known has been admitted, and his own claim has been violated. If he says that he does not know it, this means that it is possible that he grants the likelihood of certain knowledge. In other words, his own speech has been shown to be invalid.

However, if someone says that he has doubts about the possibility of knowledge and definite knowledge claims, it will be asked of him whether he knows that he has such doubts or not. If he answers that he knows that he has such doubts, and then not only the possibility but the actuality of knowledge has been admitted. If, however, he says that he also has doubts about his very own doubts, this very speech is either caused by illness or bad intention, and requires a non-theoretical response.

In response to those who advocate the relativity of all knowledge, who claim that no proposition is valid absolutely, universally and eternally, one may ask such a person whether that claim itself is valid absolutely, universally and eternally, or whether it is relative, particular, and temporary.

If it holds always in all cases and with no qualification or condition then it is true. Then at least one proposition which is absolute, universal and eternal has been proved. If this knowledge itself is also relative this means that in some cases it is not valid, and in the cases where it does not hold there are propositions which are absolute, universal and eternal.

The Rejection of the Doubts of the Skeptics

One of the doubts upon which the sophists and skeptics rely and which they have expressed in various forms and by presenting different examples are the following: Sometimes one acquires certainty about the existence of something by means of the senses, but afterwards he comes to realize that a mistake has been made.

Thus one comes to know that sensory perception is not necessarily reliable. It follows that the likelihood arises that my other sensory perceptions may also be mistaken, and the day may come when their error will also become apparent. Likewise sometimes a person finds a principle to be certain on rational grounds, but afterwards he finds that his reasoning was incorrect, and his certainty is transformed into doubt.

Thus it becomes known that intellectual reasoning is also not necessarily reliable. In the same way the probability of error infects other intellectual perceptions. The conclusion is that neither sensation nor reasons are reliable. Nothing remains for man but doubt.

The response would be as follows:

1. The purpose of this argument is to arrive at the validity of skepticism and the knowledge of its truth through reasoning, and at least to get the other party to the discussion to accept your point, that is, you expect that he will attain knowledge of the validity of your claims, while you maintain that the attainment of knowledge is absolutely impossible.

2. The discovery of error in sensory and intellectual perceptions implies the knowledge that these perceptions do not conform to reality. This necessarily implies that we accept the existence of knowledge of the error of perception.

3. Another implication is that we know that there is a reality with which our mistaken perception does not accord, otherwise there would be no concept of the error of perception.
4. Another implication is that it must be known to us that the mistaken perception itself and its mental form are contrary to actuality.
5. Finally, the existence of the one who errs, as well as his senses and intellect must be accepted.
6. This reasoning itself is a rational argument (however fallacious) and to rely upon it is to consider the intellect and its perceptions to be reliable.
7. In addition to this, other knowledge is assumed here, and that is that mistaken perceptions, being in error, cannot be true. So, the skeptic's argument itself implies the acceptance of several instances of knowledge, and so how can one deny the possibility of knowledge absolutely, or even doubt it?

All of these answers refute the argument of the skeptics. In analyzing it and exposing its fallacy we prove the validity and error of sensory perception by the help of reasoning. However, as has also been said, it is not true that the discovery of error in intellectual perceptions also infects all other intellectual perceptions, because the possibility of error may only enter speculative, or other than self-evident, perceptions.

But the self-evident propositions of the intellect which are the basis of philosophical proofs do not admit of error at all, and the explanation of their infallibility will be presented in Chapter Lesson Nineteen.

Lesson 13: The Divisions of Knowledge

In Search of the Cornerstone of Knowledge

It was mentioned in the previous lesson that some knowledge and perceptions are completely indubitable. Furthermore, the reasons given by the skeptics to justify their perverted views based on their absolute denial of knowledge embody and necessitate several instances of knowledge.

On the other hand, we know that not all our 'knowledge' and beliefs are true or correspond to reality, and furthermore, in many cases we ourselves notice some falsehoods. In view of these two points, the questions arise as to the differences among the varieties of human perceptions, such that some of them are infallible and indubitable while others are fallible and doubtful, and how we might distinguish between them.

It is a well-known matter that Descartes tried to found an unshakable philosophy in order to combat

skepticism, and he used the indubitability of doubt itself as the cornerstone of his philosophy. Furthermore, the existence of the ego of the doubter and thinker is a corollary based on that foundation.

He introduced clarity and distinctness as the criterion of indubitability, which he made a standard for distinguishing correct from incorrect ideas. He also attempted to employ a mathematical approach to philosophy, and in fact sought to introduce a new logic.

We are not presently in a position to evaluate Descartes' philosophy or to examine the degree to which he was successful at the task he set for himself. We shall only mention the point that to begin with doubt as a starting point for arguing with the skeptics is reasonable, as was seen in the previous lesson.

However, if someone were to imagine that nothing is quite so clear and certain, and that even the existence of the doubter must be inferred from the doubt, this would not be valid. Rather the existence of the aware and thinking ego is at least as clear and indubitable as the existence of the doubt itself which is one of its states.

Likewise, 'clarity and distinctness' cannot be considered the major criterion for distinguishing correct from incorrect ideas, for this criterion by itself is not sufficiently clear and distinct and free from ambiguity, and is not a serious and crucial measure, and consequently cannot divulge the secret of the infallibility of certain kinds of perceptions. To be sure, other views of Descartes could be argued at great length, but such an examination would be outside the scope of the present study.

The First Division of Science

The first division of knowledge to be considered is that between (1) the knowledge which is known directly of the essence (dhat) ¹ of the known object, in which the real and genuine existence of the object of knowledge is disclosed to the knowing subject or the percipient, and (2) the knowledge in which the external existence of its object is not observed and witnessed by the knower; rather he becomes aware of it by the mediation of something which represents it, which is termed its 'form' (surat) or 'mental concept' (mafhum dhihni).

The first kind is called 'presentational knowledge' or 'knowledge by presence' ('ilm hudhuri) and the second kind is called 'acquired knowledge' ('ilm husuli), [that is, knowledge acquired by conceptual representation].

The division of knowledge into these two kinds is rational, comprehensive and exclusive, and in this regard no third state can be supposed besides these two; that is, there is no knowledge other than knowledge which is of these two kinds.

Either there is an intermediary between the person who knows and the essence of the known object, by means of which the awareness is obtained, in which case the knowledge is called 'acquired,' or such an intermediary does not exist, or in that case there will be 'knowledge by presence.' However, the existence

of these two kinds of knowledge in man needs to be explained.

Knowledge by Presence

The knowledge and awareness that every one has of himself as a perceiving existent, is a knowledge which cannot be denied. Even the sophists who considered man to be the measure of all things did not deny the existence of man himself and the knowledge man has of himself.

Of course, this means that man himself, his very ego, is a perceiver, a thinker, who by internal witnessing (shuhud) is aware of himself, neither by means of sensation or experience nor by forms or mental concepts. In other words, he himself is the knowledge, and in this knowledge and awareness there is no plurality or otherness between knowledge, the knower, and the known object.

As was previously mentioned, 'the unity of the knower and the known' is the most perfect instance of 'the presence of the known object to the knower'. However, awareness of man by color, shape, and other characteristics of the body are not like this, but is acquired through sight, touch, and the other senses, and by means of mental forms.

Within the body there are numerous internal organs of which we are not aware, unless we come to know of them by means of their signs and effects, or we become aware of them by learning anatomy, physiology, and other biological sciences.

Likewise, this means that such knowledge is simple and unanalyzable, not such as the propositions, "I am," or "I exist," which are composed of several concepts. Thus, the meaning of 'self-knowledge' is this very intuitive, simple and direct awareness of our own souls. This knowledge and awareness is an essential characteristic of this 'self-knowledge'.

This is proved in its own appropriate place [in this book], that the soul is immaterial and that every non-material substance is aware of itself. These topics are related to ontology and philosophical psychology, consequently this is not the place to discuss them.

Our awareness of our psychological states, sentiments and passions are cases of direct presentational knowledge. When we become frightened we become directly aware of this psychological state without any intermediary, without the mediation of any form or mental concept.

When we are affectionate toward someone or something, we find this inclination within ourselves. When we make a decision to do something, we are aware of our decision and will. To be afraid of something, or to like something, or to decide to do something without awareness of the fear, or affection, or will is meaningless. For the same reason, the existence of our doubts or suppositions is undeniable. No one can claim that he is unaware of his own doubt, and that he doubts the existence of his doubt!

Another instance of knowledge by presence is the knowledge the self has of its perceptive and motor

faculties. The awareness the self has of its ability to think or imagine or of its motor abilities is presentational knowledge and is direct. These things are not known by means of forms or mental concepts.

For this reason one never makes a mistake about their employment. For example, one never uses the perceptive faculty instead of one's motor abilities, and one never uses one's ability to move instead of thinking about something. Among the things known by presence are the forms and mental concepts themselves, which are not known to the self through the mediation of other forms and concepts.

If it were necessary for knowledge of anything to be obtained by means of forms and mental concepts, one would have to know every mental form by means of some other form, and knowledge of that form also by means of another form. In this way, for everything you knew you would have to know an infinite number of other things and have an infinite number of other mental forms.

It is possible that a question might be raised here, for if presentational knowledge is the thing known itself, then it becomes necessary that mental forms will be both presentational knowledge and acquired knowledge.

For these forms, in one respect will be known by presence so, they themselves will be knowledge by presence itself. In another respect, it is supposed that they are cases of acquired knowledge of external things. So, how is it possible that one knowledge can be both presentational knowledge and acquired knowledge?

The answer is that mental forms have the property of mirroring outer forms and representing external things, and as they are means for knowing external things, they are considered as cases of acquired knowledge.

With respect to the fact that they are present before the self, and the self is directly aware of them, they count as presentational knowledge. These two respects are different from one another: the respect of their being present is the self's direct awareness of them and the respect of their being acquired is their representing external things.

In order to explain this further we shall attend to the analogy of the mirror. We are able to observe a mirror in two independent ways. One way is that of one who wants to buy a mirror, which looks at both sides of it to see that it is not broken or defective. The other way is that of one who uses the mirror, as when we look at the mirror to see our face, and although we look at the mirror, our attention is to our own face, not to the mirror.

Mental forms can also be independently attended to by the self, and in this case we say that they are perceived by presentational knowledge. They can also be a means by which external things or persons may be known, and in this case we say that they are cases of acquired knowledge.

It should be noted that the point of this explanation is not to distinguish the two cases temporally; rather the point is to distinguish two respects, without entailing that a mental concept, in so far as it is a case of acquired knowledge of an external object, should not also be known by the self or lack the respect of presence to the self.

The Reason behind the Infallibility of Presentational Knowledge:

By attending to the explanation given about presentational knowledge and acquired knowledge and the difference between them, it becomes known why

the knowledge of the self and knowledge of the states of the self and likewise other cases of knowledge by presence are fundamentally infallible, for in these cases it is the reality itself which is observed. To the contrary, in cases of acquired knowledge, forms and mental concepts play an intermediate role, and possibly there may not be complete correspondence with external things and persons.

In other words, error in perception is imaginable when there is an intermediary between the perceiving person and the perceived entity, and knowledge is realized by means of it. In this case the question arises as to whether this form or concept which mediates between the perceiving subject and the perceived object and plays the role of reflecting the perceived object represents the perceived object precisely and corresponds to it perfectly or not.

Unless it is proved that this form and concept corresponds precisely to the perceived object certainty will not be acquired with respect to the validity of the perception. However, in the case that the thing or person perceived is present before the perceiver without any intermediary with its own very existence, or is united with it, no error can be supposed, and one cannot ask whether the knowledge corresponds with what is known or not, for in this case the knowledge is the known itself.

Furthermore, the meaning of truth and error in perception now become clear. Truth is the perception which corresponds to reality and completely reveals it. Error is the belief which does not correspond to reality.

The Concomitance of Acquired Knowledge with Presentational Knowledge

Here we should mention an important point, namely that the mind always takes a picture of what is present to it like an automatic machine. From these it gets specific forms and concepts and then analyzes and interprets them. For example, when one becomes afraid his mind takes a photo of the state of fear which it can remember after the state has left.

Furthermore, it apprehends its universal concept and by appending other concepts projects it as a proposition such as 'I am afraid,' or 'I have fear,' or 'Fear exists in me.' It interprets the appearance of

this psychological state with a marvelous alacrity on the basis of its previous knowledge and identifies its cause.

This entire mental process, which is accomplished so quickly, is distinct from the state of fear and its presentational knowledge. However, simultaneity with knowledge by presence is often the source of a mistake, and one fancies that since he finds fear with knowledge by presence he also comes to know its cause with knowledge by presence, but that which was apprehended with knowledge by presence is simple, without any form or concept and also devoid of any interpretation whatsoever, and that is why it allows no room for error.

To the contrary, the simultaneous interpretation is from acquired perceptions which by themselves provide no guarantee of truth and correspondence to reality. With this explanation it becomes clear why and how mistakes occur in some cases of acquired knowledge. For example, a person feels hungry and thinks that he needs food, but this is a false appetite and he does not really need to have a meal.

The reason is that that which has been perceived with the infallible presentational knowledge was that specific feeling, which was accompanied by a mental interpretation based on comparison with previous feelings according to which the cause of the feeling must be a need for food. This comparison, however, is incorrect and because of it an error occurs in specifying the cause and providing a mental interpretation.

The errors which occur in gnostic disclosures are also of this sort. Hence, it is necessary to be completely precise in specifying presentational knowledge and to distinguish it from its accompanying mental interpretations in order not to err as a result of this confusion.

Gradation in Knowledge by Presence

Another noteworthy point is that all cases of presentational knowledge are not equal with respect to intensity or weakness. Rather, sometimes knowledge by presence is adequately powerful and intense to come to one's consciousness, while at other times it is so weak and pale that one is only semiconscious or even unconscious of it.

Sometimes the difference among the levels of knowledge by presence are caused by difference in the levels of existence of the perceiving subjects, that is, to the extent that the self is weak with respect to the degree of existence, his presentational knowledge will also be weak and pale.

To the extent that the degree of his existence is more perfect, his knowledge by presence will be more perfect and more conscious. This explanation depends on explanation of the gradation of existence and of the degrees of perfection of the self, which are to be proved in another area of philosophy, but here we can accept that on the basis of these two principles it is possible for presentational knowledge to be intense or weak.

Knowledge by presence of psychological states also can have other forms of intensity and weakness. For example, when a sick person who is suffering from pain and who perceives this pain with knowledge by presence, sees a close friend and turns his attention to him, he no longer perceives the pain.

To the contrary, in times of solitude, and especially in the dark of night in which there is nothing else to which he can pay attention, he feels the pain more intensely, and the cause of this is the intensity of his attention. Differences in the degrees of presentational knowledge may effect the mental interpretations associated with the degrees of intensity and weakness.

For example, although a self at the lowest levels has presentational knowledge of itself, it is possible that due to the weakness of this knowledge it may imagine that the relation between the self and the body is the relation of identity, concluding that the reality of the self is this very material body or the phenomena related to it, but when a more perfect degree of knowledge by presence is achieved, and in other words, when the substance of the self is perfected, such a mistake will no longer occur.

Likewise, in its proper place it is proved that man has presentational knowledge of his Creator, but due to weakness of the degree of existence and also due to the attention given to the body and material things, this knowledge becomes unconscious. However, with the perfection of the self and decrease in attention to the body and material things and the strengthening of attention of the heart to God, the Exalted, this same knowledge will reach the stage of clarity and consciousness, until one says: “Is there any manifestation of [something] other than You and not of You?”²

¹. By essence (dhat) is meant the thing itself, the reality of the thing. This is to be distinguished from the whatness or quiddity, which is the descriptive answer to the Aristotelian question, ‘What is it?’

². These words are commonly attributed to Imam Husayn (‘a) and are included in standard printings of his Supplication of the Day of ‘Arafah, although Muhammad Baqir Majlisi (1037/1628 – 1110/1699) expresses doubts about the authenticity of this part of the supplication and opines that it is the work of a sufi shaykh. See William Chittick, “A Shadhili Presence in Shi’ite Islam”, *Sophia Perennis*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 1970, pp. 97–100, where it is pointed out that the section is from the munajat attributed to Ibn ‘Ata’illah (d. 709/1309), included in the translation by Victor Danner, *Sufi Aphorisms* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1985), p. 66, paragraph 19

Lesson 14: Acquired Knowledge

The Necessity for the Survey of Acquired Knowledge

We saw that knowledge by presence is the finding of reality itself, and that therefore there is no way to have doubt or scruple about it. But we know that the range of presentational knowledge is limited and by itself it cannot provide a solution to the problems of epistemology.

If there were no way to ascertain facts by means of acquired knowledge, we would not logically be able

to accept definite theories in any science, and even self-evident first principles would lose their definiteness and necessity, and only the name of self-evidence and necessity would remain with them.

Therefore, it is necessary that we continue our endeavor to evaluate acquired knowledge and to obtain a criterion of truth for it. For the sake of this we shall survey the various kinds of acquired knowledge.

Idea and Affirmation

Logicians divide knowledge into two parts: idea (tasawwur) and affirmation (tasdiq). In fact, they have limited the common concept of knowledge to acquired knowledge, and on the other hand, they have extended it to include simple ideas.

The literal meaning of tasawwur is 'to form an image' and 'to acquire a form,' and in the terminology of the logicians it means a simple mental appearance which has the property of disclosing something beyond itself, such as the idea of Mount Damavand and the concept of mountain.

The literal meaning of tasdiq is 'to consider true' and 'to acknowledge,' and in the terminology of logicians and philosophers it is used with two similar meanings, and in this respect it is considered to be ambiguous:

- i. a logical proposition which in simple form includes the subject, predicate, and judgment of unity;
- ii. The judgment itself which is a simple matter and shows one's belief in the unity of the subject and predicate.

Some modern Western logicians imagine that affirmation (tasdiq) means the transference of the mind from one idea to another on the basis of the rules of the association of ideas. But this conception is incorrect, for neither is affirmation necessary everywhere there is an association of ideas, nor is an association of ideas required everywhere there is affirmation.

Rather, affirmation rests on judgment, and this is the very difference between a proposition and several ideas accompanying each other and following one upon the other in the mind, pictured without any relation between them.

Elements of the Proposition

We know that 'affirmation' in the sense of judgment is something simple, but in the sense of proposition it is composed of several elements. Several different views have been expressed about the elements of the proposition.

Since it would require a lengthy discussion to survey all of them, and such a survey properly belongs to the subject of logic, we shall merely have a glance at them here. Some say that each predicative

proposition (qadhiyyah hamliyyah) is composed of two elements: subject and predicate.

Others add the relation between these two as a third element. Yet others consider the judgment of the occurrence of the relationship or the lack of occurrence of the relationship to be a fourth element of the proposition.

Some distinguish between affirmative and negative propositions and say that with regard to negative propositions a judgment does not exist, but rather they consider it to be a case of the negation of judgment.

Others deny the existence of the relation in simple existential propositions (halliyyah basitah), i.e. propositions which assert the existence of the subject in the external world, and in primary predications, i.e. propositions in which the conceptual content of the subject and the predicate are the same, such as 'Man is a rational animal.' However, undoubtedly, in logic no proposition can be without either a relationship or judgment, for, as we said, affirmation rests on judgment, and judgment is with respect to two elements of the proposition.

However, it is possible that one may have to recognize a difference among propositions from a philosophical and ontological point of view.

Divisions of Ideas

From one perspective, ideas can be divided into two types: universal and particular. A 'universal idea' is a concept which can represent numerous things or persons, such as the concept of man which applies to millions of individuals. A 'particular idea' is a mental form which only represents one existent, such as the mental form of Socrates.

Each of the ideas, whether universal or particular, may be further divided by other divisions about which we shall provide a brief explanation.

Sensory Ideas: These are simple phenomena in the soul which result from the effects of the relations between the sensory organs and material realities, such as images of scenery which we see with the eyes, or sounds which we hear with the ears. The subsistence of this kind of idea depends on the subsistence of relations with the external world, and after being cut off from contact with the external world they vanish in a short period of time (such as one tenth of a second).

Imaginary Ideas: These are simple specific phenomena in the soul which are subsequent results of sensory ideas and links with the external world. But their subsistence does not depend upon links with the external world, such as the mental image of a view of a garden which remains in the mind even after the eyes are closed, and may be recalled even after years have gone by.

Ideas of Prehension (Wahm): [1](#) Many philosophers have mentioned another kind of particular idea which

is related to particular meanings, and which is exemplified by the feeling of enmity which some animals have for some others, a feeling which requires them to flee. Some philosophers have extended this term to cover particular meanings in general, including the feelings of affection and enmity of man.

Undoubtedly, universal concepts of affection and enmity are a kind of universal ideas. They cannot be counted as types of particular ideas.

The perception of particular affections and enmities in the perceiver himself that is the affection which a person finds in himself for another, or the enmity which he feels in himself for another, is really a kind of presentational knowledge of qualities of the soul, and we cannot count them as kinds of acquired knowledge.

Our feeling of another person's enmity, in fact, is not a direct feeling without intermediary, but it is a comparison between a state which a man has found within himself and attributed to another person in a similar condition. But judgments about the perceptions of animals require another discussion which we do not have the opportunity to pursue further here.

What can be accepted as a kind of specific idea is an idea which results from states of the soul, and is apt to be recalled, and which are like imaginary ideas with relation to sensory ideas, such as remembering a specific fear that appeared at a certain moment, or a specific affection which existed at a specific moment. It is necessary to mention that sometimes ideas of *wahm* are spoken of as ideas that do not correspond to any reality and are sometimes referred to as 'fantasy'.

Universal Ideas

We saw that in one respect ideas may be divided into two parts, universal and particular. The types of ideas which we have discussed until now have all been particular ideas. Universal ideas, which are called 'concepts of the intellect' or 'intelligibles' are the focus of important philosophical debates, and since long ago have been the subject of discussion.

From ancient times there have existed views according to which basically there are no universal concepts. The terms which are used to denote universal concepts are in reality like equivocal terms which denote various things.

For example, the term 'man' who is used to designate many individuals is like some proper name used by several families to name their children, or like a family name which applies to all the members of a family.

Proponents of this theory are known as 'nominalists.' At the end of the Middle Ages, William of Ockham inclined toward this theory, and it was later accepted by Berkeley. In modern times, positivists and some other schools must also be considered to hold this kind of position.² The other theory which is similar to that which has been mentioned is that universal concepts are vague particular concepts, such that some

features of particular and specific forms are omitted so that they may conform to other things or persons.

For example, our idea of a specific person could be adapted to his brother by deleting some of its features. By deleting more features it could be applied to even more people, and by continuing in this way the idea becomes more general and applies to more and more people until at last it may even be applied to animals, or even plants and minerals, such as a phantom seen from afar, which because of its vagueness may conform to the idea of a stone, tree, animal or a man.

This is why at first glance we doubt whether it is human or something else. The closer we get and the clearer we see it, the more restricted are the limits of probability, until finally, we determine a specific person or thing.

Hume had this sort of belief about universal concepts, and many others also have thought this way about universals. On the other hand, some ancient philosophers, such as Plato, insisted on the reality of universal concepts, and even considered them to have a kind of reality of their own outside the bounds of space and time.

The knowledge of universals is likened to a kind of observation of non-material entities and intellectual archetypes (Platonic Ideas). This theory has been interpreted in various ways and many theories have branched off from it.³ Thus some have held that the human spirit prior to acquiring a body had seen intellectual truths in the world of immaterial entities, and after acquiring a body it forgot them, and by seeing material individuals, the spirit becomes reminded of these immaterial truths and the perception of universals is this remembering.

Others, who do not subscribe to the spirit's existence prior to its attachment with the body, understand sensory perception as a means to prepare the self to observe immaterial entities.

This observation which is obtained by this capacity is observation from afar, and the perception of universals is this same observation of non-material realities from afar, in contrast to gnostic disclosures, which are obtained by a different kind of preparation and are observed from up close.

Some Islamic philosophers, like Mulla Sadr and the late 'Allamah Tabataba'i, accepted this interpretation.

The most famous theory of universal concepts is that they are a special kind of mental concept realized with the attribute of universality in a special stage (martabah) of the mind. Hence, in one of its definitions the intellect is termed as the faculty for the apprehension of universal mental concepts. This theory is ascribed to Aristotle and has been accepted by most Islamic philosophers.

Noting that the first and second theory in fact imply the denial of intellectual perception, which is a rallying point for the destruction of metaphysics and its depreciation to philological discussion and linguistic analysis, it is necessary to delve further on this issue in order to find a firm foundation for our

future discussions.

A Study of Universal Concepts

As has been pointed out, the nominalists held that general terms involve a kind of equivocation or something similar so that they may refer to numerous individuals. For this reason, in order to provide a decisive answer to them it is necessary to explain ambiguity, wherein a common expression is used for different things (*mushtarak lafzi*), and common meanings (*mushtarak ma'nawi*).

Ambiguity (*mushtarak lafzi*) occurs when a word is given several designations or is used to designate different meanings through multiple conventions,⁴ as 'spring' is used for a coil, a season, a fountain, and a leap. However, common meaning (*mushtarak ma'nawi*) occurs when an expression by a single convention designates a common aspect of numerous cases, and with a single meaning corresponds to all of them. The most important differences between ambiguity and common meaning are as follows:

1. Ambiguity requires numerous initial conventions, whereas common meaning requires no more than one initial convention.

2. Common meaning is true of a potentially infinite number of individuals or instances, whereas ambiguity is only true of a set number of meanings.

3. Common meaning is a single general meaning which is understood without a need for comparison, whereas ambiguity involves several meanings the determination of which requires determining indications [that fix the meaning].

Now, with regard to these distinctions, we shall resume our discussion of such expressions as 'man,' 'animal,' etc., to find whether each of these expressions can be understood as having a single meaning without need for a determining indication, or whether several meanings come to mind when one hears them and if there is no determining indication we remain puzzled about which of them the speaker meant.

Undoubtedly, we do not take Muhammad, 'Ali, Hasan and Husayn to be the meanings of the word 'man'; therefore, when we hear this expression we are not in doubt about the sense of this expression, asking which of these meanings it has. Rather we know that this expression has a single meaning which is common among these individuals and other men. Hence, it is not ambiguous.

Now let us see if this kind of expression has limited instances or whether it is true of an infinite number of individuals. It is obvious that the meaning of this expression does not accept any sort of limit on the number of its instances, but may be truly applied to infinite individuals.

Finally, we see that none of these expressions has an infinite number of designating conventions. No one is able to imagine in his mind an infinite number of individuals, while specifying an infinite number of

designating conventions for a single expression. On the other hand, we see that we ourselves can designate a single expression in such a way that it conforms to an infinite number of individuals. Hence, universals do not require an infinite number of designating conventions.

Consequently, universal terms are a kind of those which have common meaning, not of those which are ambiguous.

One may object that this explanation is not sufficient to explain the impossibility of numerous designating conventions, for it is possible that the one who designates may imagine one instance (and not an infinity of instances) in his mind, and designate an expression for all similar individuals.

We know that this person must imagine the meanings of 'all' and 'individual' and 'similar' in order to make such a convention. Hence the question returns to how these expressions are designated. How can they be applied to an infinite number of cases?

We have no choice but to posit that the mind has the ability to conceive concepts which apply to an unlimited number of cases. Hence it is not possible for such concepts to be designated one at a time for an infinite number of instances, for this is not feasible for any human.

A Response to a Doubt

Nominalists, in order to deny the reality of universal concepts, have raised the following doubt: every concept which occurs in a mind is a particular and specific concept which differs from concepts of the same kind which occur in other minds. Even if a person conceives the same concept at another time, it will be another concept.

So, how can it be said that universal concepts occur in the mind with the attributes of universality and unity? This doubt originates from confusion between the respect of conception and the respect of existence, in other words, confusion between the principles of logic and the principles of philosophy. We have no doubt that each concept, in so far as it exists, is particular, in philosophical language, "existence is equivalent to particularity."

When it is imagined again, it will have another existence, but its conceptual universality and singularity are not due to its existence but owing to its conceptual respect, that is, the same representative aspect in relation to various people and instances.

In other words, when our minds look at a concept from the point of view of its instrumental, mirroring capacity (and not independently) and examine its capacity for correspondence in various instances, the property of universality is abstracted from it. To the contrary, when its existence is considered in the mind, it is a case of particularity.

A Survey of Other Views

Those who imagine that a universal concept is a particular vague idea, and that general terms designate these same vague and pale forms [as though the particularity had been bleached out of them], will not be able to find the truth about universals. The best way to make clear their error is to draw attention to

concepts which either do not have any real instances in the external world at all, such as ‘non-existent’ or ‘impossible,’ or which do not have material or sensible instances, such as the concepts of God, angel, and the spirit, or which are conformable to both material and non-material instances, such as the concepts of cause and effect.

For with regard to these concepts it cannot be said that these are particular pale forms. Also, concerning concepts which are true of opposite things, such as the concept of color, which applies both to black and to white, it cannot be said that the color white has become so vague that it takes the absolute form of color and so is also true of black, or that the color black has become so weak and pale that it may also be truly applied to white.⁵

Platonists also have such difficulties, for most universal concepts, such as the concept of the non-existent and the impossible; do not have intelligible archetypes, so they cannot hold that the perception of universals is the observation of such intellectual and non-material truths.

Therefore, the correct position is that held by most of the Islamic philosophers and the rationalists, that man possesses a special cognitive faculty called the intellect, whose function is intellection of universal mental concepts, whether they have sensible instances or not.

¹. See Parviz Morewedge, *The Metaphysics of Avicenna (ibn Sina)* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 321f.

². In fact, while nominalism has attracted some positivists and their students, the official position of such logical positivists as Rudolf Carnap was that the entire debate about the existence of universals is meaningless. This claim was subsequently shown to be based on an inadequate theory of meaning. (Tr.)

³. The phenomenology of Edmund Husserl should be considered as being derived from this theory.

⁴. ‘Convention’ is used here in much the same way that Kripke uses ‘initial baptism’ for the social agreement by which a word is applied to a given kind of object. (Tr.)

⁵. The idea seems to be that particular vague ideas should group together things that are similar within the limits of the vagueness, as the concept of grey may be vague enough to allow for various shades. But concepts which apply to opposites do not function in this way, for black and white are not shades of color analogous to the shades of grey. Black and white are opposites, and not similar within some vague limits. (Tr.)

Lesson 15: Types of Universal Concepts

Types of Intelligibles

Universal concepts which are employed in the intellectual sciences¹ are divided into three groups: (1) whatish concepts or first intelligibles such as the concept of man and the concept of whiteness; (2) philosophical concepts or secondary philosophical intelligibles, such as the concept of cause and the concept of effect; and (3) logical concepts or secondary logical intelligibles, such as conversion ('aks mustawi) and contraposition ('aks naqidh).

We should remember that there are other types of universal concepts which are used in ethics and law, and later we shall refer to them.

This tripartite division which was originated by Islamic philosophers has many uses with which we shall become familiar in future discussions. Lack of precision in recognizing and distinguishing them from one another causes' confusion and many difficulties in philosophical discussions. Most of the lapses of Western philosophers are due to confusing these concepts, examples of which can be found in the words of Hegel and Kant. Therefore it is necessary to provide some explanations about them.

Universal concepts are either predicable of entified ('ayni) things, in which case, in technical terms, it is said that they have external characterization (ittisaf khariji), as the concept of man which is predicated of Hasan, Husayn, and so on, and it is said, "Hasan is a man," or, they are not predicable of entified things but only to concepts and mental forms, in which case they are technically said to have mental characterization (ittisaf dhini), such as the concepts universal and particular (in logical terms), the first of which is an attribute of 'the concept man' and the second of which is an attribute of 'the mental form of Hasan'.

The [concepts of the] second group which are applied only to mental things are called 'logical concepts' or 'secondary logical intelligibles'.

Concepts which are predicated of external things are divided into two groups: one group is of those concepts which the mind acquires automatically from specific cases, that is to say, when one or several individual perceptions are obtained by means of the external senses or internal intuitions, immediately the intellect acquires a universal concept of them, such as the universal concept of 'whiteness', which is acquired after seeing one or several white things, or the universal concept of 'fear', which is acquired after the appearance of specific feelings once or several times. Such concepts are called whatish concepts or first intelligibles.

There is another group of concepts whose abstraction requires mental effort and comparison of things with one another, such as the concepts of cause and effect, which is abstracted by attending to the relevant relation after comparing two things such that the existence of one depends on the other.

For example, when we compare fire with the heat which comes from it, we notice the dependence of the

heat on the fire. The intellect abstracts the concept of cause from the fire and the concept of effect from the heat. If there were no attention and comparison, these kinds of concepts would never be obtained.

If fire were seen thousands of times, and in the same way if heat were felt thousands of times, but no comparison were made between them, but the appearance of one from the other were not noticed, the concepts of cause and effect would never be obtained. These kinds of concepts are called 'philosophical concepts' or 'secondary philosophical intelligibles,' and in technical terms it is said:

The occurrence ('arudh) and characterization (ittisaf) of first intelligibles are both external.²

The occurrence ('arudh) is mental but the characterization (ittisaf) is external for secondary philosophical intelligibles. The occurrence ('arudh) and characterization (ittisaf) of secondary logical intelligibles are both mental.

The definitions and applications of the expressions 'mental occurrence' and 'external occurrence' and likewise the designations 'philosophical concepts' and 'secondary intelligibles' are controversial. We consider these only as technical terms and justify them as was mentioned.

Characteristics of Each of the Types of Intelligibles

a. The characteristic of logical concepts is that they apply only to mental concepts and forms, and consequently they are completely recognized with a little attention. All the basic concepts of logic are of this group.

b. The characteristic of whatish concepts is that they describe the whatnesses of things and specify the limits of their existence and are like empty frameworks for existents, and therefore they may be defined as conceptual frameworks. These concepts are employed in various true sciences.

c. The characteristic of philosophical concepts is that they are not obtained without comparison and intellectual analysis. When they are applied to existents they describe types of existents (not their whatish limits), such as the concept of cause, which corresponds to fire but never specifies its specific essence, but describes the kind of relation it has with fire, which is the relation of having an effect, a relation which also exists among other things.

Sometimes this characteristic is interpreted in such a way that philosophical concepts have no entified referents, or their occurrence is mental, although this interpretation is controversial and requires justification and explication. All pure philosophical concepts are of this group.

d. Another characteristic of philosophical concepts is that there are no particular concepts or ideas for them. For example, it is not the case that in our minds there is a particular form of causality and a universal concept, and likewise for the concept of effect, and other philosophical concepts.

On the other hand, every universal concept for which there is a sensory, imaginary, or prehensive (wahmi) idea, such that the difference between them is only in universality and particularity, then it will be a whatish concept, not a philosophical concept. It is to be noted that the opposite of this characteristic does not generally hold of whatish concepts that is, it is not the case that for every whatish concept there is a sensory, imaginary or prehensive form.

For example, the concept 'soul' is a species concept and a whatish concept, there is no particular mental form of it, and its instance can only be intuited by presentational knowledge.

Respectival (I'tibari) Concepts

The term i'tibari (respectival), which frequently encountered in philosophical discussions, is employed with various meanings and is really equivocal. One must take care to distinguish among its meanings so as not to confuse them or make mistakes.

In one sense, all secondary intelligibles, whether logical or philosophical, are called i'tibari, and even the concept of existence is counted as i'tibari. This term is used extensively by Shaykh al-Ishraq, and in various books of his he uses 'intellectual i'tibari' with this meaning.

Another sense of i'tibari is specified for legal and ethical concepts, which in the language of recent scholars are called 'value concepts'. In a third sense, only concepts which have no external or mental instances and which are constructed with the help of the faculty of imagination are called i'tibari, such as the concept of a ghoul.

These concepts are also called 'fantastic'. I'tibari also has another sense to be contrasted with fundamentality (asalat) which is employed in discussions of the fundamentality of existence (asalat wujud) or fundamentality of whatness (asalat mahuwiyat), and which will be mentioned in its proper place.

Here it is appropriate to explain i'tibari in the sense of value, although detailed discussion of the subject must be sought in the philosophy of ethics or the philosophy of law. We shall provide here only a brief explanation as is appropriate.

Ethical and Legal Concepts

Every ethical or legal topic which we consider consists of concepts such as ought and ought not, is required and is prohibited, and the like, which may be the predicates of propositions. Likewise other concepts, such as justice and injustice, trustworthiness and treachery can be the subjects of propositions.

When we consider these concepts we see that they are not whatish concepts, for they have no entified ('ayni) instances, hence they are called i'tibari. For example, the concepts of thief or usurper happen to

be attributes of people, but not because they pertain to the quiddity of a person, but because the person has taken someone's property.

When we consider the concept of property, we see that even if it is applied to gold and silver, it is not because they are metals of a specific kind, but because they are desired by people and they can be a means for meeting their needs.

From another perspective, the acquisition of property by a person is the sign of another concept called 'possession' which also has no external instance, that is, to credit (i'tibar) someone with the title 'possessor' and to credit the gold with the title 'possession' does not change the essence of the person nor the essence of the gold. In conclusion, expressions of this kind have special features which must be discussed from several different perspectives.

One of these perspectives is linguistic and literary, that is, for what meaning was the term originally coined, and how has the meaning changed to have acquired its present form? Is the application of this meaning literal or figurative? Likewise one may discuss prescriptive and descriptive terms, and what the purport of prescription is, and whether ethical and legal terms refer to prescriptions or descriptions.

Discussions of this kind are related to branches of linguistics and literature, and scholars of the science of the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (usul al-fiqh) also have made a great many researches and investigations into these matters.

Another aspect of discussions about these concepts is related to the ways in which these concepts are perceived, and the mechanism of transference of the mind from one concept to another, which must be examined in the psychology of mind.

Finally, another aspect of discussions about these concepts is related to their relations with objective realities, and whether these concepts have been invented by the mind and have no relation to external realities.

For example, are 'ought' and 'ought not' and other value concepts completely independent of other kinds of concepts which are constructed by means of a special mental power, or are they are merely descriptive of individual or social desires and inclinations, or are these concepts related to objective realities or somehow abstracted from them?

Are ethical and legal propositions descriptive? Do they have truth values? Can they be correct or in error? Are they prescriptive so that correctness and incorrectness are meaningless for them? In the case that truth values are imagined of them, what would be the criteria for truth and falsehood? By what standards may their truth and error be recognized? This part of the discussion is related to epistemology, and this is the area in which it must be explained.

Here we shall provide a brief explanation of the simple concepts of ethics and law, and in the final

portion of the discussion of epistemology we shall deal with the evaluation of value propositions, and at the same time we shall indicate the difference between ethical and legal propositions.

Ought and Ought Not

The words 'ought' and 'ought not' which are used for cases of commands and prohibitions, in some languages are expressed by a single particle (as in Arabic, in which the letter lam indicates the command form and the word la indicates prohibition).

In every language about which we have information, we may replace the command and prohibition forms, such as 'You ought to say it' replaces 'Say it', and 'You ought not to say it' replaces 'Do not say it'. However, sometimes they are used in the form of independent concepts with the meaning of 'obligation' and 'prohibition', as when we employ the descriptive sentence, 'It is obligatory for you to say it' instead of the prescriptive expression, 'Say it.'

These rhetorical devices exist in many languages, but they cannot be considered as the key to solving philosophical problems. One cannot define legal expressions as those which are prescriptive, for, as has been mentioned, in place of prescriptive statements one may use descriptive sentences.

The expression 'ought', whether expressed as a particle or as an independent noun, and also equivalent expressions such as 'obligatory' and 'necessary', which are sometimes used in propositions which by no means express values, such as when a teacher in a laboratory says to a student, "You ought to mix sodium with chlorine to make salt," or when a physician tells a patient, "You ought to take this medicine until you become well."

Undoubtedly, the purport of such expressions is nothing but the exhibition of the relation between the production of a chemical substance and the action and reaction, or cause and effect, during the combining of two elements, or between taking some medicine and recovering.

In philosophical terms the 'ought' in these cases expresses the deductive necessity between the reason and its result or cause and effect, that is to say, if a specific event (cause) does not occur, its result (effect) will not occur.

When these expressions are used as legal or ethical terms, they gain an evaluative aspect. Here, various views are presented about them, one of which is that the purport of such terms is to express individual or social desires and their objects regarding an action. If it is expressed in the form of a descriptive sentence, it will have no other meaning than desirability.

The correct view is this that such terms do not directly indicate the object of desire but rather the value and the object of desire of an action is understood by a conditional indication. The main purport is the very expression of the relation of causality which exists between the action and the goal of ethics or law.

For example, when a lawyer says, 'The criminal must be punished,' even though the aim of this action is not mentioned, in reality he wants to present the relation between punishment and the goal or one of the goals of the law, that is, security for the society.

Likewise, when a moral trainer says, "A loan ought to be repaid to the creditor," he really wants to describe the relation between this action and the goal of morality, such as the ultimate perfection of man, or eternal felicity.

For the same reason, if we ask a lawyer, "Why ought criminals to be punished?", the answer would be, "Because if criminals were not punished, chaos and anarchy would be imposed on the society." Also, if we asked a moral trainer, "Why ought loans to be repaid to their creditors?", an answer will be given appropriate to the standards accepted in ethical philosophy.

Therefore, the kind of concept of ought and moral and legal obligation is also that of the secondary philosophical intelligibles. If it is possible for other meanings to be included, or if they may be used in another way, it will be in a kind of figure of speech.

Legal and Ethical Subjects

As was mentioned, another group of concepts are used in legal and ethical propositions which include the subjects of these propositions, such as justice and injustice, ownership and marriage. There are also discussions from the point of view of lexicography and etymology, about these concepts and the changes in literal and figurative meanings, which are related to literature and linguistics.

In brief, it can be said that most of them are borrowed from whatish and philosophical concepts and used with conventional meanings in accord with the practical needs of man in individual and social contexts. For example, for the sake of controlling desires and putting limits on behavior, in general, limits are assigned the violation of which is called injustice and despotism.

The opposite is called justice and fairness, as with respect to the necessity of limiting man's domination over property acquired in a special way; contractual domination over some pieces of property are considered as ownership.

What is noteworthy from the epistemological point of view is whether these concepts are only based on the desires of groups or individuals and have no relation to objective truth independent of the inclinations of social groups and individuals.

Consequently, either these concepts are not susceptible to intellectual analysis, or one can search for a basis for them among objective truths and external realities, and they can be analyzed and explained on the basis of cause and effect.

In this context the correct view is this. These concepts, although they are conventional and respectful in

a specific sense, they are not generally without relation to external reality and outside the realm of the law of cause and effect. Their validity is based on the recognized needs of man to attain felicity and his own perfection.

This recognition, as in other cases, sometimes is correct and corresponds with reality, and sometimes is in error and opposed to reality. Possibly, one may put forth legislation for his own personal interests, and may even impose it on a society by force.

However, even then, it cannot be considered as being done capriciously and without standard. It is for the same reason these things can be examined critically, and some conventions may be confirmed and some may be rejected. For each of them reasons and arguments can be given. If this legislation were merely an expression of personal inclinations, like a matter of individual taste in the choice of the color of one's clothing, it would never have been worthy of praise or blame. Approval and disapproval would otherwise have no meaning but agreement or disagreement in taste.

Consequently, the worth of these concepts, although dependent on convention and contract, is considered as a symbol of objectively true relations between man's actions and their results, relations which must be discovered in the behavior of man. In truth, these contractual and conventional concepts are grounded on existential relations and true welfare.

[1.](#) The intellectual sciences ('ulum 'aqli), derived from reason, are contrasted with the transmitted sciences ('ulum naqli), the revealed or literally, narrated sciences. (Tr.)

[2.](#) Mohaghegh and Izutsu translate 'aru' as 'occurrence' and ittisaf as 'qualification', in *The Metaphysics of Sabzavari* (Tehran: Iran University Press, 1983), p. 67. Both concepts pertain to the relation between the concept and the object to which it applies, but 'aru' refers to the application of the predicate concept to the object, a relational property of the predicate concept, while ittisaf refers to the qualification of the object by the concept. Any translation of these terms is bound to be artificial, but as a memory aid the ittisaf will be called the characterization and the 'aru' will be called the occurrence, indicating that the former pertains to the character of the object while the latter to the manner in which the predicate concept occurs to one who applies it to the object, in keeping with the author's explanation.

Lesson 16: Empiricism

Positivism

In the previous lessons we briefly mentioned the kinds of ideas while at the same time introducing opposing opinions held concerning them. Here we explain more fully some of the famous noteworthy positions to be found in Western sources.

We know that most of the thinkers of the West basically deny the existence of universal ideas, and so naturally they do not accept the power, by means of which these ideas are perceived, called the

'intellect'. In the present age, positivists have not only developed the same taste, but also have gone beyond it.

They hold that true perception is limited to sense perception, to perception which is obtained as a result of contact with the sense organs by material phenomena, and which, following the cessation of the relation with the external world, remain in some weaker form.

They believe that man constructs verbal symbols for objects of perception which are similar to one another and that when he speaks or thinks, he brings to mind all cases of the same kind, or he repeats the same verbal symbols which were posited for those cases. And in reality, thinking is a kind of mental speaking.

Hence, those which philosophers call universal ideas or intelligible concepts, in their view, are nothing but those same mental words. Only when these words directly represent objects of sense perception, and their instances can be perceived by the sense organs, and can be shown to others, are they considered as meaningful and verifiable, otherwise they are considered words without meaning.

In truth, they only accept a portion of the whatish concepts, and these only as mental words whose meanings are their particular sensory instances. However, they do not accept the secondary intelligibles, especially metaphysical concepts, not even as meaningful mental words. On this basis, they consider metaphysical topics as unscientific and absolutely meaningless.

They limit experience to sensual experience, and do not pay attention to inner experiences which are acquired through knowledge by presence. At least they are considered unscientific because in their view, the word "scientific" is only applicable to cases which can be proven for others by the senses.

In this way, positivists consider discussion of instincts and motives and other psychological matters which are perceived by inner experience as unscientific. Only external behavior is held as the subject of psychology fit for scientific discussion. Consequently, they void psychology of its content.

According to this philosophy, which can be called "empiricism" or "extreme empiricism", there is no place for scientific discussion and research which could result in certainty about metaphysical topics. They consider all philosophical topics to be nonsense and worthless. Perhaps philosophy has never faced such a hard headed enemy. Therefore, we had better discuss it more fully.

A Critique of Positivism

Positivism, which is truly one of the basest tendencies of human thought in all history, has numerous failures, the most important of which will be indicated below:

1. With this tendency, the most firm foundations of knowledge, that is, knowledge by presence and propositions evident by reason ('aql), are lost. With this loss no intellectual explanation can be presented

for the correctness of knowledge and its correspondence to reality.

Positivists have tried to define true knowledge in another way. Truth is held to be knowledge which is accepted by others, which can be proved by sensory experience. Obviously, the change in terminology does not solve the problem of the value of knowledge. The agreement and acceptance of those who do not attend to this difficulty cannot create any value and worth.

2. Positivists rely on sense perception, which is the most unstable and dubious basis for knowledge. Sensory knowledge, more than any other type of knowledge, is exposed to error.

Noting the point that sensory knowledge, in reality, occurs inside of man, they have closed off the way to logical proof of the external world. There is no way for them to answer the doubts of the Idealists.

3. The difficulties which we mentioned with regard to the nominalists also apply to the positivists.

4. To claim that metaphysical concepts are meaningless is absurd and obviously invalid, for if words which refer to these concepts were generally devoid of meaning there would be no difference between them and nonsense, and the denial and affirmation of them would be equivalent. For example, that fire is the cause of heat could never be equivalent to its opposite. Even if one denies causality, he denies a proposition whose concepts he understands.

5. According to the positivists, there is no way for scientific laws to be regarded as universal, definite and necessary, for these characteristics do not admit of confirmation by the senses.

Cases are acceptable to them if and only if they are cases in which sensory experience is obtained (without paying heed to difficulties which arise due to the fallibility of sense perception which applies to all cases of it). That whereof sensory experience cannot be obtained, one must be silent, and one must absolutely withhold one's affirmation and denial.

6. The most important dead end down which positivists have been led is the subject of mathematics, which is explained and solved by intellectual concepts, that is, the same concepts which are meaningless in their view, as though they had been disgraced, while no sage would dare to consider the propositions of mathematics meaningless or unscientific.

Hence, a group of new positivists had no choice but to accept a kind of mental knowledge for logical concepts, and have sought to join mathematical concepts to them. This is an example of confusing logical concepts with other concepts.

It is sufficient to show the invalidity of their view to point out that mathematical concepts have instances in the external world, i.e., in technical terms, their characterization (ittisaf) is in the external world. The characteristic of logical concepts is that they do not correspond to any but mental concepts.

The Priority of Sensation or Intellect

Among Western scholars there are other forms of empiricism than positivism, which are more moderate and less fraught with difficulties. Most of them accept intellectual perception, but they still believe in some kind of priority for sense perception. Opposing them, there are other groups which believe in the priority of intellectual perception.

The subjects which are presented under the heading of 'the priority of sensation or intellect' are divided into two groups: one group is related to the evaluation of sensory and intellectual knowledge, and the preference of one over the other, and must be discussed in the lesson on the value of knowledge; the other group relates to their relative dependence or independence from one another.

Are sensation and intellect separate and independent, or is intellectual perception integrally related to sensation? The second group of subjects may also be divided into two parts: one is related to ideas and the other to affirmations. The first subject which is discussed here is the priority of sensation or intellect with respect to ideas.

In our view, after accepting the specific form of concepts, called universals, and accepting a special conceptual power called the intellect ('aql), this question presents itself: is the function of the intellect merely to change the form and to abstract and generalize sense perceptions, or does the intellect have independent perception, such that sensory perception at most can serve in some cases as a condition for intellectual perception?

Those who believe in the priority of sensation hold that the intellect has no function other than abstraction, generalization, and changing the form of sensory perceptions, in other words, there is no intellectual perception which does not follow upon sensory perception. Opposed to them, the Western rationalists believe that the intellect has independent perceptions which necessarily result from its existence, in other words, it is innate.

The intellect does not require any previous perceptions in order to have these intellectual perceptions. However, the correct view is that the intellectual perceptions of ideas which are universal concepts are always preceded by other particular individual perceptions. Sometimes that particular perception is an idea which results from sensation. Sometimes it is presentational knowledge which is basically not a kind of idea. In any case, the function of the intellect is not to change the form of sensory perceptions.

The second discussion is about the priority of sensation or intellect with respect to affirmations (tasdiqat). This must be considered as an independent subject which is not a function of the previous subject, for this subject turns on the question of whether after obtaining simple intellectual concepts, they follow upon sensation or are independent of sensation.

Is the judgment of unity between subject and predicate in a predicative proposition, or the judgment of

accord or opposition of the antecedent and consequent in a conditional proposition, always dependent upon sensory experience? Or can the intellect, after obtaining the necessary imaginative concepts, judge independently, without need of help from sensory experience?

Therefore it is not true that one who believes in the priority of sensation with respect to ideas necessarily has the same view with respect to affirmations. Rather, it is possible for one to believe in the priority of sensation in the one case, but to believe in the priority of the intellect in the other.

Those who believe in the priority of sensation with respect to affirmations, who are usually called 'empiricists', believe that the intellect cannot make judgments without the help of sensory experience. Those who believe in the priority of the intellect with respect to affirmations, believe that the intellect has certain assertive perceptions perceived by the intellect independently and without need of sensory experience.

Western rationalists usually consider these perceptions to be inherent in the intellect. They believe that the intellect was created in such a way that it understands these propositions automatically. However, the correct view is that independent intellectual affirmations either originate from presentational knowledge or are obtained through the analysis of concepts of ideas and by comparing their relations with one another.

It is only by extending the meaning of "experience" to include knowledge by presence, internal intuitions (shuhud-e batini) and psychological experiences that one can consider all intellectual affirmations to require experience. In any case, intellectual affirmations do not always require sensory experience or the employment of the sense organs.

The result is that neither the opinions of the empiricists nor the rationalists, whether with respect to ideas or affirmations, are exclusively correct. The correct view regarding each case is a certain sense of the priority of the intellect. In the case of ideas, it means that intellectual concepts are not the same as the changed forms of sensory ideas. In the case of affirmations, it means that the intellect does not require sensory experience to make its own specific judgments.

Lesson 17: The Role of the Intellect and Sensation in Ideas

The Fundamentality of the Intellect or Sensation for Ideas

As we have mentioned, Western philosophers may be divided into two groups with regard to the explanation of the appearance of ideas.

One group believes that the intellect perceives a series of concepts without need for sensation, like Descartes believed with regard to the concepts of God and soul, from among the immaterial things, and length and shape from among the material things. He calls these kinds of qualities of materials which are not perceived directly from sensation 'primary qualities'.

To the contrary, he called qualities such as color, smell and taste, which are perceived by sensation 'secondary qualities'. In this way he believed in a kind of priority of the intellect. He considered the perception of secondary qualities which are obtained by means of the senses to be fallible and unreliable. In this way, he proved another kind of priority of the intellect, which is related to the discussion of the value of knowledge.

Likewise, Kant related a series of concepts called 'a priori' to the mind. From among them he related the concepts of space and time to the levels of sensation, and he related the twelve categories to the level of understanding. He considered the understanding of these concepts to be essential innate qualities of the mind.

The other group believes that the mind of man is created like a blank slate, with no engraving on it, and that contact with external existents by means of the sense organs causes the appearance of images and engravings on it. In this way various perceptions occur. Epicures are reported to have said, "There is nothing in the intellect unless it has previously been in sensation." The very same phrase was repeated by John Locke, the English empiricist.

However, their statements about the appearance of intellectual concepts differ. The apparent meaning of some of them is that sensory perceptions are changed in shape and transformed to intellectual perceptions by the intellect, just as a carpenter cuts pieces of wood to make them into various shapes and build a table, chair, door or window.

So, intellectual concepts are the very sensory forms whose shapes have been changed. The statements of some others may be interpreted to mean that sensory perceptions provide the grounds and capital for intellectual perceptions, although this is not to say that sensory forms are really changed to intellectual concepts.

The Table of the Categories

Judgment	Category	Example
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	Universal	Unity	All men are mortal.
Quantity	Particular	Plurality	Some men are philosophers.
	Singular	Totality	Socrates was a sage.
Quality	Affirmative	Reality	Man is mortal.
	Negative	Negation	The spirit is not mortal.
	Infinite	Limitation	The spirit is non-material.
Relation	Categorical	Of inherence and subsistence	God is just.
	Hypothetical	Of causality and dependence	If God is just to people, He will give rewards and punishments.
	Disjunctive	Of community	Byzantium was the greatest nation of ancient Europe.
	Problematical	Possibility—Impossibility	Some planets may have living things on them.
Modality	Assertorical	Existence— Nonexistence	The earth is round.
	Apodeictical	Necessity— Contingency	God is necessarily just.

We mentioned previously that extreme empiricist, such as the positivists, basically deny the existence of intellectual concepts, and they interpret them as forms of mental words.

Some empiricists, such as the French Condiac, limit experiences which cause the appearance of mental concepts to sense experience. Others, such as the English John Locke, extend them to inner experiences. Among them Berkeley has an exceptional position, and he limits experiences to inner experience, for he denies the existence of material things. On this basis, sensory experience is not possible.

We must add that most empiricists, especially those who accept internal experiences, do not limit the realm of knowledge to the material, and they prove metaphysical matters by the intellect. Although, according to the doctrine of the fundamentality of sensation, and the complete dependence of mental conceptions on sensory conception, such belief is not very logical. The denial of metaphysics is also without reason. Because of this, Hume, who had noticed this point, considered cases which cannot be directly experienced as dubious.

It is clear that extensive detailed criticism of both tendencies would require a separate and weighty text, so that the statements of each thinker could be reported and examined, but this work is not appropriate in this book. Hence, it suffices to briefly criticize their basic ideas without regard to the particular features of each position.

Critique

1. It is not acceptable to assume that from the beginning of its existence the intellect has specific concepts, and that it is mixed with them, or that after a while it understands them automatically and without the effect of any other factor. The conscience of every aware human being denies this, whether the assumed concepts are related to the material or related to the abstract, or whether it accords with

both areas.

2. Supposing that a series of concepts are necessary for the nature and constitution of the intellect, it cannot be proved that they represent reality, and at most it can be said that a certain subject is accepted by the nature of the intellect, and it is probable that if the intellect had been created in another form, it would have perceived objects in other ways.

To compensate for this deficiency, Descartes grasped hold of divine wisdom. He said that if God had placed these concepts in the nature of the intellect, contrary to reality and truth, he necessarily would have been a deceiver. However, it is clear that the attributes of Almighty God, and His lack of deception must be proved by intellectual reasons. But if intellectual perceptions are not correct the basis of this argument collapses. The guarantee of its correctness through this argument is circular.

3. Suppose that intellectual concepts came from a change in sensory forms. This would require that a form which changes and is transformed into an intellectual concept would not retain its original form, however, with the appearance of universal concepts in the mind; concomitantly and simultaneously we see that sensory and imaginary forms retain their own states. Moreover, it is only material existents which are apt to change, while perceptual forms are abstract, as will be proved in its proper place.

4. Most of the intellectual concepts, such as the concept of cause and effect, do not have sensory or imaginary forms at all, so they cannot be said to come from changes in sensory forms.

5. Suppose that sensory forms provide the stock and ground for intellectual concepts, and that they do not really change into them. Although this is less problematic and closer to the truth [than the previous supposition], and is acceptable with respect to some whatish concepts, nevertheless, it is not proper to limit the grounds of intellectual concepts to sensory perceptions.

For example, it cannot be said that philosophical concepts are obtained from abstraction and generalization of sensory perceptions, because, as has already been pointed out, there does not exist any sensory or imaginal perceptions equivalent to them.

[Inquiry into a Problem](#)

In order to become clear about the role of sense and intellect in ideas, we shall take a glance at the types of concepts and the way in which they appear.

When we open our eyes to the beautiful scenery of a garden, the different colors of the flowers and leaves attract our attention. Various perceptual forms are pictured in our minds. When we close our eyes, we no longer see the beautiful dazzling colors, and this is the same sensory perception which vanishes when the relation to the external world is cut. However, we can imagine the same flowers in our mind, and remember that beautiful scenery. This is imaginary perception.

In addition to sensory and imaginary forms which represent specific things, we also perceive a series of universal concepts which do not describe specific things, such as the concepts of green, red, yellow, purple, indigo, etc. Likewise the concept of color itself, which can be applied to various different colors, cannot be considered as the faded and vague form of one of them.

Obviously, if we had not seen the color of the leaves of trees and things of the same color, we could envisage neither imaginary forms nor intellectual concepts of them. So, one who is blind cannot imagine colors and one who has no sense of smell has no concept of the various fragrances. Because of this, it is said, "He who lacks a sense lacks a knowledge," that is, someone who lacks a sense is deprived of a kind of concept and awareness.

So undoubtedly, the appearance of this kind of universal concept depends on the occurrence of particular perceptions. But this does not mean that sensory perceptions are transformed into intellectual perceptions like wood into a chair, or material to energy, or like a specific kind of energy is transformed into another kind, for, as we have said, this kind of transformation requires that the initial state of the thing transformed does not remain while particular perceptions can remain after the appearance of the intellectual concepts.

Moreover, transformations are basically material, while perceptions are absolutely abstract, as will be proved in its proper place, God willing. Therefore, the role of the senses in the creation of this kind of universal concept is only that of a basis or necessary condition.

There is another group of concepts which has no relation to sensible things, but rather describe psychological states, states which are perceived with presentational knowledge and inner experience, such as the concepts of fear, affection, enmity, pleasure and pain.

Undoubtedly, if we did not have inner feelings, we could never perceive their universal concepts. So, a child cannot understand some adult forms of pleasure until after it reaches maturity, and prior to that it has no specific concept of them. Therefore, this group of concepts is also in need of prior individual perceptions, but not perceptions which are acquired with the help of sensory organs. Therefore, sensory experience has no role in the acquisition of this group of whatish concepts.

On the other hand, we have a series of concepts which have no instances in the external world, and only have instances in the mind, such as the concept "universal", which corresponds to other mental concepts, and there is nothing outside of the mind which can be called "universal" with the meaning of a concept applicable to numerous individuals.

It is clear that this kind of concept is not obtained by abstraction and generalization from sensory perceptions, although a kind of mental experience is needed, that is, until a series of intellectual concepts is acquired by the mind, we cannot discuss whether they are applicable to numerous individuals or not.

This is the very mental experience which we have indicated. That is, the mind of man has the power to be aware of concepts within itself, and to recognize them just as he does the objects of the external world, and has the power to abstract specific concepts from them. The instances of these abstracted concepts are the same as the primary concepts. This is why these kinds of concepts which are used in logic are called “secondary logical intelligibles”.

Finally, we arrive at another chain of intellectual concepts, which are used in philosophy, from which primary self-evident propositions are formed, and hence, these concepts have great importance. Various opinions have been presented with regard to the formation of these concepts, discussion of which would take too much time, but in the discussion of ontology we shall speak of the conditions for the formation of each of these relevant concepts.

Here we shall only present as much as is necessary. It is to be noted that these concepts, since they are applied to things in the external world, or in technical terms, their characterization (ittisaf) is external, they are like whatish concepts, but since they do not describe specific whatnesses, and in technical terms, their occurrence (‘arudh) is mental, they are like logical concepts. For this reason they are sometimes confused with these two other groups of concepts. This very mistake is made by the great thinkers, especially Western philosophers.

We have already learned that we recognize our own selves and our psychological states or mental forms and actions of the soul, such as our decisions, with presentational knowledge. We now add that man is able to compare each aspect of the self with the self itself, without paying any attention to the whatnesses of either of them, but by paying attention to their existential relations, and finding that the self can exist without any of them.

However, none of them could occur without the self. By attending to this relation it may be judged that each aspect of the soul requires the self, but the self does not require them, but is self-sufficient, needless and independent. On this basis, the mind abstracts the concept of cause from the self and the concept of effect from each of these mentioned aspects.

Clearly, sensory perceptions play no role in the formation of the concepts of need, independence, self-sufficiency, cause and effect. The abstraction of these concepts does not originate with the sensory perception of their instances. Even knowledge by presence and inner experience relating to each of them are not sufficient for the abstraction of the concepts related to them.

Rather, comparison between them is necessary, and the specific relation between them must be taken into consideration, and for this reason it is said that these concepts do not have objective equivalents, although their characterization (ittisaf) is external.

In conclusion, every intellectual concept requires a prior individual perception, a perception which provides the grounds for the abstraction of a concept of a species. This perception, in some cases, is a sensory perception, and in other cases is knowledge by presence and inner intuitions.

Therefore, the role of sensation in the formation of universal concepts is only that of providing the grounds for one group of whatish concepts. It is the intellect that plays the basic role in the formation of all universal concepts.

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' (halliyah basitah) whereas in other cases it is termed a 'compound question' (halliyah 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.)

Lesson 19: The Value of Knowledge

Return to the Original Problem

We know that the original problem of epistemology is whether man is able to discover the truth and obtain information about reality. If so, how? What is the criterion by which one can recognize the truth from incorrect thoughts which are contrary to reality? In other words, the main fundamental discussions of epistemology include the problem of ‘the value of knowledge’, and other problems are considered to be introductory or supplementary.

Since there are several kinds of knowledge, it is natural that the problem of the value of knowledge should also have different dimensions. But what is of special importance for philosophy is the evaluation of intellectual knowledge and the proof of the ability of the intellect to solve the problems of epistemology and other branches of philosophy.

We first explained the general types of knowledge, and we came to the conclusion that a sort of human knowledge is without intermediary and is knowledge by presence. In other words, it is finding reality itself. In this kind of knowledge error is impossible. But with regard to the fact that this knowledge by itself does not meet the scientific needs of man we discussed acquired knowledge and its types. We also made clear the role of the senses and the intellect in them.

Now it is time to return to the original problem and explain the value of acquired knowledge. As acquired knowledge, in the sense of the actual discovery of reality, is the same as affirmations and propositions, naturally, the evaluation of acquired knowledge is accomplished in their area. If ideas are mentioned it will be indirectly and as the components of propositions.

What is Truth?

A fundamental problem about the value of knowledge is how to prove that human knowledge corresponds to reality. This difficulty appears in case there is an intermediary between the knower and the known. Because of that, the knower is the one to whom knowledge is attributed, and the known is the one to which being known is attributed.

In other words, knowledge is other than that which is known, but in case there is no intermediary, and the knower finds the objective existence of the known, naturally such questions will not arise.

Therefore, knowledge which is capable of truth—that is, which corresponds to reality—and is capable of error—that is, which differs from reality—that very knowledge is acquired knowledge. And if truth is attributed to knowledge by presence, this is in the sense of a denial of the possibility of its being in error.

Meanwhile, the definition of truth, which is discussed under the topic of the value of knowledge, is known, that is, it is the correspondence of the form of knowledge with the reality which it describes.

However, there may be other definitions of truth, such as the definition of the pragmatists, "Truth is a thought which is useful in the practical life of man," or the definition of the relativists, "Truth is knowledge which is appropriate to a healthy perceptual apparatus," or a third definition, which says, "Truth is that upon which all people agree," or a fourth definition, which says, "Truth is knowledge which can be proved by sensory experience."

All of these are besides the point of the discussion, and avoid answering the original problem about the value of knowledge. They can be considered as signs of the inability of the definers to solve this problem.

Supposing that some of them are correctly justified, or they are considered as the definitions necessary for specific cases (even if the definition itself is not correct), that is, they are considered as specific signs of some truth, or they indicate some specific terminology, but in any case, it must be noted that none of these justifications are able to solve our original problem.

The question about the truth in the sense of knowledge which corresponds to reality is left unanswered, and requires a correct and clarifying answer.

Criteria for the Recognition of the Truth

The rationalists hold that the standard for recognizing the truth is 'the nature of the intellect' (fitrat-e 'aql). The propositions which are inferred correctly from self-evident propositions and which are really components of them are considered to be truth, while sensory and experiential propositions are considered valid to the extent that they are proved by the aid of intellectual arguments.

However, we do not see any explanation given by them of the correspondence of self-evident propositions and innate propositions (fitriyyat) with realities, except the one mentioned by Descartes, who resorted to the wisdom and honesty of God with respect to innate thoughts. The weakness of this is clear as was mentioned in the seventeenth lesson.

There is no doubt at all that the intellect, after imagining the subject and predicate of self-evident propositions, automatically and without need for experience, definitively judges their unity. Those who have raised doubts about this proposition either have not correctly imagined the subject and predicate or are affected with a kind of illness or scruples.

But our discussion pertains to the following: whether this so-called innate kind of understanding is requisite of the way in which man's intellect has been created, so that it would be possible for the intellect of another existent (for example, the intellect of a jinn) to understand the very same propositions but in another form, or if man's intellect were created in another way would it understand matters in a

different form, or whether these understandings correspond perfectly to reality and are representatives of things in themselves, and any other existent which also had an intellect would understand the same forms.

Plainly, what it means for intellectual knowledge to have real value and to be true is the latter, but its mere innateness (assuming that it is here interpreted in the correct way) does not prove the matter.

On the other hand, empiricists hold that the standard for the truth of knowledge is capability of being proved by means of experience, and some of them have added that it must be proved by practical experience.

However, it is clear that first of all this standard is only applicable to sensory things and cases which are susceptible to practical experience. Matters of logic and pure mathematics cannot be evaluated by this standard. Secondly, the results of sensory and practical experience must be understood by means of acquired knowledge. Exactly the same question will be repeated regarding what guarantees the correctness of acquired knowledge, and by what standard can its truth be distinguished.

[Inquiry into a Problem](#)

The main point of difficulty regarding acquired knowledge is how it can be determined when there is correspondence, while it is this very form of cognition and acquired knowledge that serves as the means of our relation to the external world.

Therefore, the key to this problem must be sought where we are able to have an overview of both the form of understanding and that which is concomitant with it and we can understand their correspondence by presence and without any other intermediary. Those are propositions of inner sense, which on the one hand we find by presence concomitant with cognition, for example, the very state of fear, and on the other hand, we perceive the mental form related to it directly.

Therefore, the propositions, “I am”, or “I am afraid”, or “I doubt”, are completely indubitable. So, these propositions (propositions of inner sense) are the first propositions whose value is hundred percent proven, and there is no way for them to be in error. To be sure, we must take care that these propositions are not mixed with mental interpretations, as was mentioned in lesson thirteen.

We find such an overview in the propositions of logic, which describe other mental forms and concepts. For although both the description and the object described are found in two levels of the mind, both levels are present to the self (i.e., the I who understands).

For example, this proposition, “The concept of man is a universal concept” is a proposition which describes the features of ‘the concept of man’, a concept which is present in the mind. We are able to distinguish these features by mental experience that is without using sensory organs or the intermediary of any other perceptual form.

We understand that this concept does not describe a specific individual, but is applicable to numerous individuals. So, the proposition “The concept of man is a universal concept” is true.

By this means the way is open for the recognition of two groups of propositions, but these are not sufficient for the cognition of all acquired knowledge. If we are able to obtain a guarantee of the correctness of primary self-evident propositions we would be completely successful, for in their rays we can recognize and evaluate theoretical propositions such as the sensory and experiential propositions.

For the sake of this task we must pay careful attention to the whatnesses of these propositions. On the one hand, we must examine the concepts employed in them and consider what kind of concepts they are, and how they are obtained. On the other hand, we must look at the relations among them and consider how the intellect is able to judge the unity of their subjects and predicates.

The first aspect has been made clear in lesson seventeen. We know that these propositions are formed of philosophical concepts, concepts which terminate in presentational knowledge. That is, the first group of philosophical concepts, such as ‘need’ and ‘independence’ and then ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ are abstracted from direct knowledge and inner sense. We find their correspondence with the source of their abstraction by presence. Some philosophical concepts also reduce to them.

The second aspect that is the qualities of judgment of unity between their subjects and predicates becomes clear with comparison between the subjects and predicates of these propositions with each other. This means that all of these propositions are analytical, the concept of whose predicates is obtained from the analysis of the concept of their subjects.

For example, in this proposition, “Every effect requires a cause”, when we analyze the concept of effect we arrive at the conclusion that an effect is an existent whose existence is based on another existent, that is, it needs another existent, which is called the cause. Therefore the concept of need for a cause is implicit in the concept of effect. Their unity is found by mental experience.

To the contrary, in the proposition “Every existent requires a cause,” because from the analysis of the concept of ‘existent’ the concept of ‘requires a cause’ is not obtained, we cannot consider it a self-evident proposition. But it is also not a true speculative proposition.

In this way it becomes clear that primary self-evidence also terminates in knowledge by presence, and so they find the way to the guarantee of their truth.

A problem may be raised, that if what we find by presentational knowledge is a specific effect, how can we generalize judgments regarding it to every effect and consider such a universal judgment to be self-evident?

The answer is that although we abstract the concept of effect from a specific phenomenon, like that of our own will, it is not for that reason a specific essence, and, for example, to be considered from among

the kinds of qualities of the soul, but it is because its existence is related to the existence of another.

So, everywhere this quality is found this judgment is also established. Of course, the confirmation of this quality for other cases requires intellectual proof. For this reason this proposition by itself cannot establish the requirement of material phenomena for a cause, unless an intellectual proof of their existential relationship can be provided.

God willing, we will explain their proofs in the lesson on cause and effect. With the same proposition we also can judge that everywhere there is an existential relationship, the terms and relation can be established, and so, the existence of the cause.

In conclusion, the secret of the infallibility of primary self-evident propositions is their dependence on knowledge by presence.

The Criteria of Truth and Falsity of Propositions

With our explanation about the standard of truth it became clear that self-evident propositions, such as primary self-evident propositions and propositions of inner sense have the value of certainty. The secret of their infallibility is that the correspondence between the knowledge and the object of the knowledge is proved through presentational knowledge.

Propositions which are not self-evident are to be evaluated by logical standards, that is, if a proposition is obtained according to the logical rules of inference, it is true; otherwise it will be incorrect.

Of course, it must be noted that the incorrectness of a reason does not always signify the incorrectness of the conclusion, for it is possible to prove something which is correct by using reasons which are incorrect. Therefore, the invalidity of an argument only provides a reason for lack of confidence in the conclusion, not a reason for its actual error.

It is possible that a doubt may be raised here. According to the definition of truth as knowledge which corresponds to reality, truth and error are to be found only with regard to propositions which may be compared to reality in the external world. Metaphysical propositions, however, do not have an external reality to which they could correspond. Hence, they cannot be considered as true or false, but it must be said that they are absurd and meaningless.

This doubt arises from the assumption that external objective reality is equivalent to material reality. In order to remove this doubt it is to be noted that, first of all, external objective reality is not limited to material reality, but also includes the abstract; furthermore, it will be proven in the appropriate place that the abstract participates in reality to a greater extent than does the material.

Secondly, the reality which is meant is that to which propositions must correspond, the absolute referent of propositions; and by the external world is meant that which is beyond the concepts about them, even

if that reality and referent is in the mind, or is psychological; and as we have explained, purely logical propositions describe other mental things.

The relationship between the level of the mind which is the place of the referents of these propositions and the level from which they are viewed is like the relationship between that which is outside the mind and the mind.

Therefore, the general criterion of the truth and falsity of propositions is their correspondence or lack of correspondence with the concepts beyond them, that is, the recognition of the truth and falsity of propositions of the empirical sciences is the comparison of them with the material reality to which they are related, for example, in order to discover the truth of the proposition,

“Iron expands when heated”, we heat iron in the external world, and observe the difference in its size, but logical propositions must be evaluated by means of other mental concepts which are related to them. In order to recognize the truth or falsity of philosophical propositions, one must consider the relation between the mind and its object, that is, their being correct is that their objective referents, whether material or abstract, must be such that the mind abstracts the concepts related to them.

This evaluation is accomplished directly in the case of propositions of inner sense, and for other propositions it is accomplished with one or more intermediaries, as was explained.

The Case Itself (Nafs al-Amr)

We come across this expression in the language of most philosophers that a certain matter corresponds to “the case itself”. Among these are ‘true propositions’ some of which do not have any instances for their subjects in the external world. If supposing an instance to be existent, the predicate applies to it, such a proposition will be true.

It is said that the criterion of truth for these propositions is their correspondence with the case itself, for not all their instances exist in the external world, so that we may evaluate the correspondence between the purport of the propositions with them, and say that they correspond to the external world.

Likewise with regard to propositions which are formed of secondary intelligibles, such as logical propositions and propositions which apply to judgments about nonexistent objects or impossible objects, it is said that the criterion for their truth is their correspondence to a thing in itself.

With regard to the meaning of this expression, there are several accounts which are either very artificial, such as the saying of some philosophers that the word ‘amr’ (case) is the world of the abstract, or they do not solve the problem, such as the saying that what is meant by ‘nafs al-amr’ is the thing itself, for the question is left unanswered that at last for the evaluation of these propositions, with what are they to be evaluated?

With the explanation of the truth and falsity of propositions it became clear that the meaning of nafs al-amr is something other than external reality, rather it is a container for the intellectual demonstration of reference which differs in various cases. In some cases it is a specific level of the mind, such as with regard to logical propositions.

In other cases it is the assumption of an external demonstration, such as the referent of the proposition of the impossibility of the unity of contradictories. In cases in which there is an accidental relation in the external world, such as when it is said, "The cause of the absence of the effect is the absence of the cause," it is established that the relation of causality in truth is between the existence of the cause and the existence of the effect, and accidentally it is also related to their absence.

Lesson 20: The Evaluation of Ethical and Legal Propositions

Features of Ethical and Legal Knowledge

Knowledge of ethics and law, sometimes called 'evaluative knowledge', has features which can be divided into two general groups. One group of features is related to specific imaginative concepts, from which legal and ethical terms are formed. This was discussed in Lesson Fifteen. The other group of features concerns the shape and form of evaluative terms.

Legal and ethical knowledge may thus be explained in two ways: one is in the form of prescriptions and commands and prohibitions, as is seen in many verses of the Noble Qur'an; and the other is in descriptive form, the form of propositions which have the logical forms of subjects and predicates or antecedent and consequent, which is employed in other verses and narrations.

We know that prescriptive expressions are not propositions and do not have truth values, so one should not ask whether they are true or false. If one does ask this question, the answer is neither one nor the other, but it is simply prescriptive.

Indeed, with respect to commands and prohibitions, it may be said that they potentially indicate the desirability of the object commanded for the one who commands, or the undesirability of the object of prohibition for the one who prohibits, and because of this potential indication, they may be said to be true or false.

If the object of command is really desired by the one who commands and the object of prohibitions is really detested by the one who issues the prohibition, the prescriptive expressions, according to what

they potentially indicate, are true, and otherwise they are false.

Some Western thinkers have imagined that the consistency of ethical and legal rules is based on command, prohibition, obligation and warning, in other words, that their essence is prescriptive. Therefore, ethical and legal knowledge is not considered to have truth value. Naturally, they believe that there is no standard for their truth or falsity, and that no criterion for recognizing their truth or error can be produced.

This idea is wrong. Without a doubt, ethical and legal rules can be expressed in the form of descriptive expressions and logical propositions without prescriptive meaning. In reality, to try to fit ethical and legal knowledge into the framework of prescriptive expressions is either to consider them to be a sort of mental diversion or to be solely for the sake of meeting certain educational goals.

The Criterion for the Truth and Falsity of Evaluative Propositions

Ethical and legal propositions are explained in two ways: the first way is by describing the application of specific rules in a certain system. For example, it is said, "Lying for the purpose of reconciliation is permitted in Islam," or "Cutting the hand of a thief in Islam is obligatory," and when a jurist or Muslim judge explains such precepts he does not need mention the ethical or legal system of Islam. Hence, the expression "according to Islam" is not usually employed.

The criterion for the truth and falsity of such propositions is their correspondence or non-correspondence to ethical and legal references and sources. The way of knowing them is to refer to sources related to the appropriate system. For example, the way of knowing the ethical and legal precepts of Islam is to refer to the Qur'an and Sunnah.

The second way to describe their real application and the 'case itself' of their purport is with regard to the universal principles of ethics and law, including natural law, without paying attention to whether it is valid or not in a specific system of values or accepted by a given society.

Consider for example the following ethical propositions: "Justice is good," or "One ought not to be cruel to anyone," and such legal propositions as, "Every human has a right to life," and "No one must be killed undeservingly." There are a variety of views about this subject, and especially in Western ethical and legal philosophy, it has become an arena of conflict.

A Review of the Most Famous Opinions

The most famous opinions on this matter are the following:

A. Some of the Western philosophers of ethics and law basically deny the fundamental and proven principles, especially the positivists, who consider discussion of them to be vain and meaningless, as they are metaphysical and unscientific thoughts.

Of course, as much is to be expected from the sympathizers of this school of so-called positivists, whose eyes are glued to the senses. With regard to other thinkers who have occasionally raised this kind of issue, it must be said that the origin of this idea is the change in legal and ethical values in different societies at different times, which has led them to believe in the relativity of ethics and law, and has led them to doubt or deny basic evaluative principles. The roots of such ideas may be found in explanations of the relativity of ethics and law.

B. Another group of philosophers considers evaluative propositions to express social values arising from the needs of people and their inner emotions, which change as they change; hence, they hold that ethical propositions are outside the realm of rational discussion based on certain, eternal and necessary principles. On this basis, the criteria for the truth and falsity of these propositions would be these same needs and inclinations which are the causes of their validity.

In reply, it must be said that undoubtedly all practical wisdom is related to the voluntary behavior of man, behavior originating from a kind of desire and inner inclination directed toward a specific goal and destination. On this basis, specific non-whatish concepts occur, and propositions are formed from them.

The role of practical wisdom, however, is to lead man as he is confronted with a choice among diverse desires and inclinations to the basic and lofty human goal, and it leads him toward happiness and desired perfection.

Such a way does not often correspond with the desires of most people, who are bound to their animal desires, to worldly fleeting material pleasures. Rather it forces them to adjust their instinctual animal desires and to close their eyes to material worldly pleasures.

Therefore, if by people's needs and inclinations we mean just individual and group needs, which are actually always in conflict and interfere with each other, and cause corruption and the decay of society, then this is something opposed to the basic goals of ethics and law.

If the meaning is the specific needs and lofty human inclinations which are latent in most people and are unactualized and dominated by animal desires and tendencies, this is not incompatible with constancy, eternity, universality and necessity. These kinds of propositions need not be dispelled from the realm of demonstrative knowledge. As the evaluative concepts, which are usually subjects of this kind of proposition, implicitly contain a sort of figure of speech, this does not mean that they are without any intellectual basis, as was shown in Lesson Fifteen.

C. The third view is that the principles of ethics and law stem from self-evident propositions of practical reason, and like the self-evident propositions of theoretical reason, they arise from the nature of the intellect, and are without need of proof or argument. The criterion for their truth and falsity is agreement and opposition to human conscience.

The roots of this view lie in the thoughts of the ancient Greek philosophers, and most Eastern and

Western philosophers have accepted it. Among them, Kant has emphasized it. Of all the views, it is the most dignified one and the one closest to the truth. But at the same time, it is open to subtle objections, some of which will be indicated.

1. On the surface, this view asserts the multiplicity of intellects and the separation of their percepts, which may be denied.
2. The difficulty which is related to innateness of percepts of the theoretical intellect also applies to this view.
3. The principles of ethics and law are imagined in this view to be without need of reasoning and justification. Even the most universal of them, the good of justice and the evil of injustice, are in need of proof, as will be indicated.

Inquiry about a Problem

In order to make the truth clear regarding this question, several brief introductory remarks will be mentioned. Their detailed explanation will be left for the philosophy of ethics and law.

1. Ethical and legal propositions are related to the voluntary behavior of man, behavior which is the means to obtain desired goals. Their value derives from the fact that they are means and instruments to those desired goals.
2. The goals man attempts to achieve are either to secure natural worldly needs, and satisfying animal desires, or for securing social welfare and the prevention of corruption and anarchy, or for the achievement of eternal felicity and spiritual perfection. The natural and animal goals are not the source of values for the primary movement toward them. Of themselves, they have no relation to ethics and law.

However, social interests, whether or not they conflict with individual interests and pleasures, are one of the sources from which value arises. Another source from which value arises is the view toward eternal happiness, for the sake of which one must cover one's eyes from some material and worldly desires.

Above all, as motivation for behavior, is the desire to reach human perfection, which, in the view of Islam, is to be close to God the Most High. Therefore, it can be said that value in all cases arises from putting aside one's desires for the sake of reaching higher desires.

3. Regarding the law, different goals have been presented, the most universal and most inclusive of which is securing social interests, which has various branches.

On the other hand, different ideals have been mentioned for ethics. Above all of them is the extreme perfection of being in the shadow of those close to God the Most High. If this goal is the motivation of man's behavior, either individually or socially, it will have ethical value. Therefore, behavior regarding the

law can also be included under the umbrella of ethics, on the condition that the motivation is ethical.

4. The mentioned goals have two aspects. One is their desirability for man such that it causes man to close his eyes to base desires. On this view, these goals are related to the innate desires of man to achieve happiness and perfection. This aspect is psychological.

It is subordinate to scientific and perceptual principles and knowledge. The other aspect is ontological (takwini), which is completely objective and independent of individual inclinations, desires, recognition and knowledge.

If an action is considered in relation to its desired goal, from the point of view of its desirability, the concept of value may be abstracted from it. If it is considered with respect to its ontological relation, with the consequences which result from it, the concepts of obligation and permissibility are obtained from it. In philosophical language, such obligation is interpreted as relative necessity (dharurat bil-qiyas).

Now, with regard to this introduction, we can come to the conclusion that the criterion of truth and falsity and correctness and error in ethical and legal propositions is their effect in achieving the desired goals. The effect which is not subordinate to one's: inclinations, desires, tastes and opinion.

Like other causal relations, it arises from the reality of the case itself. Of course, in recognizing the ultimate goal, and the intermediate goals, it is possible to make mistakes, so that, for example, someone on the basis of his materialistic outlook will limit man's goal to worldly luxuries. Likewise, it is possible to make mistakes in recognition of the ways in which a man achieves real goals.

But none of these mistakes are harmful to the causal relation between voluntary actions and their results, nor do they cause their exclusion from the realm of intellectual discussions and rational arguments. The errors of philosophers do not imply a denial of intellectual realities independent from opinion and thought. Controversies among scientists about the rules of experimental knowledge do not mean that there is no such knowledge to be gained.

In conclusion, the principles of ethics and law are philosophical propositions that can be proven by intellectual arguments, although the intellect of the common man in its subdivisions and particularities is deficient and is unable to deduce a judgment for every particular proposition from the universal principles because of the complexity of the formulas, the abundance of factors and variables, and due to lack of proficiency. In these cases, there is no alternative but to rely on revelation.

Therefore, it cannot be said that ethical and legal propositions depend on the inclinations, desires, tastes and opinions of individuals or groups, and hence that definitive and universal principles are not acceptable; nor can it be said that ethical and legal propositions depend on the needs and changing conditions of the time and place, and that rational proofs do not apply to them but only to universal, eternal and necessary propositions.

It is also wrong to claim that these propositions pertain to an intellect other than the theoretical intellect, and that therefore reasoning about them with philosophical premises related to the theoretical intellect is incorrect.

Answer to an Objection

An objection may be raised here on the grounds that this view contradicts the opinion of all the logicians, an opinion which is also accepted by the Islamic philosophers. In logic, it is mentioned that a dialectical argument (jadal) is composed of indemonstrable indisputable premises, but on the contrary, a proof (burhan) is composed of certain premises, and an example of an indemonstrable premise is, "Truth is good," which is an ethical proposition.

In response, it must be stated that the greatest logicians of Islam, Ibn Sina and Khwajah Nasir al-Din Tusi, have suggested that these propositions in this universal and absolute form, are considered indemonstrable, and may only be employed in dialectical arguments, not in proofs. They have hidden and special restrictions which are obtained from the relation between and actions and its desired result.

Hence, it is not correct to tell the truth when it leads to someone's murder. Therefore, if this kind of proposition in this absolute and universal form is applied in a syllogism on the basis of its general acceptance, the proposition will be dialectical.

However, it is possible that this same proposition may be transformed into a certain proposition by taking into account rational standards, subtle relations and hidden restrictions. For such propositions proofs may be constructed, and their conclusions may be used in other proofs.

Relativism in Ethics and Law

As was mentioned, most value propositions, especially legal propositions, have exceptions, and even the goodness of truth telling is not universal. On the other hand, sometimes a single subject really may be the locus of two topics to which conflicting judgments apply. In case the criteria utilized for them are equal, one is free to use either.

In case the importance of one of the criteria is preferred over another, one ought to defer to the more important criterion. In practice, the other is then mooted. Likewise, it is seen that some legal judgments have temporal restrictions, and after a while they are abrogated.

Attention to this point has brought about the idea of the absolute relativity of the value propositions, and the idea that they do not apply generally to all individuals at all times. Schools of thought with positivistic inclinations also consider differences in value systems in different societies and times to provide reason for relativism with respect to all value propositions.

But the truth is that this kind of relativism can be found in the laws of the empirical sciences, and the

universality of empirical laws is based on the satisfaction of conditions and the nonexistence of obstacles. From a philosophical point of view, these restrictions are due to the complexity of the causes of phenomena. With the lack of one of the conditions, the effect is also annulled.

Therefore, if the causes of ethical and legal judgments are precisely determined, and the conditions and restrictions of their subjects are completely accounted for, we will see that ethical and legal principles, in the limits of these standards and final causes, are general and absolute. In this respect, they are no different from the other scientific laws.

It must be mentioned that in this discussion other focus has been on the universal principles of ethics and law; but some particularities, such as traffic regulations and the like, fall outside the scope of this discussion.

[The Difference between Legal and Ethical Propositions](#)

Now that we have come to the end of this discussion, we had better mention the difference between legal and ethical propositions. Of course, there are numerous differences between these two groups of propositions which must be discussed in legal and ethical philosophy. Here we simply point out one of these differences which are more important and basic, the difference in their goals.

As we know, the basic goal of the law is the social happiness of the people in worldly life, which is determined by legal rules with the guarantee of government enforcement. However, the ultimate goal of ethics is eternal happiness and spiritual perfection, and its compass is wider than that of social conditions.

Hence, legal and ethical subjects overlap. A proposition, insofar as it is related to the social happiness of man supported by government is legal, and in so far as it affects the eternal happiness and spiritual perfection of man, it is ethical, such as the existence of repayment of loans and the prohibition against treason.

In such cases, if the observance of the rule is only motivated by fear of governmental punishment, it has no ethical value, even if it is in agreement with legal regulations. If the deed is motivated by a higher goal, which is an ethical goal, it will also be ethical.

It must be mentioned that these differences accord with a view which is accepted in ethics, and there are also other views, for information about which one must refer to books on ethics and the philosophy of law.

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