

Truth and its cognition have been important preoccupations of mankind throughout the course of history. Since time immemorial there have been many significant questions about the nature of reality that have engaged the minds of major thinkers from varying nations in the world.

For instance:

- Is there an independent reality beyond the human mind?
- If so, can that reality be conceived?
- If we suppose that man can gain an understanding of the reality, by what tools can he get to know that reality?
- How efficient is each of these tools?
- What are the sources of cognition?
- What are the criteria for distinguishing true cognition from false cognition?
- What obstacles can prevent man from correctly acquiring the truths of the world?

This timely textbook in Muslim philosophy attempts to answer these questions with special emphasis on the teachings of the Qur'an and narrations while also providing a comparative framework between the Islamic and Western philosophical traditions.

Saeid Sobhani is a Shi'i scholar and a distinguished lecturer in Islamic studies. He has written extensively on subjects such as jurisprudence, exegesis of the Qur'an, theology and philosophy.



Saeid Sobhani **Worldview and the Theory of Knowledge: An Islamic Perspective**

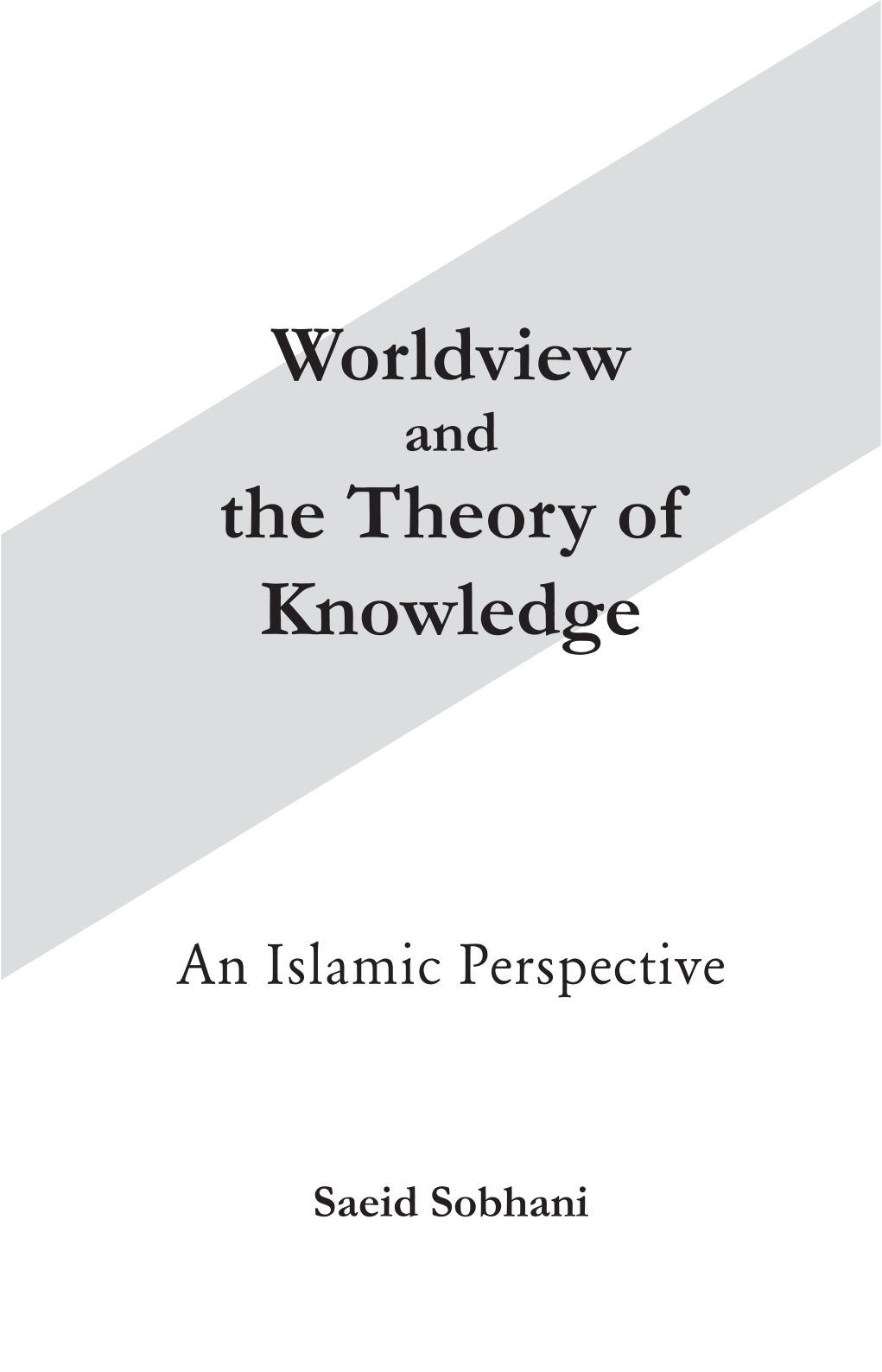


Worldview and the Theory of Knowledge

An Islamic Perspective

Saeid Sobhani





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Note on Transliteration of Arabic and Persian Words and Translations of the Qur'an

Throughout this work, a simplified version of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES) transliteration guide has been used. The Arabic letter 'ayn (ع) has been shown by a single opening quotation mark (‘), as in *Jum‘ah*. The sign of *hamzah* (ء) is represented by a single closing quotation mark (’), as in *Qur’an*. Initial *hamzah* is not marked, like *asbab*. The Arabic letter of *waw* (و) has been represented by (w), as in *wahy*, while the Persian letter *vav* (و) has been shown by (v), as in *ravish*. The *ta marbutah* (ة) at the end of words such as *al-Jumu‘at* is represented by the letter ‘h’.

All the Qur’anic verses are from Ali Quli Qara’i’s translation published by ICAS in London in 2005.

CONTENTS

About the author.....	II
Introduction	13
Lesson One: Religion, Worldview, Ideology and Cognition	17
Religion.....	18
Classification of Religions	19
Criteria for the True Religion.....	21
Definition of Religion	22
The Main Pillars of Religion (<i>Din</i>).....	25
The Constructive Role of Religious Rulings.....	27
Worldview	30
Sense-based Cognition and Cosmology	30
Ideology.....	32
The Difference between Worldview and Ideology.....	32
The Main Topics in a Worldview	33
Summary	34
Questions	34
Lesson Two: The Necessity of Religion for Human Beings	35
The Need for Religion	36
a) Religion from a Social Perspective.....	39
b) Guidance of Religion towards the lofty Goals of Creation.....	43
1. Limited Capacity of the Human Intellect	45
2. Uncertainty of Human Science	45
Summary	46
Questions.....	47
Lesson Three: Worldview, Ideology and Their	

Relationships	49
A) The First Perspective	51
Analysis of the First Perspective	53
B) The Second Perspective.....	56
C) The Third Perspective.....	56
The Relationship between a Worldview and an Ideology in the Qur'an	59
Summary	62
Questions	62
Lesson Four: Theistic Worldview.....	65
Similarities between Theistic and Materialistic Worldviews	66
a) Realism.....	67
b) Cause and Effect Relationships in All Phenomena	67
Distinctive Features of the Theistic Worldview	69
1. The Division of Existence into Material and Immaterial .. 69	
Characteristics of Material Beings	70
Characteristics of Immaterial Beings	70
2. Management and Plan in the Universe	71
3. Considering the Efficient Cause and Other Causes.....	74
Summary	76
Questions	77
Lesson five: Materialistic Worldview	79
Characteristics of the Materialistic Worldview.....	82
1. Being Is Equal to Material Nature	82
Analysis of This Theory	83
2. There Is No Scheme in Creation	85
Analysis of This Theory	86
3. The Sufficiency of Material Causes in Creation.....	87

Analysis of This Theory	87
Summary	89
Questions	89
Lesson Six: The History of Cognition	91
The Significance of Cognition in the Qur'an	97
The Importance of Epistemological Discussions.....	99
The Definition of Cognition	100
The Classification of Cognition	101
Knowledge by Presence and Acquired Knowledge.....	102
The Difference between Acquired Knowledge and Presential Knowledge	
104	
Summary	107
Questions	108
Lesson Seven: The Possibility of Knowledge.....	109
The Emergence of the School of Sophism.....	111
The Emergence of the School of Scepticism.....	114
Errors of Sense and Reason.....	114
Analysis of This Theory.....	117
The Possibility of Knowledge in the Qur'an.....	118
Summary	120
Questions.....	121
Lesson Eight: Cognitive Tools (Part One).....	123
1. The Senses.....	124
The Qur'an and Value of the Senses	125
Can the Senses Be the Only Tools of Cognition?.....	126
2. The Intellect	127
a) Analogy	128
The Epistemological Value of Analogy.....	129
b) Induction	130

The Epistemological Value of Induction.....	130
The Difference between Induction and Analogy	132
Summary	132
Questions	133
Lesson Nine: Cognitive Tools (Part Two).....	135
c) Experiment	136
What is Experiment?	137
The Epistemological Value of Experimentation and its Difference from Induction	139
d) Inference	140
e) Abstraction	141
f) Classification	142
3. The Heart (<i>Qalb</i>).....	143
The Qur'an and Inspiration (<i>kashf va shuhud</i>)	145
The Views of Scholars on Inspiration	147
The Superiority of Mystical Cognition.....	148
The Difference between Revelation and Inspiration	151
The Epistemological Value of Inspiration.....	153
Summary	154
Questions	154
Lesson Ten: The Sources of Knowledge.....	157
1. Nature (<i>tabi'at</i>).....	159
2. History	163
3. Instinct (<i>fitrah</i>).....	166
The Difference between Instinctive and non-Instinctive Affairs	167
4. The Qur'an	171
Summary	173
Questions	173
Lesson Eleven: The Stages of Cognition.....	175

1. Sensory Cognition.....	177
The Salient Features of Sensory Cognition	177
2. Rational Cognition (<i>Shinakht-i 'Aqli</i>)	179
Converting Sensory Cognition into Rational Cognition	179
A. Abstraction (<i>intiza'</i>) of General Conceptions.....	180
B. Abstraction of General Affirmation (<i>Tasdiq</i>).....	180
C. Phenomenon-mediated Cognition.....	181
Summary	188
Questions	189
Lesson Twelve: What is Truth?.....	191
The Definition of Truth	193
1. Correspondence with Reality	193
2. Social Acceptance	196
Analysis of This Theory	196
3. Usefulness to Man.....	198
Analysis of This Theory	199
4. Relativity.....	201
Analysis of This Theory	202
Summary	204
Questions	204
Lesson Thirteen: The Criterion for True Knowledge.....	207
1. Back to the Self-Evident.....	209
2. Test and Practice	211
Analysis of This View.....	212
3. Victory and Success	215
Analysis of This View.....	215
Summary	218
Questions	219
Lesson Fourteen: Barriers to Cognition (Part One).	

221

a) Barriers Related to Sensory Tools	223
b) Barriers Related to Non-sensory Tools.....	223
1. Practices That Hinder True Cognition.....	224
a) Following Desires	224
How Can Following Desires Act as a Barrier to Cognition?	226
b) Hypocritical Behaviour	227
How Can Hypocrisy Act as a Barrier to Cognition?	228
C. Blind Imitation	229
How Can Imitation Be a Barrier to Cognition?.....	230
Summary	231
Questions	232

Lesson Fifteen: Barriers to Cognition (Part Two)....

233

2. Actions That Darken the Intellect and Heart	234
a) Sin 235	
How Can Sins Act as a Barrier to Cognition?	236
b) Superficiality	237
3. External Factors	239
Misleading Propaganda	239
Summary	241
Questions	241

Lesson Sixteen: Barriers to Cognition (Part Three).

243

Fallacy (<i>Mughalitaḥ</i>)	244
Definition of Fallacy	245
Types of Fallacies.....	248
a) Lexical Fallacy	249
1. Fallacy Due to Homonymous Ambiguity (<i>Mushtarak-i</i>	

<i>Lafdi</i>)	249
2. Fallacy Due to Combinational Ambiguity	250
b) Structural Fallacies	250
1. Fallacy of Composition (<i>Su'-i Ta'lif</i>).....	251
2. <i>Petitio Principii</i> (<i>Musadirah bi Matlub</i>)	252
3. False Dilemma.....	253
Summary	253
Questions	254
Index	255
Bibliography	259

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Saeid Sobhani was born into a senior clerical family in the holy city of Qum in 1963. He completed his high school education while simultaneously undertaking spiritual and religious training under the guidance of his father, Grand Ayatollah Ja'far Sobhani.

For two decades, from 1982 to 2002, he attended the lectures of eminent scholars of Qum and mastered such disciplines as Arabic literature, logic, Islamic philosophy, exegesis of the Qur'an, History of Heterodoxy in Islam (*al-milal wa al-nihal*), the science of narrators and narrations (*'ilm al-rijal wa al-dirayah*), theology (*kalam*), Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and the principles of jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*).

He received his advanced seminary training under three senior Ayatollahs. He was a student of Grand Ayatollah Abdullah Javadi Amoli and attended his discourses on exegetical sciences and philosophy. He received his advanced training in jurisprudence under the late Grand Ayatollah Mirza Javad Tabrizi. He also attended classes offered by his father on principles of jurisprudence and theology. These three erudite scholars have played the most important role in

shaping his system of thought. In addition to pursuing his advanced training, he also taught in the most prominent universities and seminaries of Iran.

Having been immersed in the ocean of spirituality and knowledge of the holy city of Qum for two decades, Sobhani moved to the UK in 2002 to serve as a resident scholar as well as to pursue his advanced academic training in a Western context. He received his MA in Inter-Faith Relations from the University of Glasgow and his PhD in Philosophy of Religion from the University of Edinburgh.

His two-decade-long sojourn in the West has further amplified his understanding of Western academic tradition as well as Occidental cultural currents. He is currently serving as a senior lecturer at the Islamic College of Advanced Studies (ICAS) and the *Hawzah Ilmiyya* of England.

He has published a number of articles and books (in English, Farsi, and Arabic) on a wide array of subjects including theology, philosophy, jurisprudence, principles of jurisprudence, exegesis of the Qur'an, history, science of narrators and fundamentals of belief. His publications include *Rijal Studies: an Introduction* (2023), *Religious Diversity in Contemporary Shi'i Thought* (2022), and *Nayl al-Watar min Qa'idah la Darar* (The Jurisprudential Maxim of No Harm, 1999).

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary world is faced with different and contradicting ideologies. Some of these ideologies may have caused bitter divisions in society, class divisions, and possibly war and bloodshed throughout history. The question that always comes to mind is: what is the reason for the difference in ideologies? Why does one group defend a particular ideology while another group supports another ideology?

The answer is that the differences between ideologies are due to differences in worldviews. In other words, differences in worldviews lead to differences in ideologies. A worldview is an interpretation and analysis of existence, the world, man, society, and history. Ideologies then, are the offspring of worldviews.

This begs further questions: why are there different worldviews? Where do the differences in worldviews come from? Why does one group follow a materialistic worldview and the other group a theistic worldview?

The answer to these questions can be attributed to the point that these two groups have different understandings of the world. In other words, epistemological issues give rise to different worldviews.

This is why epistemological issues become particularly important and demonstrate that the root cause of differences in worldviews and, consequently, ideologies, are epistemological issues.

Furthermore, human beings have different attitudes towards the world of creation based on which they form their beliefs and convictions. These perspectives can be divided into three categories. Some people study the world solely from the perspective of modern empirical science and establish their worldview accordingly. Another group considers experimentation as an inadequate tool for acquiring knowledge of the world, and thus attempt to reach the truth about the world through the intellect and wisdom. The third group does not regard intellect and experimentation as sufficient tools; instead, they try to appreciate the reality of the world via the tool of revelation.

The sum of the beliefs and insights of each group forms their “worldview”. Truth and its cognition have been important preoccupations of man throughout the course of human history. There are many significant questions about reality that have engaged the minds of thinkers from the past. Some of them are as follow:

- Is there an independent reality beyond the human mind?
- If so, can that reality be conceived?
- If so, can we describe it to others?
- If we suppose that man can gain an understanding of the reality of the world, by what tools can he acquire that reality?
- How efficient is each of these tools?
- What are the sources of cognition?

- What are the criteria for distinguishing true cognition from false cognition?
- What obstacles can prevent man from correctly acquiring the truths of the world and thus lead him astray?

On one hand, a worldview forms the basis of man's intellectual thoughts, whereas his actions and behaviour, known as an ideology, are derived from his beliefs. On the other hand, our worldview is also dependent on our views on "cognition". Therefore, it is necessary to examine the different worldviews and identify their strengths and weaknesses. The issue of "cognition" and the various relevant theories must also be carefully considered.

This book is compiled under the title of "Worldview and the Theory of Knowledge" to undertake this important task. An attempt has been made to present the views of the Qur'an and narrations on the aforementioned topics in a structured and logical manner. Moreover, this humble work tries to examine the perspectives of other schools of thought and analyses them. Hence, this book consists of two parts. In the first part, it deals with the issues of worldview and ideology and their relationship, whilst the second part addresses the issues of epistemology.

I would like to finish this introduction with an interesting comment by Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916-2000). He says, "we are not so fond as to imagine that our treatment of the issue here raised is adequate", but we want to highlight the significance of these issues. It is true that not every book can reveal the "authors'

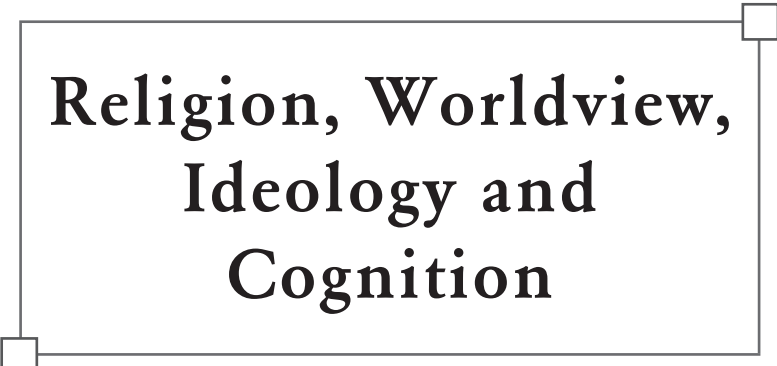
aspirations”.¹ However, I hope that this work provides intellectually acceptable answers. I do not claim that this book will fulfil all the expectations; however, I hope it will pave the way for further research.

I sincerely pray that all readers of this book are blessed with a greater understanding of the realities discussed here.

Saeid Sobhani

1. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton/ New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1975). v.vi.

LESSON ONE



Religion, Worldview, Ideology and Cognition

Religion, worldview, ideology and cognition are four closely intertwined concepts. The worldview of each school of thought forms its mental and intellectual foundation. The ideology of each school is derived from the worldview of the school. The basics of the worldview of every school depend on the issue of “cognition”. As you see, these four notions have a very close relationship with one another. To precisely understand this relation, it is necessary to define religion, worldview, ideology, and cognition.

RELIGION

From the Islamic point of view, prophethood is derived from the divine, general and universal grace of God. He has entrusted His exalted messengers with duties and commands, classified under the heading of religion, for the guidance of all mankind.¹ Although the beginnings of grand religions are “lost in the mists

1. See, *The Qur'an*, trans. Ali Quli Qara'i (London: ICAS, 2005). 16:36; 35:24.

of history,”¹ religion has been associated with human creation since Adam and Eve. The study of religions, as Fiona Bowie states, has been an important issue in “anthropology since its inception.”² In the course of human history, “there never has been a tribe of men without some form of religion.” The oldest monuments, such as Egypt’s pyramids and the Indian Vedic scriptures, prove the existence of religious beliefs and practices since ancient times.³

Religion, therefore, has been considered as part of mankind’s life since the dawn of creation. But what is religion? How can we classify religions? How and who made the religions of the world? What are the main parts of a religion and what is its function? The next section aims at discussing these questions.

CLASSIFICATION OF RELIGIONS

Western scholars have proposed many classifications of religions. Hans Küng, (1928-2021), for instance, classifies them according to their founders into three types: 1) mystic-centred religions, in which the “main

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1. William Montgomery Watt, *Religious Truth for Our Time* (Oxford: Oneworld Publication, 1995). 74.
 2. Fiona Bowie, “Anthropology of Religion” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. Robert A. Segal (Oxford/Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006). 3.
 3. Robert Ernest Hume, *The World’s Living Religions: An Historical Sketch with Special Reference to Their Sacred Scriptures and in Comparison with Christianity* (Edinburgh: T. & T Clark, 1959). 4; John B Noss, *Man’s Religions*, 7 ed. (New York/London: Macmillan Publishing Company & Collier Macmillan Publisher, 1968). 8.

figure” is “the mystic,” as in Hinduism and Buddhism; 2) wisdom-centred religions, in which the main figure is the “wise man”, as in Confucianism and Daoism; and 3) prophet-centred, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam.¹

-
1. Hans Küng, *Tracing the Way: Spiritual Dimensions of the World Religions*, trans. John Bowden (London/New York: Continuum, 2002). Xiii. Robert Ernest Hume proposes some other classifications. In his first classification, he distinguishes between dead and living religions. In another classification, he groups religions based on their geographical origins. Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism, he writes, emerged in Southern Asia; Confucianism, Taoism and Shinto appeared in Eastern Asia while Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam were born in West Asia. He also classifies religions according to the “date of their founders.” Another classification is done according to the number of followers of each religion. Another classification divides religions into universal and non-universal ones. Another classification is based on the religions’ notions of deity. Ernest also classifies religions on the bases of the “numbers of deities” worshiped in them. Finally, his eighth classification relies on the personality of the religions’ founders’. Robert Ernest Hume, *The World’s Living Religions : An Historical Sketch with Special Reference to their Sacred Scriptures and in Comparison with Christianity* (Edinburgh: T. & T Clark, 1959). 13-7. William P. Alston also refers to another classification of religions, namely, sacramental, prophetic and mystical. William P. Alston, “Religion,” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (London/New York: The Mackmillan Company/ the Free Press, 1967). 141. Kraemer divides religions into “Prophetic religions of revelation and naturalist religions of transempirical realization”. Hendrik Kraemer, *The*

Since revelation and prophecy play an essential role in Islamic theologies, Muslim theologians classify religions into two categories: revealed and non-revealed. Revealed religions are those that are rooted in the unseen world and whose teachings are based on revelation and divine commands. In these cases, the religion is not the production of its founder's thoughts and ideals; rather, he is the receiver of divine messages. These messengers, who are regarded as exalted and immaculate, having received the divine commands via revelation, convey them to the people without any alteration. Non-revealed religions are those that are not rooted in the unseen world. The founders of such religions neither consider themselves as prophets chosen by God nor claim that they convey His message.¹

CRITERIA FOR THE TRUE RELIGION

The instructions and guidance that is conveyed to humankind as divine messages by God's messengers is called religion. In other words, the reformers who consider themselves as God's selected messengers and deliver His words intact to the people, are the divine prophets of religion. On the other hand, reformers who consider themselves to be inspired by their intellect, are benevolent individuals whose instructions are human messages. The difference between divine and

Christian Message in a Non-Christian World (London: James Clarke/Company LTD, 1961). 142.

1. 'Abdullah Javadi, *Din Shinasi* (Qum: Markaz-i Nashr-i Isra', 2004). 26. 'Abdullah Javadi, *Intizar-i Basbar az Din* (Qum: Markaz-i Nashr-i Isra', 2001). 17.

non-divine reformers is that since divine messages are connected to the source of revelation, there is no error or defect in them. On the contrary, the messages of those reformers who are not divinely appointed, due to their human nature, are not free from errors and mistakes. Therefore, instructions and guidance provided by divine prophets can give rise to a religion that is free from any kind of error. This is the important difference between revealed and non-revealed religions.

Thus, from an Islamic perspective, the claims of groups and sects cannot be accepted as true religions unless they satisfy two conditions. Firstly, since religion's purpose is to provide for human beings' spiritual needs and felicity in both worlds, they must be aware of all their physical and spiritual secrets. Secondly, the law-giver should not have the slightest personal benefit in mind for the laws presented by him lest it becomes a veil in front of his eyes, but rather, he should consider the interests of society.

DEFINITION OF RELIGION

The problem of defining religion, in the eyes of Western scholars, is an important issue in the debate over religious diversity. There are many common words that we use every day that are very difficult to accurately define. The word 'religion', as Stanley L. Jaki suggests, is perhaps amongst those common words that denote views that are not only broadly different "but at times mutually exclusive."¹ Over the years,

1. Stanley L. Jaki, "Science and Religion," in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: The Mackmillan

so many definitions have been proposed by Western theologians¹ that even “a partial listing [of them] would be impractical.”²

However, the definition of religion from the Islamic perspective is not difficult. Before we discuss the conventional meaning of religion (*din*), it is appropriate to refer to its literal meaning. It is obvious that the literal meaning of religion has little bearing on the present study. However, since Muslim theologians have taken the literal definition as a starting point, we need to address that first. The term “*din*”, in the Arabic language, literally signifies “creed” (*millah*), Islam, belief, custom, piety (*wara'*), reward, ruling (*hukm*), judgement, and authority (*sultah*).³

However, this word is used in the Qur'an in the following senses:⁴

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- Publishing Company, 1987). 122.
1. Hume, *The World's Living Religions*. 6-7; Michale Peterson, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, and David Basinger, *Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). 3-6.
 2. Winston L. King, “Religion,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: The Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987). 283.
 3. Anis Ibrahim et al., *al-Mu'jam al-Wasit* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Shuruq al-Duwaliiyyah, 2004). 307. Fakhr al-Din al-Turayhi, *Majma' al-Bahrayn*, 6 vols., vol. 6 (Tehran: Murtadawi, 1996). 251-2.
 4. Ali Akbar Qurayshi, *Qamus-i Qur'an*, 7 vols., vol. 2 (Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah, 1992). 380-2.

a) Obedience and submission:

وَدَعُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ

They pray to Allah, being sincere to Him in obedience¹

b) Reward and punishment

أَإِذَا مِتْنَا وَكُنَّا تُرَابًا وَعِظَامًا أَإِنَّا لَمَدِينُونَ

When we have died and become dust and bones, we shall be brought to retribution?²

c) Judgment and decree

لَا تَأْخُذْكُمْ بِهِمَا رَأْفَةٌ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ

Let not pity for them overcome you in Allah's law [decree]³

d) Religious beliefs and teachings:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ

It is He who has sent His Apostle with the guidance and the religion of truth⁴

Having referred to the literal meanings of the term “religion” in the Qur'an, we will now address its definition. Religion is conventionally defined as a system that ensures the prosperity and perfection of man's life in this world and the hereafter. In this sense, it must consist of rules and laws that lead mankind

1. The Qur'an. 10:22. See also 31:32.

2. Ibid. 37:53. See, also 1:3.

3. Ibid. 24:2

4. Ibid. 9:33.

towards perfection and salvation in this world and in the life of the hereafter, if acted upon.¹

THE MAIN PILLARS OF RELIGION (*DIN*)

Religion, from the Islamic perspective, comprises of three elements: beliefs, practices and ethical commands. We will briefly discuss them below.

▸ Religious Beliefs

All religions, in order to preserve their school of thought, stand in need of disciplines and principles to consolidate their foundations, to clarify the beliefs and doctrines for their followers and respond to all theological doubts and questions of unbelievers. Muslim thinkers refer to this field of study as the science of *kalam* (theology).² All religions are aware of the significance of *kalam*, and disregarding it would have led to the disappearance of religions. In the course of human history, therefore, religious thinkers have attempted to clarify and interpret religious beliefs. The history of *kalam* is, therefore, as old as the history of religion itself.

-
1. Muhammad Husein al-Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan Fi Tafsir Al-Qur'an*, 20 vols., vol. 2 (Tehran: Raja, 1983). 130.
 2. Martin J. McDermott maintains that theology is the nearest term for *kalam* in English. Martin J. McDermott, *The Theology of Shaikh al-Mufid* (Beirut: Dar al-Machreq, 1986).1986 7. See also, *A New Dictionary of Religions*, (Oxford/Cambridge: Blackwell, 1955). 255-6; Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 1976). 1-4.

Religious beliefs are a set of convictions that have a direct impact on human behaviour. These convictions include issues such as belief in an origin (*mabda'*), resurrection (*ma'ad*), God's attributes, the necessity of prophethood and Imamate. Since, the religious beliefs are not mentioned systematically in the sacred texts, Muslim theologians have made use of the Qur'an, hadith and *'aql* (intellect) in an attempt to intellectually derive, clarify, justify and analyse such beliefs. The term *kalam* literally means "a full sentence" in Arabic¹ and, in Islamic teachings, it is an intellectual analysis of, and argument about religious beliefs.²

Protecting the strongholds of belief and ideology is one of the sacred goals and important missions of the divine prophets, which is highly valued. Imam Sadiq (as) considers Shi'ah theologians as troops who stand against the devil and his soldiers. The theologians try to prevent them from attacking the beliefs of those believers who do not have the power to respond to satanic doubts. According to a hadith, theologians' ideological *jihad* is more valuable than military *jihad*.³

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1. Abdullah Ibn 'Aqil, *Sharh Ibn 'Aqil*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Qum: Intisharat-i Nasir Khusru, 1985). 13; Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*. 1.
 2. 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Lahiji, *Shawariq al-Ilham fi Sharh-i Tajrid al-Kalam* (Isfahan: Mahdavi, n.d). 12; McDermott, *The Theology of Shaikh al-Mufid*. 7-8; Sa'd al-Din al-Taftazani, *Sharh Al-Maqasid*, 5 vols., vol. 1 (Beirut: Sharif al-Radi, n.d). 156.
 3. Ahmad ibn Ali al-Tabarsi, *al-Ibtijaj* (Beirut: al-A'alami, 1990). 13.

Moreover, Amin al-Islam al-Tabarsi (1073-1154), in the interpretation of “So do not obey the faithless, but wage against them a great *jihad* with it”¹ states that this verse indicates that the greatest *jihad* is the *jihad* of theologians in responding to the doubts of the enemies of religion and their followers.²

‣ Religious Rulings

The second component of religion consists of religious rulings, which are a series of laws and practices that God has ordained for the felicity of mankind, affecting both the individual and society. The religious acts are composed of mandatory commands and prohibitions that play significant roles in the life of human beings. Some of these laws will be discussed in the next section.

THE CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS RULINGS

Since God is absolute Truth and consequently His commands and prohibitions are also true and wise, we refer to some of the benefits of religious acts below.

1. Religious practices lead us to asceticism and self-control. In light of religious duties, the believers can quench their desires, modify their rebellious instincts, and use them in the right direction.

1. The Qur'an. 25:52.

2. Ahmad ibn Ali al-Tabarsi, *Majma' al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, 10 vols., vol. 7-8 (Dar al-Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, n.d). 175.

Imam Ali states (as), “I accustom my rebellious soul to piety, practicing obligations (*wajibat*) and preferable acts (*mustahabbat*), as well as refraining from prohibitions (*muharramat*) and unapproved acts (*makruhat*) so that, on the Day of Resurrection, it will enter *mahshar* (the place of resurrection) securely, and in the place where everyone slips, my soul will remain steadfast.”¹

2. Religious practices encourage humans to accustom themselves to reflecting upon the origin, final destination and quality of creation. Moreover, they make us aware of the unseen world via decisive evidence.
3. The sense of religious responsibility reminds man of the divine promises (*wa'd*) and threats (*wa'id*) and warns him to remove the veils of negligence and remember heaven and hell.
4. The most important of all is the ultimate felicity of human beings and the reward of the hereafter, which they can gain via obediently practicing religious duties.²

As mentioned earlier, in the Islamic perspective, religion is composed of three main elements: religious beliefs, religious practices, and ethical values. Having

1. Muhammad Al-Sharif al-Radi, *Nahj al-Balaghah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, 1982). 417 (letter: 45).

2. Hasan ibn Yusuf 'Allamah al-Hilli, *Kashf al-Murad fi Sharh Tajrid al-I'tiqad* (Qum: Mu'assasah al-Imam al-Sadiq, 2015). 96.

discussed the first and second elements, the following section examines the third.

‣ Ethical Values

The third pillar of religion is ethical values. Religion invites us to follow ethical values (*fada'il*), and refrain from unethical values (*masawi*). For instance, patience in the face of adversity is a virtue while impatience in times of hardship is iniquitous. Ethical values are based on the intelligibility of good and evil (*husn wa qubh-i 'aqli*) and stem from man's primordial nature (*fitrah*). Therefore, they are permanent and immutable and are not affected by the passage of time or transformation of societies.¹

As explained above, religion, worldview, ideology and cognition are four closely intertwined concepts. The next section aims to address the definition of worldview and ideology.

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1. Before Islam, Greek ethics dominated civilized societies. The best book that shows the true values of the Greek ethical school is *Tabarab al-Nafs wa Tathir al-A'raq* authored by Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Miskwayh (d. 431/1039). Later, *Akblaq-i Nasiri* was written by Khawajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 672/1274) based on Greek ethics. *Ihya' al-'Ulum* of al-Ghazali (d.505/1111) is also one of the most comprehensive books in the field of ethics. Later, Fayd al-Kashani (1091/1680) added some narrations of the infallible Imams to the book, which was published in 8 volumes under the name of *Mahajah al-Bayda' fi Tahdhib al-Ihya'*.

WORLDVIEW

A worldview, which, in Islamic philosophy, is called speculative philosophy (*falsafi-yi nazari*), is any kind of knowledge and awareness that leads to knowledge of existence. In other words, a general view of existence and what exists is called a worldview. For instance, Muslim philosophers, in speculative philosophy, divide existence into two types: necessary beings (*wajib al-wujud*) and contingent beings (*mumkin al-wujud*). They classify contingent beings into material (*maddi*) and immaterial (*mujarrad*) ones and divide material existence into substance (*jawhar*) and accident (*'arad*). They then state that God exists, material bodies, and accidents exist. Such statements about beings indicate our understanding of the world.

Here we will consider two more terms: sense-based cognition (*jahan ihsasi*) and cosmology (*jahan shinasi*).

SENSE-BASED COGNITION AND COSMOLOGY

Sense-based cognition is a common-sense tool for human beings and animals which enables them to understand what does not need to be thought. For instance, both can realise the hotness of water with the sense of touch. Some animals have a more advanced sense than humans. Clearly, via sensations like touching, smelling and tasting, or, in other words, with sense-based cognition (*shinakht-i hissi*) alone, one cannot reach a deep understanding of the universe just as one who touches an elephant's body in the dark cannot describe its form to us. If we feel the elephant's leg, we may believe that it is a giant pillar. If we touch

its trunk, we may believe it to be a big snake. If we touch its tusk, we may take it for a sharp ploughshare. Therefore, we cannot interpret the universe solely via sense-based cognition.

The examination of different features of the universe (for example, the area of the earth) is called cosmology (*jahan shinasi*). The important question is: can we interpret the world via cosmology? The answer is in the negative. In other words, if we study each phenomenon of the universe separately and come to know its components individually via cosmology, we cannot gain insight into the whole universe.

Cosmology is different from worldview. In a worldview, we consider the whole universe, while in cosmology, we discuss one individual phenomenon (such as the area of the earth, the distance of the earth from the sun, etc.). Thus, a worldview means a kind of insight and thinking about the whole world and the laws that govern its order. In other words, we may interpret the entire world as follows:

- The cosmos is created and has a creator;
- The world's order is based on cause and effect.
- The current order of the universe is not everlasting.

These are examples of what a worldview could consist of. In cosmology, we examine each phenomenon individually without looking at the whole world or comparing it with other phenomena. It is clear that by studying one phenomenon, e.g., the area of the earth, the realities of the whole universe cannot be understood.

As noted above, religion, worldview, ideology, and cognition are all closely associated. The next section, therefore, attempts to discuss ideology.

IDEOLOGY

Ideology, which in Islamic philosophy is called practical philosophy (*falsafī-yi ‘amali*), is any general insight or knowledge that is directly related to our actions. All individual social and moral duties, whether in the family or in the broader social life, stem from practical philosophy. Ideology determines the method and style of human behaviour (dos and don'ts) and states: “Be like this”, “live like this”, “make yourself and your society like this”, etc.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WORLDVIEW AND IDEOLOGY

Logically, there are two types of propositions: sometimes we say, “God exists”, “the world exists”, “the world is not eternal”, and sometimes we say, “God must be worshipped”, “lying must be avoided”, “the devil must not be obeyed”. Reflecting upon these examples, we find a fundamental difference between these two types of propositions. In the first type, there is no request, command or prohibition; rather, a predicate for a subject has been proved or disproved. In other words, in the first type, we are talking about existence or lack of existence of things, proving or disproving the attribution of a feature to a subject while in the

second type, we discuss what “should be done” or “should not be done.”¹

In summary, ideas that indicate the realities of existence are called worldview while ideas that concern and regulate human beings’ behaviour in their social and individual life and contain general dos and don’ts are called ideology.

THE MAIN TOPICS IN A WORLDVIEW

Worldview issues are those which relate to our general cognition of the world. The main issues of a worldview are as follows:

1. Is “the world beyond the mind” (extra-mental reality) real?
2. If so, is it recognisable?
3. Does the universe have a wise creator, or was it created by itself?
4. Is there a purpose in the creation of human beings and the world?
5. Has prophecy ended? If so, has divine grace been interrupted?
6. Is death the termination of life or a transfer to a permanent and everlasting life?²

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1. The concepts of worldview and ideology have also been discussed by Islamic philosophers. For more information, see, Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, *Sharh al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (Qum: Nashr al-Balaghah, 1996). 351-3; Muhammad Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta‘aliyah fi Al-Asfar al-‘Aqliyyah al-Arba‘ah*, 9 vols., vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Ihya’ al-Turath al-‘Arabi, 1981). 20-2.
 2. Ja‘far Sobhani, *Jaban Bini* (Qum: Tawhid, 1982). 11-5.

Having familiarized ourselves with the definition of religion, the next lesson will address its necessity.

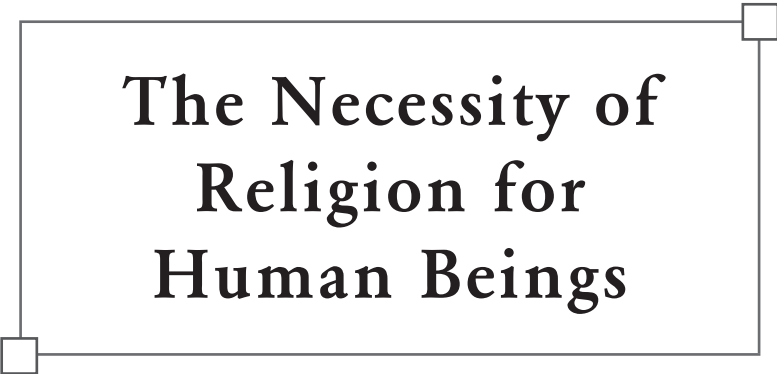
SUMMARY

1. Religion consists of religious beliefs, practices, and ethical principles which guarantee wellbeing of humans in this world and in the hereafter.
2. Religious practices help us control our rebellious instincts, reflect upon creation, remove the veils of negligence, and gain rewards in the hereafter.
3. The criterion for taking any statement or instruction as religious is that it should have been communicated by revelation from God.
4. A general view of the world is called a worldview.
5. Any general insight that is directly related to human beings' actions is called Ideology.

QUESTIONS

1. What is religion? What are the constitutive elements of religion?
2. Describe the benefits of religion.
3. What is the difference between worldview and cosmology? Why?
4. Can we interpret the universe with sense-based cognition or cosmology?
5. What is ideology?

LESSON TWO



The Necessity of Religion for Human Beings

The previous lesson shed light on the definition of religion from an Islamic perspective. The critical point which this lesson attempts to elaborate on is the necessity of religion. Do human beings still need a religion, despite their advances in science and technology? Is the intellect not sufficient for them in their quest for the path to perfection? Can we replace intellectual guidance with divine guidance?

THE NEED FOR RELIGION

Religion, or a monotheistic worldview, which stems from the source of infallible revelation, is based on a natural and innate human desire based on the premise that everyone is eager to answer these three questions: a) where did I come from? b) why did I come? and c) where will I go from here? In order to find the answers to these questions, we must draw on religious teachings. Religion holds that man is a being who is created by God to be perfected in light of practicing

religious teachings and to enjoy the fruit of his actions in the other world.¹

Some psychologists have also emphasized the inherent nature of religion. They believe that the human soul has four dimensions; a) the sense of curiosity, which is the source of the emergence and advancement of science and discoveries, b) the sense of goodness, which creates morality and great spiritual qualities, c) the sense of beauty, which creates art and manifests imaginations, and d) the sense of religiosity², which is human beings' tendency to know themselves and the rationale for the creation of mankind and the world.³ Therefore, religion meets the fourth human need, while people without religion cannot satisfy their inner desires in this dimension.

However, history reveals the emergence of some schools of thought in the past and in recent decades,

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1. The verse "Indeed we belong to Allah, and to Him do we indeed return" (2: 156) answers the first and third questions, and the verse "Did you suppose that We created you aimlessly, and that you will not be brought back to Us" (23:115) answers the second question.
 2. What is the sense of religiosity? Usually, when human beings grow up, even if they do not have a philosophical orientation, subconsciously (without having learnt from a book or having heard from anyone), their mind is preoccupied with these three questions: a) where did I come from? b) why did I come here? and c) where will I go from here? This is what is called the sense of religiosity.
 3. Tehneguy de Quenetaim, *Hiss-i Madhabi ya Bu'd-i Chaharum-i Ruh-i Insani (The Sense of Religiosity or the Fourth Dimension of the Human Soul)*, trans. Bayani (Tehran: Surush, n.d). 44.

which hold that man does not depend on divine guidance. Brahmans, according to Muslim historians of world religions such as Muhammad al-Shahrastani (1085-1152), Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi¹ (994-1064), and Abu Rayhan al-Biruni² (973-1050), deny the necessity of divine revelation for man's felicity. Brahmans³ believe that divine instructions either conform to the intellect or not. If they conform to intellectual teachings, it is obvious that there is no need for divine guidance since the human intellect can achieve the truth independently. And if divine instructions contradict the intellect, reason will not accept them.⁴ Ian G. Barbour (1923-2013) also mentions the appearance of such schools of thought, referred to as deism, in the eighteenth century in the West when "natural theology" replaced revelation and "scripture was assigned a subordinate role".⁵

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1. Ali Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi, *al-Fasl fi Al-Milal wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Nihal*, 5 vols., vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Jabal, 1983). 69.
 2. Abu Rayhan Al-Biruni, *Tabqiq ma li al-Hind*, trans. Manuchihr Saduqi (Tehran: Suha, 1983). 79.
 3. Al-Shahrastani associates Brahmans with the school of thought which was established by Brahma. Muhammad al-Shahrastani, *Al-Milal Wa Al-Nihal*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Qum: al-Sharif al-Radi, 1991). 601.
 4. Ibid. 602. See also 'Abd al-Jabbar al-Qadi, *Sharh Al-Usul Al-Khamsah* (Beirut: Dar al-Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, n.d). 380-1; Tahir Al-Isfara'ini, *Al-Tabsir fi al-Din* (Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah, n.d). 62, 126.
 5. Ian G. Barbour, *Religion and Science : Historical and Contemporary Issues* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1998). 36; Ian G. Barbour, *Issues in Science and Religion* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1972). 21-2.

Nevertheless, Muslim theologians address the necessity of religion by making nine arguments for it. The next section will address two of them.¹

A) RELIGION FROM A SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

The expansion of human beings' social life and the dismantling of life in deserts and caves indicate man's interest in social interaction. People would like to engage in collaboration with others in order to overcome problems and achieve a happy life. It seems that amongst the Muslim thinkers, Avicenna (980-1037) was the first philosopher to discuss in detail the social and rational necessity of divine religion, a view which other Muslim thinkers later expanded. He argues that, man is without a doubt, naturally a social being.² He, through collaboration with others, is capable of providing solutions for many problems and meeting individual and social needs.³ On the other hand, every society, in order to run efficiently, requires laws and

1. 'Allamah al-Hilli, *Kashf al-Murad*. 151-3.

2. Abu Ali Sina, *al-Najat min al-Gharaq fi Bahr al-Dalalah* (Tehran: Intisharat-i Danishgah-i Tehran, 2000). 708. The Qur'an considers humans as social beings. It says, "O mankind! Indeed We created you from a male and a female and made you nations and tribes" (49:13); "It is He who created the human being from water, and then invested him with ties of blood and marriage" (25:54).

3. Abu Ali Sina, *al-Shifa: al-Ilahiyyat* (Qum: Maktabah al-Mar'ashi al-Najafi, n.d). 441; Sina, *al-Najat min al-Gharaq fi Bahr al-Dalalah*. 708-9.

legislations,¹ for a lawless society will soon be plunged into chaos. Moreover, man, due to the instinct of self-preservation, consciously or unconsciously would always tend to take advantage of others for his own benefit and, consequently, cannot be a proper legislator. In other words, his instinctual bias will have a strong influence on his legislation.²

Therefore, the necessity of social laws for forming a decent human society seems inevitable. This plan (law) should have two characteristics. Firstly, the duty of individuals in the community should be made clear to prevent conflicts of interest, because people, no matter how just and conscientious, are not immune from conflict with the rights of others, which is generally unavoidable in society, until and unless the methods of their work and guidelines are determined in the social environment.³ Second, the plan should end dictatorships and lawlessness by implementing a series of valuable measures and decisive punishments.

Such a plan is nothing but religion, which lays the foundation of human society. As we said in the previous lesson, the provider of such a plan should meet two features. Firstly, he must be aware of man's physical and spiritual secrets. Secondly, he should not have the slightest personal interest in laws, but rather,

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1. Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, *Sharh al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, 3 vols., vol. 3 (Qum: Nashr al-Balaghah, 1996). 372.
 2. Sina, *al-Shifa: al-Ilahiyyat*. 442. Ayatollah Javadi has clarified Avicenna's viewpoint in a short essay. See, 'Abdullah Javadi, *Sarchishmi-yi Andishih* 6vols., vol. 4 (Qum: Markaz-i Nashr-i Isra', 2007). 218-238.
 3. 'Allamah al-Hilli, *Kashf al-Murad*. 152-3.

he should consider the interests of society. It is evident that only God has these two features.

Such views were not limited to the Muslim world. Early Modern Period European thinkers used to think along the same lines, too. For example, Baron De Montesquieu (1689-1755) believed that since legislators are disposed to particular sentiments and special thoughts, they would impose their will on legislations. He says,

Aristotle wanted to indulge sometimes his jealousy against Plato, and sometimes his passion for Alexander. Plato was incensed against the tyranny of the people of Athens. Machiavel was full of his idol, the Duke of Valentinois. Sir Thomas More, who spoke rather of what he had read than of what he thought, wanted to govern all states with the simplicity of a Greek city. Harrington was full of the idea of his favourite republic of England, while a crowd of writers saw nothing but confusion where monarchy is abolished. The laws always conform to the passions and prejudices of the legislator; sometimes the latter pass through and only tincture them; sometimes they remain and are incorporated with them.⁴

Thus, Montesquieu distinguishes between human laws and divine laws. He holds that these two kinds of

4. Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. Thomas Nugent, 2 vols., vol. 2 (New York: Hafner Press, 1959). 170.

laws are different in terms of origin, object and nature. He adds,

It is in the nature of human laws to be subject to all the accidents which can happen, and to vary in proportion as the will of man changes; on the contrary, by the nature of the laws of religion, they are never to vary. Human laws appoint for some good; those of religion for the best: good may have another object, because there are many kinds of good; but the best is but one, it cannot therefore change. We may alter laws, because they are reputed no more than good; but the institutions of religion are always supposed to be the best.¹

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1. Ibid. 58-9; see also, Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, trans. A.H.C. Downes (London: Sheed/Ward, 1936). 358. It seems that Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), the French philosopher and writer, also draws on this point. He holds that men are in need of divine laws. He writes, "in order to discover the rules of society best suited to nations, a superior intelligence, beholding all the passions of men without experiencing any of them, would be needed. This intelligence would have to be wholly unrelated to our nature, while knowing it through and through; its happiness would have to be independent of us, and yet ready to occupy itself with ours; and lastly, it would have, in the march of time, to look forward to a distant glory, and, working in one century, to be able to enjoy in the next". Rousseau concludes that only God can make perfect laws for man. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. G. D. H. Cole (London/Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1920). 46.

Having mentioned the views of some western scholars on human laws, we return to Avicenna's argument and conclude that man, due to the instinct of self-preservation, consciously or unconsciously, pursues his own self-interest. Consequently, his laws cannot be fully impartial. But God's laws, that is, religion, will be free from such partiality and deficiencies.

B) GUIDANCE OF RELIGION TOWARDS THE LOFTY GOALS OF CREATION

Man, even if he looks at the world of creation on a superficial level, cannot believe that it was created without a purpose since God is absolute perfection and His actions, that is the creation of the world, must also partake of perfection and must be devoid of all futility and defect. The Qur'an alludes to this fact and states, "We did not create the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them except with reason".¹ The purpose of creation is for every being, especially mankind, to reach its proper perfection in all aspects of life.

Moreover, the order and cohesion of the world of creation and the harmony of all beings indicate the existence of a definite purpose in creation. In other words, all beings in the world were created for "human life". The rotation of the moon, the fall of snow and rain, the tides of the seas, etc., are all for man and his evolution. If there is a disturbance in any of these phenomena, life will not be possible for humans. The Qur'an explicitly refers to this fact in many verses and

1. The Qur'an. 46:3.

states, "He disposed the sun and the moon for you, constant [in their courses] and He disposed the night and the day".¹

Now that we have established that the purpose of the creation of man is reaching perfection, the question arises as to how one can reach this perfection. Undoubtedly, animals do not need any guidance on how to live because they have learned the secrets of life through instinct (*gharizih*). Thus, in light of instinctive teachings, they reach the desired perfection. For example, every elephant is instinctively aware of its method of pregnancy, how to give birth and how to rear offspring, and this guidance eliminates the need for any teacher.

However, the faculty of instinct is not enough to meet the needs of man, and it can never lead him to his goals and destiny. It may be argued that man, in addition to instincts, has a teacher called intellect and that he can, through the use of his intellect, follow his quest for perfection. The lamp of the intellect, however, can only partially compensate for the defects caused by the weakness of instinct and can only illuminate the horizon of man's life within a specific range. The critical question is: can reason compensate for all the deficiencies of instinct? Can man, with his intellect alone, reach perfection?

It is fair to say that, for two reasons, the intellect alone, cannot compensate for the weakness of instinct and bring him to the desired perfection.

1. Ibid. 14:33.

1. Limited Capacity of the Human Intellect

It is true that in the last few centuries man has discovered many mysteries of the universe, but his unknowns are still not comparable to his knowns. Albert Einstein, a German-born theoretical physicist (1879-1955), states that it is now clear to him that the relation of human knowledge to its unknowns is like the ratio of a ladder to infinite space. He adds that human beings have climbed just a few steps of the ladder of science.¹

Is it possible to maintain, with such an explicit confession, that human beings do not need religion in the course of their perfection?

2. Uncertainty of Human Science

Man is not immune in his thoughts and perspectives, and he falls into errors in many matters. Sometimes, one hypothesis replaces another, and new ideas are presented to scientific societies. Hence, human knowledge, especially in matters related to eternal felicity and spiritual growth, is not reliable. The different and conflicting viewpoints of human beings on ethics, economics, the family and other areas, all assert the inadequacy of the intellect to arrive at an accurate conclusion in these fields, and, for this reason, we witness the appearance of incompatible schools of thought.²

1. Ahmad Amin, *Risalah al-Islam* 4 (n.d). 24.

2. 'Allamah al-Hilli, *Kashf al-Murad*. 153; Ja'far Sobhani, *Doctrines of Shi'i Islam: A Compendium of Imami Beliefs and Practices*, trans. Reza Shah-Kazami (London/New York: I.B.Tauris Publishers, 2001). 61-2.

With this inadequacy of human intellect, is it acceptable to say that God created man and left the way and the method of reaching eternal felicity and spiritual growth to man himself, and yet, He commands him to strive to achieve the goal for which he was created? Taking these points into consideration, it can be concluded that God, the All-wise, is obliged to send His divine and vital laws and guidance in the form of religion.

As we mentioned in lesson one, religion, worldview, ideology and cognition are four closely intertwined concepts. Having familiarised ourselves with the concept of religion, in the next lesson, we will address worldview and ideology and their relation.

SUMMARY

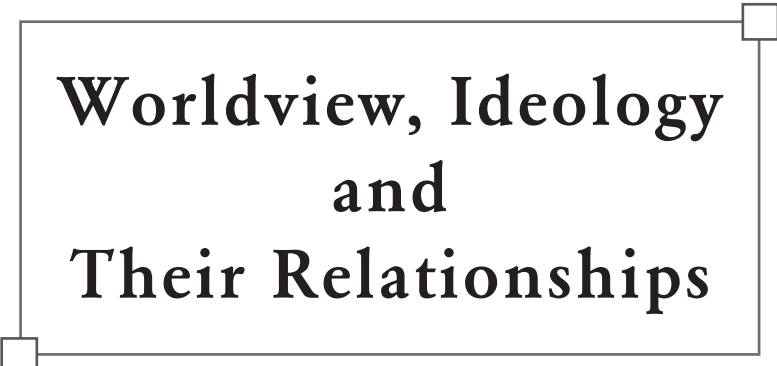
1. Man is always keen to know where he came from, why he came and where he will go. Nevertheless, the intellect alone cannot illuminate or resolve such issues. Only revealed religion can answer such inquiries.
2. Since humans in this social life encounter conflicts, a plan for removing them, called “religion”, is needed. This plan not only indicates the responsibilities of individuals in society but also can prevent them from focusing simply on personal gains.
3. Since creation aims to reach a desired perfection, and it is impossible to achieve this perfection through human intellect or knowledge alone, religion, which

originates from divine revelation, is responsible for guiding man.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the characteristics of the plan presented in the name of “religion” to end disagreements in human life?
2. What is the difference between human beings and other living beings in achieving the desired perfection?
3. Is it possible to be needless of religion and rely on human intellect and knowledge alone? Why?
4. Can instincts alone lead human beings towards eternal felicity and spiritual growth? Why?

LESSON THREE



Worldview, Ideology and Their Relationships

In the first lesson, we dealt with the definition of a worldview and an ideology. Whilst a worldview is a comprehensive view of existence, an ideology is a general insight directly related to our actions. Now it is appropriate to turn our attention to their relation. The relation between a worldview and an ideology has been discussed by Islamic philosophers,¹ who present three possible perspectives: a) the relation between them is productive; that is, an ideology is a logical result of a worldview; b) there is no relation between them; and c) a worldview serves as a basis or foundation for an ideology.

As you see, proponents of the first two perspectives on the relation between a worldview and an ideology take two extreme and opposite perspectives: the first group commit ‘excess’ (*ifrat*), while the second one commit ‘neglect’ (*tafrit*). We shall discuss these three perspectives here.

1. See al-Tusi, *Sharh al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, 2. 352; Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta‘aliyah*, 1. 20.

A) THE FIRST PERSPECTIVE

As mentioned, the first view maintains that there is a productive relationship (*rabiti-yi tawlidi*) between them, i.e., an ideology is a logical result of a worldview. The followers of this view cling to the rules of the natural world and hold that what human beings obtain from the universe as the governing laws must serve as the model for their individual and social life. In other words, we must copy the laws of nature and build up our life accordingly; consequently, obligations and prohibitions are completely born of a worldview. Thus, an ideology is a logical outcome of a worldview.

In recent centuries, Karl Heinrich Marx (1818-1883), a German philosopher, and his co-thinker Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) have been more supportive of the theory that an ideology is produced from a worldview. They used the laws of nature as the basis of their arguments and maintained that since there is a relentless battle between thesis and anti-thesis in the natural world, society must be the same.

The advocates of this view attempt to make it clear with an example. Consider the seed of an apple in the heart of the earth. There are two forces here: a) a force that wants to maintain the status quo and b) another force that wants to change the status quo and develop it into an apple tree. The first one is named thesis, and the other one anti-thesis. They maintain that there is always a constant conflict between the thesis and anti-thesis in the natural cosmos and the powerful force

is always victorious.¹ Thus, they conclude that society must also work in the same.

The abstraction of such a law from nature led these thinkers to regard it as a partisan principle and regard the struggle between the working class and the employers as natural. One of the advocates of such a perspective is Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900), a German philosopher. He emphasised the power of man and stated, "This world is the will to power -and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power – and nothing besides".² He adds that if we look at the world from inside, it will be nothing but the will to power.³

Thus, it follows from Nietzsche, that not only human life but also the life of every living thing depends on its power. From his perspective, nature hates equality. The result of the spread of Nietzsche's views was the rise of people like Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) and the outbreak of World War II.⁴ Hitler massacred millions of people by resorting to the argument that we must learn from nature, that is, creatures whose period is over must be destroyed.

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1. Murtada Mutahhari, *Majmu'ih Athar*, 25 vols., vol. 13 (Tehran: Sadra, 1978). 908-9.
 2. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967). 550.
 3. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Farasuy-i Nik va Bad*, trans. Daryush Ashuri, 2 ed. (Tehran: Kharazmi, 1994). 78.
 4. Joseph Peter Stern, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. 'Izzatullah Fuladvand, 2 ed. (Tehran: Tarh-i Nu, 1994). 123, 128.

Hitler justified the horrible violence and bloodshed in a beautiful and delicate guise of respect for the laws of nature. He stated, “If we did not respect the laws of nature, imposing our will by the right of the stronger, a day would come when the wild animals would once again devour us—then the insects would eat the wild animals, and finally nothing would exist on earth but the microbes”.¹ Such a perspective degrades humans to the level of wild animals, as it argues that power-seeking is a requirement of human nature. As a result, it lowers the value of human beings to the level of wild animals.

In summary, the followers of productive relationships follow the laws of nature and believe that man should copy them and implement them in his life, and consequently, obligation and prohibition are completely born of worldviews. This view implicitly indicates that a worldview is a complete cause (*'illat-i tamm*) for an ideology.

ANALYSIS OF THE FIRST PERSPECTIVE

In order to evaluate the first perspective precisely, let us discuss it in the form of an example. Suppose that a philosopher sees that human beings are comprised of different races and tribes. Through his theoretical wisdom (*hikmat-i nazari*), he maintains that such differences require differences in rights and advantages.

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1. Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Hitler's Table Talk (1941-1944)*, trans. Norman Cameron and R.H. Stevens (London: Enigma Books, 2000). 39; 'Abd al-Karim Surush, *Danish va Arzish*, 2 ed. (Tehran: Baran, 2006.). 30.

Then this worldview leads him towards a conclusion (i.e., an ideology); that is, different races should have different rights.

To further clarify this perspective, we portray their claim in the form of a categorical syllogism (*qiyas-i iqtirani*). Each categorical syllogism comprises a minor (*sughra*) and a major (*kubra*) premise. The categorical syllogism is as follows:

- Minor premise: humans belong to different races.
- Major premise: racial differences require differences in rights.
- Conclusion: different races should have different rights.

The minor premise is quite true that humans are made up of different races. Nevertheless, the problem is in the major premise of the above argument since there is no necessary causal relationship between differences in race and differences in rights. In other words, racial or tribal differences do not require differences in rights. Therefore, the major premise, that is, the worldview, cannot be the complete cause for the conclusion, i.e., the ideology. Consequently, the above reasoning is unacceptable due to weakness of the major premise.

Now we turn our attention to the argument of the first perspective. This perspective maintains that the laws of nature can be the source and basis of binding commands, i.e., ideology. We can present their claim in the form of a categorical syllogism:

- Minor premise: in nature, powerful beings destroy weak beings.

- Major premise: humans must follow the laws of nature.
- Conclusion: humans must be powerful and destroy weak beings.

The minor premise is absolutely true; that is, in nature, the strong beings tend to control the weak beings and dominate them. But the essential point here is the inaccuracy of the major premise of this intellectual reasoning. If a law governs nature, why should man implement that law in his society? In other words, if, in nature, the powerful creatures trample over the rights of the weaker ones, why should this law also prevail in human life? Which similarity between humans and animals leads us to the claim that humans must be subject to the law of animals? If animals have a cruel law due to their lack of understanding and intelligence, why should humans, with a high level of understanding and intelligence, follow that cruel law? There is no doubt that the human being is the highest of creations, and he cannot rationally follow a creature that is lower than him and does not have intelligence. Mankind should observe *fitrah* (innate guidance) and justice in his relationships, not the laws of creatures whose understanding and intelligence is far lower than humans’.

Therefore, our understanding of the rules of nature cannot form the basis of our practical wisdom (*falsafi-yi ‘amali*). Thus, a worldview cannot be a complete cause for an ideology, and consequently, the productive theory is unacceptable. This group, as you see, does not provide a rational reason for their claim, i.e., productive relation. The instability of some ideologies

often stems from the inaccuracy of the major premise of their syllogism. This argument will be clearer when we address the third perspective. Now we will address the second perspective regarding the relation between a worldview and an ideology.

B) THE SECOND PERSPECTIVE

The second view maintains that there is no relation between a worldview and an ideology. As we said above, while the first group of thinkers has an excessive (*ifrat-i*) view on the relationship between a worldview and an ideology, the second one takes a neglectful (*tafrit-i*) perspective and maintains that there is no relation between these notions at all. This group, like the previous one, does not provide any persuasive reason for their claim. Suppose they want to refute the productive theory; in that case, we will agree with them. But if they want to reject any sort of relationship, even as a part of the cause (*juz' al-'illah*), their view is a matter of deliberation, and the third view, which the next section aims to address, can clarify the weakness of their theory.

C) THE THIRD PERSPECTIVE

This view holds that a worldview is the foundation for an ideology. This idea maintains that a worldview is not a complete cause (*'illat-i tamm*) for an ideology; instead, it is a part of the cause (i.e., an incomplete cause) for an ideology. This means that a worldview

has no role other than building the subject or, in other words, providing a subject for an ideology.

To further clarify this perspective, suppose that a theosophist, in his theoretical wisdom, arrives at the conclusion that ‘God is the Creator and the bestower of blessings (*mun’im*)’. A divine philosopher’s finding, in his worldview, can be a minor premise for an argument. His practical wisdom (*’aql-i ’amali*), after becoming aware of the above minor premise, forms a major premise, and states that ‘appreciating the bestower of blessings is obligatory’. Putting the minor premise (i.e., God is the Creator and the bestower of blessings) and the major premise (i.e., appreciating the bestower of blessings is obligatory) together, he reaches a conclusion, as an ideology, that ‘appreciating God is obligatory’. Thus,

- Minor premise: God is the creator and the bestower of blessings.
- Major premise: appreciating the bestower of blessings is obligatory.
- Conclusion: appreciating God is obligatory.

As you see, the above categorical syllogism is comprised of two statements: minor and major premises. The first one is the finding of theoretical wisdom, and the second one is the fruit of practical wisdom. Although in light of ‘deductive reasoning’, we deduce an ‘obligation’, this ‘obligation’ is not only the product of theoretical wisdom, since knowing God as the ‘bestower of blessings’ alone is not enough in inference. Rather, via adding ‘speculative knowledge’ (*ma’rifat-i nadari*) to ‘practical knowledge’ (*ma’rifat-i*

'amali) we can state that 'appreciating the bestower of blessings is obligatory'.

It is clear that combining the two, theoretical and practical knowledge, leads us to such a conclusion. In light of what was mentioned above, it can be concluded that the relation between a worldview and an ideology is a partial one (*juz' al- 'illah*). In other words, a worldview is not a complete cause (*'illat-i tamm*) for an ideology, as the first group maintains; rather, it is a partial cause for an ideology. This means that a worldview has no role other than producing and introducing a subject for an ideology. From a logical perspective, the subject of the conclusion (i.e., "appreciating the bestower of blessings") comes from theoretical wisdom and its predicate (i.e., "obligatory") is derived from practical wisdom.

Taking into account what has been argued above, the weakness of the first and second perspectives will become more apparent. While the second view holds that there is no relation between a worldview and an ideology, it has been proven that a worldview is a partial cause for an ideology, and its role is in providing a subject for an ideology. Furthermore, the first view implicitly holds that a worldview is a complete cause for an ideology, since in nature, powerful beings dominate the weaker ones, and humans must follow suit. As explained above, a worldview cannot be a complete cause for an ideology. The instability of some ideologies often stems from the inaccuracy of the major premise of their syllogism.

As mentioned, three kinds of relations are conceivable between a worldview and an ideology. It

is now appropriate to see how the Qur'an explains the relationship between them and which of the above three theories it confirms.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A WORLDVIEW AND AN IDEOLOGY IN THE QUR'AN

The Qur'an refers to the third perspective in various verses. Although the Qur'an does not present this issue in the form of a logical and clear syllogism, reflecting upon its verses can lead us to this fact. We will consider two examples here.

According to the Qur'an, there is a precise order in the world, and all creatures perform their duties according to a specific order: "He raised the sky and set up the balance."¹ So, the order in the world is a Qur'anic worldview. Then the Qur'an refers to its own ideology and adds, "do not infringe the balance!"² It is clear that the order of the world cannot be a complete cause for "do not infringe the balance." In other words, we cannot claim that, since there is an accurate order in nature, we should not infringe the balance in our life.

To further clarify these verses, we can consider them in the form of a categorical syllogism. The verse "He raised the sky and set up the balance" forms the minor premise of its intellectual reasoning. However, the verse "do not infringe the balance" cannot be a conclusion from the first statement, since there is no relationship

1. The Qur'an. 55:7.

2. Ibid. 55:8.

between them. Instead, our intellect should establish another statement that leads us to such a conclusion.

- Minor premise: there is an accurate order in the world.
- Major premise: we must implement this order in our life in order to save ourselves.
- Conclusion: (in order to save yourself) “Do not infringe the balance.”

As you can see above, the Qur'an, after expressing some religious teaching as a worldview,¹ decrees a command as an ideology.² It seems that there is an implicit (*mahdhuf*) intellectual major premise between the worldview and the ideology (i.e., conclusion), which leads us to derive the conclusion. Therefore, a worldview is not a complete cause for an ideology; instead, it introduces a subject for an ideology. Obviously, we cannot reach a conclusion without that rational implicit statement, i.e., major premise. In other words, a worldview introduces a subject and, via an implicit major premise, we can reach a conclusion, i.e., ideology. Therefore, the Qur'an supports the third perspective.

Another example can be presented from the Qur'anic perspective. Allah is the teacher of Adam, as the Qur'an states: “He taught Adam the names, all of them.”³ In light of these teachings, Prophet Adam became aware of the realities of the world, and God made him His vicegerent. God also informed him of the nature of

1. See *ibid.* 55:7.

2. *Ibid.* 55:8. “Do not infringe the balance.”

3. *Ibid.* 2:31.

the forbidden tree that caused him to leave Paradise as the Qur'an states, "do not approach this tree, lest you should be among the wrongdoers."¹ From this, we can form the following categorical syllogism:

- Minor premise: "He taught Adam the names,"² and made him aware of the misery of this tree.
- Major premise: humans should refrain from whatever leads them towards misery.
- The Qur'anic conclusion: "Do not approach this tree."³

As seen above, the Qur'an, after expressing some religious teaching as a worldview,⁴ decrees a command as an ideology.⁵ It seems that there is an implicit intellectual major premise between the worldview and an ideology (conclusion), which leads us to derive the conclusion. Therefore, the worldview is not a complete cause for an ideology; instead, it introduces a subject and via the implicit major premise we can reach a conclusion, i.e., an ideology. So, the Qur'an supports the third perspective.

Having acquainted ourselves with the relation between a worldview and an ideology, the next lesson will discuss different worldviews and their features.

1. Ibid.2: 35; see also 7:19.

2. Ibid. 2:31.

3. Ibid.2:35.

4. See ibid. 2:3-5.

5. Ibid. 2:35. "Do not approach this tree!"

SUMMARY

1. The first theory suggests that the relation between a worldview and an ideology is productive, which means that we should follow the model of natural laws in our life. This theory does not seem logical: why should the laws governing blind and deaf nature rule the wise society of human beings who are familiar with ultimate felicity and corruption?
2. The second group believes that there is no connection between a worldview and an ideology. With the third perspective, the weakness of this theory became clear.
3. The third group, whose theory seems to be correct, maintains that a worldview has no function other than introducing a subject to an ideology. This means that a worldview, with the help of an implicit premise, can lead us to an ideology. For example, when we see the order in nature, we can conclude that there must be order in life as well.

QUESTIONS

1. Explain the three theories about the relationship between a worldview and an ideology.
2. Explain the theory that a worldview is the producer of an ideology.
3. What are the goals of those who support the theory that a worldview is the producer of an ideology?

4. Explain the view that a worldview is a basis and foundation for an ideology.
5. How can the verse “do not infringe the balance” be a conclusion to the verse “He raised the heaven high and set up the balance”?

LESSON FOUR



Theistic Worldview

As mentioned in Lesson One, in Islamic philosophy, a worldview, also known as speculative philosophy (*falsafai-yi nazari*), refers to any awareness that leads to knowledge of existence. Putting it differently, a worldview is a general outlook on existence. The philosophers of the world, who have tried to present a holistic picture of reality, can be divided into two groups: materialists and theists. Each of these two groups have their own insight. This lesson and the next one aims to examine the basic elements of both theistic and materialistic worldviews. These approaches agree on some principles and differ in some other respects. We first deal with their similarities and then with what distinguishes between them.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THEISTIC AND MATERIALISTIC WORLDVIEWS

These two schools of thought have some principles in common, the most important of which will be explained below.

A) REALISM

Both worldviews admit that there is a 'reality' beyond our minds and thoughts which is achievable and knowable by the human cognitive faculties. Therefore, both materialism and theism refute ontological idealism¹ and epistemological subjectivism²; that is to say, both consider the external world to be real and knowable. Consequently, they are opposed to sophists who believe that "nothing exists, and if it did, no one could know it, and if they knew it, they could not communicate it".³ Rather, they maintain that there is a reality beyond the mind, and it is knowable.

B) CAUSE AND EFFECT RELATIONSHIPS IN ALL PHENOMENA

Both worldviews agree about the existence of causal relationships in all phenomena. They maintain that the universe is based on the principle of cause and effect. This means that they do not consider any phenomenon without a cause, and all phenomena result from a series of causes. For instance, they hold that, due to the rotation of the earth around itself and its axial tilt, night and day and the four seasons appear. Similarly, they maintain that, due to a series of external and

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1. According to this view, there is no external reality made up of matter and energy. There are only ideas existing within minds.
 2. It means that there is no objective or external truth.
 3. Richard H Popkin and Avrum Stroll, *Philosophy*, 3 ed. (London: Butterworth-Heinemann Ltd, 1993). 221.

internal causes and factors, plants take nutrients from the earth and grow.

Sometimes materialist philosophers accuse theistic philosophers of denying causal relations between the phenomena of the world and say that theistic philosophers consider what is happening in this world to be a direct act of God, and, as such, they do not believe in natural causes. Considering the theistic philosophical books of Aristotle (384–322 BC), Plato (429–347 BC), Alfarabi (870–950 BC) and Avicenna (ca 980–1037 AD), as well as their teaching method, the inconsistency of this accusation becomes clear. All of these books consist of two sections: a section on the natural sciences that includes astronomy, mathematics, and the like, and a section on metaphysics, such as God and His attributes. In practice, this means that these thinkers first emphasise that the universe is based on the principle of cause and effect. To strengthen the minds of their students, they first taught the natural sciences and, when the students are well-trained, they were allowed to engage in metaphysical discussions.

Moreover, from the Quranic perspective, causal relationships govern natural phenomena,¹ as it states, “And you see the earth torpid, yet when We send down

1. Muslim philosophers also maintain that the effective influence of any cause depends on the universal will and providence of God. The Quran states, “The good land – its vegetation comes out by the permission of its Lord”. The Qur’an. 7:58. See also 2: 102, 151, 249; 3: 49, 166. For more information, see, Muhammad Husein al-Tabataba’i, *Al-Mizan Fi Tafsir Al-Qur’an*, 20 vols., vol. 1 (Tehran: Raja, 1983). 72; Ja’far Sobhani, *Al-Ilahiyyat Ila Huda Al-Kitab wa*

water upon it, it stirs and swells, and grows every delightful kind [of plant].”¹ In short, both theistic and materialistic worldviews believe in realism and causal relations in all phenomena of the world.

After that short introduction on the similarities of the theistic and materialistic worldviews, it is appropriate to turn our attention first to specific features of the theistic worldview. The features of the materialistic worldview will be discussed in the next lesson.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE THEISTIC WORLDVIEW

The theistic worldview has certain features, some of which we will discuss here.

1. THE DIVISION OF EXISTENCE INTO MATERIAL AND IMMATERIAL

Theistic thinkers divide beings into material and immaterial ones, and, in this way, open a path to a world beyond the realm of nature, which the Qur’an calls the ‘unseen world’ (*‘alam-i ghayb*). To clarify this division, we will now discuss the characteristics of material and immaterial beings.

al-Sunnah wa al-‘Aql, 4 vols., vol. 2 (Qum: Mu’assisih Imam Sadiq, 2009). 51-4.

1. The Qur’an. 22:5. See also the verse “He sends down water from the sky, and with it He brings forth crops for your sustenance” 2:22.

Characteristics of Material Beings

Material beings have certain characteristics, the most important of which are given below.

- A. Dependence on time and space. Every material being, like a cell, comes into the universe at a specific time and place. In other words, every material being needs time and place, i.e., a point in time for its birth and a place for its birth and residence.
- B. Alteration. Change is a material property. For example, when we place a seed under the soil, it grows under certain conditions into a tree and bears fruit.
- C. Measurability. Material beings can be measured in terms of volume, weight, shape, density, and the like.

Characteristics of Immaterial Beings

Immaterial beings are free from the features of material beings: 1) they are not time- and space-dependent, 2) they do not experience alteration, and 3) they are not measurable. Therefore, immaterial beings are free from qualities such as time, space, volume, weight, and the triple dimensions of width, length and volume. Now, let us make this clearer with some examples.

Thought is one of the immaterial beings in which the features of material beings cannot be found. No matter how hard we try, we cannot divide our thought like a piece of wood into two parts. No scholar tries to test their ideas like a drop of blood in the laboratory or formulate its reality into a mathematical formula.

Will, decision, joy, and sorrow are also immaterial beings that do not possess any properties of material beings; however, they definitely exist. We perceive joy and grief and distinguish between them. This distinction is a sign of their existence. If joy and sorrow did not exist, distinguishing between them would not happen because, according to philosophers, non-existing entities (*ma'dum*) are indistinguishable.¹

These two examples lead us to a confirmed truth: the realm of existence is not limited to the material world. We find some beings that do not have the signs of material beings. This fact can pave the way for understanding metaphysics.

As mentioned earlier, theistic worldview have some features, and now we discuss their second feature.

2. MANAGEMENT AND PLAN IN THE UNIVERSE

The second feature of the theistic worldview is its claim regarding management and plan in the universe. According to this worldview, reflecting upon the phenomena of the universe leads us to believe in the existence of management (*tadbir*) and a thoughtful plan in the world. This can be proven in two ways.

A) Order: The system that governs the cosmos is so comprehensive, precise and deep that common sense never considers it to be the result of an

1. Mulla Hadi Sabzwari, *Sharh al-Mandumah*, 5 vols., vol. 2 (Qum: Nashr-i Nab, 1990). 191-2; Muhammad Husein al-Tabataba'i, *Nihayah al-Hikmah* (Qum: Jami'i-yi Mudarrisin, 1995). 21-2.

accident. Accidentality would be justifiable if there were disorders in the world. Thus, the order of the world rejects the idea of the universe being created by chance or accident.

Abraham Cressy Morrison (1864-1951), an American chemist and president of the New York Academy of Sciences, argues that the world of existence cannot be the result of an accident. He states “the size of the earth, the distance from the sun, the temperature and the life-giving ray of the sun, the thickness of the earth’s crust, the quantity of water, the amount of carbon dioxide, the volume of nitrogen, the emergence of man and his survival” all indicate the existence of an accurate order in the universe. According to the laws of mathematics, the probability that all these factors coincidentally appeared on planet Earth at the same time is approximately one in a billion. He adds that is it impossible to ignore all “the evidence and take the one chance in a billion” that human beings and whatever exists “are the result of chance”.¹

B) Guidance and Purposefulness: The structure of the cosmos has been fashioned such that each creature can reach its desired perfection. Optimal perfection is in bees (honey production), trees (bearing fruits), animals (reproduction), etc. It shows that the universe and its particles, at whatever stage they are, according to their level of receptivity, are benefiting from supervision to reach their desired perfection.

1. A Cressy Morrison, *Man Does Not Stand Alone* (London/Edinburgh: Flaming H. Revell Company, n.d). 99 -100.

This kind of extensive guidance is named “creative guidance” (*hidayat-i takvini*) or instinctive guidance (*hidayat-i gharizi*). The Qur’an refers to this fact and states, “Our Lord is who He gave everything its creation, and then guided it”.¹

Morrison refers to the instinctive guidance of some animals. The eel is an amazing animal. Wherever it lives, in maturity, it goes to the Bermuda Islands and lays eggs in the depths of the sea. After spawning, the eel dies, and the babies return to their mother’s original homeland. When the time of spawning arrives, they make the same thousands of miles journey to reach Bermuda without anyone telling them the time and destination.² The world is full of this kind of purposefulness and guidance, which indicates the existence of management in it (*tadbir*).

1. The Qur’an. 20:50.

2. Morrison, *Man Does not Stand Alone*. 55-6. He gives more examples for the instinctive guidance of some animals. He states that robins immigrate in autumn and come back to their previous nest the next spring. He adds that, in September, the flocks of most “birds fly south, often over thousands miles of open ocean, but they do not lose their way.” This sense of direction and return to their homeland is instinctive guidance. Ibid. 49-55.

3. CONSIDERING THE EFFICIENT CAUSE AND OTHER CAUSES

The dependence of the existence of one phenomenon on another is called causal relation,¹ such as the child's dependence on its parents. There are several types of causes, the most important of which are as follows:

- a) efficient cause ('*illat-i fa'ili*);
- b) final cause ('*illat-i gha'i*);
- c) material cause ('*illat-i maddi*); and
- d) formal cause ('*illat-i suri*)²

Suppose we want to build a house. The builder is the efficient cause. The purpose of building a house - which is for living - is the final cause. Bricks, pillars and other materials are the material cause, and the building plan is the formal cause.

The theistic philosophers maintain that when a seed is planted in the earth, in addition to the material cause, an efficient cause is needed for the growth of this seed; that is, an agent who changes the matter and

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1. For the definition of cause and effect, see, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *al-Mabahith al-Mashriqiyyah fi 'Ilm al-Ilahiyyat wa al-Tabi'iyat*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Qum: Bidar, n.d.) 458; Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi, *Hikmah al-Ishraq* (Tehran: Muassasah-yi Mutali'at va Tahqiqat-i Farhangi, 1994). 62; Muhammad Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah fi Al-Asfar al-'Aqliyyah al-Arba'ah*, 9 vols., vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1981). 127; Sabzwari, *Sharh al-Mandumah*, 2. 406.
 2. 'Abu al-Hasan Bahmanyar, *al-Tahsil* (Tehran: Danishgah-i Tehran, 1971). 519-20. See also, Muhammad Sadr al-Din, "Shawahid al-Rububiyyah," in *Majmu'iyi Rasa'il-i Falsafi-yi Sadr al-Muta'allihin* (Tehran: Hikmat, 1999). 317.

transforms it from a seed into a tree and a fruit. So, the creator of this unprecedented form in matter is the efficient cause. Aristotle proves this with a rational argument and states:

Matter is moving and changing¹, and the moving object, as the receiver of motion, must be other than the mover (*muharrik*). In other words, movement falls under the category of passive receptivity (*infī'al*) which is a sign of dependency and need, while the ability to cause movement belongs to the category of action (*fi'l*) and is a sign of independence (*ghina*) and needlessness. From the intellect's point of view, it is impossible for the category of action to be the same as that of passive receptivity. Likewise, it is not possible for the category of poverty (or dependence) to be the same as the category of richness (or independence). In other words, it is impossible for one and the same thing to be both the mover and the moving object at once. Therefore, the efficient cause must be different from the material cause.²

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1. Movement, in the general sense, refers to any gradual transformation or development in which stability cannot be imagined. Sina, *al-Najat min al-Gharaq fi Bahr al-Dalalah*. 203; Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi, *Majmu'ah Musannaft-i Shyakh-i Ishraq*, 4 vols., vol. 2 (Tehran: Muassasah-yi Mutaliati vaTahqiqat-i Farhangi, 2001). 172.
 2. Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, 2. 268; Muhammad Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah fi Al-Asfar al-Aqliyyah al-Arba'ah*, 9 vols., vol. 3 (Beirut: Dar al-Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1981). 41-2; Abu Ali Sina, *Al-Shifa: Al-Tabi'iyat*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Qum: Maktabah al-Mar'ashi al-Najafi, n.d). 87; Bahmanyar, *al-Tahsil*. 475.

In other words, the doer is one who influences the outside matter due to its power, just as a tailor cuts and sews a cloth. It is clear that the position of the doer is the position of the powerful agent who wants to do something in nature. But the material cause is a part of matter and lacks the energy that the doer wants to create in it. It is the doer of the action (*fā'il*) who removes poverty and brings it to the stage of perfection. Therefore, the efficient cause is different from the material cause.¹

In short, the theistic worldview has some distinctive features. 1. Beings are categorised into material and immaterial. 2. The universe is being managed and is based on a plan 3. The efficient cause is considered along with other causes.

Having acquainted ourselves with the theistic worldview, the next lesson will discuss the qualities of the materialistic worldview.

SUMMARY

1. Both theistic and materialistic worldviews believe in a) 'reality' beyond our minds and thoughts and b) existence of cause and effect relationships in all phenomena.
2. The theistic worldview maintains that there is a precise management and a plan in the world that we come to know of via the recognition of order and purposefulness in it.

1. For more information, see, Sobhani, *Jahan Bini*. 380-95.

THEISTIC WORLDVIEW

3. The theistic worldview holds that in the world of creation, in addition to the material cause, an efficient cause is also needed because a material cause cannot perform the function of an efficient cause.

QUESTIONS

1. List the common features of theistic and material worldviews.
2. List the properties of material beings.
3. Prove the existence of management and a plan in the universe in two ways.
4. Why, in addition to the material cause, is an efficient cause also needed?

LESSON FIVE



Materialistic Worldview

The previous lesson addressed the characteristics of the theistic worldview. This lesson aims to examine the features of the materialistic worldview. Before examining it, it is appropriate to become acquainted with the general views of materialists.

In the materialistic worldview, the whole of nature and the perceptible world, with all the laws and principles that govern them, are a combination of eternal (*qadim*) and non-eternal (*badith*) phenomena.¹ Materialists consider matter as eternal and everlasting (*'azali*), but the laws governing it as non-eternal (*badith*) and arising as a result of the continuous motion of matter by accident.

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1. The term "*badith*" literally means "new" and "*qadim*" means "old". When these two terms are used to refer to various entities, they signify differences in their appearance in time. Thus, for example, the New Testament is "hadith" compared to the Old Testament. From a philosophical (rather than a purely literal) point of view, hadith means the coming into being of an entity out of non-existence. In contrast, an entity which is regarded as *qadim* has always been existent. See, al-Tusi, *Sharh al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, 3. 109; al-Tabataba'i, *Nihayah al-Hikmah*. 230-2; Hasan ibn Yusuf 'Allamah al-Hilli, *Anwar al-Malakut fi Sharh al-Yaqt* (Qum: Sharif al-Radi, 1984). 51-2.

Whenever they are asked where the source of matter is, they reply that its existence is eternal and has not been preceded by non-being; consequently, there is no need for a causal agent (*fa'il*). At the same time, all of them believe in the non-eternity of the laws and traditions that govern matter, but they do not consider it as the result of a plan of a wise agent and often justify it by resorting to the notion of accident.

The materialists of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries interpreted the world on this basis, but, by the end of the nineteenth century, principles which had only a political, but not a philosophical aspect, were added to this interpretation. They agreed on these two principles:

- a) eternity of matter
- b) non-eternality of the ruling system, which is the result of an accident

Recently, they have introduced the idea of the “property of matter” (*khaṣiṣi-yi mddih*) instead of the second principle, arguing that the system governing matter is the result of the continuous motion of matter, which has gradually led to this system.

It should be noted that the materialistic school of thought lacks a comprehensive intellectual and philosophical system on the basis of which it can interpret the existence of matter and its non-eternal rules. What is often quoted from pre-Christian materialists or in the time of Prophet Muhammad suggests that some were sceptics who were apparently unconvinced by theistic arguments. However, the materialists failed to prove or disprove the supernatural

world, and even if they denied it, they never presented an argument for it. The Qur'an describes this group as follows: "They say, 'There is nothing but the life of this world: we live and we die, and nothing but time destroys us'". The Qur'an, in reply, states that "they do not have any knowledge of that, and they only make conjectures."¹

Now that we are briefly acquainted with the materialists' way of thinking based on the two principles, it is worth noting that this school has its own characteristics that are required by their worldview. The next section will discuss some of them.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MATERIALISTIC WORLDVIEW

The Materialistic worldview typically has certain points of consideration, some of which we will explain here.

1. BEING IS EQUAL TO MATERIAL NATURE

The materialistic school considers existence as equal to matter² and maintains that there is nothing in the external world except matter, and immateriality is equivalent to non-existence (*'adam*) and absurdity. This group is called materialists because, in their view, only matter is original, and immaterial existence is nothing more than an idea. Vladimir Lenin (1870-

1. The Qur'an. 45:24.

2. Matter has three dimensions and properties such as mass, weight, volume, density, and the like.

1924), a Russian politician and political theorist, states that “Nothing can exist outside of matter and outside of this external world with which we are all familiar.”¹ Moreover, this group emphasises that the real material world, which is the world of our consciousness and senses, is the only world that has real existence.²

Analysis of This Theory

Materialists usually argue to prove the correctness of their theory in one of two ways:

- A. Not finding something is enough of a reason to believe it does not exist;
- B. Anything that cannot be experimented with and analysed does not exist.

In analysing the first reason, it could be said that materialists, by inventing an equation called “equality of existence with matter,” seek to negate the whole of the unseen world (*‘alam-i ghayb*) and the immaterial world (*mujarradat*). At the same time, they have not the slightest convincing reason for this equality. Why can’t we consider existence more general than matter? For example, in the past, humankind was unaware of the existence of many forces, such as atomic energy, in nature, but now, with the improvement of science and technology, they have been able to develop their understanding and knowledge of this force in nature.

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1. Muhammad Taqi Misbah, *Pasdari az Sangarhay-i Idi’uluzbik (Protecting Ideological Fortifications)* (Tehran: Sazman-i Intisharat va Amuzish-i Inqilab-i Islami, 1983). 305.
 2. Ibid. 307.

Before the discovery of these forces, could we maintain that there was no atomic force? Therefore, our lack of knowledge concerning the existence of a certain being surely cannot be a sufficient reason for considering it non-existent.

In analysing the second reason, it can be said that materialists have confused a philosophical worldview¹ with a scientific worldview², while the tools of a philosophical worldview are far more comprehensive than experience and experimentation. Basically, we can prove the 'existence' or 'nonexistence' of an object in the laboratory only when the laboratory tools are capable of examining this. But when the reality of what we are looking for is such that, assuming it exists, the

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1. A philosophical worldview, as opposed to a scientific worldview, is based on cognition that can only be proved by rational (not empirical) methods. This type of worldview consists in the cognition of the whole world, not the partial cognition of the world (such as knowing the boiling point of water). The philosopher asks questions that never fall into the realm of sense and experiment. He places the entire universe in his mind and deduces its characteristics. He seeks answers to such questions as the following: where did the world come from, and where will it go? What is the purpose of man in this world? Should the chain of causes and effects stop at some point, or can it go on indefinitely? Can two objects create each other? Is it possible to know the world? What are its tools? Sobhani, *Jahan Bini*. 229-231.
 2. A scientific worldview is a sort of cognition that only sensory perceptions and experimental methods can prove. For example, if we see many times that water boils at a temperature of one hundred degrees, we can say as a general rule that water boils at that temperature.

laboratory cannot recognise it, the laboratory cannot judge its existence or non-existence.¹ To put it in a nutshell, the laboratory may be able to recognise what exists, but, in other instances, it may simply not be able to judge its existence or non-existence.

2. THERE IS NO SCHEME IN CREATION

The second feature of the materialistic worldview is their claim that there is no scheme in the system of creation. This means that there is no pre-ordained plan in the creation of the universe.

The existing system is either the product of the continuous motion of matter and created by chance, or is the result of the property of matter, which by its movement, in the course of time, has multiplied into different types.²

Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), a British philosopher, is one of the proponents of such a view in the 20th century. He states that the creation of humans is the product of factors that were not based on a plan, and no aim has been considered for them. The human beings creation, his features and emotions - such as desire, fear, love and belief - are nothing but the manifestation of the accidental combination of different atoms.³

1. Ja'far Sobhani, *Falsafi-yi Islami va Usul-i Diyaliktik*, 2 ed. (Qum: Mu'assisih Imam Sadiq, 1999). 27-8.

2. Ibid. 30-1.

3. Ja'far Sobhani, *Sarchishmi-yi Hasti* (Qum: Mu'assisih Imam Sadiq, 2003). 38.

Analysis of This Theory

Interpretation of the world through the concept of accidental creation is not correct. If coincidence can justify one or two phenomena, can the whole universe, with this exact order, be justified by coincidence? The materialists consider the system that governs matter to be the product of the continuous movement of matter, which has gradually led to this system, while we observe purposefulness in this world clearly, and see that it can never be justified by an accident or characteristics of matter.

We clearly see that organs in the mother's body can prepare a baby's food on time. The woman's breast, the milk duct, and the baby's mouth are in harmony, indicating purposefulness and foresight, whilst a mindless element such as an accident cannot justify it. Interestingly, materialists, although claiming to be experts in natural sciences, justify the system of matter by resorting to an accident whereas an accident has never been the origin of this system but rather, a source of disorder and chaos.

Suppose we pour the building materials of a four-story apartment into a large container and shake it for months and years. From this continuous movement, not even a partial order can emerge. So, how can we believe that the particles of the universe, via continuous motion, were the origin of the emergence of the partial orders that gathered together and formed the existing system?

3. THE SUFFICIENCY OF MATERIAL CAUSES IN CREATION

The third feature of the materialistic worldview is the belief that material causes suffice to create the world of existence. The proponents of such a view argue that, in the emergence of species, the material cause, i.e., matter, is sufficient, and there is no need for an efficient cause (*'illat-i fa'ili*) outside matter.¹ In fact, the negation of the efficient cause is itself a proof of believing in the self-sufficiency of matter. So matter by itself (i.e., without an efficient cause outside it) turns to different species such as trees, cows, fish, iron, etc.

Analysis of This Theory

The negation of need for the efficient cause and the claim of sufficiency of the material cause are nothing more than a mistake since, in the analysis of matter, when we go back, we discover its simplicity, and finally, molecules and atoms. But as matter progresses, it becomes more complex and receives more perfection, which did not exist in the first matter.²

When, in the interpretation of the origin of species, we solely rely on the material cause, we will be incapable of interpreting its evolution. Because, as mentioned, matter is simple and non-compound in its initial state and evolves in the stages of growth. This evolution cannot be the result of a collection of non-compound

1. See, Joseph Stalin, *al-Maddiyyah al-Diyaliktikiyyah wa al-Maddiyyah al-Tarikhiyyah* (Damascus: Dar Damishq, 2007). 43.

2. Sobhani, *Falsafi-yi Islam*.32-3.

particles. Thus, evolution is naturally a new state for the matter that needs a cause beyond matter.

Let us clarify the weakness of the materialists' argument with an example. According to the materialistic worldview, simple particles via evolution turn into different species. It is obvious that there are many features in these species which did not exist in the original particles. The question is, how did the original particle produce such features without an efficient cause? It is clear that the original particles could not create these new features without an efficient cause.

In light of what has been argued so far, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. There is a close connection between an ideology and a worldview, and in a way, ideological issues are based on worldviews.
2. Theistic and materialistic worldviews have different characteristics.

Now the important question is, where do worldviews come from? Basically, why are worldviews different?

In reply, we may argue that different worldviews appear as a result of epistemological perspectives. In other words, differences in views on epistemological issues lead to a diversity of worldviews. Therefore, it is necessary to become acquainted with epistemological issues and their strengths and weaknesses. This highlights the significance of the 'theory of knowledge'. The next lessons will address epistemological issues.

SUMMARY

1. Materialists believe that the world of nature and the laws that govern it are a mixture of eternal and non-eternal entities; that is, matter is eternal, but the laws governing it are non-eternal.
2. Materialism is not a new school, and, before the birth of Christ or in the time of Prophet Muhammad, there were a group called materialists, although they had no philosophical or scientific reason for denying the metaphysical realities.
3. Materialists believe that matter is original, there is nothing but matter, there was no pre-ordained plan in the creation of the world, the material cause is sufficient for the emergence of species, and there is no need for an efficient cause.

QUESTIONS

1. Did the supernatural deniers in the time of Prophet Muhammad have an intellectual and philosophical system? How does the Qur'an describe their views?
2. Explain the theory of "equality of existence with matter."
3. Can all existents be tested in a laboratory? Why?
4. How do the theistic scholars prove the existence of prudence in the world?
5. Explain the third characteristic of the material worldview by analysing it.

LESSON SIX



The History of Cognition

The theory of knowledge (epistemology) is one of the most significant topics in the field of philosophy of religion.¹ Cognition or knowledge is a fact since,

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1. It seems that “philosophy of religion” is not a new term, but, as Stump holds, “as old as philosophy itself”. Elenore Stump, “Religion, Philosophy of,” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig (London/New York: Routledge, 1998). 248. Alston, however, believes that the phrase dates back to the last years of the eighteenth century. The term “philosophy of religion,” he argues, came into common usage due to “the influence of Hegel”, who referred to the philosophy of “history, mind, art, as well as religion”. William P. Alston, “Religion, History of Philosophy Of,” *ibid.*, ed. Edwards Craig (1984). 239.

It seems that the definition of philosophy of religion depends on the definition of the words “religion” and “philosophy”. It is clear that any ambiguity in the definition of these two words will make for further confusion in the definition of philosophy of religion. Brian Davies states that it is hard to explain “what the philosophy of religion is.” It might be defined as “philosophizing about religion.” However, since thinkers are not at one over the essence of philosophy and religion, this “definition has its drawbacks.” Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 2 ed. (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

ix; John Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*, 4 ed. (New York/London: Routledge, 1977). 4,6. Taliaferro also refers to the same problem and writes that “if there are difficulties defining religion,” it is clear that the definition of philosophy of religion will be problematic. Charles Taliaferro, *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1998). 31. Michael Peterson et al., agree that, due to the ambiguity of the nature of religion and philosophy, it is difficult to say what philosophy of religion is. They, nevertheless, hold that it is possible to provide a “working definition” for it. It is, they say, “the attempt to analyse and critically evaluate religious belief.” Peterson, *Reason and Religious Belief*. 8.

It would be appropriate here to refer to other Western thinkers’ definitions. John Hick holds that it is “the philosophical defence of religious beliefs.” John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, 4 ed. (New Jersey/London: Prentice-Hall, 1990). 1. Alvin Plantinga presents a similar definition and states that it can be understood to mean “philosophical reflection” on the essential teachings of religion. Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (London: George Allen/Unwin LTD, 1975). 1. Ian G. Barbour proposes a clearer definition and contends that it is “the use of the critical methods of philosophy to clarify the assumptions and concepts of various religious traditions”. Barbour, *Issues in Science and Religion*. 19. The philosophers of religion, therefore, pave the way “for the claims of” revealed theology. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*. 1. In other words, as Kant states, they do not “promote or add to the substance of religious beliefs”; they simply “analyse their structures and lay bare their presuppositions, judgments, and inconsistencies.” Hillary Rodrigues, and John S. Harding, *Introduction to the Study of Religion* (London/New York: Routledge, 2009). 33. Philosophers of religion, therefore, address the intellectual

issues that are concerned with religious beliefs. Popkin and Stroll, *Philosophy*. 176. In sum, philosophers of religion attempt to investigate religious teachings intellectually in terms of coherence and plausibility. Having referred to the definition of philosophy of religion, we turn our attention to one of its features now.

These philosophers do not teach religious beliefs and even do not view them through a religious perspective. From this point of view, disbelievers, believers and agnostics can equally philosophize on religion. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*. 1. Philosophy of religion, in other words, is a “hospitable discipline”; that is, “it is as open to interested professional philosophers—whose ranks include atheists, agnostics, secular humanists, Marxists and followers of world religions including Christianity—as it is to philosophically-inclined Christian theologians”. Alan P.F Sell, *The Philosophy of Religion* (London/New York: CroomHelm, 1988). 1. In other words, philosophers can intellectually analyse religious statements, whether they attain certainty about their truthfulness or not. Therefore, a Christian philosopher or an agnostic, for instance, can investigate the religious beliefs of Judaism philosophically. On the contrary, theologians can defend the realms of religion provided that they are certain of the veracity and authenticity of the foundations and principles of that religion. A Muslim theologian, for instance, will uphold the Qur’anic religious beliefs on condition that he accepts, as a presupposition, that the Prophet Muhammad is rendered infallible as the receiver and conveyer of the divine message to people. He, moreover, should accept the immunity of the Qur’an against any alteration. However, the scope of topics that are examined by the philosophers of religion now is more comprehensive than at any former time. We are witnessing a constant and noticeable grow of

according to mans' conscience, his condition or status is different before and after gaining knowledge.¹ Philosophers of religion have endeavoured to explore how knowledge is obtained, the value of human knowledge and the rules by which we can assess the authenticity of knowledge claims.

Philosophers before Socrates (399-470 BC) did not seem to have paid much attention to epistemological issues since their main concern was the creation of the universe and the changes in nature. It appears that the proposition 'cognition of the world is possible' was an acceptable presupposition for them. At the same time, some epistemological issues were raised by some of them. For example, they evaluated some sources of cognition and preferred some over others. For instance, Heraclitus (535-4375 BC) and Parmenides (515-460 BC) preferred reason ('*aql*') while Parmenides

contributions by some of the most prominent philosophers nowadays. Since philosophical reflection enriches religious teachings, it has become a serious subject for discussion in many religions. Taliaferro, *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*. 1-2.

Philosophy of religion is "one of the fastest" developing disciplines in the field of philosophy, "with a range of journals, institutions, and conferences providing forums for ongoing dialogue". 144. Over the last thirty years, we see a significant "resurgence of interest" in the realm of "philosophical theology". William J Wainwright, *Philosophy of Religion*, 2 ed. (London: Wadsworth Publishing Comany, 1999). V.

1. Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi, *Majmu'ah Musannaft-i Shyakh-i Ishraq*, 4 vols., vol. 4 (Tehran: Muassasah-yi Mutaliati vaTahqiqat-i Farhangi, 2001). 223.

distinguished between noumenon and phenomenon. Nevertheless, such arguments were not sophisticated and serious. These discussions continued until the time of the Sophists, who were fundamentally sceptical of the possibility of acquiring knowledge.

The first philosopher to stand up to the storm of scepticism was Socrates, who showed the possibility of gaining knowledge. After him, Plato addressed the major issues of cognition, and then Aristotle presented his epistemological views.¹ These discussions continued later. However, the epistemological issues were never considered separately and in the form of a codified science.²

As will be presented in the forthcoming lessons, the 'theory of knowledge' is a new topic that has been propounded in the last three centuries in the West. However, its principles and essential roots in Islamic philosophy are discussed under various headings such as 'mental existence' (*wujud-i dhihni*), 'immateriality of the soul' (*tajarrud-i ruh*), 'theoretical and practical reason' (*aql-i nazari wa 'amali*), and the 'criterion of truth and falsehood of propositions.'

The appearance of Western ideas and epistemological tendencies in Iran created a new atmosphere for such discussions. Ayatollah Muhammad Huseinal-Tabataba'i (1094-1981) should be considered as a pioneer in the presentation of epistemological discussions. He took the first step in Islamic epistemological discussions

1. For more information about his view, see, Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 9 vols., vol. 1 (New York/London: Doubleday, 1993). 277-319.

2. Ibid. 13-95; Popkin and Stroll, *Philosophy*. 219-224.

by presenting his views in his book *Usul-i Falsafih va Ravish-i Ri'alism*.¹ After him, his prominent students such as Ayatollah Murtada Mutahhari (1919-1976), Ayatollah Abdullah Javadi (b. 1933) and Ayatollah Ja'far Sobhani (b. 1929) continued to add to the discussions.

It seems that the first element that attracted the attention of scholars to this field has been the discovery of sensory errors and the inadequacy of cognitive tools in recognising external realities. Such findings led some ancient philosophers to pay more attention to intellectual perceptions and not consider sensory perceptions to be reliable.

On the other hand, the philosophers' disagreements in rational questions and the contradictory arguments they made to prove and validate their thoughts and ideas allowed the sophists to deny the value of rational perceptions. However, a group of scholars tried to answer the sophists' doubts, and these discussions had an increasingly significant impact on the development of cognitive discussions.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COGNITION IN THE QUR'AN

The Qur'an seems to emphasize the value of cognition more than any other divine book. It is interesting to know that almost 730 verses deal with the issue of cognition, its types, dimensions, motives and results.

1. This book was published in five volumes with Ayatollah Mutahhari's footnotes.

Moreover, the Qur'an introduces the acquisition of knowledge as one of the duties of human beings.¹

On the one hand, from the Qur'anic perspective, man is endowed with free will and owes his perfection to his chosen views and deeds, whilst, on the other hand, we know that making correct choices is not possible without knowledge. This is where the importance of cognition becomes clear since those who have the correct and sufficient knowledge and act accordingly, will become prosperous and achieve the desired perfection. The Qur'an refers to the means of acquiring knowledge and states that "Allah has brought you forth from the bellies of your mothers while you did not know anything. He made for you hearing, eyesight, and hearts so that you may give thanks."²

The Qur'an considers itself a source of awareness which was revealed for the guidance of humankind.³ So, man must think in order to select the right path. Suppose we abandon the tools of cognition and perceptual faculties and prevent ourselves from understanding the facts and observing the light of guidance. In that case, it is clear that we will fall to the brink of the lowest living beings and consequently will be of less value than even cattle. The Qur'an states, "They have hearts with which they do not understand, they have eyes with which they do not see, they have

1. Muhammad Taqi Ja'fari, *Shinakht az Didgah-i 'Ilmi va az Didgah-i Qur'an* (Tehran: Daftrar-i Nashr-i Farhang-i Islami, 1981). 327.

2. The Qur'an. 16:78.

3. The Qur'an states, "Indeed this Quran guides to what is most upright." Ibid. 17:9.

ears with which they do not hear. They are like cattle; rather, they are more astray. It is they who are the heedless.”¹

THE IMPORTANCE OF EPISTEMOLOGICAL DISCUSSIONS

The most important discussion in the realm of cognition is the evaluation of the issues of this emerging type of knowledge. The first question that comes to mind is, why do we discuss issues related to cognition? What does our knowledge of cognition have to do with our scientific life? We may reply that epistemology expresses the value of human philosophical and scientific thoughts, and unless cognitive issues are elucidated, no philosophical and scientific school will be valuable.

Let us make it clearer. As stated in the introduction to this book, we are faced with multiple and sometimes conflicting worldviews in today's world. The questions that might come to mind are, why are there different worldviews? Where do the differences in worldviews come from? How do we judge between worldviews and choose the right one?

The answer to these questions is: because the cognitive approach of these worldviews are different. In other words, epistemological issues give rise to different worldviews. This is why epistemological issues become particularly important and indicate that the root of differences in worldviews is epistemological issues. In order to choose the correct worldview, one

1. Ibid. 7:179.

must examine their epistemological foundations. To put the matter in another way, the reliability of any worldview depends on its epistemological basis. Therefore, epistemology indicates the value of human philosophical and scientific thoughts.

For example, one of the critical issues in epistemology is whether there is a world beyond the mind. If so, can it be conceived? If so, can we describe it to others?

As long as a researcher does not have precise replies to these questions, knowledge cannot be valuable for him because any philosophical discussion depends on the existence of the world beyond the mind. Therefore, epistemological studies can make scientific and philosophical approaches more valuable.

THE DEFINITION OF COGNITION

It might be said that the concept of cognition is self-evident, and thus there is no need for a definition.¹ Nevertheless, if we want to define cognition or knowledge (*ilm*), it is better to define it as “the presence

1. Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, 3. 278; Mahdi Ha'iri, *Kawush Hay-i 'Aql-i 'Amali* (Tehran: Danishgah-i Tehran, 1968). 116. Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, *Sharh al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Qum: Nashr al-Balaghah, 1996). 302-3; Hasan ibn Yusuf 'Allamah al-Hilli, *Kashf al-Murad fi Sharh Tajrid al-I'tiqad* (Qum: Mustafawi, n.d). 172. The purpose of a definition is to remove ambiguities involved in understanding something. Naturally, there is no need to define when there is no ambiguity. For instance, there is an ambiguity in the concept of 'soul' while the concept of 'sunlight' is clear for all.

of something with us.”¹ By ‘us’, we mean ‘the perceiving soul’ (*nafs-i mudrik*), while the body is at the service of the perceiving soul with all the tools and instruments at its disposal. Whenever something is present in such a soul, cognition is achieved. “Presence” does not only mean external existence because the external existence has a container for itself, whilst the perceiving soul has another particular container for itself.

In light of what has been stated, cognition can be defined as “the presence of a form of knowledge (*surat-i ‘ilmi*) of something in our perceiving soul”. It is worth noting that the form of knowledge can be particular (*juz’i*), such as the mental form (*surat-i ‘ilmi*) of our parents, or universal (*kulli*), such as the general concept of ‘human’ (*insan-i kulli*).

Having defined the term ‘cognition’, we may define the theory of knowledge as ‘the science which discusses human cognition, the evaluation of its types and the criteria for their validity’.²

THE CLASSIFICATION OF COGNITION

Cognition can be divided by various criteria. We refer here to a classification that is of paramount

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1. Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta‘aliyah*, 3. 284; Muhammad Sadr al-Din, “Risalah al-Tasawwur wa al-Tasdiq,” in *Al-Jawhar al-Nadid* (Qum: Bidar, 1984). 307; Ja‘far Sobhani, *Nazariyyah al-Ma‘rifah* (Qum: al-Markaz al-‘Alami li al-Dirasat al-Islamiyyah, 1991). 34.
 2. Muhammad Taqi Misbah, *Amuzish-i Falsafih*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Tehran: Sazman-i Tablighat, 1985). 137

importance.¹ Cognition can happen by gaining two types of knowledge: ‘knowledge by presence’ (*‘ilm-i ḥuḍuri*) and ‘acquired knowledge’ (*‘ilm-i husuli*). The next part aims to discuss these types of knowledge.

KNOWLEDGE BY PRESENCE AND ACQUIRED KNOWLEDGE

We are aware of a series of thoughts and objects, and we are constantly increasing this awareness. We are aware of our environment, objects, people, and, our psychological states, sentiments and passions such as fear and joy. But is our knowledge the same in all these matters? In other words, is our awareness of fear or hunger the same as our awareness of the environment around us? If the awareness of these two is different, what is the reason for this difference?

In reply to this question, it should be said that our knowledge and perceptions are obtained in two ways: a) without an intermediary and b) with an intermediary.

Awareness without an intermediary is a knowledge that is gained as a result of direct contact between the perceiving soul and reality, in which case, the said reality completely exists in the perceiving soul. For example, when we feel hunger, the reality (of hunger) is revealed to us without any intermediary. In other words, we find the reality itself, not its form or the mental concept. This awareness is called ‘knowledge by presence’. Sadr al-Din (1572-1641) places great value on such knowledge and maintains that real cognition is

1. For more classifications, see Sobhani, *Nazariyyah al-Ma‘rifah*. 37-53.

‘knowledge by presence’.¹ Some examples of knowledge by presence are:

- awareness of personal (*nafsani*) states and feelings, such as the feeling of pain, joy, and sorrow.²
- awareness of the forms and concepts in the mind, such as the concept of ‘*insan*’ (human being) and the concept of an imaginary man with five-heads.³
- awareness of the powers of the soul, like the power of thought and the power of imagination.⁴
- knowledge of our own actions, like the act of willing something or making a decision.⁵

But sometimes our awareness of the world is formed through a mental concept; that is, we first become aware of the mental concept, and since this form reflects and represents the same external object, we become aware of it. In other words, through one of the five senses, we communicate with the outside world, and these senses imprint an image in our minds. Then we gain

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1. Muhammad Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta‘aliyah fi al-Asfar al-‘Aqliyyah al-Arba‘ah*, 9 vols., vol. 6 (Beirut: Dar al-Ihya’ al-Turath al-‘Arabi, 1981). 163; Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta‘aliyah*, 3. 288-9; Sadr al-Din, “*al-Tasawwur wa al-Tasdiq*.” 307.
 2. al-Tusi, *Sharh al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, 2. 294; Sadr al-Din, “*al-Tasawwur wa al-Tasdiq*.” 307; Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali, *Mahak al-Nazar* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1994). 102-8.
 3. Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi, *Majmu‘ah Musannaft-i Shyakh-i Ishraq*, 4 vols., vol. 1 (Tehran: Muassasah-yi Mutaliati va Tahqiqat-i Farhangi, 2001). 484; *ibid.*, 2. 111.
 4. Muhammad Husein al-Tabataba‘i, *Usul-i Falsafih va Ravish-i Ri‘alism*, 5 vols., vol. 2 (Tehran: Sadra, 1985). 37-40.
 5. *Ibid.* 37-40.

knowledge through this image. This type of knowledge is called acquired knowledge.¹

The Difference between Acquired Knowledge and Presential Knowledge

There are many differences between the two types of knowledge, but we will discuss some of them below.

1. In acquired knowledge, the recognition of objects occurs with an intermediary. We communicate with an object via one of the five senses, and these senses imprint an image in our minds. Then we gain knowledge through this image. While in knowledge by presence, we receive awareness without an intermediary. We feel hunger itself not via any mental concept.²
2. In acquired knowledge, forms and mental concepts play an intermediate role, and perhaps there may not be in complete conformity with the external world. As a result, acquired knowledge is fallible, unlike knowledge by presence, which is fundamentally infallible; because there is no intermediary called the mental concept to which the outside world must correspond; rather the perceiving soul sees the reality (itself) and not its mental concept.

1. Sabzwari, *Sharh al-Mandumah*, 2. 487-9 ; *ibid.*, 1. 77-8; Muhammad Sadr al-Din, *Mafatih al-Ghayb* (Qum: Tahqiqat-i Farhangi, n.d). 108; Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, 6. 161; al-Tusi, *Sharh al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, 2. 308; Sadr al-Din, "*al-Tasawwur wa al-Tasdiq*." 307.

2. Hasan Hasan Zadih Amuli, *Al-Nur al-Mutajilli fi al-Zuhur al-Zilli* (Qum: Daftar-i Tablighat-i Islami, 1996). 13.

In other words, error in perception is possible when there is a mediator or intermediary between the perceiving person and the perceived entity, and knowledge is realized through it. In this case, the question arises as to whether this intermediary performed its representational role accurately or whether it made an error? But if there is no mediator between the perceiving person and the perceived entity, and that which is known is itself present to the perceiver without an intermediary, there is no possibility of error.¹

3. Acquired knowledge can be classified into 'idea' (*tasawwur*) and 'affirmation' (*tasdiq*).² In the statement 'Max is great', if we conceive the concept of 'Max' or 'great' alone, it will be an idea,³ while if we agree with the conception of the whole statement, it will be an affirmation.⁴ However,

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1. Muhammad Sadr al-Din, *Al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ad* (Tehran: Anjuman-i Falsafih va Hikmat-i Iran, 1975). 110; Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, 6. 257 (footnote 2); Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, 1. 263. Misbah, *Amuzish-i Falsafih*, 1. 25.
 2. It seems that it was al-Farabi (Alpharabius) who first divided acquired knowledge into idea and affirmation. Abu Nasr al-Farabi, *Al-Mantiqiyyat*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Qum: Maktabah al-Mar'ashi al-Najafi, 1988). 266.
 3. For more information about the definitions of 'idea', see, Sadr al-Din, "*al-Tasawwur wa al-Tasdiq*." 309-314; al-Tusi, *Sharh al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, 1. 12, 23; Abu Ali Sina, *Mantiq al-Mashriqayn* (Qum: Maktabah al-Mar'ashi al-Najafi, 1985). 9.
 4. For more information about the definitions of 'affirmation', see, al-Farabi, *al-Mantiqiyyat*, 1. 266; Sadr

such a classification is not applicable to knowledge by presence. Idea and affirmation depend on the existence of mental concepts in our mind. In other words, the mental concept is either an idea or an affirmation. Therefore, since knowledge by presence is an intuition of reality and is not essentially like a mental concept, it cannot be divided into an idea and an affirmation.¹

4. Acquired knowledge can be transmitted to others via signs and words. The concept of 'Max is great' can be conveyed in the form of signs or a sentence to others. But one who is hungry cannot convey the specific feeling of hunger to others.²
5. Acquired knowledge can be divided into 'necessary knowledge' (*daruri* or *badihi*)³ and theoretical knowledge (*nadari* or *iktisabi*).⁴ In contrast, such a

al-Din, "*al-Tasawwur wa al-Tasdiq*," 309-314; al-Tusi, *Sharh al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, 1. 12.

1. Sadr al-Din, *Al-Mabda' wa Al-Ma'ad*. 111; Hasan Zadih Amuli, *Al-Nur al-Mutajilli fi al-Zuhur al-Zilli*. 12; Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, 6. 257 (see the footnote 2); Sabzwari, *Sharh al-Mandumah*, 1. 78; Muhammad Rida Muzaffar, *al-Mantiq*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Qum: Isma'iliyan, 1987). 12.
2. Murtada Mutahhari, *Majmu'ih Athar*, 25 vols., vol. 6 (Tehran: Sadra, 1978). 275.
3. The necessary (or self-evident) knowledge is that which does not require reasoning (*istidlal*), like "the whole is greater than the part".
4. Theoretical knowledge is that which cannot be obtained easily; rather, it needs contemplation or a rational operation, like "the earth is motionless".

division does not apply to presential knowledge.¹ The criterion of this division is whether such knowledge (in order to prove its existence) needs an argument and reasoning or not, and clearly, reasoning is specific to acquired knowledge. If we obtain presential knowledge, we no longer require proofs and arguments. For example, you have a toothache, you feel the pain with certainty and do not need reasoning for reaching certainty about it.

Having familiarised with the concept of cognition and its history, the next lesson will discuss the possibility of knowledge.

SUMMARY

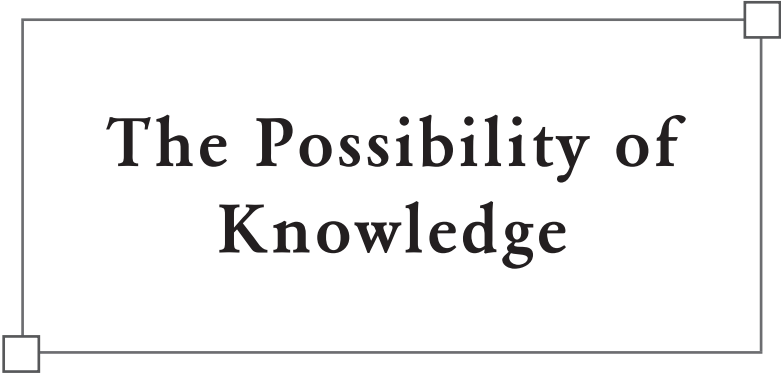
1. The errors and insufficiency of cognitive tools are among the causes of the appearance of epistemology.
2. Epistemological studies are concerned with the evaluation of scientific and philosophical approaches to cognition.
3. Epistemology is an area of human knowledge that helps evaluate different types of scientific schools.
4. Knowledge by presence is cognition without an intermediary, whereas acquired knowledge is cognition through an intermediary (mental concept).
5. Knowledge by presence is infallible, whereas acquired knowledge is fallible.

1. Sabzwari, *Sharh al-Mandumah*, 1:84.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the origin of epistemological issues?
2. How can epistemological studies help evaluate different scientific and philosophical approaches?
3. Define cognition and epistemology.
4. Define knowledge by presence and acquired knowledge and their differences.
5. Why is knowledge by presence infallible and acquired knowledge fallible?

LESSON SEVEN



The Possibility of Knowledge

Every human being, during the course of their life, gains knowledge and awareness of a series of affairs and constantly adds to this knowledge. For example, we are aware of our surroundings, we know many people, and we do not doubt the existence of this world. However, the history of philosophy refers to some thinkers who had doubts about possessing knowledge and awareness of the world, and thus they founded some schools of thought that reflected that perspective. These thinkers can be divided into two groups:

- the sophists, who denied the existence of the world outside the mind, and
- the sceptics, who believed in the world outside the mind, but they did not consider it knowable.¹

We will now analyse these two approaches.

1. Paul Foulquié, *Mitafizik*, trans. Yahya Mahdavi (Tehran: University of Tehran, 1987). 49; Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 1. 413-20.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE SCHOOL OF SOPHISM

Around 500 years before Christ, a group of Greek thinkers denied the reality of the world outside the mind and considered human thoughts and ideas about the external world to be unrealistic. The emergence of this way of thinking was the result of two essential elements:

1. At that time, there were conflicting schools of thought and philosophies that offered different views about the origin and end of the world, its creator, the purpose of creation, as well as other philosophical matters. Each school of thought rejected the arguments of the other schools and labelled them as misguided. The strife between these groups was endless. The sophists, due to the weakness of their thought, could not recognise the truth amongst the different and conflicting schools and thought that there was no reality at all. They maintained that if there were a reality, there would be no room for endless conflicts between thinkers. In a nutshell, the constant disagreement between the schools of thought led them to altogether deny reality and truth.¹
2. There were professional teachers who taught rhetoric and debate and trained lawyers for the courts. The profession required that a defence lawyer be able to substantiate any claim (even false ones) and refute any opposing claim (even true ones). Constantly

1. Foulquié, *Mitafizik*. 54.

dealing with such fallacious teachings gradually made them think that there was basically no truth beyond human thought.¹

Popkin and Stroll, in *Philosophy*, maintain that the sophists “taught their followers how to ‘get along’ in the world *without* certain knowledge. They taught their followers how to win disputes, how to speak well and convincingly and generally, how to succeed.” Gorgias, the great sophist, proclaimed that “nothing exists, and if it did, no one could know it, and if they knew it, they could not communicate it”.²

Teaching fallacious methods to prove or disprove claims, gradually created the sophist belief that truth and falsehood are fundamentally subject to human thought. As a result, there are no truths beyond human belief. This is what Protagoras, perhaps the greatest of the sophists, states, “Man is the measure of all things.”³

Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle vehemently opposed this school, refuting their fallacious methods. They tried to prove that objects are real regardless of our perception. Aristotle admitted that human beings, in their intellectual arguments, are not free from errors, but he also argued that these errors did not imply that

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1. Sobhani, *Nazariyyah al-Ma‘rifah*. 60; Popkin and Stroll, *Philosophy*. 221; Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 1. 83-5; R. J Hollingdale, *Western Philosophy: an Introduction* (London: Kahn/ Averill, 1966). 73-4.
 2. Popkin and Stroll, *Philosophy*. 221; Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 1. 93.
 3. Popkin and Stroll, *Philosophy*. 221; Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 1. 86; Foulquié, *Mitafizik*. 54; Hollingdale, *Western Philosophy*. 74.

there was no reality outside the mind. In addition, he formed the rules and criteria of the science of logic to keep the mind immune from making mistakes in reasoning.¹

However, the best way to understand the world outside the mind of human beings is to refer to conscience. It is actual water that quenches the thirst of the thirsty man, not the mental concept of water, and the conscience of each person bears testimony to this fact. Avicenna believed that sophists were unaware of the truth and suggested that a fire should be lit and sophists should be asked to enter in it. If they stayed away from it, we would ask them why they were avoiding the fire, since the existence or non-existence of fire was the same for them. He also suggested that sophists be flogged, and when they felt the pain, be asked if there was any difference for them between beating and not beating.²

As mentioned above, the history of philosophy refers to the emergence of two schools of thought which doubted the existence of reality beyond the mind of human beings, namely, sophism and scepticism. The next section will address the second school.

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1. Muhammad Husein al-Tabataba'i, *Usul-i Falsafih va Ravish-i Ri'alism*, 5 vols., vol. 1 (Tehran: Sadra, 1985). 42.
 2. Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, 1. 90; Sina, *al-Shifa: al-Ilahiyyat*. 53.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE SCHOOL OF SCEPTICISM

The school of scepticism doubted the possibility of proper knowledge of the external world and claimed that we could not perceive the truth as it is. Historically, it is not clear why scepticism emerged after sophism.

It seems that the sceptics of the pre-Christian era had come to know that, on the one hand, they could not deny the existence of the world outside of the mind, and, on the other hand, the human senses were not always free from error. As a result, they concluded that perhaps other human perceptions, which we normally consider to be free from error, were not infallible either. Scepticism emerged as a philosophical school with the ideas of Pyrrho of Elis (360-270 BC). Therefore, he is known as the “founder of Scepticism”.¹ The ten arguments presented by Pyrrho can be taken as the emerging point of this school.² The most important of these arguments will be explained below.

ERRORS OF SENSE AND REASON

Human cognition of the external world is formed in some cases via senses and in other cases via the intellect. It is evident that neither of these two faculties is free from error. For instance,

1. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 1. 157.

2. See, Foulquié, *Mitafizik*. 56-65; Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta‘aliyah*, 1. 90; Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta‘aliyah*, 3. 455; Sina, *al-Shifa: al-Ilahiyyat*. 48-52.

- when we put a wooden oar in the water, it appears to be bent;¹
- when we stand in the middle of two parallel lines, we see the end of the two lines connected;
- when we spin a lightened torch in a circular motion, it looks like a circle;²
- “The green trees on the faraway mountainside look a greyish blue in the haze of distance”
- “A round coin looks elliptical from a 45-degree angle and flat from a 90-degree angle.”³

Some experimental scientists believe that, due to the error of sense in empirical laws, “no theory can be proven to be true.” Therefore, revision of many rules with subsequent investigations is not unexpected.⁴

The errors of the intellect are no less than those of the senses. The different and contradictory viewpoints of human beings regarding theological, philosophical and other matters, all indicate the inadequacy of the intellect in arriving at an infallible conclusion in these fields. In other words, the emergence of conflicting schools of thought testifies to the fallibility of the intellect. A theory may be viewed as true by one group and as false by another. Perhaps the ambience affects a person’s understanding, in the sense that if they lived in another milieu, they would have had a different idea.

1. Popkin and Stroll, *Philosophy*. 214.

2. For more examples, see, Sobhani, *Nazariyyah al-Ma’rifah*. 65.

3. Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*. 76-7. See also, Foulquié, *Mitafizik*. 57-8; Will Durant, *The Pleasures of Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964). 21-4.

4. Barbour, *Issues in Science and Religion*. 146-7.

In short, we make use of the senses and intellect, and these two faculties are not free from error. So the question arises, how can we make sure that our other senses and intellectual perceptions are not free of error?¹

Pyrrho refers to the fallibility of human senses and intellect and states that the “search for truth was vain”. From his perspective, there are “no objective criteria for distinguishing between true and false sense perceptions” or selecting which of several opposing judgments was the true one. He concludes that certain knowledge is impossible. Therefore, looking for “knowledge must be given up, and one must learn to live in a state of suspended judgment. Thus, in Pyrrho, an epistemological theory (one cannot know the truth) leads to a moral theory (one ought not to seek the truth).² He adds, “We can only know how things appear to us. The same things appear differently to different people, and we cannot know which is right”. Therefore, we cannot be sure of anything, and a wise “man will withhold his judgment. Rather than say,

1. For more information, see, al-Tusi, *Sharh al-Isyarat wa al-Tanbihat*, 1. 215; abu Ali Sina, *al-Ta'liqat* (Cairo: 'Alam al-Kitab, 1973). 68- 70; al-Razi, *al-Mabahith al-Mashriqiyyah*, 1. 3502; Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, 3. 468-499; al-Tabataba'i, *Nihayah al-Hikmah*. 253-5; Muhammad Sadr al-Din, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*, 7 vols., vol. 2 (Qum: Bidar, 1987). 71-6; Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali, *al-Munqadh min al-Zalal* (Qum: Dar al-Fikr, n.d). 538-40.

2. Hollingdale, *Western Philosophy*. 94-5.

'This is so,' we should say, "So it appears to me" or "It may be so."¹

ANALYSIS OF THIS THEORY

It seems that the above argument cannot prove the claim of the sceptics that all human perceptions are invalid. They allege that the existence of some errors invalidates all knowledge and perceptions of man, while the realisation of the presence of such errors and distinguishing the correct perceptions (in these cases) is itself evidence that man has a set of accurate and well-established perceptions. Human beings, in light of this true knowledge, evaluate their other perceptions and, in this way, realise their errors in the realm of their senses and intellect.²

Let us illustrate this further with an example. When we put a wooden oar in water, we ask the sceptics, do you doubt that the oar is not bent or are you sure that it is not bent? In response, they will say that they are sure that it is not bent. If we ask them again how they are sure that it is not bent, they will take the oar out of the water, so that you will see for yourself that the oar is flat. This example demonstrates two facts:

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1. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 1. 413.
 2. Ja'far Sobhani, *Shinakht dar Falsafih-yi Islami* (Qum: Mu'assisih Imam Sadiq, 1996). 38-9. Sadr al-Din attempts to discuss the errors of the senses. See, Muhammad Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah fi al-Asfar al-'Aqliyyah al-Arba'ah* 9vols., vol. 4 (Beirut: Dar al-Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1981). 65-6. Fakhr al-Din al-Razi also discusses these errors in more detail. See, al-Razi, *al-Mabahith al-Mashriqiyyah*, 1. 350-2.

1. that there are two kinds of knowledge a) false knowledge and b) certain (*yaqini*) knowledge.
2. that false knowledge can be recognised in light of certain knowledge. In other words, unless there is certain knowledge, man cannot recognise the error of his senses or intellect.

Therefore, acknowledging that the wooden oar appears to be bent in the water does not harm the feasibility of gaining certain knowledge; rather, it confirms that we have certain knowledge and that the oar is not bent.

In light of the above points, we can conclude that human perception is sometimes wrong and at other times is definitely in line with reality. In order to avoid mistakes in our perception, a solution must be found, and that is the science of logic.¹ Therefore, the existence of errors in human perceptions does not imply the impossibility of gaining certain knowledge. Having analysed the views of the school of sceptics, it is appropriate to have a glance at the Qur'anic perspective on the possibility of knowledge.

THE POSSIBILITY OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE QUR'AN

There is no such topic as the 'possibility' or 'impossibility of cognition' in the Qur'an. However, what we can gather from the Qur'an is that it considers cognition definitely possible. God regards Prophet

1. Popkin and Stroll, *Philosophy*. 282.

Adam on earth as his vicegerent in terms of knowledge of facts and cognition of realities. The Qur'an states, "He taught Adam the Names, all of them."¹ This means that God, in order to honour and glorify Adam, taught him the names. It is clear that knowledge (*ilm*) will bring dignity and honour to Adam when it symbolises and reflects the truth and reality. Uncertain thoughts can give him no grace.

Moreover, a sense of curiosity and realism is one of the dimensions of human beings; that is, everybody is innately created as a truth seeker. Had human creation not been associated with this sense of curiosity about reality, people would never have succeeded in discovering truths. On the other hand, the Qur'an, explicitly and implicitly, calls people to gain knowledge, and understand the secrets and mysteries of the universe, mainly when dark clouds of ignorance encompass man. It states, "It is Allah who has created seven heavens, and of the earth [a number] similar to them. The command gradually descends through them, that you may know that Allah has power over all things, and that Allah comprehends all things in knowledge."²

Such verses explicitly assert that one of the purposes of creating the world is to inform man of the knowledge of God, the power of God and His essence. If knowledge and cognition were not possible, how could becoming aware about the knowledge of God and His eternal power be one of the purposes of creation?

1. The Qur'an. 2:31.

2. Ibid. 65:12.

It is worth noting that the term “*ilm*” (knowledge) has been used 779 times, “*fikr*” (thought) 18 times, “*tadabbur*” (contemplation) 4 times, “*‘aql*” (reason) 47 times and “*lubb*” (intellect) 16 times in the Qur’an. Through many verses, the Qur’an invites us to think about and enjoy these blessings. The Qur’an’s repeated reference to these notions is itself a remarkable proof of the possibility of cognition.¹ Moreover, there are more than seven hundred verses in the Qur’an about knowledge and its sources², which is another reason for the possibility of cognition.

In light of what has been argued above, it can be concluded that Muslim philosophers accepted two points: a) there is an independent reality outside the human mind and b) it is possible to know it. Now the critical issue is how and by what means that reality can be known, which we will discuss in the next two lessons.

SUMMARY

1. Those who have doubts about knowledge of the external world are divided into two groups: sophists and sceptics.
2. The existence of conflicting philosophical views and the use of rhetoric and debate in proving false claims

1. Ja‘far Sobhani, *Manshur-i Jawid*, 14 vols., vol. 1 (Isfahan: Amir al-Mu‘minin, 1985). 195.

2. Nasir Makarim, *Piyam-i Qur’an*, vol. 1 (Qum: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah, 1983). 100

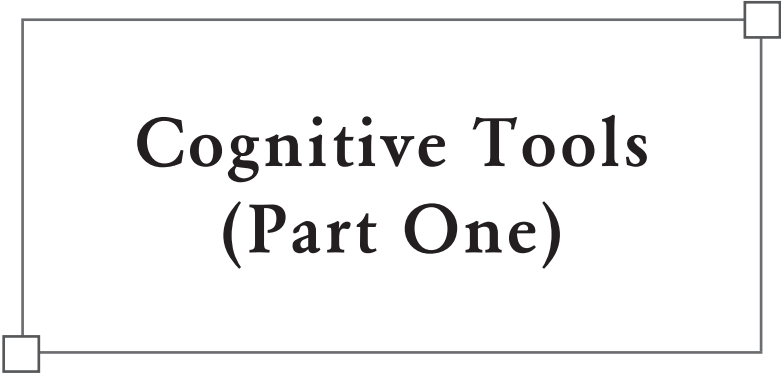
were the sources of the emergence of the school of scepticism.

3. The best response to the sceptics is to refer them to their conscience.
4. A group of thinkers have considered some errors of sense and intellect as the reason for the human inability to reach truth or certainty.

QUESTIONS

1. What were the origins of the school of sophism?
2. What did Avicenna suggest about the treatment of sophism?
3. Describe the origins of the school of scepticism.
4. Can the error of sense and intellect be considered a reason for the impossibility of reaching any truth or certainty? If not, why?
- 5- How can the verse “He taught Adam the Names, all of them” be a reason for the possibility of cognition?

LESSON EIGHT



Cognitive Tools (Part One)

Based on what was explained in the previous lessons, we can accept two facts: a) there is an independent reality outside the human mind and b) it is possible to perceive it. Now the important question is: how and by what means can that reality be known?

Muslim philosophers have proposed the following tools for understanding facts: the senses, intellect and the heart (*qalb*). Intellectual reasoning also falls into different types such as, analogy (*tamthil*), induction (*istiqra'*), experiment (*tajrubih*), etc. We will explain them below.

1. THE SENSES

Our five senses are one of the tools of cognition that we have been familiar with since the dawn of humanity and through which we have communicated with the external world. We gather information from the external world via the channel of the senses. This means that if we lack sensory perception, the path of rational perceptions will also be closed to us. For this reason, Aristotle says: whoever lacks one sense has lost

the knowledge of that sensation.¹ This means that if a person is born blind, s/he cannot understand the concept of colours and their variety. No definition can lead him to distinguish between the colours of black and brown.

Sadr al-Din maintains that the senses play a significant role in human intellectual deductions. He believes that all human perceptions are rooted in the senses, so that, without them, the human perceptive power can never comprehend rational concepts. He says that the different human senses help the perceptive faculty to understand general concepts (*mafahim-i kulli*).² By seeing John, Robert and Mary with one's eyes, one can deduce a general concept of the human being (*insan-i kulli*).

THE QUR'AN AND VALUE OF THE SENSES

The Qur'an attaches great importance and value to the senses. It holds that the eyes and ears are accountable and states, "Do not follow that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed the hearing, the eyesight, and the heart – all of these are accountable."³ It invites us to look at the farms⁴ and the creation of the heavens and the earth.⁵

1. Muhammad Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah fi al-Asfar al-'Aqliyyah al-Arba'ah* 9vols., vol. 9 (Beirut: Dar al-Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1981). 126. See also, Sabzwari, *Sharh al-Mandumah*, 1.246, 325; *ibid.*, 5. 132.

2. Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, 3. 381.

3. The Qur'an. 17:36.

4. *Ibid.* 56:63.

5. *Ibid.* 14:19.

Regarding the value of sensory perceptions, the Qur'an states, "Allah has brought you forth from the bellies of your mothers while you did not know anything. He made for you hearing, eyesight, and hearts so that you may give thanks."¹ Among the five senses, due to the importance of the eyes and the ears, the Qur'an mentions these two, along with the term "*af'idah*" (hearts)—which refers to another cognitive tool that we will discuss later. It is worth noting that the verse ends with "so that you may give thanks," which means that the proper use of these tools is a kind of gratitude to God.

CAN THE SENSES BE THE ONLY TOOLS OF COGNITION?

A group of Western philosophers like John Locke (1632-1704) have considered the senses to be the only way to knowledge and have rejected other means of cognition.² While acknowledging the value of the senses, Islamic philosophers do not consider the means of cognition to be exclusive to this set of tools for the following two reasons:

- Firstly, as we will discuss later, there are some perceptions that can never be accessed through the senses. In other words, although the senses have a preliminary role in some perceptions, the result is achievable by means of the intellect (not the senses).

1. Ibid. 16:78.

2. al-Tabataba'i, *Usul-i Falsafih*, 1. 6.

- Secondly, the senses make many mistakes that must be corrected by the intellect. For example, our eyes may see trees parallel to each other on both sides of the street. However, further away, they may seem to intersect. This is obviously an error; the criterion for recognising this error is the intellect.

Let us further explain this argument. It is true that we rely on our senses in recognizing this error because we have walked down the street many times and have seen the exact distance between the trees, but just seeing it again and again does not make us realize the error in eyesight. Rather, we realize the error of the eye with an intellectual argument; that is, by using the principle of non-contradiction. This principle argues that “it is impossible for these trees to be both parallel and unparallel at once.” The invalidity of “the meeting of two contradictions at once” (*ijtima‘i naqidain*) can only be understood through the intellect. According to these two reasons, the senses cannot be the only tool at our disposal for cognition.

2. THE INTELLECT

Although the senses are one of the essential tools of cognition through which we can perceive the sensory world, the intellect can expand the realm of human cognition. It can reveal many truths which the senses would never be able to reach. Intellectual reasoning can be classified into different types such as, analogy

(*tamthil*), induction (*istiqla*), experiment (*tajrubih*), etc., which we will discuss next.

A) ANALOGY

The transition from one thing to another owing to the similarity between them is called analogy.¹ Let us make it clear with two examples. Suppose you have read a book by a famous author which you found very interesting. Then you see a new book from the same author, and, comparing with the previous book, you may say: "This book will definitely be as interesting as the previous book." In this case, you deduce the attractiveness of the second book from the first book since it was written by the same person.

Here is another example of an analogy. We know that wine is forbidden (*haram*) in Islam. We also know that wine is intoxicating. We also assume that we are not aware of the verdict regarding beer. Here, due to the similarity between wine and beer (intoxication), we may conclude that beer is also forbidden.

Therefore, in analogy, the criterion is similarity between two things: the thing perceived by the tools of cognition (such as the book which you already read or wine that you knew about), and the thing which is not yet perceived by the cognitive tools (such as the unread book or beer). The important question which the next section aims to consider is the value of analogy.

1. Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, *al-Jawhar al-Nadid* (Qum: Bidar, 1984). 189.

The Epistemological Value of Analogy

In analogy, we expand our knowledge through the similarity of two things. Still, it should be noted that the similarity of two things, although very close, is not a definite reason for treating the two things in the same way. For this reason, analogy has been considered as a non-definitive reason¹, and juridical analogy (*qiyas-i fiqhi*), which is the same as logical analogy, is not valid according to the Shi'ah jurists. Yes, on two conditions, analogy can provide us with definitive reasons. The first condition is that the criterion for ruling in the first case (intoxication) should be specified in the reason² (in a narration, for instance)³. The second condition is that the same criterion should exist in the second case (i.e., beer). In such a situation, analogy will produce a definitive reason.

We may further clarify the non-definitiveness of analogy with another example. We know that, according to Shi'ah jurisprudence, the *'idda* (waiting period after divorce) for ladies who have been divorced is three months, i.e., they must wait for nearly three months before they can remarry. One could argue that this law was useful in the past to determine whether a woman was pregnant from her ex-husband before entering into another marriage. With the advancement of technology today, one may ask whether this waiting period is still necessary. The basis of this argument is that the

1. In logic, it is called *mustanbih al-'illah*.

2. In logic, it is called *mansus al-'illah*.

3. It means that the *hadith* states that wine is *haram* owing to intoxication.

issue of pregnancy can be resolved immediately after a divorce by sonography. In this case, she may be able to immediately marry again after divorce without waiting for three months. Shi'ah scholars unanimously agree that analogy cannot be applicable in such cases because it is unknown whether the above-mentioned reason for the waiting period ('*idda*') is the only cause or just one of a number of causes. Therefore, the waiting period for divorcees still applies even if she knows that she is not pregnant from her ex-husband through sonography. In light of what has been discussed, it can be concluded that, as long as we do not know the reason for the verdict (like '*iddah*' in the above example), analogy cannot provide us with a definite reason.

B) INDUCTION

Induction, like analogy, is one of the tools of cognition and can develop the realm of cognition. Induction consists of examining various details and deriving a general rule from them.¹ To illustrate, suppose the census officers notice after a census that all the people they visited were literate. Then they announce that all the people of this city are literate. A significant question to be addressed in the next section is the value of induction.

The Epistemological Value of Induction

In induction, like analogy, the criterion is similarity between two things: the thing which is in the realm of the senses (such as the census of people visited) and the

1. al-Tusi, *al-Jawhar al-Nadid*. 188.

thing which is outside the realm of the senses (such as the people who have not been visited). Such induction, therefore, is a non-definitive reason to prove that all the people of the city are literate since, in this example, there may be many illiterate people who have not been visited. This type of induction is called 'imperfect induction' (*istiqla'-i naqis*).

If, however, we examine all the people of this city without any exception and see that everyone has been educated to a degree, it could serve as a definitive reason and we can say conclusively that all the people of this city are literate. This type of induction is called "complete induction" (*istiqla'-i tamm*). It is worth noting that what leads us to certainty is not the 'complete induction', but rather our comprehensive observations.

Although a 'complete induction' leads to certainty, such an induction is practically impossible in many cases. For instance, we may examine twenty species of animals (not all) and find that they move their lower jaw when eating. Then, we generally conclude that all animals move their lower jaw when eating. Such an induction is incomplete and does not yield certainty because we have not examined all the animals. We may find out later that an animal like a crocodile moves its upper jaw. How is it possible for all the animals on the planet to be examined, for example? There may be animals that humans are not even aware of. Moreover, if all species of animals were examined, still the past or future species of animals could never be examined at all.¹

1. Misbah, *Amuzish-i Falsafih*, 1. 100.

The Difference between Induction and Analogy

The basis of reasoning in induction and analogy is the similarity of the items. In other words, there are some similarities, for example, between wine and beer in analogy, as both are intoxicants. In induction, likewise, there are similarities, for example, between the people visited and those who have not been visited since both are residents of the same city.

The difference between the two is that in induction, the inference is from particulars to a universal. That is, by examining some individuals (some people of a city), we arrive at a general rule (for all people of the city). While in analogy, the inference is from a particular thing (wine) to another particular thing (beer).

As we noted, Muslim philosophers have specified some tools for cognition, namely, the senses, the intellect and the heart. Intellectual reasoning also falls into different types such as analogy, induction, experiment, etc. Having discussed the senses, analogy and induction, the next lesson will examine the rest of the cognitive tools.

SUMMARY

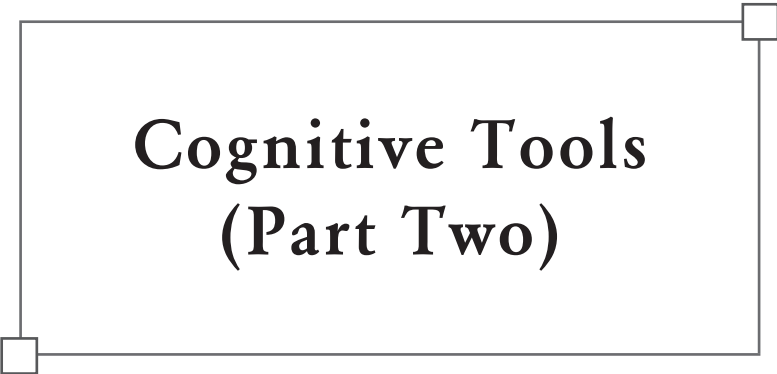
1. Although the Qur'an considers the senses as one of the essential tools of cognition, it has never considered it as the only tool of cognition because not all of our perceptions can be traced back to the realm of the senses.

2. Analogy denotes the inference of a particular proposition from another particular one due to the similarity between the two things involved.
3. Analogy leads to a non-definitive reason unless the resemblance between the two things involved is the complete cause.
- 4-Induction means examining different particulars to deduce a universal rule.
- 5- Imperfect induction provides us with a non-definitive reason, but complete induction leads to a definite reason. Its certainty is not due to induction but rather due to observation and the senses. In addition, comprehensive induction is often not possible.

QUESTIONS

1. Why would a person who lacks sensory perception also find a lack in his intellectual perception?
2. Why can't the senses be the only tool of cognition?
3. Define analogy and explain its epistemological value.
4. Define induction and explain its epistemological value.
5. In what cases does the intellect not have a decisive verdict in analogy? Why?

LESSON NINE



Cognitive Tools (Part Two)

As explained in the previous lesson, Muslim philosophers have defined some tools for cognition, i.e., the senses, the intellect and the heart. Intellectual reasoning is divided into different types such as analogy, induction, experiment, etc. The previous lesson addressed the senses, analogy and induction. This lesson aims to examine experiment and the rest of the cognitive tools.

C) EXPERIMENT

Experimentation has been one of the most important tools of cognition that has been considered in all eras. In Aristotelian philosophy, it was introduced as one of the tools of certain knowledge. Examining the hadith corpus, we find that the Imams attached great importance to the issue of experimentation, since humans can use it as a means to expand the realm of their cognition and achieve new knowledge that cannot be gained by other means. Regarding the significance of experimenting, Imam Ali (as) states, “In experience

lies new cognition. Paying heed to it [experience] leads to growth.”¹

Islamic scholars also used this tool extensively in the natural, mathematical, and astronomical sciences. Avicenna, for example, gained much of his knowledge through experiments.² This tool of cognition received more attention in the scientific and industrial revolution in the West; however, it can never be considered as one of the West’s initiatives since Muslim scholars had paid due attention to this earlier. This tool has more applications and advantages than induction and analogy, which we will now explain.

WHAT IS EXPERIMENT?

Suppose we examine several pieces of iron and observe that they expand at a specific temperature, and we repeat this process until we are convinced that expansion is a particular effect that develops in iron at a certain temperature. In this case, we can confidently state that ‘all the iron in the world, that is of the same composition as the pieces we tested, expands by heat’. In other words, when we come to the conclusion, in our experiment, that expansion is related to the two factors of iron and heat, and that no other property is

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1. Hasan Ibn Shu‘bah, *Tuhaf al-‘Uqul fi Akhbar Al al-Rasul* (Qum: Jami‘i-yi Mudarrisin, n.d). 96.
 2. For example, Avicenna says on the issue of the rainbow, that he had experienced this issue many times. Abu Ali Sina, *Al-Shifa: Al-Tabi‘iyyat*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (Qum: Maktabah al-Mar‘ashi al-Najafi, n.d). 51. He refers to some issues about animals that were proven to him by experience. Ibid., 3. 101.

involved, we extend this knowledge to all the identical items outside our experiment. In our experiment, we change the conditions so much that we finally realise that expansion is not related to a specific condition and location, but only to the two factors of iron and heat. Then, according to the rational rule “two identical things will have the same verdict,”¹ we generalise the rule and maintain that “all the iron in the world, which is of the same composition as the tested pieces, expands by heat.”² The epistemological value of experimentation and its difference from induction is

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1. The rule is “Judgement regarding similar cases of what is permissible or impermissible is one.”

حكم الأمثال في ما يجوز وما لا يجوز واحد.

It is one of the rules that underlie many issues. However, there is no discussion under the title of this rule in philosophical books, and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi has devoted a chapter in *al-Arbaʿin fi Usul al-Din* to discuss this rule. He states that

إِنَّ حَكْمَ الشَّيْءِ حَكْمَ مِثْلِهِ، وَ ذَلِكَ لِأَنَّهُ إِذَا دَلَّتِ الدَّلَالَةُ عَلَى أَنَّ التَّعِينَ الَّذِي بِهِ الْإِمْتِيَّازُ غَيْرُ دَاخِلٍ فِي الْمَنَاطِ، فَحِينَئِذٍ لَمْ يَبْقَ إِلَّا الْمَاهِيَّةُ، فَلَوْ صَارَتْ تِلْكَ الْمَاهِيَّةُ مُحْكَمَةً عَلَيْهَا بِحَكْمٍ فِي مَوْضِعٍ وَ يَسْلُبُ مِنْهَا ذَلِكَ الْحَكْمُ فِي مَوَاضِعٍ أُخَرَ، لَرُمَ اجْتِمَاعُ النَّفْيِ وَ الْإِثْبَاتِ. وَ هَذِهِ مُقَدِّمَةٌ يَتَفَرَّعُ عَلَيْهَا كَثِيرٌ مِنَ الْمُبَاحِثِ الْكَلَامِيَّةِ وَ الْفَلَسَفِيِّ.

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *al-Arbaʿin fi Usul al-Din*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Cairo: Maktabah al-Kuliyyat al-Azhariyyah, 1986). 323. At the end of this book, he devotes a chapter to listing some of the intellectual principles that underlie philosophical issues. See *ibid.* 321-8. See also, Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Mutaʿaliyah*, 9. 253; Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Mutaʿaliyah*, 1. 359.

2. Sobhani, *Shinakht*. 130-2.

the important question which will be investigated in the following section.

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL VALUE OF EXPERIMENTATION AND ITS DIFFERENCE FROM INDUCTION

Paying attention to this example, it becomes clear why certainty is the outcome of experimentation, while incomplete induction¹ does not lead to certainty. This is because, in an experiment, we find the cause of the specific verdict (expansion of this iron) and we develop a more general verdict via the intellect, while in induction, we only perform an incomplete observation and never reach the cause. In other words, we never obtain the cause of the verdict²; rather, by observing a few cases, we reach a conclusion and, for example, we claim that animals move their lower jaw when they eat. However, it should be noted that being an animal does not necessarily involve the movement of the lower jaw as there may be an animal (such as a crocodile) that moves its upper jaw while eating.

To further explain the difference, the criterion of judgement in an experiment is the identical nature (*tamathul*) of that which has been tested with that which has not been tested, while the criterion of judgement in induction and analogy is similarity (*tashbuh*). From

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1. As mentioned before, complete induction is nearly impossible.
 2. Abu Ali Sina, *al-Shifa al-Mantiq*, 4 vols., vol. 3 (Qum: Maktabah al-Mar'ashi al-Najafi, 2012). 95-6; Sabzwari, *Sharh al-Mandumah*, 1. 325-6.

this, it becomes clear why experimentation provides us with a definite reason, while induction and analogy do not. This is because the intellect does not accept that two similar things must follow the same rule, but it certainly admits that two identical things must follow the same rule. In summary, experimentation can lead us to certainty, while incomplete induction and analogy cannot.¹

As was mentioned earlier, the intellect is one of the tools of cognition which, in addition to analogy, induction and experiment, has a realm of its own. They are inference (*istintaj*), abstraction (*intiza' va tajrid*) and classification, which we will briefly discuss below.

D) INFERENCE

Sometimes the intellect, after reflecting upon a series of studies on different subjects, can reach a general law. Inferences are steps in reasoning, moving from premises to logical consequences. For example, sound reason says, 'no phenomenon can occur without a cause'. Then, through an argument, the intellect concludes that 'every phenomenon has a creator'. We can also expand our knowledge via categorical syllogisms (*qiyas-i iqtirani*). For example, regarding natural disasters such as earthquakes, our intellect states:

- Minor premise: "an earthquake is a phenomenon".

1. By analogy, here, I mean the non-definitive type which is called *mustanbit al-'illah* in logic. In the *mansus al-'illah*, however, we can gain certainty. See Lesson Eight.

- Major premise: “every phenomenon has a creator”.
- Conclusion: “an earthquake needs a creator or cause”.

As can be seen, humans can expand the realm of their knowledge in light of inference. They achieve new knowledge (i.e., an earthquake needs a creator or cause) which cannot be understood by other means.

E) ABSTRACTION

When we observe several people like John, Robert, and Emma and compare them, we can separate the personal features of each (like age, colour, weight etc.) from their common features. The intellect then arrives at a general concept, which applies to all people equally.¹ This is called abstraction. This role can be described as “transforming sensory cognition into intellectual cognition.” This means that first we obtain sensory knowledge by seeing different people with our eyes; then, our intellect turns this sensory knowledge into a universal and rational concept.² The role of reason, then, is to change sensory knowledge into intellectual concepts. We can associate some features with such intellectual concepts:

- General concepts apply to many items.
- The abstraction of general concepts is carried out through reason.

1. Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, 1. 272.

2. Ibid. 319.

- The abstraction of general concepts follows the perception of particulars.¹

As you can see, we can expand the realm of our knowledge in light of abstraction, by which we achieve a new piece of knowledge that cannot be gained with other tools.

F) CLASSIFICATION

Another function of the intellect is the classification of beings and the placement of each under a specific category. For example, the intellect says, greed, jealousy, love and affection are a type of quality of the soul (*kayfi nafsani*), or shapes such as squares, rectangles and triangles are classified as types of physical qualities (*kayfi jismani*).² Therefore, it is the duty of the intellect to classify these beings and to include each one in one of various categories of “quantity” (*kamm*) and “quality” (*kayf*). In a nutshell, in light of classification, humans can expand the realm of their knowledge and can achieve new pieces of knowledge that cannot be gained by other means.

As we mentioned earlier, some Muslim philosophers present three tools for cognition, namely, the senses, the intellect, and the heart. The next section aims to address the last tool, i.e., the heart.

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1. For more information, see Murtada Mutahhari, *Majmu'ih Athar*, 25 vols., vol. 9 (Tehran: Sadra, 1978). 396-403; *ibid.*, 10. 281-306.
 2. For more information about the other functions of the intellect, see, Sobhani, *Nazariyyah al-Ma'rifah*. 141-154.

3. THE HEART (*QALB*)

In the materialistic world, the tools of cognition are limited to the senses and reason. For materialists, existence is equal to material beings, and immaterial beings are non-existent. However, in the theistic worldview, there is another tool called the heart, or inspiration (*kashf va shuhud*), in which humans can perceive some realities that are not recognisable by the senses or intellect.¹ The various sects of mysticism, regardless of all their differences, agree on the principle that realities can be attained only by intuition (*shuhud-i 'aqli*), interior revelation, journeying within (*siyr va suluk*) and leading an ascetic life (*riyadat*), and not by rational reasoning.

The heart here is not a muscular organ which pumps oxygen-rich blood throughout the body. According to the mystical meaning, it is the centre of understanding, which is designated as “*fu'ad*” in the Qur'an.² The heart is a tool for a particular kind of cognition and inspiration which is beyond reason. The heart is a means of connecting to the centre of receiving truths, to which the senses and intellect have no access. All mystics share a common definition and understanding of the heart.³

1. Abu Ali Sina, *al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ad* (Tehran: Danishqah-i Tehran, 1984). 117-9; Muhy al-Din ibn 'Arabi, *Fusus al-Hikam* (Cairo: Ihya' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1946). 49.

2. The Qur'an. 53:11; 17:36.

3. Taj al-Din Husein Kharazmi, *Sharh Fusus al-Hikam* (Qum: Bustan-i Kitab, 2000). 587-590.

The heart and soul of human beings are like a mirror in which no truth is reflected should it be tainted with the dust of sin and the rust of ugly behaviour. However, when piety prevails and the dust of sin is washed away, and its rust is removed by self-purification, the truths of the unseen world are revealed to the heart. The Prophet points to this fact and states, "If you did not speak too much and did not open your heart to all kinds of thought, you would see what I see, and you would hear what I hear."¹

Muhy al-Din Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240) states that, in light of the manifestations (*tajaliyyat*) onto the human heart, the veils of the invisible world are removed from the eyes, and consequently, the unseen world will be as evident as the world of appearance (or phenomena) (*'alim al-shahadah*) is.² Sadr al-Din maintains that, due to hard austerities and long struggles, he received God's grace. As a result, he discovered mysteries that he was unaware of until then. Problems were solved for him that had remained unresolved through argument. Moreover, the issues that were clear to him through intellectual arguments became clearer via intuition, and he found reality.³

Thus, in a short phrase, mystical experience can be defined as finding a way beyond the senses and

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1. Muhammad Husein al-Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan Fi Tafsir Al-Qur'an*, 20 vols., vol. 5 (Tehran: Raja, 1983). 292.
 2. Muhy al-Din Ibn 'Arabi, *al-Futuh al-Makkiyyah*, 14 vols., vol. 3 (al-Iskandariyyah: al-Hay'ah al-Misriyyah al-'Ammah li al-Kitab, 1984). 154
 3. Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, 1. 7; Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, 9. 136.

observing the truths of the unseen world with the inner eye.¹

THE QUR'AN AND INSPIRATION (*KASHF VA SHUHUD*)

The Qur'an refers to this tool in several verses by alluding to the fact that we can attain specific knowledge in light of purification of the soul. For example, it says, "O you who have faith! If you are wary of Allah, He shall appoint a criterion [*furqan*] for you."² It is clear that reaching this position is not easy, and the mystic must go through many steps and austerity to achieve it.³

In this verse, piety is the source of the correct knowledge of realities. Consequently, a lack of piety is considered as the source of a kind of ignorance or misrecognition of truth. Perhaps, the secret behind this proposition is that using God-given tools (like the senses, strength and thought) to commit sins, results in a person's knowledge of truth becoming diminished. Moreover, lack of piety could contribute to the expansion of false beliefs in people's lives. As Tabataba'i states, "it leads them to become incapable

1. Makarim, *Piyam-i Qur'an*, 1. 253.

2. The Qur'an. 8: 29.

3. For these steps, see Sulayman Talmisani, *Manazil al-Sa'irin ila al-Haq al-Mubin*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Qum: Bidar, 1992). 117-262; Muhammad Ali Hakim, *Lata'if al-'Irfan* (Tahran: Danishgah-i Tehran, 1961). 243-259; al-Tusi, *Sharh al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, 3. 394.

of distinguishing between truth and falsehood.”¹ Although some societies may have made progress with modern industries and science, impiety can reduce their realm of understanding of realities, especially with regards to the immaterial world.

Many narrations emphasize inspiration as a tool of cognition, some of which are mentioned here. Imam Ali (as) states that the mystic, as a result of austerity and journey (*suluk*) within, reaches a stage where truths are revealed to him in the form of light.² Moreover, the Prophet says, “if you control your eyes and heart, you will hear what I hear, and you will see what I see.”³

Jesus Christ says that knowledge is not in the heavens to descend on you; neither is it in the depths of the earth to ascend to you, but in the depths of your heart. Follow the morals of the angels, so that knowledge may appear to you.⁴ Furthermore, the Prophet maintains that whoever purifies himself for forty days for the sake of God, the fountains of wisdom will flow from his heart onto his tongue.⁵

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1. Muhammad Husein al-Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan Fi Tafsir Al-Qur'an*, 20 vols., vol. 9 (Tehran: Raja, 1983). 56.
 2. Al-Sharif al-Radi, *Nahj al-Balaghah*. 337
 3. al-Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan Fi Tafsir Al-Qur'an*, 5. 292.
 4. Husein ibn Rida Brujirdi, *Tafsir al-Sirat al-Mustaqim*, 5 vols., vol. 2 (Qum: Ansariyan, 1995). 479.
 5. Muhammad Baqir Al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, 111 vols., vol. 53 (Beirut: Dar al-Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1982). 326; Muhammad al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, 8 vols., vol. 2 (Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah, 1986). 16.

THE VIEWS OF SCHOLARS ON INSPIRATION

There is much disagreement about this tool. Most mystics and illuminationists (*ishraqiyyin*) maintain that the heart is the only reliable tool of cognition.¹ Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi, also known as Jalal al-Din Muhammad Balkhi (1207-1273), who belongs to this group, says:

The leg of syllogisers is of wood
a wooden leg is very infirm²

The materialistic philosophers, on the other hand, fundamentally deny such a tool. It seems that only the contemporary philosophers, Henri Bergson (1859-1941) and William James (1842-1910), believe that the intellect and the senses are not the only means of cognition and that humans can reach absolute truth by inner intuition.³

Muslim philosophers believe that through intuition, humans attain knowledge that is not comprehensible

1. Dawud Al-Qaysari, *Sharh Fusus al-Hikam* (Tehran: Intisharat-i 'Imi va Farhangi, 1995). 345.

2. Jalal al-Din Rumi, *Mathnavi-yi Ma'navi* (Tehran: Zawwar, 1994). 56.

Although this poem rejects intellectual argumentation, it is based on the first figure of conjunctive syllogisms. The minor premise is "The leg of syllogisers is of wood". The major premise is "a wooden leg is very infirm". The conclusion will be "the leg of syllogisers is very infirm". So, Rumi rejects the intellect via an intellectual argument.

3. Muhammad Ali Furughi, *Siyar-i Hikmat dar Urupa*, 3 vols., vol. 3. 264-73; Murtada Mutahhari, *Mas'ali-yi Shinakht* (Qum: Sadra, 1995). 66.

by the senses or intellect, just as they can attain knowledge through the senses or intellect that cannot be attained through intuition. Therefore, the realm of inner intuition is immaterial beings, while that of the senses and intellect is material beings.

The adherents of mysticism maintain that such a cognition is superior to intellectual cognition, which will be discussed in the next section.

THE SUPERIORITY OF MYSTICAL COGNITION

The mystics believe that intuitive knowledge (*maʿrifat-i shuhudi*) is honourable and superior to intellectual cognition. Three pieces of evidence are used to prove this claim.

1. Intuitive knowledge is a kind of direct and immediate perception of facts. We receive this knowledge from the unseen world in light of inner wayfaring (*siyr va suluk*). In contrast, rational cognition is obtained through reasoning and argument.

In other words, rational knowledge is like acquired knowledge (*ilm husuli*), whilst intuitive knowledge, as Imam Baqir (as) states, is not teachable but a light that God puts in the heart of whomever He wants.¹ In the interpretation of the verse, “We gave him life and provided him with a light by which he walks among the people,”² al-Tabatabaʿi argues that the meaning of ‘light’ in this verse is knowledge (*maʿrifat*), which is the fruit of faith in the heart,

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1. Muhammad Baqir Al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, 111 vols., vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Ihyaʾ al-Turath al-ʿArabi, 1982). 225.
 2. The Qurʾan. 6: 122.

not science that is acquired through teaching and learning. The Prophet also says that whoever becomes pure for the sake of God for forty days, God will pour the springs of wisdom onto his heart.¹

2. In the eyes of the mystics, intuitive knowledge leaves no room for error and forgetfulness. Sayyid Jalal al-Din Ashtiyani (1925-2005), in his commentary on Dawud al-Qaysari's (1260-1350) introduction to *Fusus al-Hikam*, contends that this knowledge, which either is "the certainty of vision" (*'ayn al-yaqin*) or "the truth of certainty" (*haq al-yaqin*), has no way of being forgotten or doubted.² Ibn 'Arabi also says

1. Muhammad Baqir Al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, 111 vols., vol. 17 (Beirut: Dar al-Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1982). 242-3.

2. Sayyid Jalal al-Din Ashtiyani, *Sharh-i Muqadimah-yi Qiysari bar Fusus al-Hikam* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1991). 52. It is worth nothing that there are three types of *yaqin*.

a) *'Ilm al-yaqin* (knowledge of certainty or certainty acquired by knowledge): Suppose a fire is lit at a certain point, and there is a wall between you and the fire. If you discover the existence of the fire from the effect of the fire (like smoke rising from behind a wall), this knowledge is *'Ilm al-yaqin*, and it is like someone knowing God through intellectual proofs.

b) *'Ayn al-yaqin* (certainty acquired by direct observation): If you jump across the wall in the example above and see the fire up close with your eyes, this would be an instance of *'ayn al-yaqin*. This stage is higher than the previous stage because intuition (*shubud*) is higher than knowing. At this stage, a person can practically observe the effects of monotheism in his life.

c) *Haq al-yaqin* (the true and real essence of certainty): If you get so close to the fire that you touch its heat and

that there are two ways to know God. The first way is discovery and intuition, in which there is no error and no need for proof. The second way is through argument, which is not as reliable and valuable as the first method due to the possibility of erring.¹

3. The realm of mystical cognition is wider than that of rational cognition. Although rational cognition is broader than sensory cognition, rational cognition also has its limitations. The intellect cannot be expected to understand teachings that are only possible through intuitive cognition. The knowledge of the divine names, the manifestations of God, existential perfection, resurrection, types of punishment in hell, diseases of the soul and their cures can only be perceived by intuition since reason is limited to worldly matters and does not have the power to comprehend these spiritual truths.² In

the fire warms you, and you actually enter it, such a state is called *haq al-yaqin*. Your certainty, at this stage, is much higher than in the previous two stages.

At this stage, we reach a level where we directly see ourselves in contact with God's essence. In such a situation, we do not see ourselves anymore; instead, we only see God. We realise that our actions are God's actions, and our attributes are also God's attributes. Man sees God in everything. This kind of cognition is not achievable unless we reach a high level of certainty i.e., *haq al-yaqin*. Murtada Mutahhari, *Bist Guftar* (Qum: Sadra, 1990). 357-8.

1. Muhy al-Din Ibn 'Arabi, *al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyyah*, 14 vols., vol. 5 (al-Iskandariyyah: al-Hay'ah al-Misriyyah al-'Ammah li al-Kitab, 1984). 75.
2. 'Abdullah Javadi, *Shinakht Shinasi dar Qur'an* (Qum: Markaz-i Nashr-i Isra', 1991). 358, 359

short, mystical cognition can gain some realities from this world as well as the ‘unseen world’, while the intellect cannot access that world.

There is an important question as to whether this mystical cognition is the same as the divine revelation (*vahy*) that is given to prophets. If not, what are their differences? The next part attempts to discuss this.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REVELATION AND INSPIRATION

When a person communicates with the unseen world individually and, without making use of the physical senses, discovers the truth with his/her heart, this kind of perception—which is of an individual nature—is called inspiration (*kashf va shuhud*). However, if this connection with the supernatural world is such that it results in receiving a series of general teachings and general instructions for all people (or for a group of

people)¹, it is called “revelation” (*vahy*). Its bearer is the

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1. According to the traditional Muslim view, God has sent one hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets. Muhammad Al-Saduq, *al-I'tiqadat* (Qum: al-Mu'tamar al-'Alami li al-Shaykh al-Mufid, n.d). 92-3. See also Muhammad Baqir Al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, 111 vols., vol. 11 (Beirut: Dar al-Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1982). 30, 58, 32 and 28. These prophets can be divided into two types: major (*ulu al-'azm*) and minor (non-*ulu al-'azm*). Major prophets are those to whom God gave a divine Book. Muhammad Al-Saduq, *'Ilall Al-Sharayi'*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Qum: Davari, 1996). 122-3. Such Books have been given to Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, all major prophets. Al-Majlisi, *Bihar*, 11. 32, 56; Al-Saduq, *'Ilall Al-Sharayi'*, 1. 149. Minor prophets, on the other hand, are those to whom God did not give such a book and who were merely guardians and preachers of previous major prophets' teachings. Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Jonah, Job, Aaron, Solomon and David are minor prophets. The Qur'an. 3:163. Another difference between the two groups of prophets is the universal nature of major prophets' missions versus the limited nature of the missions of minor ones. The messages of major prophets were for all people at all places whilst the mission of the minor prophets was limited to a specific era or area. 'Abdullah Javadi, *Tasnim: Tafsir-i Qur'an-i Karim*, vol. 12 (Qum: Markaz-i Nashr-i Isra', 2009). 84. See also Al-Majlisi, *Bihar*, 11. 32-3. Earle Edwin Cairns holds that the message of the gospel was universal. Earle Edwin Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*, 3 ed. (Michigan: Zondervan, 1996). 19. In summary, major prophets benefit from two main distinctive features, that is, a divine Book (of *shari'ah*) and the universality of their missions.

“angel of revelation” and its recipient is a “prophet”.¹

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL VALUE OF INSPIRATION

During the history of mankind, many people have misused people’s trust and beliefs and have introduced themselves as recipients of inspiration. From another angle, human nature compels humans not to accept any claim without conclusive evidence. Avicenna maintains that whoever accepts the claim of a claimant without necessary evidence has lost their sound human nature.²

In light of what Avicenna says, it should be noted that accepting any claim without reason and evidence is a kind of departure from human nature because the claimant of inspiration says something that is neither tangible nor obvious to us. Therefore, their perception is valid only for themselves, not for others. Ibn ‘Arabi, in particular, does not confirm all the intuitions (*shuhud*) of the mystics and says that sometimes intuitions are Satanic.³ Yet, the fact that we cannot understand what someone received does not necessitate its denial. The only thing that can be said is that whenever inspiration is in the form of revelation (*vahy*) and accompanied by

1. Ja’far Sobhani, *Raz-i Buzurg-i Risalat* (Tehran: Burhan, n.d.) 72.

2. Sina, *al-Najat min al-Gharaq fi Bahr al-Dalalah*. 304.

3. Muhy al-Din Ibn ‘Arabi, *al-Futuh al-Makkiyyah*, 14 vols., vol. 4 (al-Iskandariyyah: al-Hay’ah al-Misriyyah al-‘Ammah li al-Kitab, 1984). 278-9; Sadr al-Din, *Al-Mabda’ wa Al-Ma’ad*. 200.

a miracle, such an inspiration will be authoritative for the claimant and for others as well.

Now that we have familiarised ourselves with the tools of cognition, it is appropriate to turn our attention to the sources of knowledge in the next lesson.

SUMMARY

1. Experiments involve reaching a definite verdict through repeated observations and using the intellectual rule of “two identical things will have the same verdict.”
2. The intellect has a decisive judgment for two identical things, but it does not have a decisive verdict for two similar things.
3. We can expand the realm of our cognition with inference, abstraction and classification.
4. Inspiration means the connection of humans with the unseen world through the heart, and, in order to reach it, one has to go through difficult stages.
5. Inspiration is a claim which is acceptable to the person who claims it only, but it will not be authoritative (*hujjah*) for others.

QUESTIONS

1. Why does experimentation, contrary to imperfect induction, yield certainty?

COGNITIVE TOOLS (PART TWO)

2. How does the intellect expand the realm of human cognition in light of inference and classification?
3. Define 'inspiration' and explain its differences from 'revelation'.
4. Explain 'abstraction' with an example.
5. Explain the epistemological value of 'inspiration'.

LESSON TEN



The Sources of Knowledge

Now that we have become acquainted with the tools of cognition, it is time to examine the sources of knowledge. It might be asked: since the tools and sources of knowledge have a similar nature, what is the difference between them? The answer is that they are fundamentally different and their difference can be illustrated with an example.

The relationship between the tools and sources of knowledge is like the relationship between a water pump and a well. With the help of a water pump, as a tool, we extract water from the well, as a source. In this respect, the senses and the intellect are considered tools of cognition and the place where the tools go to obtain knowledge are its sources. For further explanation, consider another example. We consider the Qur'an and narrations of the infallibles to be the source of knowledge, and *ijtihad* as the tools for gaining knowledge from these sources. This means that with *ijtihad*, we explore knowledge which is undiscovered in the Qur'an and narrations.

This lesson aims to examine nature, history, instinct (*fitrab*) and the Qur'an as sources of cognition.

1. NATURE (*TABI'AT*)

Nature refers to the physical world around us, the world of time, the world of place, the world of motion, in short, the very world we live in. Most theistic and materialistic philosophers accept nature as a source of knowledge. Only a few of them, such as Plato and Descartes (1596-1650), do not accept nature as a source. They believe that, on the one hand, human beings' relationship with nature is through their senses. On the other hand, sensory cognition is partial, and such cognition has no epistemological value. Therefore, nature cannot be considered a source of cognition.¹

However, the Qur'an invites us to study nature and the phenomena of creation as a source of knowledge so that one can consciously move towards God. The Qur'an states, "Have they not contemplated the dominions of the heavens and the earth, and whatever things Allah has created."²

The world of nature is considered one of the most important sources of knowledge from the Qur'anic perspective. In this regard, the Qur'an gives many examples and pieces of evidence, one of which I will explain here. The Qur'an declares that one should reflect on the creation of the earth and the heavens and understand their secrets. Some other verses prove the possibility of resurrection. For example, it states, "Do they not see that Allah, who created the heavens and the earth, is able to create the like of them? He

1. Mutahhari, *Mas'ali-yi Shinakht*. 61. See, Popkin and Stroll, *Philosophy*. 213-9; 222-3.

2. The Qur'an. 7:185.

has appointed for them a term, in which there is no doubt.”¹

This verse consists of two premises. The minor premise is “God is the creator of the earth and the heavens”.² The major premise is “[He] is able to create the like of them”. The second premise is exactly the intellectual rule, which was discussed in the previous lesson, that is, “the intellect provides us with the same rule for identical things”.³ This means that the creation of the heavens and the earth in another world is like the creation of the heavens and the earth in this world. If He can create them in this world, He can also create them in another world, according to the aforementioned intellectual rule. In light of these two

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1. Ibid. 17:99. See, Muhammad Husein al-Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan Fi Tafsir Al-Qur'an*, 20 vols., vol. 13 (Tehran: Raja, 1983). 210; Fakhr al-Din Al-Razi, *Mafatih Al-Ghayb*, 32 vols., vol. 21 (Beirut: Dar al-Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1999). 412.
 2. This fact can be proven by other verses, like 2:29; 7:54; 2:164; 6:1, 73; 9:36; 1:3.
 3. Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, 1. 359; Sabzwari, *Sharh al-Mandumah*, 2. 198.

حكم الأمثال في ما يجوز وما لا يجوز واحد

premises, we can conclude that He is able to create the heavens and the earth on the Day of judgement.¹

The Qur'an refers to many natural phenomena such as lightning², mountains³, rain⁴, colours⁵, clouds⁶, winds⁷, night and day⁸, ships⁹, stars¹⁰, and animals¹¹. Nature, with all its dimensions, is a source of knowledge that man communicates with through his senses. After that, man goes beyond the world of the senses and reaches the world of rational perception, which can consciously move him towards God.

Let me illustrate how nature is the source of knowledge by remarking on a Qur'anic fact. One of the lofty truths that the Qur'an has revealed is that the entire universe glorifies (*tasbih*) God. The Qur'an has mentioned this fact in many verses, such as: "The seven heavens glorify Him, and the earth [too], and whoever is in them. There is not a thing but celebrates His praise"¹² and "Have you not regarded that to Allah prostrates whoever is in the heavens and whoever is

1. Such an argument is also mentioned in verse 46: 33.

2. The Qur'an. 2:55.

3. Ibid. 13:41.

4. Ibid. 16:65; 22:63; 35:27; 39:21.

5. Ibid. 2:69.

6. Ibid. 2: 164; 24:43.

7. Ibid. 7:57; 45:5.

8. Ibid. 24:44; 31:29; 16:65; 23:80.

9. Ibid. 31:31; 35:12.

10. Ibid. 7:54; 37:88; 56:75; 81:2; 6:97.

11. Ibid. 67:19; 88:17.

12. Ibid. 17:44.

on the earth, and the sun, the moon, and the stars, the mountains, the trees, and the animals and many of mankind?"¹

If a creature glorifies God, This means that it has understanding, consciousness and life. Sadr al-Din maintains that, according to these Qur'anic verses, all beings in the world glorify Him knowingly. He adds that the beings of the world glorify God according to their capacity and knowledge. He tries to prove this fact based on the verses of the Qur'an and philosophical arguments.² So, the universe with all its particles, has life and consciousness. It is worth noting that the life of each being is different from those of others. For instance, both humans and plants have life; however, the capability and the power of human senses are higher, compared to those of plants.

In fact, nature states, 'I glorify God, and, O humans, who are greater than me, do not neglect the glorification of God'.³

1. Ibid. 22: 18. See also 55:6; 57:1; 59:21; 24:41; 38:18; 41:11; 13:13; 16:49.

2. Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, 1. 118; Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, 6. 139-40; Muhammad Sadr al-Din, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*, 7 vols., vol. 7 (Qum: Bidar, 1987). 148-50; Sadr al-Din, *Shawahid al-Rububiyyah*.² 298. Rumi also tries to explain this fact in his poems. See Rumi, *Mathnavi-yi Ma'navi*. 86. Vol 1.

3. This can be gleamed from the verses mentioned previously.

2. HISTORY

History is similar to nature, and, like nature, is evolving and has specific laws and traditions of itself. Due to its importance, we discuss it separately as a source of knowledge. History does not simply denote a series of minor events that occurred in the past; it is evident that history in this sense has no scientific value since it is particular and personal. Instead, the purpose of studying history is to understand the laws and traditions that govern human life, which can be obtained from studying and analysing past events in the lives of human beings.

The Qur'an encourages us to study history as a source of knowledge and calls the lessons we learn from history "*ibrat*". It states, "there is certainly a lesson in the accounts of their life for those who possess intellect."¹ The importance of history, as a source of knowledge, becomes clear when we know that there are only a few events in human life today the likes of which cannot be found in the past: "history repeats itself", as the famous saying puts it. Imam Ali (as) points to the repetition of history and states, "O servants of God, time is flowing for the present generation as it was for the past generations."²

The Qur'an considers history as a real phenomenon and believes that it has its own traditions and rules that it does not violate. It says, "Yet you will never find any change in Allah's precedent, and you will never find any

1. The Qur'an. 12:111. Translated by the author.

2. Al-Sharif al-Radi, *Nahj al-Balaghah*. 221.

revision in Allah's precedent."¹ Due to the importance that the Qur'an attaches to the "traditions of history" (*sunnat ha-yi tarikh*) as a source of knowledge, we cite two examples here.

- a) The Qur'an considers piety and purity of the heart as the reason for the survival of governments. This means that individual and social security and peace is achieved by observing justice, while oppression and tyranny causes the destruction of nations. This fact can be confirmed by experience and repeated tests in the lives of previous nations and also by rational calculations. The Qur'an states, "Your Lord would never destroy the townships unjustly while their inhabitants were bringing about reform."²
- b) The Qur'an considers the materialistic condition of societies to be influential in their way of thinking and living and believes that throughout history, transgressors and affluent people have obstructed the path of divine prophets and have constantly opposed them. The Qur'an states, "We did not send a warner to any town without its affluent ones saying, 'We indeed disbelieve in what you have been sent with.'"³ In contrast, the poor and the helpless have been the supporters of the people of God and His messengers.⁴

1. The Qur'an. 35:43.

2. Ibid. 11: 117.

3. Ibid. 34: 34.

4. As the Qur'an states, "[The charities are] for the poor who are straitened in the way of Allah." Ibid. 2: 273.

Although pure instinct invites both groups towards God, there are obstacles for the rich group that do not exist for the poor group. The feeling of needlessness of Allah, no matter how delusive and imaginary, becomes a source of human pride and arrogance. This means that such a feeling can weaken and disable man's instinctual and intellectual cognition in such a way that man cannot see the realities, and, consequently, the acceptance of truth will become very difficult for him. However, the poor are usually far from such deceptive factors: intact instinct and common sense encourage them to pursue the truth and follow the divine prophets.

Imam Ali (as) also considers history as a source of cognition. In his letter to his son, he states, "Even though I have not met the previous generations and lived with them, yet I looked into their behaviour and pondered over their reports and walked among their ruins till I was as one of them. He adds that, by reflecting on their history, it is as though I have lived with them from the first to the last. I have therefore been able to discern the negative points from the positive points and the beneficial from the harmful. I have selected the most special of those matters for you, collected their good points, and kept away their useless facts from you."¹

This passage of the letter clearly indicates that history can be considered as one of the sources of cognition. The researcher, via the tools of cognition, may discover particular realities which cannot be accessed elsewhere.

1. Al-Sharif al-Radi, *Nahj al-Balaghah*. 393-4. (letter 31).

3. INSTINCT (*FITRAH*)

The human being is a multi-dimensional and peerless creature in the order of creation. Human beings make use of reason to acquire knowledge and truth and are inherently very keen to benefit from intellectual arguments. They, however, feel a power in the depth of their souls that is called, in the theological parlance, *fitrah*.¹ It is an inner source that can lead us to truth.

We discover within ourselves two kinds of tendencies, namely, acquired and non-acquired. Acquired tendencies, such as customs and manners, are those that we obtain through society, family and ancestors. Indians, for instance, love spicy food. This kind of tendency can be changed by the influence of time and place. Non-acquired tendencies are those that we find within ourselves without any prior teaching or training. Everybody, wherever they live, possesses religious feelings. They are inclined to the supernatural forces of the world and understand the beauty of justice and of fulfilling promises, as well as the ugliness of breaking laws. It is clear that, in our understanding of beauty or ugliness, we do not refer to, or depend on, our prior teaching or training. We achieve this feeling

1. The term *fitrah* is derived from the Qur'an (30:30). It can be translated, as William C. Chittick states, as "original disposition". William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994). 51.

through the depth of our souls. This type of tendency is called *fitrab* in the theological parlance.¹

In summary, when human beings reach maturity, they become aware of a series of truths without the need of a teacher or mentor. For example, they regard oppression and cruelty as bad while they consider justice and benevolence as good. When they commit something wrong, they hear a voice from the depth of their hearts blaming them, or, when they perform a good deed, they feel happy. They enjoy beauty and hate ugliness, and finally, in the depths of their souls, they have a sense of inclination towards God. These facts signify that God has placed a great source of knowledge known as instinct in human beings.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INSTINCTIVE AND NON-INSTINCTIVE AFFAIRS

For more information on this source of knowledge and how it differs from ordinary matters, that is, acquired issues, we will now discuss four of its characteristics.

- A. Every thought or idea that stems from instinct is universal, and no human being lacks it, such as interest in wealth.
- B. Instinctive affairs are carried out under the leadership of instinct, and there is never a need for teaching or learning them.

1. Ja'far Sobhani, *Al-Ilahiyyat Ila Huda al-Kitab wa al-Sunnah wa Al-'Aql*, 4 vols., vol. 1 (Qum: Mu'assisih Imam Sadiq, 2009). 11-2.

- C. Every thought or act that has an innate root is beyond the realm of political, geographical and economic factors.
- D. Persistent propaganda against instinctive affairs may slow down the development of our instinct, but it can never eradicate it.¹

The Qur'an presents *fitrah* as a source of knowledge. When Ibrahim destroyed the idols, a group of idol worshipers asked him if he had broken them. Ibrahim said, "Rather, it was this biggest of them who did it! Ask them, if they can speak."² Ibrahim's words shook the idolaters' minds and awoke their sleeping conscience. Like a wind which takes away the ashes from the flames and revives the light of the fire, Ibrahim revived their monotheistic instincts which were behind the veils of ignorance, pride and prejudice. In a short moment, they awoke from this deep sleep of negligence. As the Qur'an says, "Thereat they came to themselves and said [to one another], 'Indeed it is you who are the wrongdoers!'"³ This verse, clearly presents the *fitrah* as a source of cognition.

Many Muslim theologians resort to *fitrah* in order to prove the existence of God. They state that, in crises, especially when there is no hope for help, human beings feel that there is a supernatural power⁴ that can help

1. Sina, *al-Najat min al-Ghariaq fi Bahr al-Dalalah*. 117; Ja'far Sobhani, *Rah-i Khuda Shinasi* (Tehran: Sadr, n.d). 49; Sobhani, *Doctrines of Shi'i Islam*. 12-3.

2. The Qur'an. 21: 63.

3. Ibid. 21:64.

4. The term supernatural, as Rodney Stark states, is much wider than God. He defines the supernatural "as forces or

them. They, referring to some Qur'anic verses,¹ believe that everybody, believer or non-believer, in a critical situation and overcome by despair, seeks God.² Sadr al-Din, for example, states that the belief in God and His attributes is an intrinsic issue. People look for God in dangerous situations even though they are unaware of such an intrinsic inclination.³ This shows that *fitrah* is one of the sources through which theologians can find the roots of belief in God.⁴

Let us further explain this point by presenting a question regarding human nature as a source of knowledge. The question is: what is the difference between the principles of belief in revealed religions? What are the differences between the religious beliefs

entities, conscious or otherwise, that are beyond or outside nature and that can suspend, alter, or ignore physical forces". Rodney Stark, "Economics of Religion," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. Robert A. Segal (Oxford/Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006). 50.

1. The Qur'an. 6:40-1; 29:65.
2. Muhammad Husein al-Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan Fi Tafsir Al-Qur'an*, 20 vols., vol. 12 (Tehran: Raja, 1983). 272; Sobhani, *Manshur-i Jarwid*, 1. 39-0; Mahmud Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshaf*, 4 vols., vol. 3 (Egypt: Mustafa al-Bani, 1966). 222.
3. Sadr al-Din, *Al-Mabda' wa Al-Ma'ad*. 23-4.
4. Christian theologians have also produced the same literature regarding man's instinctive knowledge of God. John Damascene, a famous Greek scholar, as Etienne Gilson writes, holds that "the knowledge that God exists is naturally implanted" in all mankind. Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955). 91.

of Prophet Moses and Prophet Jesus with those of Prophet Muhammad? Has Prophet Muhammad changed or abrogated the principles of beliefs of the previous prophets?

Ayatollah Javadi holds that there is no difference between the religious beliefs of all the Prophets. This means that all the foundations and principles of their beliefs are equal and the same.¹ He adds that the Qur'an does not present new principles or viewpoints but rather depicts and clarifies the previous principles that were revealed to previous Prophets.² To Javadi, the unity of the Prophets' religious beliefs is delineated in the Qur'an and hadiths, and, consequently, the diversity of religious beliefs is inconceivable. He maintains that the religious beliefs of all revealed religions are the same. They cannot be subject to change or abrogation. He attempts to substantiate his claim by referring to human nature as one of the sources of cognition. He maintains that a) all the religious beliefs of the Prophets conform to *fitrah* and b) *fitrah*, in the course of human history, is not changeable. From these two premises, he concludes that religious beliefs are not changeable. In sum, since man's *fitrah* has not been and will not be changed, the religious beliefs of divine

1. 'Abdullah Javadi, *Tasnim: Tafsir-i Qur'an-i Karim*, vol. 2 (Qum: Markaz-i Nashr-i Isra', 2010). 195; 'Abdullah Javadi, *Tasnim: Tafsir-i Qur'an-i Karim*, vol. 7 (Qum: Markaz-i Nashr-i Isra', 2009). 71; 'Abdullah Javadi, *Tasnim: Tafsir-i Qur'an-i Karim*, vol. 22 (Qum: Markaz-i Nashr-i Isra', 2010). 544.

2. 'Abdullah Javadi, *Tasnim: Tafsir-i Qur'an-i Karim*, vol. 5 (Qum: Markaz-i Nashr-i Isra', 2010). 533; *ibid.*, 21. 360.

religions cannot be changed, and they are the same.¹ As the above argument indicates, Javadi draws on *fitrah* as one of the sources of cognition in order to prove the unity of religious beliefs of the prophet-centred religions.

It is worth noting that the judgments of the intellect about the beauty and ugliness of human acts have no source other than *fitrah*. Whoever turns to their conscience will find the beauty and goodness of fulfilling promises or reciprocating goodness. They would also realise the ugliness of treachery or breaking promises. These issues form the basis of “the intelligibility of good and evil” (*husn va qubh-i ‘aqli*).

4. THE QUR‘AN

The Qur‘an is another source of cognition. This book considers itself the source of guidance for all human beings in all eras and areas; it does not consider itself to be specific to a particular period, race or nation.²

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1. ‘Abdullah Javadi, *Tafsir-i Mawdu‘i-yi Qur‘an-i Karim: Fitrat dar Qur‘an*, 19 vols., vol. 12 (Qum: Markaz-i Nashr-i Isra‘, 2005). 145; ‘Abdullah Javadi, *Tasnim: Tafsir-i Qur‘an-i Karim*, vol. 9 (Qum: Markaz-i Nashr-i Isra‘, 2009). 592; *ibid.*, 10. 415; ‘Abdullah Javadi, *Tasnim: Tafsir-i Qur‘an-i Karim*, vol. 17 (Qum: Markaz-i Nashr-i Isra‘, 2010). 123-6; Javadi, *Intizar-i Bashar*. 178; ‘Abdullah Javadi, *Islam va Mubt-i Zist* (Qum: Markaz-i Nashr-i Isra‘, 2009). 310.
 2. See the Quran, “it is just an admonition for all humans” 74:31; “Yet it is just a reminder for all the nations” 68:52; and “We did not send you except as a bearer of good news and warner to all mankind” 34:28.

The Qur'an is a book that originates from infinite divine knowledge and is free from any kind of error as it says, "falsehood cannot approach it, from before it nor from behind it, a [gradually] sent down [revelation] from One all-wise, all-laudable."¹

The Qur'an calls people to contemplate over its verses and states, "Do they not contemplate the Qur'an, or are there locks on the hearts?"² We can receive truths by reflecting on different layers of the Qur'an as a source of knowledge. By presenting a parable, the Qur'an declares its greatness to the people and says, "Had We sent down this Qur'an upon a mountain, you would have seen it humbled [and] go to pieces with the fear of Allah. We draw such comparisons for mankind, so that they may reflect."³

Therefore, the Qur'an describes itself as a great source of knowledge that cannot be achieved elsewhere. It can reveal the hidden truth and guide man to perfection in this world and the hereafter. In general, any source, like the Qur'an, that is free from any error, can be a source of knowledge, such as the authentic narrations of the Infallibles.

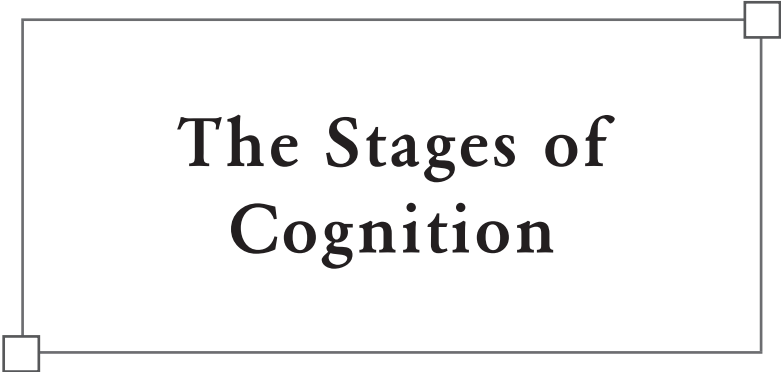
To review what we discussed in the previous lessons, Muslim philosophers consider the senses and the intellect as two of the most important tools of cognition. However, they naturally assume two stages for cognition, which will be explained in the next lesson.

1. The Qur'an. 41:42.

2. Ibid. 47:24.

3. Ibid. 59:21.

LESSON ELEVEN



The Stages of Cognition

In previous lessons, we noted that the senses, the intellect and the heart are tools of cognition. Philosophers are divided into three groups in terms of these tools of cognition. a) Some consider the senses¹ as the only means of cognition and believe that knowledge is valuable when it enters the mind through the lens of the senses; otherwise, it is nothing more than an illusion. b) Some, like Plato, consider intellect to be the only means of cognition and do not value the senses due to its particularity.² c) Some, like Henri Bergson and other mystics, consider cognition to be possible only through the heart.³

Since they believe in only one tool, these three groups naturally consider cognition as a single stage. However, since Islamic philosophers consider the senses and intellect as two tools of cognition, they naturally assume cognition to occur in two stages. Sensory cognition seems to precede rational cognition, which means that via the senses we can reach intellectual cognition. This lesson aims to discuss this issue in detail. First, we shall address the features of sensory

1. They are called Empiricists.

2. al-Tabataba'i, *Usul-i Falsafih va Ravish-i Ri'alism*, 2. 4.

3. Mutahhari, *Mas'ali-yi Shinakht*. 84-6.

and intellectual cognitions. Then, we explain how sensory cognition can lead to intellectual cognition.

1. SENSORY COGNITION

Receiving knowledge through one of the five senses is called sensory cognition. In this type of cognition, there is no difference between humans and other living beings, except that some of them have stronger or weaker senses than humans. The eagle is known for its sharp eyes, the ant for its extraordinary sense of smell and the dog for its ability to inhale odours several hundred metres away. Now we discuss the important features of sensory cognition.

THE SALIENT FEATURES OF SENSORY COGNITION

Sensory cognition has many important features, some of which we will briefly discuss below.

1. Sensory knowledge is particular since each piece of knowledge is perceived separately. For example, children know their fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters separately and can distinguish them from each other, but they cannot have a general concept of humans due to their lack of intellection. They know colours from their childhood and can distinguish between them. Their perception of colours is particular; consequently, they cannot have a general sense of colours owing to their rudimentary thinking. In light of these two examples, it can be

concluded that human sensory perception alone, like children's sensory perception, is a particular perception, not a general one.

2. Sensory perception is not profound. This means that with the five senses, one can recognize the outward appearances and properties of objects such as sound, colour, smell, taste, softness, roughness, and the like. The inner features of objects, such as their essence and the causal relationships between them, are outside the realm of sensory perception. They must be perceived by another tool, i.e., intellectual cognition.
3. Sensory cognition is presence-based. This means that it can only perceive objects that are present with an external existence, but things that existed in the past and do not exist now, or things which will appear in the future, are outside the realm of sensory cognition. Therefore, sensory cognition does not pertain to the past or the future.¹
4. Sensory knowledge can only perceive objects which are physically accessible. Using our eyes, ears, or other organs, we can easily sense such objects. We cannot sense an object distant from us or one that is blocked by an obstacle, and thus such objects will be outside the realm of our senses. For instance, if we cannot hear a sound due to it being distant, it will be beyond the realm of our sense of hearing.

1. Ibid. 100-101.

2. RATIONAL COGNITION (*SHINAKHT-I 'AQLI*)

In contrast to sensory cognition, rational cognition is precisely the opposite in terms of its characteristics. This means that

- a) instead of perceiving the individual and gaining particular cognition (*shinakht-i fardi*), it leads us towards a general perception;
- b) instead of showing the apparent perception, it shows the profound conception;
- c) contrary to sensory cognition, which is based on the presence of objects at the time of cognition, rational cognition does not depend on time. It is appropriate for the present, past, and future.
- d) unlike sensory cognition, which depends on the physical accessibility of objects, rational knowledge is not limited to a specific place.

After getting acquainted with the features of the senses and the intellect as two tools of cognition, it is now appropriate to explain how sensory cognition precedes rational cognition; that is, how we can reach intellectual cognition via sensory perception. The next section aims to address this issue in detail.

CONVERTING SENSORY COGNITION INTO RATIONAL COGNITION

Sensory cognition usually precedes rational cognition; that is, we may produce rational cognition from sensory perception. Such a conversion is possible through three logical processes which will be elaborated below.

A. Abstraction (*intiza'*) of General Conceptions

The human mind has an extraordinary power to convert sensory cognition into intellectual knowledge. For example, the mind, having observed different individuals, such as Lucas, Lima and Ava, can convert these particular concepts into a universal concept called 'human'. We certainly draw on the intellect in this conversion since the general concept does not exist externally to be comprehended via the senses.¹ In addition, cognition through the senses is restricted to particular cases, while this converted cognition provides a general piece of knowledge. Therefore, we can turn sensory knowledge, which is particular, into a general conception. In other words, we can produce a general idea. (*tasawwur-i kulli*)

B. Abstraction of General Affirmation (*Tasdiq*)

Sometimes, with the help of particular sensory cognition, we arrive at a general intellectual rule. For example, we observe with our own eyes that "iron expands due to heat". We repeat this process many times in different conditions and places. In all these cases, we observe the expansion of iron due to heat. In light of these particular sensory cognitions, we arrive at a general truth: iron expands due to heat.

It is clear that this scientific law has not been obtained through the senses only (observation) because we can only test a limited number of pieces of iron. However, the intellect, based on the principle "two

1. For more information see, Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, 1. 272-3.

identical things will have a similar verdict” extends the rule to include the untested iron and achieves a general law, that is, “iron expands with heat”. Thus, we convert sensory knowledge (e.g., gained by observation via our eyes) to a general intellectual affirmation (*tasdiq*) or rule.

As stated earlier, sensory cognition is limited, meaning the objects must be close to the observers’ eyes. It is clear that if the observer is unable to see the object due to an obstruction or due to distance, his eyes will not be able to perceive it. However, such a limitation is not present in intellectual cognition. In the previous two cases, therefore, the intellect expands its knowledge longitudinally¹ and horizontally.²

C. Phenomenon-mediated Cognition

The third case of turning sensory cognition into intellectual cognition is phenomenon-mediated cognition (*shinakht-i ayati*). Let us demonstrate this with two examples. We have not seen William Shakespeare (1564-1616) close up because he lived hundreds of years ago; however, by reading his works, we realise his literary and creative abilities and consider him a genius because no ordinary person can produce such great works as his. The books, *Al-Shifa’* and *The Canon of Medicine* signify Avicenna’s ingenuity in philosophy

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1. “Longitudinal expansion” means that the general concept applies to all human beings who have been living in different times (past, present and future).
 2. “Horizontal expansion” means that the general concept (human) applies to all human beings at the present time who live in different parts of the world.

and medicine. By reading his scientific works, we realise the author's extensive knowledge in philosophy and medicine. As you can see in these two examples, sensory cognition leads us to rational cognition. This intellectual cognition is called *shinakht-i ayati*, for which, in addition to longitudinal and horizontal expansions, there is also an expansion in depth.

The Qur'an calls this kind of knowledge, by which we penetrate the depths of things, '*shinakht-i ayati*'. In fact, God wants to guide us to the essence and attributes of His perfection and beauty by presenting His signs. Regarding *shinakht-i ayati*, the Qur'an states, "among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and whatever creatures He has scattered in them."¹

Imam Ali (as) has a metaphorical statement about *shinakht-i ayati*. He divides human beings into two types, the blind and the seeing (*basir*). He says that the blind only see the beauty of this world. They cannot have a deep understanding of the world beyond. But the *basir* attempts to go beyond the appearance of this world and reach its depth.²

The Qur'an places great emphasis on *shinakht-i ayati* and, while introducing some of God's *ayat*, "His signs",³ it invites us to know the creator of the signs.⁴ The story of Abraham and his debate with the idol-worshippers is

1. The Qur'an. 42:29.

2. 'Abd al-Hamid Ibn Abi al-Hadid, *Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah*, vol. 8 (Beirut: Dar al-Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, n.d). 285.

3. The Qur'an. 30:20,21,22,23,24,25,46; 41:37,39; 42:29,32.

4. Ibid. 10:67; 13:3,4; 14:5; 15:75; 16:12,79; 19:128; 23:30; 27:86; 29:24; 30:21,22,23,24,37; 31:31; 32:26; 34:19; 39:42,52; 42:33; 45:13.

a kind of *shinakht-i ayati*. Abraham attempted to prove the invalidity of the lordship of the planets, the moon and the sun, with their sensual effects, that is, their decline and absence from the eyes of people. He stated that it was not appropriate for the Lord to be absent from His people because the people need to be guided by their Lord in all aspects and moments of their life.¹

By observing the order of the world, the wonders of nature, its novel and stable system, through sensory cognition, theistic scholars realise the existence of the Creator of that order, His extensive governance, and His infinite knowledge and power. One of the most commonly used arguments for the existence of God is the teleological argument sometimes referred to as “the argument from design”.² Human beings, in the course of human history, have been keen to contemplate over the orderly and constant phenomena in the natural world. This order has raised a question in their minds, namely, what is the consequence of this order? Is it

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1. The Qur'an states, “Thus did We show Abraham the dominions of the heavens and the earth, that he might be of those who possess certitude. When night darkened over him, he saw a star and said,” This is my Lord!” But when it set, he said,” I do not like those who set.” Then, when he saw the moon rising, he said,” This is my Lord!” But when it set, he said,” Had my Lord not guided me, I would surely have been among the astray lot.” Then, when he saw the sun rising, he said,” This is my Lord! This is bigger!” But when it set, he said,” O my people, indeed I disown what you take as [His] partners. Indeed I have turned my face toward Him who originated the heavens and the earth, as a *hanif*, and I am not one of the polytheists.” Ibid. 6:75-9.
 2. Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*. 216.

a matter of blind chance or the design of a master architect?

The argument from design consists of two premises. The first premise is that the world discloses a teleological order which we achieve via our sensory faculties. We may turn this sensory cognition into an intellectual cognition and consider it as the second premise of the above argument, surmising that the world cannot be the result of blind chance but it was produced by an intelligent architect. Therefore, these two premises lead us to the conclusion that an intelligent power exists who is beyond the world, whether we name him God or not. From the Qur'anic perspective, the precise order in the different realms of the natural world clearly point to a divine design. The Qur'an, referring to some signs of God, tells us that the harmony of this order is evidence of His existence. It says,

Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, and the ships that sail at sea with profit to men, and the water that Allah sends down from the sky with which He revives the earth after its death, and scatters therein every kind of animal and the changing of the winds, and the clouds disposed between the sky and the earth, are surely signs for a people who apply reason.¹

1. The Qur'an. 2:164. See also, Muhammad Qurtubi, *Al-Jami' li Abkam al-Qur'an*, 21 vols., vol. 2 (Tehran: Intisharat-i Nasir Khusru, 1985). 191-203; Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *Mafatih*

Avicenna, also referring to the verse “soon We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in their own souls until it becomes clear to them that He is the Real,”¹ maintains that this verse proves the existence of God via the argument of design. In *Al-Isyarat wa al-Tanbihat*, which is one of his last philosophical books, Avicenna holds that, through His signs, we appreciate His existence just as via smoke we realize the existence of fire.²

Advocators of the design argument, such as William Paley (1743-1805), liken the world to a watch and God to the “Divine Watchmaker”. They hold that as a watch shows that its maker is intelligent, the natural world reveals that its designer is “more intelligent than the human watchmaker”.³ This argument, as Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) holds, “always deserves to be named with respect”.⁴

al-Ghiyb, 32 vols., vol. 4 (Beirut: Dar al-Iḥyā’ al-Turath al-‘Arabi, 1999). 152-174; al-Tabataba’i, *Al-Mizan*, 1. 398-405.

1. The Qur’an. 41:53.
2. al-Tusi, *Sharh al-Isyarat wa al-Tanbihat*, 3. 66-7.
3. Nigel Warburton, *Philosophy: The Basics*, 4 ed. (London/ New York Routledge, 2005). 13.
4. He states, “It is the oldest, clearest and the most appropriate to common human reason. It enlivens the study of nature, just as it gets its existence from this study and through it receives ever renewed force. It brings in ends and aims where they would not have been discovered by our observation itself, and extends our information about nature through the guiding thread of a particular unity whose principle is outside nature” Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). 579-80.

This argument, like other theological arguments, has been criticized by Western scholars,¹ and Muslim scholars have attempted to answer their criticisms of this argument.²

As noted earlier, sensory perceptions lead monotheistic philosophers to an intellectual cognition, i.e., the existence of God. This is what we mean by turning sensory cognition into intellectual cognition. In other words, the 'argument of design' is a rational argument in which its minor premise is obtained via the senses. The philosophers have deduced a rational argument from this sensory cognition, i.e., they have turned sensory cognition into intellectual knowledge.

Furthermore, by perceiving the purposefulness³ of the world and the harmony of all phenomena in

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1. For these critiques, see, Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*. 217-222; Wainwright, *Philosophy of Religion*. 52,61; David A. Pailin, *Groundwork of Philosophy of Religion* (London: Epworth Press, 1986). 264-8; Popkin and Stroll, *Philosophy*. 180-190; Christopher Hamilton, *Understanding Philosophy* (Cheltenham: Nelson Thoenes Ltd, 2003). 232-4; Hans Küng, *Does God Exist?*, trans. Edward Quinn (London: St James's Place, 1980). 531-3.
 2. 'Abdullah Javadi, *Tabyin-i Barahin-i Ithbat-i Khuda* (Qum: Markaz-i Nashr-i Isra', 1999). 227-243; Ja'far Sobhani, *Madkhal-i Masa'il-i Jadid dar 'Ilm-i Kalam*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Qum: Mu'assisih Imam Sadiq). 72-113.
 3. Purposefulness means that the structure of the universe has been formed such that each creature can reach its desired perfection. Utmost perfection in the case of bees is honey production, and in the case of animals in general, perfection means reproduction, producing meat, etc. It means that the creatures of the universe, at whatever stage they are, according

the path of perfection of human beings and other living beings, these thinkers prove that the world has a knowledgeable and careful governor. He created the universe in such a coherent and harmonious way that the world will be in danger of destruction if one part of it is removed.¹

Therefore, if the existence of an object is proof of the existence of a cause, its creator, the attributes of that object will also be a proof and a sign of the characteristics of that cause. For instance, if the existence of a painting indicates the existence of a painter, the more beautiful this painting is, the more it proves the creativity and skill of that painter.

In light of what has been argued above, it can be concluded that sensory cognition is the root and basis of much intellectual cognition. This is where the importance of Aristotle's words becomes clear as he stated that whoever lacks one sense has lost the knowledge of that sensation.² Moreover, Sadr al-Din maintains that the senses play a very significant role in man's intellectual knowledge. He believes that all

to their level of receptivity, benefits from guidance to reach their perfection. This kind of extensive guidance is named creative guidance (*bidayat-i takvini*) or instinctive guidance (*bidayat-i gharizi*). The Quran also refers to this fact and states, "Our Lord is who He gave everything its creation, and then guided it". The Qur'an. 20:50.

1. For more information see, Sobhani, *Madkhal-i Masa'il-i Jadid*, 1. 72-109.
2. Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, 9. 126. See also, Sabzwari, *Sharh al-Mandumah*, 1.246, 325; *ibid.*, 5. 132.

human perceptions are rooted in the senses.¹ Therefore, sensory knowledge, which is particular, can be turned into general rational knowledge. That is, it can be expanded longitudinally, horizontally and deeply.

Let's review what we have discussed from lesson six until now.

- There is an independent reality beyond the human mind.
- We can perceive it via the appropriate tools, like senses.

However, we are certain that some of our perceptions and knowledge are 'right', while some are 'wrong'. With this in mind, two questions arise here:

- What is the definition of 'truth'?
- What is the criterion for distinguishing between 'true knowledge' and 'false knowledge'?

These two questions are among the most significant epistemological points, which will be discussed in the following lessons.

SUMMARY

1. The external features of objects, such as weight, colour, size etc., can be understood by the senses, but the inner features of objects, like their essence and causal relationships between objects, are beyond the realm of the senses.

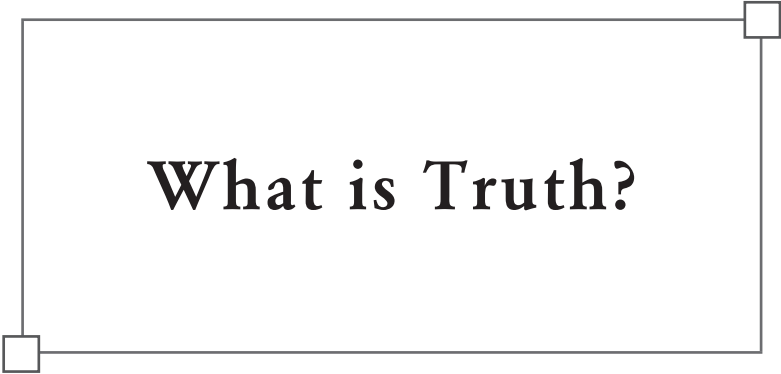
1. Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, 3. 381.

2. Present existence and having a place are conditions for sensory cognition, but these are not conditions for intellectual cognition.
3. With rational cognition, one can abstract general concepts, which can sometimes be conceptions (*tasawwurāt*) and sometimes affirmations (*tasdiqāt*).
4. In *shinakht-i ayati*, which is a type of rational cognition, we come to know the source of the signs and its characteristics via observing the signs.

QUESTIONS

1. Explain the characteristics of sensory knowledge.
2. What are the general concepts that the intellect can abstract?
3. What is the meaning of longitudinal and horizontal expansion in intellectual cognition?
4. Explain *shinakht-i ayati*.
5. How does Imam Ali (as) explain *shinakht-i ayati*?
6. How can we convert sensory cognition into rational cognition?

LESSON TWELVE



What is Truth?

It may have happened to us that we definitely believed in something for a long period of time but later realised that our belief was dubious or false. This fact indicates two things: a) not all our perceptions and knowledge are true and in accordance with reality, and b) not all our ideas (*tasawwurāt*) and affirmations (*tasdiqāt*) are erroneous. In other words, some are “true”, and some are “false.” With this in mind, two questions arise:

- What is the definition of “truth” and its opposite, “falsehood”?
- What is the criterion for distinguishing between “true knowledge” and “false knowledge”?¹

These two questions are among the most sensitive epistemological issues, which we want to now discuss. This lesson will address the first question, and the second question will be discussed in the next lesson.

1. The difference between the two discussions will be clarified in the next lesson.

THE DEFINITION OF TRUTH

We have heard many times that this idea (*tasawwur*) or this proposition is true or false. However, what does 'truth' mean? There are many definitions for truth, some of which will be considered below.

1. CORRESPONDENCE WITH REALITY

Some philosophers maintain that objects have a special reality in the external world which does not change, regardless of our true or false cognition. If a proposition regarding an object, or the form of 'mental existence' (*wujud-i dhihni*) of that object corresponds to its outside reality, our cognition will be an instance of 'true knowledge' and vice versa.¹ For example, when we say, "that book is in the form of a rectangle", or we think of it as a rectangle, if the book in question is in the shape of a rectangle in the external world, our cognition will be considered as true. Let us further clarify this with another example. Someone says, "there are five trees in the courtyard." Thereafter we count them and confirm that it is true. Thus, the statement corresponds with the external reality.²

In other words, objects outside of our mind, irrespective of our cognition, have a special reality which does not change based on our true and false understanding. In the above example, in fact, the shape of the book is rectangular; that is, its length and width

1. Sabzwari, *Sharh al-Mandumah*, 2. 212-4; Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, 1. 81-90; Sina, *al-Shifa: al-Ilahiyyat*. 48-55.

2. Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*. 43-4.

are not equal, regardless of whether our perception reveals a rectangle or not. Therefore, whenever our knowledge is the same as the reality outside the mind, that knowledge is correct; otherwise, it will be wrong.¹

The correspondence view applies easily to empirical statements like the above examples.² It may be claimed that this theory can be acceptable in propositions about external referents (*qadaya-yi khariji*) but not about mental propositions (*qadaya-yi dhibni*). In explaining this issue, it must be noted that the phrase *qadaya-yi khariji* refers to objects that exist only in the external world.³ For instance, in order to find the truth of the proposition “Iron expands when heated”, we should heat it in a furnace in the external world. If we see the expansion in its size with our eyes in the laboratory, this proposition is true.

However, such a definition is not applicable to ‘mental propositions’, which are those propositions whose subjects only exist in the mind, not in the external world. For instance, a ‘universal concept’ (*mafhum-i kulli*) can be divided into essentials (*dhati*) and accidents (*‘aradi*). Furthermore, essentials can be divided into species (*naw’*), genus (*jins*) and differentia (*fasl*). As you see, the concepts of essentials, accidents, species, genus, and differentia can only exist in the mind, not in the external world. The important question is, if these concepts do not exist in the external world, how can we realize their correctness? In other words,

1. Sobhani, *Shinakht*. 208-9.

2. Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*. 44

3. For example, the oven in the kitchen is on now.

what do these mental concepts, which have no external existence, have to conform with in order to be true?

In reply, we can say that it is true that 'mental propositions' do not exist externally, but each proposition has a reality of its own, and this fact does not depend on our validation or will. For example, when we say, 'bringing two contradictories together is impossible', it is a fact which does not depend on the will, legislation or validation of anybody. Or, when we say, 'the negation of two contradictories is impossible', this also has a reality of its own. Muslim philosophers call this reality the 'thing in itself' (*nafs al-amr*). The criterion for the truth of mental propositions is correspondence with *nafs al-amr*.¹

In short, *nafs al-amr* is a fact that exists beyond our perception and mind; it has a reality independent of our consideration. The criterion for the truth in 'mental propositions' is the correspondence of that mental concept with its *nafs al-amr*. So, if we want to know whether 'bringing two contradictories together is impossible' as a 'mental proposition' is true or not, we should compare it with its *nafs al-amr*. In considering the truthfulness of '*qadaya-yi khariji*' or 'empirical statements' such as "Iron expands when heated", they should be compared with realities in the external world.

Muslim philosophers throughout history have accepted this criterion and believe that the standard of 'truth' is the conformity of an idea or statement

1. Muhammad Husein al-Tabataba'i, *Bidayah al-Hikmah* (Qum: Jami'i-yi Mudarrisin, 2003). 21-2; al-Tabataba'i, *Nihayah al-Hikmah*. 15.

with its reality.¹ According to this, truth is not more than one. Thus, if Max says that the leaves of this tree are green and John, due to jaundice, states that they are yellow, one of them is telling the truth, but not the other. This argument indicates that the truth is one, not multiple. Now, we will consider the second definition of truth.

2. SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE

Defining truth, some Western philosophers contend that if the people of a society accept an idea, that is the truth, and if a new idea emerges after a while supported by a general consensus, it will replace the previous one as the truth.² For example, Ptolemy's hypothesis that the earth is fixed and the planets revolve around it was a 'true' theory for fifteen years, but when scientists came up with a new theory, the previous idea was considered a mistake, and the latest theory was then considered true. Therefore, the majority's consensus is the sign of truth according to this theory.

Analysis of This Theory

In analysing this theory, it can be said that the acceptance by a society can be a sign of truth if the truth and falsehood of a statement is in the hands of that society,

1. For more information see, Abu Nasr Al-Farabi, *Fusul Muntaza'ah* (Al-Zahra: Tehran, 1985). 52; Sina, *al-Shifa: al-Ilahiyyat*. 48; Bahmanyar, *al-Tahsil*. 391 and 291-2; Sadr al-Din, *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, 1. 89-90 and 336; al-Tusi, *Sharh al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, 1. 112.

2. Foulquié, *Mitafizik*. 364; al-Tabataba'i, *Usul-i Falsafih*, 1. 132.

but if the truth and falsehood of a proposition does not depend on the judgment of society, then social consensus cannot be the criterion.

To further explain the matter, we should know that our knowledge is of two kinds:

- A. Propositions that do not change with people's agreement or disagreement, as when we say: water is composed of two elements, oxygen and hydrogen. In this case, the agreement or disagreement of people about the nature of water has no effect on its reality.
- B. Propositions that have no reality other than unanimity (*ijma'*) of society, such as social laws.

According to this classification of knowledge, it can be said that in the second category, unanimity is a sign of truth. For example, every society has the right to choose its government system and tax laws based on a majority vote from the members of parliament, and this choice will be the sign of truth as long as it has social support. In other words, if the people of a country agree on a special system one day, as long as they keep that consensus, this system will be viewed as right, but if they later adopt a different system, then 'truth' will be seen in the form of the second system. In fact, each of these two inconsistent policies will have been understood as 'true' in its own time and according to the intellectual capacity of the people.³

In light of what has been said, it can be concluded that in the first category, the agreement or disagreement

3. See, Sobhani, *Doctrines of Shi'i Islam*. 5.

of people has no effect on the truth or falsity of the proposition because that statement has a reality which is outside the realm of people's choice. In the second category, however, the consensus of the people can be a sign of the truth of those propositions.

It seems that the proponents of the second perspective, that is, 'social acceptance', have mistaken the real issues with the legal issues of society. They think that the criterion for truth in social matters should also serve as the criterion for truth in real matters.

Now we discuss the third view on the definition of truth.

3. USEFULNESS TO MAN

Some believe that 'truth' is something that is beneficial to human beings, whilst 'falsehood' is that which is not beneficial. For them 'truth' is inseparable from expediency (*maslahat*) or wisdom (*hikmat*). This means that every 'truth' is associated with expediency and wisdom. If lies and falsity are in opposition to the truth, they are also against *maslahat*. On the other hand, any truth is also useful and beneficial. Therefore, 'every truth is useful' and 'every useful entity is a truth'.¹

Truth is an idea that is useful in human life. According to them, human beings should have a calm and beneficial life in the world. The intellect has a duty to help them realize such a beneficial life. As such, the duty of the intellect is not to recognize the reality of objects in the world but to introduce beneficial facts. Therefore, correspondence of an idea to its reality is

1. Mutahhari, *Mas'ali-yi Shinakht*. 177.

not the standard for truthfulness. It seems that William James (1842-1910), an American philosopher, refers to the above theory when he argues that truth is a useful idea in the practical life of human beings.¹ Therefore, whatever is beneficial is a truth even if it is false or a lie.

Analysis of This Theory

In analysing this theory, it should be noted that ethical matters are of two types, general and particular.

- a) In general ethical matters, 'truth' is inseparable from expediency (*maslahat*) or wisdom (*hikmat*). This means that every 'truth' is associated with expediency (or wisdom). If lies and false accusations are in opposition to the truth, they are also against *maslahat*. On the other hand, any truth is also useful and beneficial.

From the Qur'anic perspective, in general ethical issues, 'truth' implies being beneficial. It says,

He sends down water from the sky whereat the valleys are flooded to [the extent of] their capacity, and the flood carries along a swelling scum...That is how Allah compares the truth and falsehood. As for the scum, it leaves as dross, and that which profits the people remains in the earth.²

In explaining this verse, it should be noted that when there is rain and flood, naturally, scum is formed on the surface of the water such that we can

1. Foulquié, *Mitafizik*. 357.

2. The Qur'an. 13:17.

only see the scum, not the water. It is clear that the scum has no force of its own, and, if it moves, it is due to the movement of the water.

The Qur'an likens water to the truth and the scum to falsehood. It adds that with the movement of a flood, which is the true movement, the scum also moves. This analogy reveals that falsehood has the help of the force of truth; in other words, falsehood shows itself with the mask of reality. According to the Qur'an, when the flow of water calms down, the foam disappears, and water, which is truth, remains. The Qur'an concludes that 'truth' remains since it is useful. In other words, whatever is beneficial for the people is 'truth', and whatever is to the detriment of society is 'falsehood'. In short, the verse "That is how Allah compares the truth and falsehood" indicates that there is a necessary correlation (*mulazimih*) between truthfulness and profitability in general ethical issues.

- b) In particular ethical cases, however, truth and usefulness are not always identical. This means that the truth may be harmful in some cases. An example may better illustrate this fact. Suppose my friend, Max, is busy with his crucial exams in the final days of the semester. Incidentally, his father dies during these days. Now, if Max asks me about his father's health and I say, "He is well", this false news would give him the peace of mind to pass the exams. While if Max knows the truth, i.e., the illness of his father, it may be harmful for him and he may fail his exams. This example indicates that, in particular matters,

there is not always a necessary relation between truth and usefulness.

In summary, the third theory, that is the theory of usefulness, is acceptable in general ethical matters but not in particulars cases. It seems that since the proponents of this theory have realised that, in general cases, truth is useful, they conclude that truth in all cases implies usefulness, but the fact is that truth is useful only in specific instances, and not every truth is useful. Thus, we can see that the proponents of this theory have mistaken general moral issues for particular ones. Therefore, being beneficial cannot be considered the criterion for truth.

The next section will discuss the fourth perspective on the definition of truth.

4. RELATIVITY

The fourth theory contends that truth is a perception that arises from the interaction between our perceptual faculties with the outside world. In other words, truth is a perception that arises from the exposure of external objects to the senses, such as vision.¹

According to this theory, the criterion for truth is not correspondence to reality; rather, it is a matter of individual perception. This means that if two people have two types of perceptions due to facing an external reality, they are both truths. Let us illustrate this theory with two examples. a) If one person sees an object as red and another person, due to jaundice, sees the same

1. Sobhani, *Shinakht*. 215; Mutahhari, *Mas'ali-yi Shinakht*. 181.

object as yellow, both are true. b) If we put one of our hands in cold water and the other in hot water, then we put both hands in luke warm water, it is clear that both hands will not have the same feeling. We feel cold in one hand and warm in the other. According to the fourth view, both perceptions are true.¹ Therefore, contrary to the first view, truth is not one, but multiple. If two people have different opinions regarding the same object, both will be correct. As a result, we will have two truths.

Analysis of This Theory

This theory is a matter of deliberation in two ways.

- A. The issue of the ‘relativity of truth’ (and error) can be acceptable in cases where the object, external to the mind, does not have a certain reality. For example, people who live in very large palaces consider houses of five hundred meters to be small; at the same time, people living in fifty-meter residential complexes consider a five-hundred-meter house to be massive. Here, each of them has made such a judgment according to their personal situation. Obviously, the judgments of both are correct since size is a relative matter.

But the fact is that ‘relativity of truth’ (and error) according to the ‘realism of knowledge’ is nothing more than a myth, and the truth is single. Let us

1. Mutahhari, *Mas’ali-yi Shinakht*. 181. For more theories on the definitions of truth, see, Brain Carr, “Factual Truth,” in *An Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. G.H.R. Parkinson (London: Routledge, 1988).

consider the case of water again. If we believe that, in luke warm water, one hand feels cold and the other hand feels warm, this statement is correct, and both hands show the truth. But if we believe that the water in question, which has a certain temperature, is both cold and hot, this is certainly wrong. The source of the fallacy is that the speaker, instead of attributing two different feelings to the nerves of his hands, attributes differences to the temperature of the water. It is clear that this causes him to consider truth to be relative, not absolute. In short, the relativity of truth is admissible when the object does not have a definite reality outside the mind. Therefore, we should not consider our different feelings or understandings of the same object as a sign of their truth.¹

- B. Does the theory of 'relativity of truth' include the claim that "all truth is relative" or not? In other words, if we claim that "all our perceptions of the external world are relative", is this claim also a relative or absolute truth? If you accept the former and believe that this claim is also relative, this implies that you have accepted an absolute proposition. That is, you have absolutely said that all propositions, including this very claim, are relative. If you accept the latter answer and believe that this claim is absolute (i.e., not relative), it implies that you have accepted an absolute proposition. In any case, if you claim that "all our perceptions of the external world are relative", the claim leads to a paradox.

1. al-Tabataba'i, *Usul-i Falsafih*, 1. 166.

As we mentioned at the beginning of this lesson, not all our knowledge is true, and there may be some false knowledge as well. This reality leads us to two essential questions.

- a) What is the definition of “truth”?
- b) What is the criterion for distinguishing between “true knowledge” and “false knowledge”?

Having answered the first question, the next lesson will address the second question.

SUMMARY

1. Muslim philosophers define truth as a correspondence between propositions and their own realities.
2. The agreement of society in matters which have a reality of their own cannot be the criterion for truth.
3. Being useful in particular ethical matters cannot be the criterion for truth.
4. The origin of the relativists’ fallacy is that they do not attribute their different feelings or understandings of an entity to themselves but mistakenly to that entity.

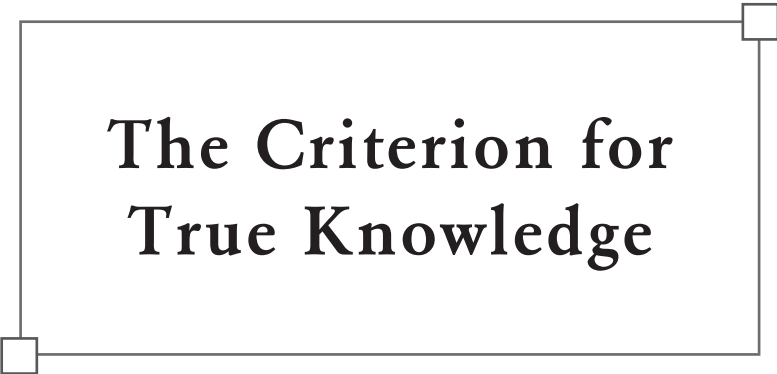
QUESTIONS

1. How do Muslim philosophers define ‘truth’?
2. What is the criterion for truth in “mental propositions”?

WHAT IS TRUTH?

3. Why does truth not always imply *maslahat* (expediency) in particular moral matters?
4. How do relativists define “truth”?
5. Explain how the theory of ‘relativity of truth’ leads to a paradox.

LESSON THIRTEEN



The Criterion for True Knowledge

As we stated in the previous lesson, not all our knowledge is true and there may be some false cognition. This fact directs us to two basic inquiries.

- a) What is the definition of ‘truth’?
- b) What is the criterion for distinguishing between ‘true knowledge’ and ‘false knowledge’?

The first inquiry was discussed in the previous lesson. This lesson will address the second inquiry. It should also be noted that while the previous lesson addressed the level of subsistence (*thubut*), this lesson is concerned with the level of proof for subsistence (*ithbat*).

Let us explain the difference between these two lessons in the form of an example. You may ask what the definition of water is. In reply, it can be said that water is a liquid composed of oxygen and hydrogen. This is defining water on the level of subsistence (*thubut*). After knowing the definition of water, you may raise another question and ask whether this liquid in the bottle in front of me is water or apple juice? This is speaking on the level of proof for subsistence (*ithbat*).¹

1. Mutahhari, *Mas'ali-yi Shinakht*. 203.

Therefore, this lesson is concerned with the level of proof for subsistence, that is to say, how we realise that our knowledge corresponds to reality.

As explained above, Muslim philosophers maintain that every proposition has its own reality. If that proposition is in accordance with its own reality (external world or the thing itself, i.e., *nafs al-amr*), then it will be 'true knowledge'; otherwise, that proposition will be false. Now the question is, how can we deduce if our knowledge corresponds to reality? Two people may have two kinds of cognition in the same case, and both claim that their cognitions are in accordance with reality. How can we know which of the two cognitions corresponds to reality? By what standard can we distinguish true knowledge from false?

There are several viewpoints here, some of which will be discussed below.

1. BACK TO THE SELF-EVIDENT

In the fifth century BC, Aristotle developed a yardstick called logic to distinguish true knowledge from false knowledge.¹ According to the science of logic, human thoughts are divided into 'self-evident' (*badihi*) and 'theoretical' (*nazari*) thoughts.² The self-evident proposition is clear on its own and does not require reflection or argument, such as 'The sun is bright'. The theoretical proposition is not self-evident and requires

1. al-Tabataba'i, *Usul-i Falsafih*, 1. 136.

2. Sabzwari, *Sharh al-Mandumah*, 1. 87.

reflection and reasoning, like 'All angles within a triangle add up to 180 degrees'.

Muslim philosophers maintain that if our knowledge is of the first type, that is, self-evident, and no rational person can deny or doubt it, it is called a 'criterion-bearing' (*khud mi'yar*) proposition. In other words, self-evident propositions have already been proven and do not need to be argued for. However, if our knowledge is of the second type, that is, the theoretical proposition, the truthfulness of such knowledge claims depends on them going back to self-evident knowledge.

In addition, the correctness of one theoretical proposition may be guaranteed by another theoretical proposition, and that (i.e., the second one) may also be confirmed by a third one, and so on. But in the end, it reaches a point where the last cognition depends on a self-evident proposition that guarantees the correctness of all the previous ones.

Suppose that we know that the angle A is equal to angle B. We also know that the angles B and C are equal. However, we have no idea about the equality of angles A and C. Here we can resort to a self-evident proposition, namely that 'two things equal to a third thing are equal to each other'. Then, we say that if angle A is equal to angle B, and additionally angle B is equal to angle C, then angle A will definitely be equal to angle C.¹

1. We may add another example. We know that Lima and Oliver are the same age, and, on the other hand, we also know that Oliver and Noah are the same age. If someone asks us whether Lima and Noah are the same age, we may not be aware of the answer at that moment since it

Therefore, in the eyes of Muslim philosophers, our knowledge should be consistent with reality in one of two ways: a) We achieve a self-evident proposition which has the value of certainty (like “This water is hot”). These propositions, due to their self-evident nature, are infallible. b) If the cognition is a ‘theoretical proposition’, it should be turned into a self-evident proposition whilst observing the codified laws in the science of logic and observing the conditions of inference. In both cases, the knowledge of man will correspond to reality.¹

Now we move on to the second perspective for the criterion for ‘true knowledge’.

2. TEST AND PRACTICE

A group of philosophers believe that experimentation and practice are the criteria for right cognition. This means that if we want to make sure that our knowledge is in line with reality, it must be capable of being tested and experimented upon. In explaining this issue, it must be noted that there are two types of propositions: a) Some propositions can be tested practically. For such empirical propositions, experimentation and practice are the criteria for truth. For instance, the proposition ‘iron expands with heat’ can be tested in

needs reflection. However, by considering a self-evident proposition, that is, “two things equal to a third thing are equal to each other”, we can answer that Lima and Noah are the same age. Sobhani, *Nazariyyah al-Ma‘rifah*. 233-4; Mutahhari, *Mas’ali-yi Shinakht*. 206-7.

1. Misbah, *Amuzish-i Falsafih*, 1. 223.

the external world. If we observe that it expands on heating, our knowledge corresponds to reality. b) The second type of proposition — such as “The world is eternal” — cannot be tested in practice. In this case, it is impossible to recognise the correspondence of this type of proposition with reality.¹

John Locke (1632-1704), one of the significant figures of this school, states, “There is nothing in the intellect unless it has previously been in sensation.”² He says elsewhere that the human mind is at first like a plain whiteboard on which nothing is written, but, little by little, information is imprinted on it through sense and experience.³

Therefore, we may come across a hypothesis that says ‘The boiling point of water is one hundred degrees’. To prove it, we have to test it again and again in different conditions and places. When we come to the same conclusion in all experiments, we say that this proposition is in accordance with reality, and we realise the correspondence via experimentation. It is clear that if the theory is beyond the realm of experimentation, it will be impossible to test its correspondence with reality.

ANALYSIS OF THIS VIEW

There is no doubt that experimentation is the source of the flourishing of science and human domination

1. al-Tabataba’i, *Usul-i Falsafih*, 1. 133.

2. Barbour, *Issues in Science and Religion*. 87; Misbah, *Amuzish-i Falsafih*, 1. 198.

3. Foulquié, *Mitafizik*. 127.

over nature, and that human beings have been able to achieve great success and progress in today's industry and technology in light of experimentation. According to Bertrand Russell (1872- 1970), Muslim philosophers valued experimentation more than the Greeks.¹ For example, in the book *Al-Shifa*, Avicenna says that on several occasions he was able to prove a certain theory through experimenting and testing.²

However, the question is whether experimentation can be considered the only criterion for cognition. Putting it differently, what is confirmed by an experiment shows that our knowledge accords with reality, and what can't be experimented is a mistake, or at least we do not know whether it accords with reality or not. This view is a matter of deliberation in several ways.

1. The summary of the above theory is that 'being empirical denotes that the proposition accords with reality'. The question is, has this proposition been proven by any experiment? The answer is definitely in the negative because this is not a tangible proposition (like the expansion of iron with heat), but rather a philosophical proposition and the place of cognition here is the mind (not the external world). If similarly, we say that this is a self-evident

1. Bertrand Russell, *The Science Outlook* (London: Gorge Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1931). 21-2.
 2. For example, he says on the issue of the 'rainbow', that he experienced this issue many times. Sina, *Al-Shifa: Al-Tabi'yyat*, 2. 51. He refers to some issues about animals that were proven to him by experience. Ibid., 3. 101.

proposition, this means that the subconscious has acknowledged a 'criterion-bearing proposition' and considered it the measure of other cognitions.

2. Since the realm of experimentation is limited to material beings, some propositions taken for granted by all philosophers cannot be tested.¹ For example, 'the impossibility of a vicious circle (*dawr*) or infinite regression (*tasalsul*)' cannot be proven in the laboratory, for, as we have noted, material beings fall into the realm of experimentation, whilst philosophical laws do not. Therefore, accepting such a criterion implies opposing some propositions considered as axioms (*musallamat*) in other schools.
3. Experimentation is dependent on tools, and this dependence may shake the value of empirical issues in the future because every day, a better experiment is presented with more accurate tools, which indicates the invalidity of previous experiments. Hence, some of the empirical scientific issues may have temporary value today and are expected to become obsolete in the future.² For example, in the future, a new tool may be invented that measures blood sugar levels more accurately, and this shows that the previous experiments were not accurate.
4. The fourth drawback is that none of the propositions that occurred in the past (like a war) or are expected to happen in the future, can be experienced now since both are 'non-existent' (*ma'dum*) and, as such,

1. Javadi, *Shinakht Shinasi dar Qur'an*. 385.

2. Murtada Mutahhari, *Ashna'i ba 'Ulum-i Islami* (Qum: Sadra, 1979). 113.

cannot be tested. As a result, it is not possible to prove propositions about things that happened in the past or will happen in the future.¹ This criterion is only applicable in limited cases, so it cannot be a comprehensive standard.

Now we address the third perspective.

3. VICTORY AND SUCCESS

Some scholars believe that the success of a school of thought is the criterion for the correctness of its propositions. They argue that to know whether a proposition accords with reality, we do not need to pay attention to the contents of the proposition. Rather, the success of the school of thought to which that proposition belongs is the criterion for its truth. In other words, if an idea wins, it indicates that it accords with reality. They argue that if it were not true, it could not win.² Accordingly, if the followers of one religion are more than those of other religions, it shows that the teachings of that religion are in accordance with reality, since, otherwise, it would not have acquired more followers.

ANALYSIS OF THIS VIEW

It should be noted that the reason for the success of a school of thought can be considered in two ways. a) This school has loyal followers, and the reason for

1. Javadi, *Shinakht Shinasi dar Qur'an*. 386.

2. Sobhani, *Shinakht*. 235.

its success is the followers' loyalty and practice of the teachings of that school. We may see this kind of success as a sign and measure of truth. The Qur'an says in this regard, "And say, 'The truth has come, and falsehood has vanished. Indeed falsehood is bound to vanish,'"¹ b) Sometimes, the reason for the victory of a group pretending to follow a school of thought is not mere following and adhering to the teachings of that school. With more deliberation, we can find that other reasons have played a significant role in their conquest. Despite this possibility, can success be considered the standard of truth?

Suppose we assume that the reason for the success of a school of thought is financial aids, military facilities, dictatorship, coup d'état, etc. Can its success be considered as a sign of the truth of its teachings? In other words, can we consider it as the standard of truth?

We may also explain the weakness of this theory with a historical event. Imam Ali (as) and Mu'awiyah faced each other in a military battle. There is no doubt that the Imam considered himself right and was aware of the divine promises, yet he announced his military defeat.² Can Ali's defeat be considered the defeat of his ideas and the military victory of Mu'awiyah as the legitimacy of his views? Can we say that Ali's defeat indicates that his teachings did not accord with reality? It is important to admit that Mu'awiyah's victory was not the victory of his school of thought; rather, it was the victory of the people of Syria over the people of

1. The Qur'an. 17:81.

2. Al-Sharif al-Radi, *Nahj al-Balaghah*. 174. Sermon 116.

Iraq. In other words, if the Iraqi people had not left Imam Ali (as) alone and had not ignored his orders, they would not have suffered such a defeat.

It is interesting that the Imam points to this fact and says, Mu‘awiyah’s army will soon defeat the people of Iraq since the people of Syria “are united in helping falsehood” while the people of Iraq “are not united in supporting the truth.” Imam addressed his own people and said, “you disobeyed your Imam while he was right and they [the people of Syria] obeyed their Imam [Mu‘awiyah] in falsehood. The people of Syria are loyal to their leader and you are traitors. The people of Syria will soon dominate you and take over the government.”¹ This sentence clearly reveals that the school of Imam Ali (as) did not fail; rather, the people of Iraq failed due to opposing and disobeying Imam’s orders. Obviously, such a failure cannot be a sign of the invalidity or inconsistency of a school with reality.²

In short, if a school of thought succeeds, victory may be the measure of truth, provided that following the school is the complete cause of success. But if we believe that other causes and factors have played a role in the success of a certain viewpoint, that success cannot be considered a criterion for knowing the truth. In other words, mere success cannot indicate that the teachings of that school are in sync with reality.³ Therefore, if one religion has a greater number of followers compared to others, it does not necessarily imply that the teachings of that religion are in accordance with reality since the

1. Ibid. 67. Sermon 25.

2. Sobhani, *Shinakht*. 236-7.

3. Mutahhari, *Mas’ali-yi Shinakht*. 231-2.

number of followers of a religion may increase due to external factors.

In the previous lessons, we argued that the senses, intellect, and heart are three important tools for knowing the realities of the world. Some ‘barriers to cognition’ may cause weakness in these three tools, and consequently, they may lose their natural function. The issue of ‘barriers to cognition’ is one of the most critical issues in the theory of knowledge since the main reason for the difference between theistic and materialistic philosophers originates in this issue. The following lessons will address the barriers to cognition in detail.

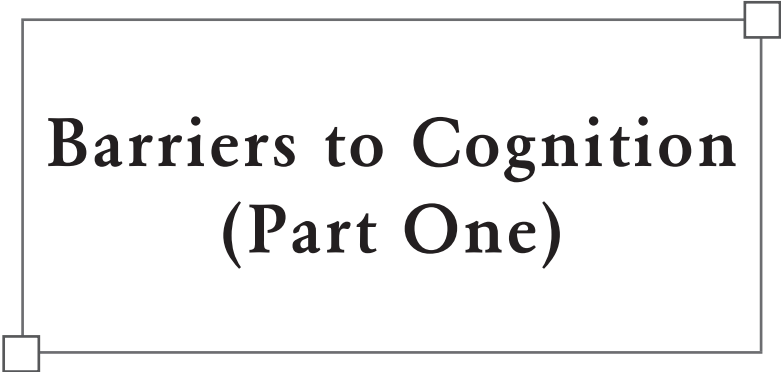
SUMMARY

1. According to Muslim philosophers, all theoretical (non-self-evident) ideas (*taṣawwurat*) and affirmations (*tasdiqat*) should lead to self-evident ideas and affirmations, since self-evident propositions are infallible.
2. If experimentation is a criterion for cognition, many certainties (*musallamat*), such as the impossibility of a vicious cycle, would not be capable of being proven. Moreover, experiments are limited to the realm of material beings, not philosophical laws.
3. Success cannot be an accurate measure of correct cognition because factors other than loyalty to a school of thought and following its teachings, such as material and military help, can play an essential role in the success of that school.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between 'the definition of truth' and 'the criteria for true cognition'?
2. From the Muslim philosophers' perspective, how do we recognise that a proposition accords with reality?
3. Why can't experimentation be the criterion for cognition in philosophical matters?
4. Why are incidents that have happened in the past or will happen in the future, not verifiable?
5. Why can't the success of a school of thought be a sign that the teachings of that school accord with reality?

LESSON FOURTEEN



Barriers to Cognition (Part One)

In the previous lessons, we noted that the senses, intellect, and heart are three essential tools for knowing the realities of the world. With our five senses, we experience sensations; with the intellect, we can understand and analyse intellectual affairs; and with the heart, one can appreciate supernatural and unseen realities.

The issue of ‘barriers to cognition’ is one of the most important issues in the theory of knowledge since the main reason for the differences between theistic and materialistic philosophers is rooted in this issue. This means that materialistic philosophers, owing to obstacles they have in the field of intellectual and intuitive (heart) cognitions, cannot make use of the intellect and heart to appreciate the truth. If one day these obstacles are removed, the materialistic sages will have no differences with the theistic ones.

Obstacles are divided into two types: a) Barriers which are related to the tools of cognition and b) Barriers which are related to the form of arguments. The first type will be discussed in this lesson and the following lesson. The second type will be addressed in Lesson Sixteen.

The first type, i.e., barriers which are related to the tools of cognition, can also fall into two categories: a) sensory barriers and b) non-sensory barriers. We will discuss these below.

A) BARRIERS RELATED TO SENSORY TOOLS

The five senses are able to perceive accurately on condition that they face no obstacle. For example, if someone wears matte black glasses, they will certainly not see anything, and if they wear blue glasses, they will see everything blue. If the lens of their glasses is concave, they will see everything upside down. Other senses have their own obstacles, which are discussed in detail in the textbooks of biology and physics. Our discussion here will be more concerned with non-sensory tools, i.e., intellectual and intuitive (heart) barriers.

B) BARRIERS RELATED TO NON-SENSORY TOOLS

Wisdom and heart are like a light that God has placed in human beings and can illuminate the road for miles. However, many obstacles may block this spotlight, diminishing its power of guidance and ultimately misleading us. Several verses of the Qur'an mention these factors, which can be divided into three main groups:

- the practices that hinder true cognition;
- the actions that darken the mirror of the intellect and the heart; and
- the external factors that negatively affect human thought, intellect and emotions.

We shall briefly explain these three factors below.¹

1. PRACTICES THAT HINDER TRUE COGNITION

Many factors cause problems that prevent the intellect and heart from functioning well. We will explain some of these in light of Qur'anic verses here.

a) Following Desires

Some people follow their own desires and take them as their lord. Consequently, God will leave them alone, and they will reside in the dark. A person who follows their long-held inclinations and desires will eventually be a denier. From the Qur'anic point of view, such people lose the power of their ears and eyes and consequently become blind and deaf. They, as a result, fall into the deep sleep of negligence. The Qur'an states,

Have you seen him who has taken his desire to be his god and whom Allah has led astray knowingly, and set a seal upon his hearing and his heart, and put a blindfold on his

1. This lesson and the next one mostly draw on Makarim, *Piyam-i Qur'an*, 1.

sight? So who will guide him after Allah?
Will you not then take admonition?¹

Regarding the cause of the revelation of this verse, commentators state that, one night, Abu Jahl and Walid ibn Mughayrah were visiting the Ka'bah in Mecca. Abu Jahl said that he was confident that [Prophet] Muhammad (s) was the messenger of God. Walid protested and asked, "How do you know he is right?" Abu Jahl said, "O Walid, we used to call him '*amin*' (trustworthy) from our childhood, so how can we call him a traitor after perfection and growth?" Walid said, "Then, why do you not believe in him?" Abu Jahl replied, "Do you want the girls of Quraysh to claim I have surrendered for fear of defeat? I swear to *Lat* and '*Uzza*, I will not follow him."²

The question that seems important epistemologically is, how following one's desires can be a barrier to cognition. The following section tries to answer this question.

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1. The Qur'an. 45:23. The term *hawa*, in the verse, literally signifies "to fall from a height". It means that, following one's desires causes man to fall in this world and be punished in the hereafter. This is why hell is called *Harwiyah*, because it is the place of falling. See Muhammad Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-'Arab*, 15 vols., vol. 15 (Beirut: Dar al-Sadir, 1993). 373; Khalil ibn Ahmad Farahidi, *Kitab al-'Ayn*, 9 vols., vol. 4 (Qum: Hijrat, n.d). 105; Husein Al-Raghib al-Isfahani, *Mufradat Alfaz al-Qur'an* (Beirut/Damascus: Dar al-Qalam/al-Shamitiyyah, 1991). 849.
 2. Ahmad Mustafa al-Maraghi, *Tafsir al-Maraghi*, vol. 25 (Beirut: Dar al-Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1985). 27.

How Can Following Desires Act as a Barrier to Cognition?

When reflecting upon the cause of the revelation of the above verse, it becomes clear how following one's desires prevents the perceiving of truth and causes an obstacle to cognition. This is because when interest in one thing pervades and penetrates a human soul, they cannot see and think about anything other than that; they use all their abilities and capabilities to achieve it. In other words, the love of high social positions, wealth and fame draws such a thick veil over the lover's perceptions that he is ready to trample on all truths in order to reach the desired goals.

Imam Ali (as), in reprehension of following desires, which blocks the ways of cognition, states, "Whenever someone falls in love with something, it blinds his eyes."¹ He holds that "following desires is the blight of the intellect."²

From the Qur'anic point of view, following desires hinders perceiving of the truth and has significant consequences. Its epistemological consequences are deviation from the path of guidance³, being deprived of divine proofs⁴, resorting to mere conjectures⁵, moving

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1. Al-Sharif al-Radi, *Nahj al-Balaghah*. 160. (Sermon 109)
 2. 'Abd al-Wahid Amidi, *Ghurar al-Hikam* (Tehran: Danishgah-i Tehran, n.d.) 29.
 3. The Qur'an. 38: 26.
 4. Ibid. 47:14.
 5. Ibid. 53:23.

away from rationality¹, denial of the manifested proofs², materialism³ and rejection of the truth.⁴

In light of what has been argued, it can be concluded that extreme interest in an object makes us strive with all our being to achieve it; we see nothing but the object of interest. Such an attitude weakens or completely diminishes our perceptual powers, and we are then unable to comprehend the truth.

We will now deal with the second factor that causes an obstacle to cognition.

b) Hypocritical Behaviour

Hypocrisy literally means concealment. A hypocrite is one whose speech is contrary to what they hide in their heart.⁵ The religion of Islam emerged as a divine law in Mecca, and the Prophet was able to guide a group of people in thirteen years by enduring suffering and pain, and finally he emigrated to Medina. The hypocritical party of Medina was formed by the pagans of Mecca and some Jews of Medina to start a psychological warfare and create problems for the Muslims.

The Qur'an, at the beginning of the second chapter, describes polytheists and hypocrites. Two verses describe the first group⁶, while the characteristics of

1. Ibid. 25:43.

2. Ibid. 5:70.

3. Ibid. 45:23.

4. Ibid. 28:50.

5. Ahmad Ibn Faris, *Mu'jam Maqay'is al-Lughah*, 6 vols., vol. 4 (Qum: Maktab al-A'lam al-Islami, 1983). 455.

6. See the verses 2:6-7.

the second group are described in thirteen verses.¹ A group of commentators believe that approximately one third of the Qur'an is about hypocrisy,² highlighting the severity of this vice and the problems that it may create.

The Qur'an states, "Their parable is that of one who lighted a torch, and when it had lit up all around him, Allah took away their light, and left them sightless in a manifold darkness."³

This means that the hypocrites are those who light a fire in the middle of the night for deception; that is, they try to endear themselves to people. As soon as the light of hope surrounds them, God will dash their hopes and expose their evil plans by informing the Muslims.

From an epistemological perspective, it is important to examine how hypocrisy can impede cognition. This question is addressed in the following section.

How Can Hypocrisy Act as a Barrier to Cognition?

The spirit of hypocrisy causes us to be in harmony with every group and society, to take on the colour of any environment and to move with every school of thought. As a result, we would lose the originality and independence of our thought. Obviously, we would always think in accordance with the ideology and interests of the group we accompany. Therefore, we tend to constantly change our way of thinking and

1. See the verses 2:8-20.

2. Ja'far Sobhani, *Manshur-i Jawid*, 14 vols., vol. 9 (Qum: Mu'assisih Imam Sadiq, 2004). 9.

3. The Qur'an. 2:17

methods. In such a situation, we would never have the power to judge and think correctly. A hypocrite is weak in terms of perceptual ability and discernment. The disease of hypocrisy blinds them, and the veil of hypocrisy casts a thick cover over their mind. The torch of truth in such people is always off.

Earlier, we argued that there are three factors that can affect the functioning of the intellect and heart. In the following section, we will discuss the third factor which can contribute to weakened perception tools.

C. Blind Imitation

The content of the prophets' calls to people, in general, can fall into two main parts, religious beliefs and religious practices. From the Islamic perspective, imitation is one of the religious duties in the realm of religious acts, and a non-*mujtahid* should take recourse to a well-qualified *mujtahid*.¹ But imitation is forbidden in religious beliefs, and the Qur'an urges people not to adhere to any belief without research and rational argument, as it states, "Do not follow that of which you have no knowledge."²

One of the issues that was very common in the pre-Islamic era was honouring one's ancestors and unconditional respect for their thoughts, habits and

1. Imam Sadiq (as) states that ordinary (non-*mujtahid*) people should imitate the scholar who is pious, a guardian of the religion of God, an opponent of his/her own desire, and obedient to the commands of God. Muhammad al-Hurr al-'Amili, *Wasa'il al-Shi'ah*, 30 vols., vol. 27 (Qum: Al al-Bayt, 1988). 131.

2. The Qur'an. 17:36.

customs. In justifying their ugly deeds, they said they were simply following what their ancestors had previously done. In other words, they were arrogant people, and to justify their bad behaviour, they propounded the religion of their ancestors and said that they followed them unconditionally. The Qur'an condemns this way of thinking and states,

And when they are told, 'Come to what Allah has sent down and [come] to the Apostle,' they say, 'Sufficient for us is what we have found our fathers following'. What, even if their fathers did not know anything and were not guided?!

In this verse, the Qur'an addresses the view of the polytheists and states that when they were requested to embrace God's call and to renounce their idols and heresies, they would say that their ancestors' traditions were enough for them, and thus they followed them. In response, the Qur'an asks: Is unconditional imitation of the ignorant and misguided permissible?

From an epistemological perspective, it is important to examine how imitation can act as a barrier to cognition. This question is addressed in the following section.

How Can Imitation Be a Barrier to Cognition?

There is no doubt that the spirit of appreciation and observance of human principles demands that fathers and ancestors be respected, but this does not mean that

1. Ibid. 5: 104.

we should consider them infallible and stop criticizing and examining their thoughts.

Therefore, imitators lose their intellect and thought and entirely follow their predecessors. Imitation creates a thick veil over their perceptual tools. The sense of imitation can be a source of flourishing and creativity in childhood, but it can weaken the faculties of thinking and creativity in our youth. In a nutshell, imitation can limit our power of thinking and destroy our thought and sense of analysis and consequently be a barrier to cognition.

As we explained in this lesson, the Qur'an divides the barriers to cognition into three main groups: a) the qualities that become veils for cognition, b) the actions that darken the mirror of the intellect and heart, and c) the external factors that negatively affect human thought, intellect and emotions. Having addressed the first group of barriers, in the next lesson, we will deal with the second and third groups of these obstacles.

SUMMARY

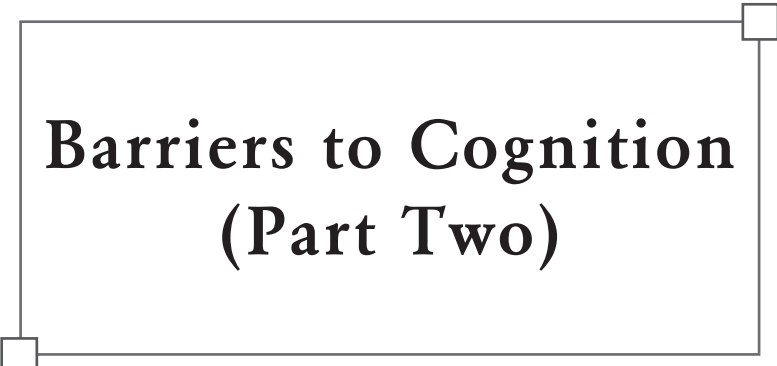
1. The Qur'an divides the obstacles to cognition into three groups: a) the qualities that become veils for cognition, b) actions that darken the mirror of the intellect and heart, and c) external factors that negatively affect human thought and intellect.
2. Following desires can cause love for something to penetrate our whole being and deprive us of the power of reasoning.

3. The veil of hypocrisy causes a person to take on the environment's colour and identify with others.
4. Imitation deprives us of the power of thinking and the flourishing of the intellect and plunges us into the darkness of ignorance.

QUESTIONS

1. How does the Qur'an divide the obstacles to cognition?
2. How does following desires cause veils over our cognition tools?
3. Why does the Qur'an ask people not to adhere to any belief without rational arguments?
4. How can imitation become a veil over our cognition tools?
5. Why do hypocrites never have the power of sound thinking?

LESSON FIFTEEN



Barriers to Cognition (Part Two)

As stated before, the intellect and the heart are important tools for cognition which can expand the realm of human knowledge. However, these tools may be subject to dangers that can weaken their functions and are in fact a kind of veil and an obstacle to correct cognition. In the previous lesson, we said that the Qur'an divides the barriers to cognition into three main groups, namely,

- practices that hinder true cognition;
- actions that darken the intellect and heart; and
- external factors that negatively affect human thought, intellect and emotions.

The first one has already been discussed. This lesson aims to deal with the second and third groups of these obstacles.

2. ACTIONS THAT DARKEN THE INTELLECT AND HEART

There are many actions which may impair the functioning of these two tools. In the next section, we will briefly discuss some of these actions.

A) SIN

The Qur'an, in several verses, introduces sin as one of the great obstacles to cognition. It points out that improper deeds can pollute and darken the pure mirror of the mind, and when it darkens, the power of human cognition weakens and eventually disappears. The Qur'an states, "No indeed! Rather their hearts have been sullied by what they have been earning."¹

It seems that the verse is highlighting three significant points:

- Man's tools of perception, based on his original nature, are like a mirror that reflects reality as it is.
- People's improper deeds smear the mirror of their intellect and heart, which may change their nature.
- When the mirror of the mind is smeared, it prevents the mind's understanding of reality, and the person may not perceive the truth as it is.²

Imam Ali (as) points to the fact that the intellect is like a mirror, and says, "A man's mind is like a mirror that helps him see the beauty or ugliness of his deeds."³ Therefore, from the Qur'anic point of view and the narrations, the mirror of the mind, as long as it maintains its original nature, is an indicator of realities while sins pollute the mind and destroy its

1. Ibid. 83:14.

2. Muhammad Husein al-Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan Fi Tafsir Al-Qur'an*, 20 vols., vol. 20 (Tehran: Raja, 1983). 234.

3. Amidi, *Ghurar al-Hikam*. 6566.

clarity. Therefore, in the eyes of the Qur'an, sins cause rust (*rayn*) on the mirror of the mind and consequently cause a barrier to cognition.¹

It appears that the epistemological question that needs to be addressed is how committing sins can create a barrier to cognition. We will try to answer this question in the following section.

How Can Sins Act as a Barrier to Cognition?

Let us explicate this point with a narration from the Prophet. He states that whenever a person commits a sin, a black spot appears in their heart; that is, their faculty of perception. If they repent, their heart will be polished and that spot will be removed. However, if they commit sins again, that black spot grows bigger and bigger until it covers their whole heart. This is the rust that the Qur'an talks about when it says, "No indeed! Rather their hearts have been sullied by what they have been earning."²

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1. *Rayn* is used in three senses: 1. Dust that gathers on precious objects. 2. Rust that covers the surface of metals and is a sign of decay. 3. Anything that dominates and overcomes another object. Therefore, this word is used in the domination of wine over reason, domination of death over the living and domination of sleep over wakefulness. Al-Raghib al-Isfahani, *Mufradat*. 373; Fakhr al-Din Al-Razi, *Mafatih Al-Ghayb*, 32 vols., vol. 31 (Beirut: Dar al-Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1999). 17; Ma'luf Lu'is, *al-Munjid fi al-Lughah wa al-a'lam* (Qum: Intisharat-i Zavi al-Qurba, 2010). 290-1.
 2. The Qur'an. 83:14.

According to the above-mentioned hadith, sin can create a kind of darkness in the human heart that naturally weakens perception. Putting it another way, sinfulness can gradually turn into the permanent disposition of our heart (*malakah*), preoccupying us with everything and everyone other than God, and this creates darkness and destroys the basic human nature. The darkness of the heart has several degrees that the Qur'an describes with such terms as *rayn*¹, *ghashawa* (blindfold)², and *qulf* (seal).³

As the above explanation showed, sins can destroy the hearing and sight of the heart and consequently render it incapable of knowing reality.

Now we will discuss the next element which may harm the ability of perceptual cognition.

B) SUPERFICIALITY

Superficiality or lack of contemplation is also one of the obstacles to cognition and can draw a thick curtain over the eyes of the human intellect. The Qur'an states in this regard, "Man prays for ill as [avidly as] he prays for good, and man is overhasty."⁴

The embitterment, failures, and calamities that have befallen human beings throughout history due to hastiness are innumerable, but we may not be aware of some of them. A person who is immersed in ugliness and misery may think that they are moving towards felicity,

1. Ibid. 83:14.

2. Ibid. 2: 7; 47: 23.

3. Ibid. 2:88; 4:155.

4. Ibid. 17:11.

and this can be due to superficiality and lack of careful thinking. The late Tabataba'i, in the interpretation of the above verse, states that human beings' rashness means that when they ask for something, they do not reflect upon its advantages and disadvantages. As soon as something attracts their attention, they seek it without thinking. Consequently, they might suffer losses. Therefore, impulsive men cannot distinguish between good and evil. They rush towards falsehood as if they were trying to reach truth.¹

Moreover, Imam Sadiq (as) considers superficiality as one of the barriers to cognition and states, "be thoroughly aware of the way of salvation and your misery. Do not ask God for anything which, in actuality, causes your anguish, while you think it leads you towards salvation."²

Therefore, every researcher must avoid superficiality and study every issue fundamentally. It is worth noting that every subject has its own roots and origins which might remain unknown to us, due to our superficiality and haste. Superficiality, can consequently be an obstacle to cognition.

In the previous lesson, we mentioned that the Qur'an divides the barriers to cognition into three main groups. Having discussed the first and second groups, the following section will now address the third group.

1. al-Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan*, 13. 49.

2. 'Abd Ali Al-'Arusi al-Huwayzi, *Tafisr Nur al-Thaqalayn*, 5 vols., vol. 3 (Qum: Mujahidi, 2004). 141.

3. EXTERNAL FACTORS

External factors are associated with those cognition problems which do not relate to our traits and actions. They, however, may affect man's perception and consequently hinder his knowledge. The Qur'an mentions these obstacles in several verses, one of which will be explicated below.

MISLEADING PROPAGANDA

No school of thought, irrespective of being right or wrong, is needless of spreading its doctrines. This means that they need publicity in order to expand their territory and followers. It is true that truth always agrees with human nature, and falsehood disagrees with it, but, at the same time, nature (*fitrah*) sometimes loses its role of truth-seeking, and as a result, needs a warner to make it aware of the truth.

For this reason, throughout history, various ideologies have trained propaganda agents and dispatched them to different places to publicize their thoughts. The Qur'an also emphasizes the issue of publicity as 'commanding the good' and 'forbidding the evil' and states, "There has to be a nation among you summoning to the good, bidding what is right, and forbidding what is wrong. It is they who are the felicitous."¹

Just as promoting true teachings affects the human soul, so does the propagation of false thought. Deviant

1. The Qur'an. 3:104

sects usually make use of two ways to propagate their ideas:

1. They cover their false ideas with eloquent and beautiful truths, and after capturing people's attention, they inject false thoughts into their minds. For example, we can refer to the superstition and idolatry of the time of the Prophet, examples of which can be seen even today in Southeast Asia. For instance, they ask, 'how do you worship an invisible God, when you can worship the statues and idols that represent Him?' By making such apparently interesting arguments, they draw a thick veil over the eyes of human intellect and deprive people of understanding the truth.
2. Sometimes, the deviant sects appeal to the instincts of anger and lust and create an ill-founded idea. Nevertheless, they present it as humane and admirable. The issue of nationalism belongs to this kind of poisonous propaganda that takes advantage of human emotions, and, instead of promoting a God-centred life, focuses on the motherland and consequently humiliates others. Such propaganda may also light the fire of war between nations.

Therefore, since misleading propaganda with its sweet and magical expressions cover falsehood with truth, it may prevent correct perception.

As we mentioned at the beginning of Lesson Fourteen, barriers to cognition can be divided into two types: a) barriers which relate to the tools of cognition and b) barriers which relate to the form of arguments. The first one was discussed in this lesson and the

previous lesson as well. The next lesson aims to address the second type.

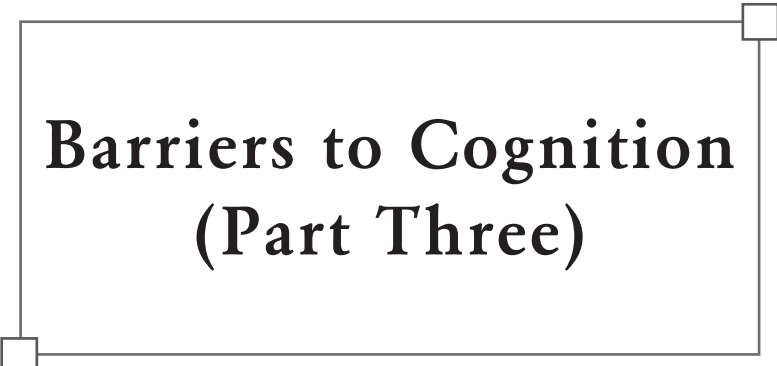
SUMMARY

1. Sin darkens the mirror of the heart and destroy its sense of reality.
2. The superficial man, due to his haste, cannot distinguish truth from falsehood.
3. Beneficial publicity originates from reason and wisdom, while false propaganda exploits emotions.
4. Perverted thinkers draw a thick veil on human perception with their beautiful expressions.

QUESTIONS

1. How does sin weaken human understanding?
2. When does reason lose its original nature and function?
3. What is the interpretation of the Prophet regarding the veiling function of sin?
4. How does haste hinder precise understanding?
5. How do false schools of thought use propaganda to spread false ideas?

LESSON SIXTEEN



Barriers to Cognition (Part Three)

FALLACY (*MUGHALITAH*)

As noted before, the obstacles to cognition are divided into two types: a) barriers which relate to the tools of cognition and b) barriers which relate to the form of arguments. We discussed the first type in Lessons Fourteen and Fifteen in detail. This lesson aims to deal with the second one.

Today's world is full of different opinions and thoughts, and the founders of each school of thought have exclusivist claims to human guidance and felicity. Undoubtedly, there is only one truth. On the other hand, falsehood never offers its absurd tenets to us using the label 'invalid'; rather, it always wears the mask of truth. The people of falsehood always adorn their statements, consciously or unconsciously, with truths, in order to secure their place in the hearts. This is a fallacy.

Since the purpose of truth-seeking people is to lead the addressee to facts, they always avoid the trap of fallacies. That is why not even the slightest trace of a fallacy can be seen in the teachings of God and His messenger. Only those who intend to lead people astray

make use of fallacies to increase their followers; they cling to this strategy to achieve their goals. Therefore, every researcher must be aware of these fallacies.

DEFINITION OF FALLACY

The most basic type of argument in Aristotelian logic is syllogistic (*qiyasi*) reasoning.¹ A syllogism consists of propositions that necessarily lead us to a conclusion. Each syllogism consists of minor and major premises and a conclusion. For example:

- Minor Premise: all cats are vertebrates.
- Major Premise: all vertebrates are animals.
- Conclusion: all cats are animals.

A correct syllogism is dependent on its form² and material. The term ‘material’ refers to the propositions that compose the syllogism, such as self-evident propositions (*awaliyyat*), observational propositions (*mushahadat*), experience-based propositions (*mujarrabat*), etc. Needless to say, a syllogism leads to certainty when, besides observing the codified rules of the science of logic, its propositions are constituted

-
1. There are three types of arguments, namely, categorical syllogism (*qiyasi-i iqtirani*), induction (*istiqla*) and analogy (*tamthil*). The most important of them is categorical syllogism.
 2. In terms of form, they fall into conjunctive (*iqtirani*) and exclusive (*istithna'i*) arguments. If neither the conclusion nor its contrary is mentioned in the argument, it is conjunctive. If the conclusion or its contrary is included in the argument, it is termed exclusive.

by certainties (*yaqiniyyat*).¹ But, if it is composed of propositions that only appear to be true (*mushabbahat*)²

-
1. Certainties are propositions that are in accordance with reality and there is no possibility of error in them. They include self-evident propositions (*awaliyyat*), observational propositions (*mushahadat*), experience-based propositions (*mujarrabat*), mass transmitted propositions (*mutawatirat*), priori propositions (*fitriyat*) and intuitive propositions (*hadsiiyyat*). *Awaliyyat* are propositions that we acknowledge as soon as we imagine the subject and predicate. For example, the unity of opposites is impossible. *Mushahadat* are the propositions that we accept by the testimony of the senses, like “this pigeon is white”. Experience-based premises are propositions that have been acknowledged by repeated observations and the formation of a hidden analogy, like “metals expand with heat” (as explained in Lesson Nine). Mass transmitted premises are propositions that many people have reported, and we know that it is not possible for them to conspire to lie. Priori propositions are those whose middle term (*hadd-i wasat*) is included in them (*qadaya qiyasatuha ma’aha*); in other words, *fitrah* (natural instinct) finds the middle term whenever it encounters these propositions and affirms them correctly. For instance, when we see the proposition “the number four is even”, we quickly acknowledge its correctness with the help of the middle term proposition “a number is even if it is divisible by two”. Intuitive propositions are those which we realize through the power of the senses. For example, when we see that the shiny side of the moon is always towards the sun, we quickly realize that this is because the moon receives its radiance from the sun.
 2. *Mushabbahat* are those propositions from which two meanings can be understood, with one being true and the other false. For instance, the proposition “Allah is the Light”

or illusion-based propositions (*wahmiyyat*)¹, a syllogism loses its demonstrative (*burhani*) effect and is called a “fallacy” (*mughalitat*).² Regarding fallacies, Aristotle gives an interesting example:

An object may be made of pure gold, low-grade gold or gold-plated metal. An argument is sometimes perfect and pure, and it is termed demonstration (*burhan*). Sometimes it has a coating of gold, but the gold is not real, and that is a fallacy. No one can distinguish between low-grade gold, pure gold, and coated metal unless he is an expert and insightful.³

Regarding the importance of recognizing different types of fallacies, Ayatollah Mutahhari states that there seem to be more cases of fallacies than correct syllogistic (*giyas-i iqtirani*) arguments, in the words

is true, as the Qur'an states in 24:3. However, if by “light” we mean “visible light” (the false and incorrect aspect of the proposition), we have used a *mushabbaha* proposition.

1. Illusion-based propositions are false arguments that the human imaginative power easily acknowledges. For example, when it is said that “the dead are scary”, reason says that the dead do not have the ability to move to be scary, but most people find the dead scary.
2. Muhammad Sadr al-Din, *Sharh Usul al-Kafi*, 4 vols., vol. 2 (Tahran: Muassasah-i Mutali'at va Tahqiqat-i Farhangi, 1987). 198; Mahmud ibn Mas'ud Qutb al-Din Shirazi, *Hikmah al-Ishraq*, 4 vols., vol. 1 (Tehran: Hikmat-i Islami-yi Sadra, 2013). 183.
3. Aristotle, *Mantiq Arastu*, 3 vols., vol. 3 (Beirut: Dar al-Qalam, 1980). 774.

of pseudo-philosophers . Therefore, it is necessary to know the types of fallacies.¹

Having acquainted ourselves with the importance and definition of fallacies, it is appropriate to discuss its types.

TYPES OF FALLACIES

As noted above, if a syllogism is flawed in terms of its form or material, it is called a fallacy. This flaw is of three types: 1) material, 2) formal (i.e., flaw in composition and structure) and 3) both material and formal.² Therefore, any type of error in ‘reasoning and inference’ is a fallacy. Popkin and Stroll state that fallacy is “a term used to denote anything that causes an argument to go wrong.” They hold that there are so many kinds of fallacies that it is impossible to draw a complete list of them, and, as a result, “it is difficult to specify in general why an argument is fallacious.”³

However, the root of errors in propositions is either lexical (*lafdi*) or structural. Therefore, fallacies could be divided into two types: lexical and structural.⁴ This lesson aims to explain some examples of these two types of fallacies.

1. Mutahhari, *Ashna’i ba ‘Ulum-i Islami*. 84.

2. Muhammad Sadr al-Din, *Majmu‘ih Rasa’il-i Falsafi-yi Sadra* (Tehran: Hikmat, 1996). 234.

3. Popkin and Stroll, *Philosophy*. 308.

4. Hibatullah Ibn Malika, *al-Mu’tabar fi al-Hikmah*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Isfahan: Danishgah-i Isfahan, 1994). 268.

a) Lexical Fallacy

As mentioned above, lexical fallacies denote those in which the problem has a lexical root. The most important of these are explained below.

1. Fallacy Due to Homonymous Ambiguity
(*Mushtarak-i Lafdi*)

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines “homonym” (*mushtarak-i lafdi*) as “a word that is spelled the same and sounds the same as another, but is different in meaning or origin.”¹ For example, ‘spring’ in the sense of ‘a season’, ‘spring’ in the sense of ‘fountain’ and ‘spring’ in the sense of ‘coil’ are homonyms. Most errors in fallacies originate in this type of lexical commonalities. Plato, a great sage, has written a book on fallacies, in which he only mentions this type of fallacy due to its importance, but not the other types, due to their lesser importance.²

This type of fallacy occurs where a single word has multiple meanings, and this plurality of meanings causes an error. For example, a word is used in one sense in the minor premise and in another sense in the major premise. For instance,

- Minor Premise: feathers are light.
- Major Premise: whatever is light cannot be dark.
- Conclusion: feathers cannot be dark.

1. <https://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/homonym>

2. Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, *Asas al-Iqtibas* (Tehran: The University of Tehran, 1948). 518

The word 'light' in the minor premise means 'of very low weight', while, in the major premise, it signifies 'bright'. As we see, ambiguity (*ishtarak-i lafdi*) is the source of error in the conclusion.

2. Fallacy Due to Combinational Ambiguity

Sometimes, there is no lexical ambiguity in the propositions, and the meanings of each word are clear, but the composition of the proposition is the source of error and ambiguity. In the sentence "I took some pictures of the ducks at the zoo swimming, but they were not good", the meanings of all the words are clear, but the problem is that we are not sure whether 'they' refers to the ducks or the pictures. Therefore, we do not know which one was not good: the ducks or the pictures? Therefore, the source of the possible mistake here is the structure of the sentence.¹ The above sentence is formed in a way that the antecedent of the pronoun 'they' is unclear to the reader, and this is the source of ambiguity and fallacy.

As stated above, the root of errors in propositions is either lexical (*lafdi*) or structural. The next section aims to explain some examples of structural fallacies.

b) Structural Fallacies

A structural fallacy is one in which the source of error is not the words or composition of the propositions, but the structure of the syllogism or the types of its

1. Muhammad Husein al-Tabataba'i, *Majmu'ah Rasa'il al-'Allamah al-Tabataba'i* (Qum: Baqiyat, 2007). 292.

material. We will discuss the most important types of this fallacy below.

1. Fallacy of Composition (*Su'i Ta'lif*)

This type of fallacy is where the syllogism conditions are not met, and, therefore, the result will be incorrect. The lack of fulfilment of conditions in the composition of the syllogism is sometimes so imperceptible that only experts can identify it. Therefore, every researcher needs to be fully acquainted with the rules of syllogisms. Take this argument, for example:

- Minor premise: "Max is a human".
- Major premise: "Humans are poets".
- Conclusion: "Max is a poet".

The source of the error here is that the condition of the first form of syllogism; that is, the universality of the major premise has not been met.

It should be noted that the first form of categorical syllogism (*qiyas-i iqtirani*) is one in which the middle term (*hadd-i wasat*) is the predicate (*mahmul*) in the minor premise and the subject (*mawdu'*) in the major promise. There are two conditions for such a pattern to produce a sound argument. 1. The minor premise should be affirmative and the major premise should be universal.¹ As mentioned in the above example,

1. Hasan ibn Yusuf 'Allamah al-Hilli, *Al-Asrar al-Khafiyyah fi al-'Ulum al-'Aqliyyah* (Qum: Bustan-i Kitab, 2008). 219; Sa'd ibn Mansur Ibn Kamunah, *Sharh al-Talwihat al-Lawhiyyah al-'Arshiyyah*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Tehran: Markaz-i Pazhuhishi-yi Mirath-i Maktub, 2008). 321; al-Tabataba'i, *Majmu'ah Rasail al-'Allmah al-Tabataba'i*. 295.

the major premise is not universal. The lack of this condition produces a wrong conclusion.

2. *Petitio Principii (Musadirah bi Matlub)*

This refers to a kind of syllogism in which the conclusion is exactly one of the premises, and there is only a verbal and a minor difference between them.¹ For instance:

Minor premise: "Every man is human."

Major premise: "Every human smiles."

Conclusion: "Every man smiles."

As you see, no intellectual reasoning has been made, and nothing new has been discovered since the conclusion in terms of meaning is the same as the major premise in the above syllogism. This type of fallacy is also named "circular argumentation". Richard Popkin and Avrum Stroll state that the closer the premises "are to the conclusion, the easier the fallacy is to detect", but when the "premises and conclusions are widely separated by a long chain of argumentation, it may be difficult to discover that the whole argument is circular". For instance:

A: 'Moses is divinely inspired'.

1. Popkin and Stroll, *Philosophy*. 314; al-Tabataba'i, *Majmu'ah Rasail al-'Allmah al-Tabataba'i*. 296; Sadr al-Din, *Majmu'ih Rasa'il-i Falsafi-yi Sadra*. 235; Ibn Kamunah, *Sharh al-Talwihat*, 1. 321; Bahmanyar, *al-Tabsil*. 181; Shams al-Din Muhammad al-Shahrzuri, *al-Shajarah al-Ilahiyyah*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Tehran: Hikmat va Falsafi-yi Iran, 2004). 363; Sina, *al-Najat min al-Ghariaq fi Bahr al-Dalalah*. 103.

B: 'How do you know?'

A: 'Because the Bible says he is'.

B: 'But how do you know the Bible is reliable?'

A: 'Because it was written by Moses who is divine'.¹

In the above syllogism, there is a distance between the first proposition (i.e., "Moses is divinely inspired") and the conclusion (i.e., because the Bible "was written by Moses who is divine"), but they are identical in terms of meaning. Therefore, such an argument could not lead to a new conclusion.

3. False Dilemma

If we provide an inadequate number of options in a syllogism when there are more alternatives worth mentioning, we are creating a false dilemma. For instance, my relatives fall into two types: my friends and my enemies. The first group should be respected, while the second should be ignored. From the syllogism, it can be concluded that I should either respect or ignore my relatives. It is clear that the conclusion is unacceptable since some of my relatives may be neither my friends nor my enemies, but rather neutral individuals.

SUMMARY

1. Fallacy is a syllogism formed by propositions that only appear true (*mushabbhahat*) or are illusion-based (*wahmiyyat*).

1. Popkin and Stroll, *Philosophy*. 314.

2. Equivocation is a fallacy in which a word is used in the minor premise in one sense, and in the major premise in another sense.
3. Sometimes, the meanings of all the words are clear, but the method of composition of the premises is confusing.
4. When the codified conditions in an analogy are not observed, it is called a “fallacy of composition”.

QUESTIONS

1. Who tries to use fallacies in their arguments? Why?
2. What is the definition of fallacy? What is the difference between verbal and non-verbal fallacies? Explain them with examples.
3. What does “fallacy of composition” mean? Explain with an example.
4. How can the form of a word be the source of the error in a fallacy? Give an example.
5. How can the form of composition be the source of the error in a fallacy? Explain with an example.
6. What does *Petitio Principii* mean? Explain with an example.

INDEX

A

Abstraction: 143, 182.
Acquired knowledge: 107, 108.
Act: 228, 230, 238.
Affirmation: 182.
Analogy: 130, 131, 134, 135.

C

Cause: 69, 76.
Certainties: 248.
Classification: 21, 103, 144.
Cognition: 19, 32, 93, 94, 99, 102, 103, 128, 150, 177, 179, 181,
183, 223, 226, 228, 230, 232, 235, 238, 245.
Correspondence with Reality: 195.
Cosmology: 32, 33.

E

Effect: 69.
Evil: 95.
Existence: 71.

Experience: 248.

Experience-based: 248.

Experiment: 138, 139.

Experimentation: 138, 141, 216.

F

Fallacy: 246, 247, 251, 252, 253, 255.

Following desire: 233.

H

Heart: 145, 236.

History: 13, 18, 93, 94, 98, 112, 114, 116, 119, 154, 165, 171.

Homonymous: 251.

I

Idea: 108.

Ideology: 19, 34, 36, 51, 61.

Illusion-based propositions: 249.

Immaterial: 71, 72.

Immaterial being: 72.

Imperfect induction: 135.

Induction: 132, 134, 135, 141.

Inference: 142.

Instinct: 168.

Intellect: 47, 129, 236.

Intuitive knowledge: 150.

K

Knowledge by presence: 109.

M

Major premise: 56, 57, 59, 62, 63, 143, 253, 254.

INDEX

Material: 71, 72, 84, 89.

Material being: 72.

Materialism: 91.

Materialists: 82, 85, 91.

Minor premise: 56, 59, 62, 63, 142, 253, 254.

N

Nature: 84, 161, 163.

R

Realism: 69.

Relativity: 203.

Religion: 14, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 31, 36, 37, 38,
40, 41, 45, 94, 95, 96, 97, 117, 171, 188, 214.

S

Sense-based cognition: 32.

Sensory cognition: 178, 179, 180, 181.

Sin: 237, 243.

Superficiality: 239, 240.

T

Theoretical knowledge: 108.

W

Wisdom: 225.

Worldview: 17, 19, 32, 34, 35, 51, 61, 67, 71, 81, 84.

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