

Knowledge from the Viewpoint of Mulla Sadra

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Abstract

Knowledge itself is one of the main subject areas which has been disputed among philosophers. Western thinkers gained a new perspective after development of the natural sciences and highlighted the epistemological view about knowledge and science.

While Western philosophers pay attention to epistemology, Islamic philosophers concentrate on ontology. In the same approach, Mulla Sadra has some new theories concerning knowledge and also science. The main innovation is to consider knowledge as existence, then from this point of view he comes to believe in unity between knowledge, knower and the known.

There are great similarities between epistemology and ontology in the philosophical system of Mulla Sadra. Each one consists of three homologous worlds which are called the world of intellect, imagination and natural world in epistemology. The criterion to distinguish between true and false statements is correspondence between these three worlds.

Keywords

knowledge, science, intellect, Mulla Sadra, unity

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Definition of knowledge:

Mulla Sadra considers knowledge as a being or something related to existence. He says knowledge is not a reality, but it is existence and it cannot be defined.²

He believes knowledge is something which reflects in the brain of the human being after the acquisition of knowledge.

It is understood that knowledge is the image of the reality which is reflected in the brain of the one who acquires knowledge.

But what is worth mentioning is that this definition of knowledge as given by Mulla Sadra is restricted to acquired knowledge.

Mulla Sadra referred to knowledge from different perspectives. These perspectives are as follows:

1- Form

In most of his statements knowledge is the image of the reality reflected on the brain of the one who acquires knowledge (Mulla Sadra, 1380, P189). It is worth mentioning that the word knowledge from this perspective is only acquired knowledge.

2- Appearance

Knowledge from this perspective is similar to light. Light not only is bright itself but also makes other things bright. In the same way knowledge appears and makes other things appear, meaning it gives a light of understanding to the human being.

3- Existence

Knowledge is existence but it cannot be seen. In other words knowledge is an unseen existence and it is not related to the material world (Mulla Sadra, 1380, P289). This is the innovation of Mulla Sadra in which he considers knowledge as an existence, not as a nature.

4- Meeting and Reaching

The soul of the human being is able to understand different levels of realities. The degree of these realities sometimes is weak like natural or experimental realities and sometimes is strong like the logical realities. If the human being's soul understands the first category (sensitive realities) the soul would be the creator of the mentioned realities, on the contrary, in the second category, (logical realities) the soul of the human being only connects to the logical realities, then understands them (Javadi Āmolī, 1379, V4, P177-179).



The different kinds of knowledge

Mulla Sadra believes that there are different criteria which make knowledge to be divided into several parts. The most important criteria are the levels of existence of knowledge and how knowledge is reflected in the brain of the human being.

1- Three dimensional worlds

The world other than God has been divided into three different stages, that is, the natural world, the world of imagination, and the world of intellect. It was mentioned that Mulla Sadra considers knowledge as an existence, so he believes this existence has the three mentioned parts. It means knowledge has three different parts including natural (sensitive), imaginary and intellectual⁷ parts⁸. He considers the natural world (part) as the least valuable part of knowledge, on the contrary he says knowledge regarding intellect and wisdom is the most valuable kind of knowledge. In other words he believes intellectual knowledge is the upper stage of the knowledge which is acquired through sense.⁹

2- Acquired knowledge and intuitive knowledge

There are different criteria by which knowledge is divided into acquired knowledge and intuitive knowledge. But from the viewpoint of Mulla Sadra differences or sameness between knowledge and what is known to the human being as a criterion of knowledge is the cause of this difference between acquired knowledge and intuitive knowledge. Knowledge present before the knower is called intuitive knowledge. This is the sameness between knowledge and what is known such as the knowledge of non-material objects of themselves.

But if our knowledge about something is other than of ourselves like our knowledge about other things like chair, tree, book, ... this kind of knowledge is called an acquired knowledge.

Intuitive knowledge

Mulla Sadra took the view that the only true knowledge is intuitive knowledge, because in this kind of knowledge the reality and its essence is known and discovered by the knower without any means¹¹, that is there is a similarity between knower and cognition and their difference is not a real but abstract. Intuitive knowledge is fundamental to acquired knowledge meaning that it is the first knowledge and prepares the ground for acquired knowledge, so intuitive knowledge is the basic principle of epistemology according to the theory of existence.



Acquired knowledge

As it was mentioned, acquired knowledge is the image of things in the brain; this image is acquired from existence or essence (nature). The role of acquired knowledge is the same as the role of universal sciences because it is the image reflected in the brain, therefore, it is universal.¹⁶

3- Conception and affirmation

The most important characteristic of knowledge is its division into two parts: conception and affirmation.

If acquired knowledge reflected on the mind is without statement it is called conception but if this reflected knowledge were to be stated in a way that a person would be able to accept or reject it, this will be affirmation. But Mulla Sadra says these words are only are the interpretation of the mind: their reality is the same (Mulla Sadra, Resalah, P56).

4- Particular and general

Form is divided into two parts: particular and general.

Mulla Sadra accepts this and says that the general image is the one that can have many different instances, for example the image of tree outside of the mind (Mulla Sadra, 1360, P112). This is the weak existence according to Mulla Sadra.

How to gain general concepts

Conception can be considered in two ways. The first is an external view in which we consider conceptions as a reality which deliver information (Khosropanāh, 1388, P69). The second one is a personal existence of the concept is considered not his role that give information to the outside world (Ibrāhīmī. D. 1379, V2, P85).

Identity of knowledge

There are two broader perspectives on the identity of knowledge. The materialists believe in the fundamentality of the material and say we are only able to acquire knowledge with respect to the material and experimental truth and there are no realities other than those revealed by the experimental sciences, that the human being can only can acquire experimental knowledge. On the contrary, the religious scholars believe that sensible objects only prepare the ground for perception and the acquisition of knowledge. They say that real knowledge is a sort of



existence and detached or unseen being . So this fact is the essential characteristic of knowledge.

Mulla Sadra took the view that this detachment is a kind of separation from the material and conveying to imaginable existence then to intellectual existence. Because knowledge is an existence and a reality that exists all the time, but materialistic things cannot exist for ever, therefore, there is no similarity between knowledge and the material, however knowledge is an immaterial existence.

"There is a one and united existence of all the three pillars of the knowledge including knowledge (science), knower (savant or scientist) and datum (the known) from the respect of existential existence and objective realization " Mulla Sadra says he believes these three concepts' distinction is only a kind of conceptual abstraction. He says concept can apprehend itself; therefore, this concept is knowledge, knower and the known (Mulla Sadra, 1410, V3, P318) that is, a one reality but three different abstractions.

It is worth mentioning that Mulla Sadra does not claim that two existences through their total differences or two or more different entities or concepts get united and become similar but he mentions that becoming united is that one existence of concepts or entities (Khosropanāh, 1388, P181).

Trilateral stage of comprehension

Mulla Sadra believes that there are three stages for apprehension (perception). The lowest stage is the apprehension (perception) gained through senses (sensory perception).

In the second stage, the impulsive soul is able to have imaginary perception and in the third and more perfect stage, the impulsive mind is able to have intellectual perception. The Impulsive mind is a pillar in all these three stages; it applies different means to percept in each stage (Khosropanāh, 1388, P243).

The unity of knowledge, knower and cognition

Mulla Sadra believes in three pillars of knowledge, that is knowledge, knower and cognition. In fact they are the same, united, that is they are one reality (unified reality) and only it is the mental interpretation which makes them seem to be three different things (Khosropanāh, 1388, P172).



But what is worth mentioning is that cognition here includes all the sensual and fictitious perception and intellectual perception is the most valuable kind of perception in Mulla Sadra's view (Mulla Sadra, 1410, V3, P318).

Beginning of perception

The first stage of apprehension is sensory perception. This perception is gained through a person's connection with nature, but Mulla Sadra considers it more general and says this connection with nature prepares the ground to reach the next phase in which the impulsive mind takes a role and sensory perception becomes free from corporeality. This new phenomenon is called lighted perception or lighted form.

Theory of commensuration as a criterion of verticality

The theory of commensuration was established by Plato and continued by Aristotle. They believed in this theory but they did not use it by this name (Paul, 1967, V2, P224). The theory of commensuration discusses correspondence between what is in the mind and external things, therefore, according to this theory, the correct statement is the one which corresponds with external reality and vice versa. Mulla Sadra's writings show that he also had belief in the theory of commensuration (Mulla Sadra, 1410, V1, PP89).

It is worth mentioning that discussion of commensuration only is valid in the case of acquired knowledge because in intuitive knowledge, the known is presented before the knower, so there is no need for correspondence.

Substantial movement to obtain acquired knowledge

It is said that Mulla Sadra considers knowledge as an existence. The human being's soul has different stages in order to be developed, therefore, the soul of the human being is on a path in which it experiences changes. Mulla Sadra calls it a substantial movement in the stages of acquiring knowledge. He says on the basis of this belief that the human soul at the first step is empty, and then the substantial movement starts step by step. The soul develops to acquire the fictitious perception and then the intellectual perception (Mişbah Y, 1373, V2, P210). The human being's soul accepts all of these kinds of knowledge and, not only the nature of soul is not changed itself, but it also find the ability to produce intellectual concepts.



Theory of basic principles

Mulla Sadra, like the other philosophers, prefers to have a basic view in the evaluation of knowledge and took a view that all the knowledge and statements of human beings go back to the basic principle in which there is no need to have argument because these basic statements are clear enough; everybody accepts them, therefore, if one wants to know whether an statement is true or not, it is whether this statement goes back to a self-evident statement or not (Mulla Sadra, 1410, v3, p181). The theory of basic attitude is divided into two tendencies of rationalism and empiricism (Mulla Sadra, 1360, 4th M).

Conclusion

Mulla Sadra considers there to be a firm relationship between ontology and epistemology. In fact he regards ontology to be the foundation of epistemology, and that this is the only way to escape from relativism. Mulla Sadra has changed our view towards knowledge and has persuaded us to consider both knowledge and science as an existence. This new view enables us to believe in the unity of three aspects of knowledge: knowledge, knower, and cognition. Mulla Sadra applies his great innovation which is called substantial movement to understand how one can gain knowledge. The person at the first stages of knowledge can only have sensual perception and then come to have perception of imagination. The journey ends in the stage of intellectual perception which is the highest and most important stage of knowledge.



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