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ON THE LOOKOUT FOR THE BEDROCK OF KNOWLEDGE¹

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

There are ideas and judgments about which one has no doubt. Even the sceptics' arguments, offered to justify their position of absolutely ignoring the possibility of any kind of certain knowledge, involve and imply the knowledge of several propositions as it is established in its proper place in epistemology. On the other hand, we know that not all that we claim to know corresponds to reality, and even in some cases we come to clearly realize the falsehood of our claims of knowledge. Taking these two facts into consideration, the question arises as to what is the essential difference between various types of human knowledge, so that some of them are infallible and indubitable, while others are fallible and doubtful, and how one can distinguish between the two. This problem has been designated as that of the value of knowledge (*arzish-i ma'rifat*).

The value of knowledge is the most important issue in the theory of knowledge. Obviously, value here has nothing to do with ethical value. It refers to the degree of reliability of our knowledge. In other words, the value of knowledge depends on its potential for providing us with a precise picture of reality and its correspondence to that reality. The essential problem in the theory of knowledge is the question as to whether human beings are able to discover facts and to know realities, and if yes, by what means, and how one can distinguish between a true understanding and a false illusion.

Following Aristotle, Muslim philosophers and logicians have divided judgmental knowledge into the self-evident and the speculative, the latter being dependent on the former for its epistemic value. This is why they consider self-evident propositions to be the foundations of speculative knowledge. It means that if self-evident propositions compose an argument as its premises, they will lend its conclusion absolute certainty. Such conclusions can in turn become premises for other arguments, providing them with conclusions of the same degree of certainty. In this way, the structure of knowledge is built up.

¹ This article is a translation (with some revisions) by Ali Mesbah of the section "The Value of Knowledge" in Askarī Sulaymanī Amīrī, *Maṭīq wa Shenākht Shenāsī az Naẓar-i Ustād Meṣbāh; bā ḍamīma-i Ravesh Shenāsī-i 'Ulūm (Logic and Theory of Knowledge according to Professor Mesbah; with a Postscript on the Methodology of Science)*, to be published.

But the main question, pertaining to the validity and truth of self-evident propositions, especially the primary ones, remains unanswered. In other words, how one justifies their self-evidence and their correspondence to reality. This question arises when we have a duality of subject and object of knowledge, that is, in knowledge by representation (*'ilm huşūlī*), in which the possibility for falsehood exists. But in the case of knowledge by presence (*'ilm huđūrī*), in which the knower finds the objective reality of the known without the mediation of any concept, there will remain no place for questioning its reliability.

It is worth mentioning that when we speak of truth, we mean “some knowledge corresponding to reality”. It differs dramatically from the pragmatic definition: an idea or belief is true if it *works*: “The ‘workableness’ which ideas must have, in order to be true, means particular workings, physical or intellectual, actual or possible, which they may set up from next to next inside of concrete experience”². An idea “*becomes* true, is *made* true by events”³. Our definition of truth diverges also from that of the relativists: “an understanding required by a healthy system of perception”; and from such definitions as: “what all people agree upon”. We think that all such explanations of truth divert one from the main issue, i. e. the value of knowledge.

The Empiricist Proposal

Empiricists and experimentalists suggest a methodological criterion for truth. They consider an understanding to be true, if and only if it could be proved through sensory experiments. Some even add the condition of a practical experiment to be compulsory for the truth value of a proposition. This measure is only applicable to sense data, and propositions yield themselves to practical experiment. It is not pertinent for evaluating pure logical and mathematical truths. Furthermore, the result of an experiment should be understood through knowledge by representation, and the question is repeated for such an understanding and its validity, and the criterion through which one may evaluate its truth.

The Rationalist Proposal

Rationalists introduce “primary nature” as the criterion for realizing the truth. But we did not come across any explanation by them justifying the correspondence of such natural and self-evident propositions to reality, except what is ascribed to Descartes about natural ideas in which he resorts to the “undeceiving God”. Having a clear idea of the subject and the predicate of primary self-evident propositions, the faculty of reason will judge their unity with certainty, without any need for experiment. But the question is whether such innate and natural un-

² James W. *The Meaning of Truth*. Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1975. P. XIV.

³ James W. *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*. Indianapolis, IN; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1907. P. 201.

derstanding completely corresponds to reality and shows things as they are, and whether any creature endowed with intellect would understand the world as we do, or whether our understanding is the result of the structure of human mind, in such a way that if it were created with a different configuration, it would understand the world otherwise, or whether the mind of another creature — such as a genie, for example — may understand the same objects differently. Obviously, what we mean by the epistemological value of our knowledge, and by objective rational understanding, is general and pertains to all intellects, independent of the particularities of the human mind, and, hence, being natural and innate, cannot suffice to establish such a value.

Descartes based his philosophy on the idea that there is no doubt about the existence of doubt itself. He even built the existence of “I”, as the one who doubts, upon the existence of doubt. He argued: “I doubt, therefore I am”, or “I think, therefore I am”, (*Cogito, ergo sum*), by which he meant that if I doubted everything I would never doubt the existence of doubt itself. Since there would be no doubt without a person who doubts, the existence of the person who doubts and thinks is indubitable too. Descartes introduced “clarity and distinction” as the criteria for indubitability, and considered it as a criterion for distinguishing true ideas from the false ones, and was to employ a mathematical methodology in philosophy and to propose a new logic.

Although taking doubt as a starting point is reasonable when confronting sceptics, it is a mistake to suppose that there is nothing clearer and more certain than “doubt” itself, and even the existence of the one who doubts won’t be known without the existence of doubt! That is because the existence of an “I” that is aware and thinks is at least as clear and certain as the existence of doubt, which is one of its states. Furthermore, “clarity and distinction” cannot be regarded as the main criteria for distinguishing true ideas from the false ones, because this criterion itself is not clear, distinct, certain, and unambiguous enough, and, therefore, is not a reliable touchstone for judging about other ideas. The last, but not the least, point is that this criterion is unable to reveal and explain the secret of why some sort of knowledge is infallible and indubitable.

Another problem, in which rationalists also have engaged, is that, for them, rational understanding depends on sense perception. They believe that rational understanding about the most obvious of the self-evident propositions is based on accurately conceiving its subject and predicate. The subject and the predicate in a rational proposition are universal concepts, and their conception is preceded by particular (whether sensory or imagery) perceptions, that is, first one has to have a particular sense perception, then its image is perceived by the imagination, and then its universal concept is understood in the faculty of reason. On the other hand, some concepts in rational propositions are secondary intelligibles, which are posterior to the primary intelligibles. It means that after one abstracts a primary intelligible from a particular perception, it is the role of reason to work on it and build a secondary intelligible. Almost all self-evident propositions and all philosophi-

cal propositions in general, are made of philosophical secondary intelligibles, as all logical propositions consist of logical secondary intelligibles. Therefore, the problem of the value of knowledge is put forward like this: rational knowledge is composed of a subject and a predicate, both of which are secondary intelligibles. Secondary intelligibles are derived from primary intelligibles, which in turn follow sensory perceptions or images. The outcome, therefore, is that all rational concepts end up in sensory perceptions, and when we establish the fallibility of the senses, the question arises as to how we can develop absolutely certain rational ideas and objects in order to put in rational propositions. For instance, one of the self-evident propositions is: “The whole is bigger than its part”. The concept of the whole and part is produced only when we have already understood a complex, in which we have compared the relation of the whole to its parts. The understanding of the concepts of the whole and part depend on understanding the complex. Since there is no size and magnitude in the spiritual world, then the complex should be a material object. This means that self-evident propositions, such as “the whole is bigger than its part” depend on sense perceptions, which are doubtful and epistemologically worthless. Therefore, the whole system of intelligibles collapses along with the self-evident propositions.

Some philosophers are satisfied with saying that our knowledge ends up in rationally self-evident propositions which are infallible, and whoever assumes them doubtful and faulty, he has fought his own conscience and nature, because such concepts and ideas cannot be ignored. Ignoring them leads to their approval, which establishes their truth. But this argument is insufficient, and the problem persists. The problem is that all kinds of knowledge by representation (*‘ilm ḥuṣūlī*) — including primary self-evident propositions — involve an intermediary form between the knower and the known, between the subject and the object of knowledge, and wherever there is mediation, there is a place for questioning correspondence to the referent.

The Key to the Solution

In his *Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism*, Allamah Tabataba’i embarks on the issues of the value of knowledge⁴, the emergence of plurality in knowledge⁵, and also on conventional concepts⁶. On these occasions, especially when he discusses the way in which human knowledge multiplies, he seems to have provided the key to the dilemma. We can benefit from his suggestions to find the solution to the problem of the correspondence of propositions to their referents. We can infer from his ideas that representational knowledge ends up in presentational knowledge, and when the human soul is able to juxtapose and com-

⁴ *Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā’ī*. *Uṣūl-i Falsafeh va Ravesh-i Realism / Introduction and footnotes by Murtaḍā Mutahharī*. Qum: Daftar-i Intishārāt-i Islāmī. Vol. 1. Art. 4. P. 101—62.

⁵ *Ibid.* Vol. 2. Art. 5. P. 169—265.

⁶ *Ibid.* Art. 6. P. 269—348.

pare what is known by presence with its representational form in the mind, it can judge the correspondence of that concept with its real referent. What distinguishes Allamah Tabataba'i from other Muslim and Western rationalist thinkers is the fact that he reduces self-evident propositions to presentational knowledge. We interpret Allamah's exposition to mean that concepts that make up self-evident propositions are derived from presentational knowledge. They are not concepts of quiddity (primary intelligibles); therefore, they are not abstracted from sense perceptions, and are not prone to falsity and misunderstanding.

We have different types of knowledge, and the question of validity and truth value is applicable to all sorts of human knowledge. One of the most fundamental divisions of knowledge is its division into knowledge by presence and knowledge by representation. The latter, however, is of priority for philosophy, because it deals with rational understanding and the human intellect's capability to unveil the truth. The key point in the question about the truth value of this type of human knowledge pertains to its correspondence to reality and the procedure through which one is able to identify such equivalence. Apparently, in knowledge by representation, our single avenue to reality is constructed out of mental forms. Mental forms provide no guarantee for corresponding to their referents. It is like a situation in which one wants to know somebody through their photo. If there is no other way to see the person, except this photo, one never is sure whether the photo is a genuine one. The same applies to our understanding of reality through mental forms. If there are one thousand and one reasons for establishing a fact, the question remains intact that these reasons themselves originate from sense perceptions and rational understandings, which are instances of knowledge by representation and in need of validation too. Both sense percepts and rational concepts are mediators between our understanding and the objective world, and the main problem of truth value pertains to the question how to establish the correspondence of such mediators to reality. Sensory misconceptions give us enough clues not to rely on our perceptions and enough reason to believe that no necessary correspondence exists between our mental forms and their referents. This is why we consider knowledge by representation as fallible. Of course, the fallibility of such knowledge does not mean that all its products are doubtful, but it means instead that their equivalence to reality should be established in an indubitable way, and only if this happens, would there remain no question about its credibility and truth. We should mention here, that when we speak of "objective reality" in epistemology, we do not mean what is outside ourselves, but it refers to a situation beyond our understanding. Hence, our soul is beyond our concept of the soul because the concept of the soul signifies the objective reality of our soul which exists beyond our knowledge of it. To be true, our mental form of our soul should correspond to its objective reality, and to ascertain such uniformity is the challenge of any theory of knowledge.

The key to the solution, we think, should be sought in those cases of knowledge by representation in which we are able to cognitively dominate its mental form as well as its objective referent, and find their uniformity through knowledge by pres-

ence without the mediation of any mental form. When the referent is not perceived but through mental forms, there is no way for acquiring certainty about the correspondence of the form to its objective reality. On the other hand, in cases in which I have a mental form referring to a reality that is present before me and I understand it through knowledge by presence, the assessment of their sameness becomes possible because, in this case, I have access to both (the signifier and the signified) without any need for mediators. Therefore, I do not need any mental operation or reasoning to judge their equivalence either, since I am able to compare the two and perceive their equality through knowledge by presence. Hence, the spell of knowledge can only be broken by representational knowledge derived from knowledge by presence. We will explain this idea further in this article by analyzing different sorts of propositions.

1. *Self-evident Propositions*

What is crucial for foundationalism is to guarantee the truth of the self-evident propositions because in the light of them it becomes possible to evaluate speculative propositions, including sensory and experimental ones. In order to appraise the validity and certainty of primary propositions we need to scrutinize the nature of these propositions: first we should inquire about the concepts which such propositions comprise and how they are understood, and secondly, we have to recognize how the intellectual faculty judges the unity between their subjects and predicates.

1.1. Logical Propositions

Logical propositions are judgments about logical concepts. Logical concepts, or logical secondary intelligibles, are identified as concepts whose occurrence (*'urūd*) and characterization (*ittiṣāf*) are both mental. This means that we have direct knowledge of them as well as of their referents, and understand their correspondence to their mental reality through knowledge by presence. Therefore, our mind encompasses the referent of the logical propositions that refer to mental forms and concepts. Although the signifier of logical concepts exists at one level of the human mind, and what it signifies exists at another level, both are present in the human soul (the perceiving I), and I find them together through knowledge by presence. For instance, the proposition, “the concept *human* is universal” describes a characteristic of “the concept *human*”; a concept that exists in our mind, and we can identify its characteristics through inner experience (or introspection). It means that we can understand — without any recourse to sensory perception or receiving aid from any mental form — that this concept does not signify any specifically given person, but rather it is applicable to countless individuals of its kind. In this way, we are able to establish the truth of logical propositions through knowledge by presence beyond the slightest doubt. Logical propositions form the foundation of self-evident propositions, by which we can acquire other propositions, whose truth we can judge with absolute certainty.

1.2. Primary Self-evident Propositions

Concepts used in primary self-evident propositions are instances of philosophical secondary intelligible whose occurrence is mental while their characterization is external. We think that the source from which they are abstracted is knowledge by presence, i. e. such concepts are first and foremost abstracted from what is known through presentational knowledge and from their objective mutual relations. Therefore, one can immediately find their correspondence with their referents through knowledge by presence, leaving no room for doubt about their truth value.

However, to understand how we judge in these propositions, we should compare their subjects and predicates in order to find out about the procedure leading to our decision about their unity. By analyzing concepts that are used in such propositions, we see that all primary self-evident propositions are analytic ones; the concepts used in their predicates are understood from the concepts employed in their subjects. For instance, by analyzing the concepts in the proposition, “every effect needs a cause” we realize that the concept of “effect” signifies a reality whose being depends on something else, called the cause, not other way round. In other words, an effect is in need of the cause for its existence, while the cause has no need, whatsoever for the effect in order to come into existence. Therefore, the concept of the “need for a cause” (the predicate) is implied in the concept of “effect” (the subject), and we find this unity in our mind by presentational knowledge. In order to be clearer, we may compare the analytically self-evident proposition “any effect needs a cause” with the proposition “any being needs a cause”. By analyzing the concept of “being” we do not come to the concept of the “need for cause”, therefore the second proposition is not self-evident, and if someone claims it truth, one has to establish it through arguments. Now we are able to conclude that primary self-evident propositions also end up in knowledge by presence, and this is what warrants their truth value.

A possible objection may arise here as to how we can have a universal law and regard it self-evident, while what we find through presentational knowledge is a particular case of a concept. For example, we find a private instance of the concept “effect” in ourselves through introspection, and recognize its relation to another private instance of the concept “cause”. What comes out of such a personal experience may be put into words in the form, “this particular effect needs that particular cause”. But how can we claim self-evidence for the universal law, “Any effect needs a cause”? The answer lies in the fact that we abstract “effect” as a concept from a particular and private case, such as our “will”, when we compare it with ourselves and find its existential need to us, but the abstraction of this concept is not the result of the particular nature of this phenomenon, as a quality of the soul, but this concept is understood because its very existence depends on another entity — whatever it might be. The concept “effect” signifies a class of existence, not a quiddity; therefore, it is applicable to any instance of that class of existence. The

unique feature of “effect” is its existential dependence on another entity (cause), and wherever such a condition is met, the same judgment is also true. This universal law is self-evident, absolutely certain, and infallible because it is derived from knowledge by presence, and we find its primary instances in ourselves, and find out about the type of relation between its subject and predicate through presentational knowledge.

Of course, the presence of this condition in incidents other than those understood through presentational knowledge need to be established through rational arguments. This is why this proposition alone is unable to ascertain a material phenomenon’s need for a cause before its existential dependence is rationally determined. What this self-evident proposition can do is judge — with 100% certainty — that whenever existential dependence is established, the occurrence of a cause is necessary.

1.3. Inner Experiences

Propositions of inner experiences (*wijdāniyāt*) are drawn from knowledge by presence and they always go together. An instance of such propositions is “I am afraid”. Here we find the experience of fear without the mediation of any concept, but rather through a direct access to the reality that we call “fear”. It is an inner experience of a state of my psyche that is known to me through an unmediated awareness. Of course there are several stages of representational knowledge that follow this kind of knowledge. At the first step, by my mental power, I construct the concept “fear” as a mental form to represent such an inner understanding. Then I can express it through a linguistic term — that may vary in different languages — and then I may build it into the proposition, “I am afraid” as a grammatical structure in order to convey my situation and feeling in the form of knowledge by representation. All these stages are representational knowledge, but they all stem from a single immediate presentational knowledge. Since mental forms and propositions are my constructs, they are present before me, and my direct knowledge of them is an instance of knowledge by presence. I can compare them to their referents through knowledge by presence, and find out about their congruence. Therefore, the epistemic value of propositions of inner experiences is also absolutely certainly established through knowledge by presence.

1.4. The Principle of Non-Contradiction

The principle of non-contradiction is one of the primary self-evident propositions about which a consensus exists among Muslim logicians. However, there is a difference of opinion on the reason for its self-evidence. The principle conveys the impossibility of the convergence, as well as the divergence, of two contradictories. It means that there is no third option between two contradictories. It is possible to put this principle in three forms:

1. One option is to put it across as two predicative propositions: “the convergence of two contradictories is impossible” (P1), and “the divergence of two con-

tradictories is impossible” (P2). As one can see, the subject of (P1) is “the convergence of two contradictories” and the subject of (P2) is “the divergence of two contradictories”, and the concept “impossible” belongs to the predicate of both.

2. One can express these propositions in another way as follows: “contradictories certainly do not converge” (P3), and “contradictories certainly do not diverge” (P4). We may even say that these are the original forms of (P1) and (P2). Now it is clear that “certainly” in both (P3) and (P4) designate their “matters” or “modes”. If one combines each one of the subjects and the predicates of propositions (P3) and (P4), putting them as the subject of new propositions, and put their common matter as the predicate in the new propositions, then we have (P1) and (P2). The predicate “impossible”, which means “what will certainly not occur”, is derived from the matters of the propositions (P3) and (P4), that is, the concept “certainly not”.

The subject in (P3) and (P4), namely, “contradictories”, however, is an abstract concept, derived from the existence and non-existence of an entity. Existence and non-existence are instances of philosophical secondary intelligibles, and “contradictories” is derived from the mode of the relationship between these concepts. Hence, the concept “contradictories” should be considered a philosophical secondary intelligible too.

3. The third alternative is to say: “contradictories are not truly predicated of one subject” (P5), and “contradictories are not truly negated from one subject” (P6). In this version of the principle, (P5) refers to two affirmative propositions, in which the subjects are the same, but one of the predicates is obverted (such as *All A is B*, and *All A is non-B*). On the other hand, (P6) refers to two negative propositions with the same conditions (such as *All A is not B*, and *All A is not non-B*). This version of the principle of non-contradiction suggests contradiction at the level of single concepts and ideas.

Allamah Tabataba’i puts the two latter propositions together in the form of a single factual disjunctive (*munfaṣilah ḥaqīqīyah*) proposition as: “Any proposition either [its affirmation is true, and its negation is false], or [its affirmation is false, and its negation is true]”⁷. In this disjunctive proposition, the subject is “proposition” regardless of its affirmative or negative quality. Therefore, the subject is a logical secondary intelligible, while the predicate is derived from another proposition signifying the truth of a third proposition and the falsehood of a fourth one. According to this analysis, the principle of non-contradiction should be considered a logical issue because its subject is two contradictory propositions, and the main contradiction would be between truth and falsehood of propositions.

It seems that, from the abovementioned options, the second form is more plausible, in which contradiction is deemed between “existence” and “non-existence”,

⁷ *Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā’ī. Nihāyat al-Ḥikma. Qum: Mu’assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1362 H. S. P. 239.*

and is more apt for philosophical discussions. According to this analysis, the concepts “not converge” and “not diverge”, which are located in the predicate of the propositions, are already presupposed in their subjects, “contradictories”. That is because, according to this version of the principle, contradiction is understood between the existence of an entity and its nullity. Therefore, the principle of non-contradiction becomes an analytic proposition, and this fact justifies its being a primary self-evident proposition.

1.4.3. *The Principle of Non-Contradiction and Other Propositions*

Since Aristotle, it was clear that there is a relation between the principle of non-contradiction and other propositions, whether self-evident or speculative. In the last analysis, all propositions, even the primary self-evident ones, come back to this principle to establish their claims. One may say that to establish *A is A* we need this principle too. If the divergence or convergence of contradictories were possible, no attribute would be established for any subject because of the potentiality for its simultaneous negation. If the principle is denied, the whole of the human knowledge would be at risk. So there is a consensus about such a relation between this principle and other propositions. There is, however, a difference of opinions about the type of such relation:

Deductive Theory: Fakhr Razi regards the relation between the principle of non-contradiction and other propositions to be that of deductive relation. He suggests that there is only one self-evident proposition, and it is the principle of non-contradiction. Other propositions, however, are speculative ones, established by recourse to this principle. Nasir al-Din Tusi, in his critique of Razi’s *Al-Muḥassal*, strongly opposes this idea⁸.

Specialization Theory: This theory, that goes back to the time of Aristotle, suggests that the principle of non-contradiction is the origin of all human knowledge, that is, all propositions are not but various applications of this principle. For instance, the equity principle in geometry that says: “two quantities equal to a third measure, are equals themselves”, is an instance of the principle of non-contradiction in case of quantities. Ibn Sina, in the “Demonstration” of his *Al-Shifā’*, and Mulla Sadra, in his *Al-Ḥikma al-Muta’āliya fī ‘l-Asfār al-Arba’at al-Aqliya*, have accepted and confirmed this theory.

Complementary Theory: According to Allamah Tabataba’i, the principle of non-contradiction is a complementary part of any affirmation, and certainty about any proposition goes back to this principle⁹. It means that refuting the possibility of the truth of the contradictory claim of any proposition depends on this princi-

⁸ Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī. *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal* / Ed. ‘Abdullāh Nūrānī. Tehran: Tehran University and McGill Institute of Islamic Studies, 1359 H. S. P. 27—28.

⁹ *Mullā Ṣadrā*. *Al-Ḥikma al-Muta’āliya fī ‘l-Asfār al-Arba’at al-Aqliya*. Tehrān: Bunyād-i Ḥikmat-i Islāmī Ṣadrā, 1380 H. S. Vol. 3. P. 445 (the note by Allamah Tabatabai), and *Ṭabātabā’ī*. *Uṣūl-i Falsafeh*. Vol. 2. P. 107.

ple. When one is certain about a proposition, whether self-evident or speculative, one thinks of a syllogism by exclusion in the form of: "Either this proposition is true and its contradictory is false, or this proposition is false and its contradictory is true. But this proposition is true; then its contradictory is false". In other words, double certainty (certainty about the truth of the affirmation/negation in a given proposition in addition to certainty about the falsehood of a contradictory claim) depends on this principle. Without such a syllogism, the possibility of the truth of the contradicting claim cannot be refuted.

Theory of Hindering the Opposite Belief: Murtada Mutahhari considers the principle of non-contradiction necessary to hinder one from the opposite belief.

Theory of Secondary Knowledge: Primary self-evident propositions do not depend on the principle of non-contradiction for their certainty; otherwise, there will remain no difference between them and speculative propositions. So we may not regard this principle a necessary condition for certainty about any proposition. All that can be said in this regard is that if one wants to become aware of the impossibility of the contradiction of a proposition, one needs to pay attention to the principle of non-contradiction. One may even rule out such dependence, especially if this principle is regarded as a logical proposition.

2. Speculative Knowledge

There are some other types of propositions called "secondary self-evident propositions", but a closer examination of them reveals the fact that they do not deserve the title "self-evident". They are all speculative propositions and the establishment of their truth is based on demonstrations. Here we will try to go through these propositions and show their need for major premises in order to prove their truth value as a result of logical demonstrations.

The epistemic value of speculative propositions relies on, and is judged by, the way they are established. If they are deduced from self-evident propositions through logically valid procedures, they give us certainty and one can be sure of the result; otherwise, the truth of such a speculative proposition is not guaranteed. Since there are complexities in logical deduction, both in their matters and forms, the farther a proposition is from self-evident ones, the greater is the risk of the occurrence of fallacies. Therefore, the epistemological value of speculative propositions is stratified, depending on their distance from self-evident propositions.

A question may arise here as to how one can speak of the truth or falsehood of metaphysical propositions, while there is no objective reality corresponding to their subjects or predicates. The answer lies in the fact that "objective reality" is not restricted to material reality; rather it includes abstract reality too. Furthermore, "the reality" to which propositions should correspond includes anything signified by their subjects and predicates, and "the objective" means whatever exists beyond these concepts, even if they are mental beings, or psychological events. Logical propositions signify other mental affairs, and because the signifier and the signi-

fied exist in different levels of human mind, the signified are considered “objective” with regard to the concepts signifying them.

2.1. Innate Propositions and Intuitive Propositions

Innate propositions (*fītriyāt*) are those propositions whose middle terms are always present in the mind. Although these propositions are deemed principles of demonstrations, they are not self-evident, but since their middle terms do not need contemplation, we consider them next to the self-evident propositions. This is also true about intuitive propositions (*cognitio intuitiva*).

2.2. Propositions Based on Sense-Data

Some logicians consider propositions based on sense-data one of the principles of demonstration, and call them “secondary self-evident propositions”. Because judgment in these propositions depends on employing sense organs and faculties, the correspondence of their data to their referents is fallible. This is why such Muslim philosophers as Ibn Sina¹⁰, Mulla Sadra¹¹ and Allamah Tabataba’i¹² explicitly consider such propositions in need of demonstrations in order to prove their epistemological value. Therefore, sensory experience should be considered a necessary (not sufficient) condition to convey the existence and attributes of sense objects, and certainty about them rests on rational arguments.

2.3. Propositions Based on Experiment

One of the principles of demonstration is considered to be propositions based on experiment, which depend on experiencing instances of its subject. These propositions are also called secondary self-evident propositions. The quality of being self-evident, or even quasi self-evident, is jeopardized in this case for two reasons:

First, these propositions are based on experiment, and therefore, are fallible and unreliable, unless their correspondence to reality is proved through logical demonstrations.

Secondly, to generalize the outcome of our experiences to all other cases, we need to add another premise. Logicians suggest premises such as: “what occurs all (or most of) the time cannot be accidental”, or “it is impossible for an unnatural event to happen all (or most of) the time”. The problem is that neither of these premises are self-evident, let alone those propositions whose truth is based on them. Furthermore, it is impossible to examine and experience all (or most of) the cases of a phenomenon or an event. Hence, even if the major premise (which is added) were correct, one cannot consider those limited cases or experience as instances of this premise.

¹⁰ *Ibn Sīnā*. «Al-Ta’līqāt», with the introduction by ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Badavī. Cairo: Al-Hay’ā al-Miṣriyya al-‘Āmma li-‘l-Kitāb, 1392 H. L. P. 88, 148.

¹¹ *Šadrā*. *Asfār*. Vol. 3. P. 498.

¹² *Ṭabāṭabā’ī*. *Nihāyat al-Ḥikma*. P. 262.

Some logicians replace the above-mentioned premises with the principle: “similar cases have the same positive and negative attributes”. According to this principle, if the occurrence of an event is repeated in certain conditions, we would know that event would occur if the same conditions are repeated. In this way, the causal relation between this event and the given conditions is discovered. But this principle is also impractical, because it is not easy to establish the complete similarity between two situations. Moreover, with such a premise, there remains no need for repetition, while propositions based on experiment are supposed to follow a set of experiences.

Some scientists have resort to the established principle, “nature always acts in the same way” in order to prove the validity of propositions based on experiment. But there are two problems with such an argument: first, this principle is not self-evident, and secondly, it does not negate the possibility that there may be some unknown elements or conditions that has influenced our experiment. Therefore, one cannot conclude from one’s experiment that an event is the effect of what one has found in the experiment.

Sometimes, it is suggested that through probability calculation, one may establish the validity of propositions based on experiment because by repeating the same experiment and observing the same outcome, the possibility for the opposite result dims until it tends to nil. But it is obvious that even the slightest probability of the opposite prevents a scientist from certainty about the result of one’s experiment.

The only way for experimentally establishing a necessary relation between two phenomena, is to discover the causal relation between them under strictly controlled environment in which all possible elements and conditions that may have any influence on the event under investigation are kept under control. If the causal relation were determined, there would be no need for repetition, but since such a strict control is normally impossible, there is a need for repetition in order for the scientists to ensure the results.

Therefore, such propositions are not self-evident, and contain a hidden syllogism, but the major premise is not what the above-mentioned philosophers, logicians, and scientists have suggested. Instead, the major premise is: “whatever has changed in the controlled experimental environment is the cause of this phenomenon”. This major is given by reason, while the minor is provided by sense experience. It should be noted that it is very hard to establish the claim that the only cause of this event was the identified element and nothing else had any influence whatsoever. What is even harder is to prove the exclusive and irreplaceable cause of an event, because it is always possible that in other conditions, another factor can produce the same effect. For these reasons, propositions based on experiment neither achieve the epistemological value of self-evident propositions, nor produce double certainty (in which their opposites become impossible).

2.4. Transmitted Propositions (Mutawātīrāt)

Transmitted propositions are among those propositions considered as principles of demonstrations. According to logicians, judgment in such propositions depend on a great number of people reporting the same event to the extent that it becomes impossible to imagine that they all have conspired to lie in this regard. Of course, the conditions for concluding the impossibility of scheme differ from one case to another due to the diversity of situations. Evidently, there is a concealed premise in such judgments, leading to the conclusion that in a given case conspiracy is impossible.

Conclusion

As I tried to show in this article, all speculative knowledge, including some of those propositions traditionally called “secondary self-evident propositions”, are not reliable unless they are established through a logical procedure on the basis of self-evident propositions. Only primary self-evident propositions, along with propositions of inner experience, independently establish their truth. We challenged other attempts at answering the question as to why these propositions are self-evident, and came to the point that the real bedrock of knowledge should be looked for not in some types of representational knowledge (*‘ilm huṣūlī*), but the answer lies in another type of knowledge called presentational knowledge (*‘ilm huḍūrī*), or knowledge by presence, in which the reality is present before human soul, and no intermediary, whether it is a mental form, or faculty of perception, mediates between the subject and object of knowledge.