

NEED FOR A NEW PARADIGM IN EPISTEMOLOGY AND ETHICS

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For a great many years, philosophy in the Islamic world gave every indication of becoming increasingly marginal and less influential both in the academic circles and semi-academic life. Yet the years since mid-seventies have brought unanticipated changes in the relationship between philosophical thinking and general academic culture including developments in the social sciences, and as a result, academic theorists and philosophers have sought – and developed – fresh theories to account for these cultural and ideational shifts. Foredoomed to decay and extinction not so long ago by the self-acclaimed experts of scientific empiricism and narrow scientific rationalism, Islamic thought has been able not only to hold its own against the fury of anti-religious thinking, its own inherent genius has flourished tremendously. Today neither scientism nor secular modernity appears capable of sapping its intellectual energy or shaking its cultural foundations. In an age in which thinkers generally find themselves in intellectual morass, Islamic thought offers them a genuine alternative – a venue of hope, sanity and intellectual integrity. The present article is a modest attempt at exhibiting the vitality and vigour of an impeccable and rich traditional thought that challenges the dominant paradigm in epistemology and ethics.

Professor Bernard Williams in his study of Descartes¹ very properly names the Cartesian enterprise that of *The Pure Inquirer*. During the course of thought-provoking discussions on Cartesian method and his cognitive scheme, Williams expounds the deep problem in one of the most interesting passages of the book (pp. 64-8), which may be summarized thus: knowledge is haunted by relativism. The very idea of knowledge requires that there be something independent of knowledge which is there to be known. But what we know is affected by the cognitive apparatus (conceptual, sensory, linguistic, cultural, etc.). Of course we can try to find out

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about the apparatus, but that is just one further piece of knowledge, and hence the initial point applies once again. So how do we break out? This indeed is the crux of the problem: Descartes' project was the search for culture-free or 'absolute' (not tied to any partial perspective) certainty. Epistemology to this day is plagued by this problem. For Descartes the whole of reality could be reduced to two poles, mind and matter, both cold, both lifeless, both cut off from the source of Light, which is also the source of wisdom and of all true understanding. Modern scientific method and its philosophical concomitant – empiricism – are rooted in Cartesian dualism. For modern science to function it must reduce everything there is to pure quantity, that is to say, to mathematical formulae. In so doing it inevitably excludes the greater part of reality. Empiricism, by its very nature, requires the exclusion of all non-material factors or consideration and the isolation of the material world from all that lies beyond it. It requires also the exclusion from the mind of the scientist of any mental process that is not strictly rational and mathematical. This inevitably led to the secularization of science and theory of knowledge in general.

This epistemology emphasizes the distinction between objective and subjective, between the observer and an external world, between subjective states of emotion and belief and a 'reality' which lies outside the observer and which can be known only by observation and reason. The dichotomy between 'facts' and 'values' is a main characteristic of the epistemology of the modern scientific man. The prevailing episteme of the Occident is the episteme of empiricism in its variegated types and shades. It is a way of knowledge that is diametrically opposed to that which is prevalent in many societies where knowledge and wisdom are seen as residing in a state of inner consciousness. The awareness that there are serious faults in Western epistemology is steadily gaining ground. The theory of objective knowledge, as developed by such diverse figures as Descartes and Karl Popper has been under attack for over two centuries. What makes a piece of Knowledge 'objective' is decided by a set of criteria; and it is this 'criteria of objectivity' which has been attacked most notably by David Hume and, more recently, by T. S. Kuhn. He believes that in the last analysis there is no unambiguous scientific test that enables individual scientists to choose between competing scientists. Thus in Kuhn's epistemology, an objective, value-free neutral science does not exist. In this way attacks on Western (mainly Anglo-American) epistemology from within the scientific community² – particularly from Whitehead, Kuhn, Polanyi, Feyerabend,

Mitroff and Ravetz – have opened up a debate on alternative epistemologies and non-Western styles of thought.

A thoughtful perusal of the work of major Western writers and philosophers will convince one that most contemporary writings on epistemology and moral philosophy are often misleading, trivializing and badly wanting in conceptual, as distinct from an analytical, valour. Ernest Gellner's *Spectacles and Predicaments – Essays in Social Theory*³ stands in marked contrast to the general cavalier attitude found in the majority of works appearing in the West. Gellner's closely-argued book clearly shows that the metaphysical vision of philosophy today may have been beclouded, it is still not defunct. He himself makes a convincing case for the epistemic plausibility of 'ideologies' and 'historically upheld visions'. In defending Descartes partially, Gellner opines that he was not so worried by the perspectival quality of knowledge, which in itself is not necessarily problematic. If diverse perspectives are reasonably coherent, if they fit into a scheme which explains why they diverge (even if that scheme is itself perspective-bound), this on its own does not generate scepticism. Many traditional belief-systems have such a 'stratified' distribution of visions amongst segments of the population. Indeed what did bother Descartes, in Gellner's view, was not the existence of perspectives alone, but the fact that some of them were so patently dreadful and absurd. Discussing the various options for belief in Part II of his above-mentioned book (this part is quite significantly entitled "The cognitive predicament"!) he very succinctly puts the question thus:

'Is the scientific world picture more valid than the non-scientific, traditional or Revelationist one?'⁴

The entire book is admirable in its project, full of incisive points and certainly accurate in many of its claims. For example, in Gellner's view empiricism is an ideology amongst others, though it is an ethic of cognition, and its substantive prejudgments are indirect and negative. Impugning this philosophical theory he very rightly observes:

The central element in empiricism, on this account, is a substantive, a priori and negative principle – the exclusion of certain logically possible and historically upheld visions Perhaps, who knows the world is a Big cosy Meaningful Unity after all, only we have not hit on it yet; or perhaps even – excuse my shudder – one of the existing faiths is the true one.⁵

Regrettably the fact, however, is that in quite a few Muslim countries including Pakistan we are witnessing among the academia the flourishing of the very dangerous brand of empiricism and scientism which is the natural consequence of trying to validate all truth via the medium of science. The present-day student of philosophy tends to be introduced to philosophical problems which are formulated within a framework of quasi-technical concepts. These concepts typically derive from symbolic logic, the natural sciences and mathematics, and are employed in discussions in which it is presupposed that, in one way or another, those disciplines have a special significance for epistemology and metaphysics. A relevant case that can be cited here is W. V. O. Quine's conception of epistemology *naturalized* i.e., of a theory of knowledge itself brought within the corpus of the natural sciences pursued by empirical methods.⁶

I shall here pause to discuss in some detail the nature-centered philosophical outlook, the logical outgrowth of naturalized epistemology that has dominated the philosophical scene in the West for the last few decades. For the nature-centered outlook, God either does not exist or is reduced to marginality, for the world as a given contains all that there is to know. But it is nature-matter, not the human mind, that manifests the *logos*, as the individual is nothing more than an organic part of the world of matter and, as such, completely reducible and subservient to it. Nature-matter, through its continuous flux and unceasing evolution, keeps on evolving higher and more complex forms of life and intelligence. In other words, it is both the creative and the unifying principle in the universe. The whole world (nature and humanity) is subject to one and the same natural law, which is known, collectively, as "scientific laws", "laws of movement", or "immutable and objective laws of nature". In this nature-centered universe, humanity has no special status, for nature is neutral and indifferent.

The nature-centered outlook could become more polished and sophisticated, and even more complex, but, in the last analysis, everything is subject to a ruthless monistic causality. The category of nature-matter could conceal itself under more subtle categories ("secular absolutes") that duplicate in their very structure the reductive monism of the category of nature-matter. The most common absolutes are the following: the nation-state, the market economy, the profit motive, the principle of utility laws of supply and demand, the invisible hand, the pleasure principle, libido, eros, the *Volk*, the Absolute Idea, the *elan vital*, will power, historical inevitability, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the white man's

burden. All of these absolutes and ultimate points of reference have causal primacy and are presumed to be of comprehensive explanatory power of both man and nature.

Issuing forth from the nature-centered outlook, an individual is merely a natural man or woman. There are many variations on this concept, the two most important being "economic man", and "physical" or "libidinal man". Economics views the individual in economic terms alone and as reducible, despite his/her complex totality, to a number of identifiable needs to be satisfied and an amount of energy to be used (and sold as labour). Each individual is a productive and purchasing power to be explained in terms of input and output and to be utilized in production and consumption. Psychology sees the individual in either "physical" or "libidinal" terms. An individual's behaviour is charted in terms of either external stimuli and responses (a nervous system) or in terms of a dark yet natural and physical libido. The duality of such "economic" and "physical" individuals corresponds to the duality of profit and pleasure, to the duality of production and consumption, and of the puritan and the hippie. It can also be seen as echoing the ultimate duality of the humanity-centered and nature-centered outlooks.

The ultimate goal of science has become precision, not complexity, and the very taxonomy of our sciences is based on this criterion. Sciences are either exact or inexact. Of course, the exact sciences are ranked higher in the hierarchy, which is based on nature-matter as an ultimate category, for exactness is defined in terms of proximity (or distance) from the one principle that governs the universe: general (material and natural) law. The paradigmatic hypothetical moment in this context, the moment when the paradigm fulfills the immanent law, is when a comprehensive knowledge of these laws is reached and then formulated in the neutral, precise, and exact language of algebra or through mathematical equations and simple binary oppositions that do not know God, man, angels, or devils, and that stand beyond good and evil, completely sterilized from history, emotions, and time.

If all of these terms and methodologies are but variations on, or manifestations of, the concept of nature-matter, the same could be said of such concepts as progress, growth, and planning, for they all operate in terms of the causal primacy of one or a combination of material factors. Thus the world is caught in the web of materialistic hard causality, of cause inexorably and unambiguously leading to effect, of stimulus producing response, of infrastructure secreting a superstructure — just as matter somehow miraculously produces

mind – with “effect”, “response”, “superstructure”, and “mind” being mere epiphenomena and illusion. An individual’s consciousness itself is nothing but “a higher form of matter”.

This process of reduction, deconstruction, and neutralization is also a process of desanctification of both nature and man. Everything is reduced “in the last analysis” to the level of useful/usable or useless/unusable matter, which gives rise to what may be termed the “secular imperialist epistemology”. Humanity and nature are forms, to one principle, immanent in matter. Both are reducible to their lowest common denominator (the one principle), so that they may become quite amenable to measurement, quantification, instrumentalization, utilization and, in brief, more amenable to technocratic engineering and programming. Both humanity and nature, being simply one-dimensional, can be readily harnessed in the service of an ultimate purpose (a *telos*) to be defined by statesmen or scientists, or an amalgam of both: in other words, a technocratic elite that has a special access to the *gnosis* of science and/or of the state. Everything, including the human individual, has to be subject to measurement. Everything has to be instrumentalized, reduced to the general laws of nature and matter, all of which lead to technological utopia and the end of history.

The human mind itself within this naturalistic frame of reference grants sanctity to nothing. It sees the world (both humanity and nature) as ultimately knowable (and controllable and usable). The light of reason, knowing no limits, penetrates everything like a ruthless X-ray. It judges everything by objective neutral criteria (firmly rooted in the ultimate category of nature-matter). And matter, as we all know, does not hesitate or mediate, brooks no ambiguities and tolerates no complexity, recognizes no *logos* or *telos* – it just keeps on moving and expanding unless stopped from without, something like a “natural man”. On an epistemological level, an individual degenerates into the state of nature, moves like it, expands like it, all the while becoming more or less a natural force. Being autonomous and self-referential, standing beyond good and evil, the individual cannot be judged by any criteria that is external to himself/herself. If the world is centered around the individual, it is centered around his/her own interests, physical welfare, and profit and pleasure.

Reverting back to the main thesis of the present paper, I would contend that the fundamental philosophical issues that concern a deeply religious person, on the other hand, are to be seen as logically prior to those that arise when thinking within the framework of quasi-

technical concepts in question. For this reason it is often impossible to relate his concerns and interests directly to the issues that in recent years have dominated debate within analytical philosophy. However, there are strong reasons for being critical of assumptions which tend to be unquestioningly accepted in adopting the framework within which contemporary problems are being formulated and the relevance of these should be obvious. They are especially so for anybody who might feel that there is something profoundly wrong in scientific Realism, physicalistic metaphysics, utilitarianism and so on, and something philosophically sterile (even if scientifically important) in the current debates of cognitive scientists, information technologists, symbolic logicians and so on. Indeed the credentials of the enterprise of naturalizing epistemology have been questioned by members of the analytical/linguistic philosophical group itself. For example, as Chomsky has shown so convincingly,⁷ this epistemology is totally unfit to explain the working of our minds and of our learning capacity. Naturalism must ascribe this task to epistemology which it is unable to carry out in its empiricist form. Gellner too is bitterly critical of Quine when he writes:

It seems to me that, by naturalizing epistemology we make it worthless, for it can then no longer provide an answer to the problem which really historically inspired it. *Naturalizing* it means practising it within a given or assumed world. But the problem which inspired it was the problem of choosing between radically different and incommensurate worlds. This problem has arisen on the boundaries between cultures or between epochs The enterprise of 'naturalizing' epistemology is paradoxical. When naturalized, it can no longer do the job for which it was originally invented – to stand outside and tell us which of the rival, basically divergent worlds we really live in. This task, contrary to Quine's view, does have to be done and cannot be evaded.⁸

An epistemological theory or paradigm deals with the science and theory of knowledge. A paradigm can be defined as a set of assumptions made by the researcher about the nature of a phenomena under study (ontological), the theory of knowing it (epistemological), the criteria used to analyze and evaluate the validity of the theory itself (metatheoretical), and the best way to research it in relation to other similar phenomena (methodological). The epistemological paradigm of Cartesian modernism attaches credibility to mechanistic empiricism in the physical sciences and to logical positivism in the social sciences. The former focuses on observations of causal

relationships, while the latter focuses on correlational linkages. Modernism also recognizes shallow rationalism and rational empiricism. While rationalism assumes thought to be the key to scholarly inquiry, rational empiricism examines ideas against observations.

Postmodernism which stresses a semiological perspective of reality, on the other hand, rejects mechanistic empiricism, logical positivism, and rational empiricism.⁹ Its adherents object to mechanistic empiricism as inhuman and take issue with logical positivism on the grounds of its being reductionist (*i.e.*, incapable of capturing the totality of a given phenomena), which is more than the mere sum of its parts. Moreover, they also oppose it because its proponents subscribe to operationalism, which assumes that the physical concrete indicators are capable of encompassing the complete reality within the observed phenomena. Their favourite epistemological paradigms are constructivism and constructive realism. The postmodernists in the social sciences believe that the whole of a phenomenon is greater than its parts and that theoretical concepts are larger than mere myopic measures of their empirical indicators. The whole of reality, a cultural symbol for example, cannot be captured by the current crude devices of experimentation but can at best, be experienced through living it. In the postmodern sensibility the search for unitary claims has been abandoned altogether. Instead there is pastiche, cultural and methodological recombination. Anything can be juxtaposed to anything else. This trend in contemporary European thought provides great support to sapiential Islamic epistemology.

It is my considered view that if philosophy is to have existential and practical resonance, it must become part of a holistic conceptual network through which a person organizes both his knowledge and action and, in fact, his entire being. Reason should not be seen as disembodied from the context within which it operates; and that respect for reason must logically involve respect for that which sustains it – the culture mode in which one lives. Among all the great traditional systems of thought ('logically possible and historically upheld visions' – in Gellner's usage), it is Islam which many thinkers and scientists both discovered as most compatible with modern scientific thinking, and quite often ahead of it. Islam has its own epistemic order, a most satisfying and edifying one indeed. Far from the cramping effect of contemporary Western paradigm of empiricist epistemology, in the Islamic epistemics a person retains his total cognitive wealth. Challenging the exclusiveness and validity of the prevailing episteme, Islamic epistemics or theory of knowledge is both inclusive and humane. Historically, the integrative Islamic

epistemology was successful in achieving a synthesis of that varied and multi-coloured world of facts into a unified structure of *ilm*, knowledge, as conceptualized, defined and operationalized in the West is at a banal level when compared to the all-encompassing notion of *ilm* that was the hallmark of early Muslim culture. Based on the immutability of *tawhid* and universality of the world-view of Islam, the moral imperative of *ilm* has not changed at all. Indeed, the Muslim civilization has demonstrated the capability of unified intellect and action at both conceptual and operational level. Only by seeing the epistemic theory within its cultural tradition and social matrix is it possible to grasp its integrating and synthetic dimensions.

Speaking from my own experience, I am convinced that human ideals thrive only when set in the context of a transcendent attitude. Over a period which now almost extends to three decades of studying, reflection and teaching I have been struggling hard to penetrate and conquer the citadel of truth and the fortress of moral virtue and righteousness. Epistemology and ethics or morality together, in my view, constitute the entire gamut around which a man's whole life revolves. In an article 'Rationality and Moral Action' published elsewhere, I have argued that a meaningful understanding of ethical principles and moral life can evolve only when knowledge is taken as essentially the reflection of a light which is kindled from within the deeper self and not from external sources. That is to say ethical and moral value and man's search for enduring truth and meaning are deeply intertwined. Through an elaborate analysis and criticism of utilitarian ethics I try to argue in that essay that considerations of ethics and value-theory inevitably raise epistemological questions: in what sense conscience or 'heart' *i.e.*, the appreciative consciousness founded in active motions of feelings, emotion and will, have an epistemic capacity? In what sense, following Ghazali and Pascal, may we say the heart has reasons which reason does not know?

In the framework of theistic ethics, Quran also clearly mentions the epistemic function of the heart – *lahum qulubun yaqilun biha* (22:46), they have been given hearts through which they should ponder and reflect. This means that axiology is the form of purity of heart and its discernment. Morality, according to the Quran, is the formal entailments of being pure of heart. "Cogitating heart" means more of course than merely adding feeling to thoughts, so as to have "heart-felt" thoughts. The expression refers to a deep appropriation as a mode of cognizing. Deep appropriation demands that the words be put to practice; the thought must involve itself in action. Reality being unremittingly situational, thoughts and words must get situated

in the sorts of real activities that pertain to their subject matter. They must get enacted so that the relevant concepts get exercised and the reader gets capacitated in order to begin even to apprehend the reality of which the words speak. Otherwise, with the words 'left on the lips' doubt defeats understanding and the reader remains an inert victim trapped in a realm of abstraction. From the Quranic perspective, epistemology is never detachable from its ethics. It is a theory in which knowing is always a function of doing. The knowledge of God is always a matter of obeying God. In early Islam it was axiomatic that one obeyed in order to know God. That is to say, apprehension constituted a fundamental component of knowledge and the role of activity in its acquisition was paramount.

The Islamic metaphysical scheme binds up true knowledge and wisdom with virtue, character and being – inner formation for information, so to say, is here the axial truth. Seeking of knowledge is in this perspective more like a struggle and a participatory journey. On such a participatory journey truth is not the formal correspondence of propositions with what is the case, but of persons with the real. A believer does not merely, if at all, *have truth*, like scientist perhaps; but he must *be true* (as must a seeker or a lover). On the Muslim 'straight path', truth is in submission (*islam*). Understanding and imperative are both translations and derivatives of one root f-q-h for understanding of truth and law; '*tafaqquh*' and '*fiqh*'; and rightness is the finding of one's sound nature. For Gazali, "Real revelation is an attribute of the essence of the heart and its inward part." By contrast, error is the state of a person who is distanced and veiled from the real. Instead of the contemporary narrow 'correspondence' theory of truth, a true believer proffers what may be termed 'correspondential truthfulness'. It alters the otherwise more philosophical and analytical account of knowledge as "justified true belief" by making the sense of justified Quranic. Belief is justified as it makes us just. The Islamic expression for it is jurisprudence *fiqh*, truth enshrined in the lawful life. Aphoristically put: to be right here one must be righteous. One can understand only with moral reformation. Knowledge in the Islamic episteme is firmly anchored to purity of heart and moral rectitude. When our deeds match our thoughts we gain a disclosure situation for further truth. Truth cannot be disclosed to a soul marred and diseased by sin, since unless sound it cannot see.

Even an analysis of the English usages and their semantic constitution considerably substantiates the Islamic point of view. Thus, there is a subtle relationship between the locution 'understanding' (so central in epistemology) and 'undergoing'. The

word 'understand' is not fully synonymous with our current use of the word 'know', though it is sometimes a near synonym. The latter is often comfortable with a distancing "about", while the former is etymologically a "standing under". For example, we describe wild hawks or mineral structures, and 'know about' them. Unequivocally, we understand at the levels of human sentience – life, learning, and personal intelligence. Downwards on the scale of being from this we may ask whether a virus is 'alive' or a rat 'learns'. Upwards, we consider whether God is a 'person'. Knowledge is typically of what we stand over, though it is also rewarded by a sort of understanding which enters into subordinate being. *Understanding*, when it exceeds *Knowing* in its meaning, is of coordinate or superordinate levels of beings; its true home is *meaning*, of which the root is "mind", always near religion. Recalling Augustine and Ghazali, *Knowing* trends to go with science, *Scientia*, while *understanding* moves, later if not sooner, in the realm of action and wisdom, *sapientia*. Ghazali's complaint against the religious scholars (ulama) was that they seek an understanding without any undergoing, *ilm* without *islam*. The result is superficiality and empty memorization of 'names and forms'. Though they are familiar with the history of Islamic religion, they cannot be active religiously. Their religious capacities are retroactive, not active. Knowledge is not, for Ghazali, the prolific retention of a tradition but a light which floods the heart and creates an impact by piercing life: the difference between comprehending the *meaning* and *point* of a discussion or discourse.

Any deep analysis of knowledge-morality nexus from the traditional sapiential perspective of Islam must take note of the ideas of the pathfinding savant, the "Reviver of Islam" – Ghazali.¹⁰ He was not uninterested in conventional epistemology. He outlines various advancing levels of sensation, discrimination, and intellection. We can know God's created Earth in our intelligent capacity as his vicegerents (*caliphs*) That licenses the sciences which Ghazali recognizes and sometimes praises. Yet he is careful to note that the spiritual level exceeds but includes rationality and, more problematically, sensation. Though he reveals much appreciation of the natural scene, we find him a citizen of two worlds, the sensuous-visible one and the spiritual-invisible one. The cognitive component is *cogitation* – discursive and conceptual – found in empirical/natural science and also in wisdom. But wisdom is a perceptive, faithful seeing of the invisible, and involves more than the calculatory reason. Intellection is not what it might superficially appear, simply a logical process. It felicitously combines the conceptual and perceptual

elements. Thus there are in Ghazali two powers of higher mind: intellectus adds intuition to the more simply discursive *ratio*.

The *Niche for Lights* is an extended meditation of sufi epistemology, evaluating the degrees of illumination in which various inquirers stand. Ghazali does not so deliberately provide us with an account of subjective distortion, but nevertheless he is sometimes explicit and everywhere implicit over the same terrain. Born with a natural disposition (*fitra*) to be *muslim*, submissive to God, the person comes to dwell in the times of ignorance. This indisposition Ghazali calls self-impulse (*hawa*) of which the contrary is the genuinely religious impulse. Those who understand nothing are in a class "veiled from Allah by pure darkness", of which "self-absorption is the characteristic". This veil is, as it were, their self-centered ego and their lusts of darkness; for there is no darkness so intense as slavery to self-impulse (*hawa*) and self-love. Though intermediately there are many translucent veils which hide God, all our final capacity, complete ignorance, is invariably produced by this passion. The predicates which describe this impulsive, non-Islamic person are the successive vices described in *The Revivification of the Sciences of Religion*: perversions of the heart, sensuality, malice, envy, worldliness, avarice, status-seeking, terminating in arrogance and conceit. Pride is the final result of *hawa* and the antithesis of trusting submission (*islam*). On the other side, the attributes of an authentic Muslim are those epistemic virtues which facilitate and guarantee true veridical knowledge: courage, gratitude, fear and hope, poverty and self-denial, trust, love, and yearning consummating in resolve, sincerity, contemplation, and self-examination. The vices which flow from *hawa* lead to ignorance, while the virtues which detail the Islamic disposition (*fitrah*) permit knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of ultimate reality. It is quite obvious how the "Reviver of Islam" never disjoins sufi experience from integrity in the common life, nor character from cognition, and how he insists that we know only in self-mortification, purity of heart and motivation.

Ghazali's religious epistemology can be briefly summarized thus: *Iman* through *ilm* to *ma'rifa*. In retrospect Ghazali reviews the levels that were involved in his progressive *Deliverance from Error* and finds that they are the typical ones in religious knowledge and education: "Certainly reached by demonstration is knowledge (*ilm*); actual acquaintance with that (revelational) state is immediate experience (*dahwq*); the acceptance of it as probable from hearsay and trial is faith (*iman*). These are three degrees. 'God will raise those of you who have faith and those who have been given

knowledge in degrees.” These degrees of knowledge are the *traditional*, the *intellectual*, and the *experiential*. They correspond roughly to the ways we know someone is at home. We may trust someone else who is an informant, or conclude from our own overhearing of his voice within, or see the person inside his house, although the religious analogue of this seeing is complex and with varying clarity.

- (a) *Iman* is what may be called systemic faith. This does not cover all that, for example, Augustine means by *fides*, but only the traditional element. It is borrowed belief. The dominant component here is ‘following the authority of others’ (*taqlid*), either naively or with some intelligent awareness of what is involved. Ghazali intensely criticizes arrest here where advance is possible, but he knows that there is no other entrance in Islam. There is a child-like state of faith. We naturally accept parents and teachers; we sometimes give ready and rational adherence to mediated truth. *The Book on Knowledge* in *The Revivification* reveals this chronological and catechetical priority of *iman* over *ilm*, the next kind of knowledge to which we turn. In the second book, he is amply creedal, as in the first book he is amply discursive. In both books he tutors and argues. Creedal discussion is the gateway to all the ensuing books which brings one to religious life (*deen*).
- (b) The second degree, *ilm*, is intellectual knowledge. Here the root component is a demonstrative logic. The claims of reported prophecy are comprehended, and the result is a science, *Kalam*, theology. This knowledge is the kind that Ghazali can put into his books, not the whole of religion, as he repeatedly warns the reader, but its conceptual transcription. We expect this knowledge to make sense; we search the faith we inherit for its reasonableness, and we estimate critically where we are headed. But this is never by a strong, autonomous logic which pushes us within, which forces conclusions upon the non-participant. That hope was the *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, exposed in that work. Argument here is by a rather modest dependent reasonableness drawing us inward, satisfying us with logical coherence as we enter. The sense of Ghazali’s use of “demonstration” is not an apodictic proof, but a softer *ilm* which certainly makes intellectual sense. Religious knowledge is not brought by logical violence, but neither must we violate logic by its coming.

- (c) The consummate gift is intuitive knowledge (*ma'rifa*) or immediate experience (*dhawq*). But these words attest a perceptual intimacy; *ma'rifa* is personal disclosure and *dhawq* is literally "tasting". The pleasure of the knowledge of God Most High is a kind of perception and perception demands a thing perceived and a power of perceiving. This is, so to say, "spiritual vision", where the power of internal perception is like the power of external vision. The peak moments are of an episodic "passing away" (*fana*) into God, but the constant result is an ever-present apprehension of God in a life lived in steady Godward reference which Ghazali calls trusting (*tawakkul*) and which is fully parallel to the deepest sense of *fides*. The prophets are given revelation (*wahy*, major inspiration), while the saints and the pious are called to "awakening" (*ilham*, minor inspiration); but both have this immediate experience of God.

Ghazali thus recognizes increasingly sophisticated tiers of epistemic awareness. At the simplest is physical sense, sense perception, which we share even with animals. Beyond this there is mnemonic level, at which sense perceptions are integrated in memory. Then, as may begin in children, the simpler memory advances to a level of discrimination involving inductive logic and habitually correlated perceptions. Still further along, phenomenal knowledge matures with adult intellectual development, including deductive logic and conceptual analysis of discriminated sensations. But, at the highest level, a person's noumenal wisdom come when 'another eye is opened by which he beholds the unseen And other things which are beyond the ken of the intellect'. Even in the common life persons often make non-discursive judgments, of which poetic and metrical criticisms serve as examples. For Ghazali, humility, more than rationality is the intellectual condition of one's knowledge of God. Pride is the debilitating sin, humility is the facilitating virtue through which one's reflection of God is restored. Esoteric meanings, says Ghazali, complete rather than conflict with exoteric ones; they deepen and broaden them. They both operate as complementary components in the enlargement of true understanding.

In my view Ghazali's reflections in epistemology are archetypal and paradigmatic representation of Islamic theory of knowledge and provide the best framework for the conceptualization of the entire Islamic universe of knowledge – the Islamic *episteme*: 'an invisible pattern that serves as a fundamental regulatory mechanism for

formation of knowledge'.¹¹ Indeed the present intellectual climate in the West is quite favourable for exploring alternative epistemologies and certainly Islamic theory of knowledge, if presented in the current philosophical idiom, stands good chances of sympathetic consideration and acceptance. Whereas the Enlightenment had sealed certain avenues of knowledge to the modern mind, the contemporary phase of high modernity seems to be reopening them. An example may be given from the revival of the debate on the limits of human rationality and a renewed interest in the possible relevance/meaning of revelation.

To sum up: In radical contrast to A. J. Ayer who characterizes epistemology as an exercise in scepticism,¹² my position in this paper is that knowledge of the ultimate reality is not only available to the true seeker, it has moral and salvific value too. A philosopher's vocation should be cultural renewal and direction and he should come out of his ivory tower and should go beyond hair splitting analyses, non-committal attitude and unprincipled abstention or avoidance.¹³ The dominant Western paradigm of knowledge has a hollow centre, whereas the Islamic epistemics provide a focus of direction towards the human centre and has a transcendent, timeless reference as its norm. Islamic epistemology remains uncluttered by any Western logical or epistemological restraints. It has a constant record of not only recognizing, but also of using the heart as a vehicle for acquisition of knowledge. That experience of the heart through which it 'sees' and penetrates 'truth' is frequently referred to as 'religious experience'.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Bernard Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry*. Penguin Books, 1978.
- 2 A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*. Free Association Book, London, 1984 (Reprint).
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- 3 E. Gellner, *Spectacles and Predicaments*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979. Paperback edition 1991.
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- 6 Quinie, W. V. O., *From a Logical Point of View*, 2nd ed. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1953.
- 7 Chomsky, N., "Current Issues in Linguistic Theory" in *The Structure of Languages*, ed., S. A. Fodor and J. J. Katz, New York, 1964, pp. 50-55. Also see *Language and Mind*, New York: Harcourt & Brace, 1968; *Reflections and Language*, New York: Pantheon, 1975 and *Rules and Representation*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.
- 8 *Op cit.*, p. 232.
- 9 See, for example, the works of the Frankfurt School of Philosophy and in particular, the various writings of Habermas, Foucault, and Derrida.
- 10 Parts of *Ihya Ulum al-Din* have been translated into numerous European languages by different scholars. See particularly *The Book of Knowledge*, trans. Nabih Amin Faris, Lahore: Mohammad Ashraf, 1962. He has also translated and published *The Foundations of the Articles of Faith*, and *The Mysteries of Purity. The Deliverance from Error*, trans. W. Montgomery Watt, Allen and Unwin, London (1953). *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, trans. Sabih Ahmad Kamali, Lahore, Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1958. Al-Ghazali's *Mishkat al-Anwar (The Niche for Light)* translated W. H. T. Gairdner, London, Royal Asiatic Society (1924).
- 11 This is how Karlis Racevskis defines "episteme". See his *Michael Foucault and the Subversion of Intellect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 22.
- 12 Ayer, A. J., *Fundamental Questions of Philosophy*. Penguin Books, London, 1973, p. 1.
- 13 It has reference to the phrase "method of avoidance" which belongs to John Rawls. See his *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (1985), p. 231.