

Philosophy Handouts- Lec#6

What is Islamic Philosophy?

Islamic philosophy aims to understand the real world within human capacity. It is built upon both revealed knowledge, based on divine revelation and the messages of the prophets, and rational thought. Throughout history, prophets have guided humanity, leaving behind religious and cultural models. The message of all prophets emphasized thinking, reflecting on the world and human existence. Islamic philosophy integrates reason with submission to divine will, ensuring that faith and intellect do not contradict but complement each other.

Purpose of Knowledge in Islamic Philosophy

The goal of Islamic philosophy is to understand God, nature, and humanity through reason and argument. Islam values truth and reality, seeking to know the existence of God and man's duties towards the Creator. There is no conflict between Islam and philosophy; rather, they complement one another, as Islamic thought accepts rational judgments when aligned with divine principles.

Wisdom or Knowledge in Islamic Philosophy

The divine revelations and teachings of prophets shaped human thought and provided ethical and legal guidance. Sophia (Wisdom) in Islamic thought emerges from divine teachings and serves as a quest for ultimate truth. Islamic philosophy is a divine philosophy, aiming for a comprehensive understanding of existence, knowledge, and values.

Knowledge of Man in Islamic Epistemology

Man, as God's vicegerent, has been endowed with creative and conceptual knowledge. It is his duty to mold all forms of knowledge including natural sciences, social sciences, and pure sciences within the framework of Islamic teachings. Knowledge is not merely for academic or worldly pursuits but must be used to establish an Islamic system that aligns with divine guidance.

Purpose of Man's Knowledge

Islam's perspective on man emphasizes two key objectives:

- **Transformation of creation into divine patterns:** Humans are entrusted with rearranging natural resources to serve both material and spiritual needs.

- **Adherence to ethical values:** In all actions, humans must uphold the principles of devotion to Allah and justice to mankind.

Limitations of Human Knowledge

Although seeking knowledge is a fundamental step towards understanding Allah, human perception is inherently limited. The Qur'an acknowledges this limitation by referring to the unseen realm beyond human comprehension. As Allah states in the Qur'an:

“I swear by what you see and what you do not see...” (Q.69:38-39) “Glory be to Him Who created pairs of all things, of what the earth grows, and of their kind and of what they do not know...” (Q.36:36)

Faith in these limitations encourages Muslims to continuously seek knowledge, while remaining within the divine framework outlined by the Qur'an.

Difference between Ilm and Knowledge

The concept of 'Ilm' is broader than 'knowledge'. While knowledge refers to general information, Ilm' encompasses theory, action, and education. Wisdom represents the highest form of knowledge. Islamic epistemology identifies three degrees of certainty (Yaqeen):

- **Ilm-ul-Yaqeen** – Knowledge of Certainty (Q.102:5)
- **Ayn-ul-Yaqeen** – Eye of Certainty (Q.102:7)
- **Haqq-ul-Yaqeen** – Truth/Reality of Certainty (Q.56:95)

Knowledge Premises and Argumentation

Islamic philosophy does not solely rely on revelation but also appeals to pure reason. Muslim philosophers have formulated theories on metaphysics, truth, and society, engaging in deep philosophical discourse while maintaining alignment with divine teachings.

Study of Knowledge in Islamic Philosophy

Islamic philosophy is based on **three key sources**:

- **Sunnah**

- **Reason**
- **Qur'an** as the ultimate source of knowledge

The Qur'an presents divine knowledge about destiny, creation, and the afterlife. This divine insight serves as a guiding force in Islamic thought, distinguishing it from purely rationalistic philosophies.

Unity in Islamic Philosophy

1. Unity of Allah (Tawhid)

Allah is the sole Creator and Sustainer of all existence. Everything apart from Him is His creation. Faith and recognition of Allah should be constant in a Muslim's consciousness. The Qur'an urges reflection on creation:

“Our Lord! Not for naught hast Thou created (all) this. Glory to Thee! Give us salvation from the penalty of fire.” (Q.3:191)

2. Unity of Creation

Islamic teachings affirm that science and Qur'anic knowledge should be in harmony. Natural sciences study God's creation, and when applied in an Islamic framework, they contribute to the establishment of a just society.

3. Unity of Thought (Revelation and Reason)

Revelation and reason share inherent qualities. However, reason is limited to what is apparent, while revelation offers knowledge of both the seen and unseen. The Qur'an states:

“But nay! I swear by that which you see, and that which you do not see.” (Q.69:38-39)

Although reason is a valuable tool, it must be guided by revelation to prevent an over-reliance on empirical and rationalist philosophies.

Revelation Over Reason

Islamic scholars, such as Al-Ghazali, emphasized that sense perception is fallible. He placed revelation above pure philosophy. Later, Muhammad Iqbal followed a similar approach, rejecting Ibn Rushd's rationalist interpretation and advocating for the supremacy of divine wisdom.

Unity of Man

Islamic teachings highlight the importance of knowledge in shaping human dignity. When Allah taught Adam the names of things, He demonstrated the superiority of knowledge. The vicegerency of man requires him to use knowledge responsibly, ensuring that scientific research and intellectual pursuits align with divine guidance.

Relationship between Revealed and Acquired Knowledge

Unlike other philosophies, Islamic epistemology prioritizes revelation over human reason. However, it acknowledges the role of intellect in understanding divine truths. A religious person should believe in intellect as a tool for discovering truth, while a rational thinker should recognize the divine nature of revelation. The Qur'an is the ultimate rational source of knowledge, combining faith with reason.

Components of Islamic Philosophy

Islam is a comprehensive system that includes beliefs, morality, rights, and jurisprudence. The sources of Islamic knowledge stem from divine will and revelation, as well as intellect and tradition. Prophetic teachings form a continuous chain of knowledge, ensuring the preservation of divine wisdom from Adam to the final messenger.

Conclusion

Islamic philosophy integrates reason, revelation, and knowledge to guide humanity toward truth, ethical behavior, and divine understanding. Seeking knowledge is a sacred duty that must be pursued with sincerity, wisdom, and alignment with Islamic principles.