

Philosophy- Lecture #7

Sources and Principles of Knowledge in Islamic Philosophy

Sources of Knowledge in Islamic Philosophy

Islamic philosophy identifies two main sources of knowledge: divine revelation and human reasoning. The divine revelation is considered absolute and flawless, while human reasoning, though valuable, is limited and requires guidance from revelation to attain certainty.

Primary Sources of Knowledge

1. **Qur'an** The Qur'an is the most authoritative source of knowledge in Islam. It is believed to be the literal word of God, revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Qur'an addresses fundamental concepts such as divine decree, predestination, resurrection, and the nature of the material world. It provides a framework for understanding existence and reality, offering clear guidance based on divine wisdom. Since the Qur'an comes directly from Allah, it is considered infallible and superior to any human-derived knowledge.
2. **Sunnah (Prophetic Teachings)** The Sunnah consists of the sayings, actions, and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It serves as a practical interpretation of the Qur'an and provides additional insights into the application of divine guidance in daily life. The Sunnah complements the Qur'an by elaborating on its teachings and demonstrating how they should be implemented. The Prophet's knowledge, being divinely guided, acts as a bridge between revelation and human understanding.

Secondary Sources of Knowledge

1. **Ijma (Consensus)** Ijma refers to the collective agreement of Muslim scholars on interpretations of the Qur'an and Sunnah. When faced with new issues or challenges, Islamic scholars rely on Ijma to ensure a unified approach to religious and legal matters. This consensus plays a vital role in maintaining continuity in Islamic jurisprudence and adapting religious teachings to contemporary issues.
2. **Qiyas (Analogy)** Qiyas is a method of reasoning used to derive legal rulings for new situations that are not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an or Sunnah. By drawing analogies between known rulings and new cases, scholars apply established principles to

address emerging issues. This method ensures that Islamic law remains relevant and applicable to evolving societal needs while maintaining consistency with divine teachings.

Types and Forms of Knowledge in Islamic Philosophy

Islamic philosophy recognizes multiple forms of knowledge, each playing a distinct role in understanding reality and fulfilling human responsibilities. These types of knowledge include:

1. **Revealed Knowledge (Ilm al-Wahi)** Revealed knowledge is divine and comes directly from Allah through the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It includes knowledge about faith, the unseen, morality, the afterlife, and divine laws. It is considered absolute and unchangeable.
2. **Acquired Knowledge (Ilm al-Iktisabi)** Acquired knowledge is obtained through human efforts, including reasoning, observation, and experience. This includes sciences, mathematics, history, philosophy, and other intellectual pursuits. While valuable, acquired knowledge must align with divine revelation to ensure moral and ethical correctness.
3. **Empirical Knowledge (Ilm al-Tajribi)** Empirical knowledge is gained through observation, experimentation, and sensory experience. It forms the foundation of natural sciences such as physics, chemistry, and biology. The Qur'an encourages the study of nature as a means of understanding Allah's creation.
4. **Intuitive Knowledge (Ilm al-Huduri)** Intuitive knowledge refers to direct, inner awareness and spiritual insight. It is a form of understanding that does not rely on external sources but is perceived internally, often associated with mysticism and spiritual enlightenment. Sufi scholars emphasize the role of the heart in attaining this type of knowledge.
5. **Rational Knowledge (Ilm al-Aqli)** Rational knowledge is based on logical reasoning and intellectual analysis. It includes philosophy, jurisprudence, and theological arguments that seek to understand the nature of existence, ethics, and divine attributes. Reasoning must work within the framework of revelation to prevent deviation from divine truth.

6. **Practical Knowledge (Ilm al-Amali)** Practical knowledge focuses on applying theoretical principles to real-life situations. This includes ethics, law, governance, and technology. Islam emphasizes the practical implementation of knowledge for societal benefit.
7. **Theoretical Knowledge (Ilm al-Nazari)** Theoretical knowledge is conceptual and abstract, dealing with fundamental truths about existence, metaphysics, and logic. This type of knowledge is essential for developing frameworks that support both scientific and spiritual understanding.
8. **Spiritual Knowledge (Ilm al-Ruhani)** This knowledge pertains to the understanding of the soul, self-purification, and the connection between humans and Allah. It is deeply tied to Islamic mysticism (Tasawwuf) and is sought through devotion, worship, and self-discipline.
9. **Derived knowledge** is inferred from existing sources using reasoning, analogy, and empirical observation. It ensures the adaptability of Islamic thought to evolving circumstances.

Difference Between Derived and Acquired Knowledge

Acquired knowledge refers to knowledge gained through human efforts, including reasoning, observation, and experience. It encompasses sciences, philosophy, mathematics, and history. On the other hand, derived knowledge is inferred from existing sources through reasoning, analogy, and scholarly consensus. It includes Qiyas (analogy), Ijma (consensus), and the application of scientific inquiry to religious principles. While acquired knowledge is obtained through direct study and empirical methods, derived knowledge ensures the continuity and adaptability of Islamic thought by interpreting and extending established principles to new situations.

The Role of Knowledge in Islam

Knowledge holds a central place in Islam, as it enables humans to fulfill their role as vicegerents of Allah (SWT) on Earth. Muslims are encouraged to seek knowledge to advance both spiritually and materially. The study of natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities should align with divine principles to contribute to human welfare and moral development. Scientific research and

intellectual inquiry are essential for understanding the universe and fulfilling the responsibilities entrusted to mankind. Without knowledge, Muslims cannot progress or effectively serve their purpose as representatives of Allah on Earth.

Principles of Knowledge in Islamic Philosophy

1. Unity of Allah (Tawhid)

Tawhid, the oneness of Allah, is the foundation of Islamic knowledge. All existence originates from Allah, and everything is distinct from Him as the Creator. Acknowledging Allah's supremacy is crucial for gaining true knowledge. Muslims are encouraged to reflect upon the creation and recognize the divine order in the universe.

The Qur'an states: *"Our Lord! Not for naught have You created this. Glory to You! Save us from the Fire."* (Q:3:191).

Barriers to knowledge include lack of faith, blind imitation, and superstitions, which can mislead individuals from attaining truth.

2. Unity of Creation

Islamic philosophy asserts that there is no contradiction between Qur'anic knowledge and scientific knowledge. Science is regarded as the study of Allah's creation, and its discoveries should be used to establish justice and serve humanity. By understanding natural laws, Muslims can develop societies that adhere to ethical and moral principles. Scientific progress should be in harmony with divine guidance to ensure that it contributes to a just and peaceful civilization.

3. Unity of Thought (Revelation and Reason)

Both revelation and reason originate from Allah. Revelation provides certainty (yaqeen), while reason is limited to observable reality (zahir). While human reasoning is valuable, it requires divine guidance to reach ultimate truth. The Qur'an acknowledges the importance of rational inquiry, stating:

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

For knowledge to be well-balanced, reason must be submitted to revelation; otherwise, it risks being influenced by mere empiricism or speculative philosophy.

4. Revelation Over Reason

The philosopher Al-Ghazali argued that human perception and reasoning are fallible, and thus, revelation should take precedence. He emphasized that certainty can only be achieved through divine knowledge.

In contrast, Ibn Rushd (Averroes) advocated for the harmony of faith and reason, suggesting that rational thought should play an independent role. However, his views were later challenged by scholars like Muhammad Iqbal, who supported Al-Ghazali's notion that revelation provides ultimate knowledge about human destiny and purpose.

5. Unity of Man and Knowledge

Islamic philosophy teaches that knowledge is a divine gift given to humanity. Allah (SWT) taught Adam the names of things, demonstrating the superiority of human intellect over other creations. This incident signifies that knowledge carries responsibility.

The angels were commanded to prostrate before Adam not because of his piety, but due to his knowledge. This highlights the importance of knowledge and the obligation of humans to use it wisely in fulfilling their duties.

6. Relationship Between Revealed and Acquired Knowledge

Islamic epistemology upholds the supremacy of revelation while recognizing the role of human intellect. Unlike Western philosophies that often rely on skepticism (raib), Islam starts with certainty (yaqeen). Human reasoning supports revelation by demonstrating its logical and ethical coherence. The Qur'an is both an inspirational and rational source of knowledge, guiding intellectual pursuits within the framework of divine truth.

Summary

Islam is a comprehensive system encompassing beliefs, morality, rights, and jurisprudence. The foundation of Islamic teachings lies in divine will and knowledge. Both intellect and tradition serve as epistemological sources, allowing Muslims to understand God's will. The shared principles of divine religions confirm the unity of revealed knowledge throughout history.