

Foundations of Indian and Muslim Epistemology:  
A General Overview

Naseem Gul\*

Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah University, Rajouri, Jammu & Kashmir, India

[rnaseemguldar@gmail.com](mailto:rnaseemguldar@gmail.com)

Article Info		
Submitted	: December 8, 2021	DOI: 10.20885/ijjis.vol4.iss2.art4
Accepted	: March 5, 2021	*Corresponding author
Published	: March 25, 2021	

**Abstract**

*Epistemology is the most fundamental branch of philosophy. It discusses philosophically truth and falsehood, validity of knowledge, limits of knowledge and nature of knowledge, knower and known, etc. Defined narrowly, epistemology is the study of knowledge and justified belief. As the study of knowledge, epistemology is concerned with the following questions: What are the necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge? What are its sources? What is its structure, and what are its limits? As the study of justified belief, epistemology aims to answer questions such as: How we are to understand the concept of justification? What makes justified beliefs justified? Is justification internal or external to one's own mind? Understood more broadly, epistemology is about issues having to do with the creation and dissemination of knowledge in particular areas of inquiry. This paper will provide a systematic overview of the problems that the questions above raise and focus in some depth on issues relating to the structure and the limits of knowledge and justification given much interest towards the Indian and Muslim epistemology. An attempt has also been made to discuss the epistemological issues and types of knowledge generally accepted by Indian and Muslim epistemologists.*

**Keywords:** *Epistemology, Philosophy, Muslim Perspective, Hindu Perspective, Knowledge, Belief.*

**A. Introduction**

Epistemology is one of the core areas of philosophy. It is concerned with the nature, sources and limits of knowledge. As a branch of philosophy, epistemology is concerned with the discussion of the problem concerning knowledge. The word epistemology is derived from the Greek word, “*Episteme*” which means knowledge. The term was introduced into English by the Scottish philosopher James Frederick Ferrier. Epistemology deeply focuses on all aspects of knowledge as knowledge is the principal stock in trade of philosophers. It deals with knowledge as a universal matter and aims to discover what is involved in the process of knowing. It studies

the nature, conditions and values of knowledge without deciding before what consequences of its study would be. It also means preliminary study of knowledge undertaken at the very beginning of work of scientific systematization. It asks such questions as: What is knowledge? How is knowledge acquired? What do people know? How do we know? What we know? Is there something common to all different activities to which we apply the term knowledge? Is knowing a special sort of mental act? If so, what is the difference between belief and knowledge? Can we know anything beyond the objects with which our senses acquaint us? Does knowing make any difference to the object known? How does a man know what is real? How do we get knowledge and how can we be sure it is true?<sup>1</sup>

We each exist for but a short time, and in that time explore but a small part of the whole universe. But humans are a curious species. We wonder, we seek answers. Living in this vast world that is by turns kind and cruel, and gazing at the immense heavens above, people have always asked a multitude of questions: How can we understand the world in which we find ourselves? How does the universe behave? What is the nature of reality? Where did all this come from? Did the universe need a creator? Most of us do not spend most of our time worrying about these questions, but almost all of us worry about them some of the time. Traditionally these are questions for philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

Western Philosophy has remained more or less true to the etymological meaning of 'philosophy', in being essentially an intellectual quest for truth. Indian and Muslim Philosophy has been, however, intensely spiritual and has always emphasized the need of practical realization of truth.<sup>3</sup> And this is the reason why most of the schools of Indian and Muslim Philosophy are also religious sects.<sup>4</sup> Although comparative philosophy is still a young discipline, enough work has been

---

<sup>1</sup> Barry Stroud, "Epistemology, the History of Epistemology, Historical Epistemology," *Erkenntnis* (1975-) 75, no. 3 (2011): 495–503.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010), 13.

<sup>3</sup> Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, Reprint (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2009), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Sharma, 13.

done in this field to break the barriers to philosophical communication between East and West. Nevertheless, owing to intellectual chauvinism and delusions of cultural supremacy, philosophers of each tradition continue to contemptuously dismiss the philosophies of other traditions. The result is that blissful ignorance, benevolent indifference, unmitigated intolerance, worn-out clichés pious platitudes, and self-serving shibboleths still rule the day.<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to note that, despite their vast cultural differences, the basic philosophical problems raised, as well as the majority of solutions proposed, by the Indian, European and Muslim traditions are astoundingly similar. Every problem that occupied the attention of European and Indian philosophers also engaged Muslim philosophers: monism and pluralism, change and permanence, appearance and reality, materialism, atomism, idealism, realism, pragmatism, the nature of self and consciousness, perception, language and reality, theories of meaning and names, the problem of universals and particulars, nominalism conceptualism, criteria of valid knowledge, laws of logic, theories of inference, freedom and determinism, the individual and society, the good life- these are but a few issues common to Indian, European and Muslim philosophies. Who can fail to discern the philosophical astuteness of Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Vasubandhu, Candrakriti, Dignaga, Dharmakriti, Dharmottra, Annambhatta, Kumarila Bhatta, Prabhakara, Gangesa, Sankara and Ramanuja, similarly the contribution of al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rush, Ibn Tufail, Ibn Miskaveh, Ibn Arabi, Ahmad Sirhindi, Gazali to name a few?<sup>6</sup>

In a very real sense, Indian and Muslim philosophies are pragmatic because of their strong practical bent. According to Indian and Muslim thinkers the aim of philosophy is not just the satisfaction of intellectual curiosity or the pursuit of theoretical truths; the more important aim is that philosophy should make a difference to the style and quality of life. If a philosophy, no matter how sophisticated and intellectually satisfying it may be, has no bearing on our life, it is deemed an

---

<sup>5</sup> Ramakrishna Puligandla, *Fundamentals of Indian Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 3–4.

<sup>6</sup> Puligandla, 4.

empty and irrelevant sophistry. The character and life of a philosophical idealist must differ from that of a philosophical realist in some significant sense; similarly, the disposition and lifestyle of a man who accepts a philosophy according to which God exists should differ from that of one whose philosophy rejects the notion of God. For this reason, philosophers are revered and admired in the Indian and Muslim culture.<sup>7</sup>

## **B. Indian Philosophy**

Each Indian philosophical system is classified as orthodox or unorthodox according as it accepts or rejects the authority of the *Vedas*, the oldest and most sacred scriptures of the Hindus. A word of caution for the reader is necessary here. The fact that a system is orthodox does not necessarily mean that it is theistic; as such, a system can be both orthodox and atheistic. The reason for this is that theism and atheism are both compatible with the teaching of the *Vedas*. The following are generally regarded as orthodox systems: *Samkhya*, *Yoga*, *Nyaya*, *Vaisesika*, *Mimamsa*, and *Vedanta*. The unorthodox systems are *Carvakism* (materialism), Jainism, and Buddhism. One may, however, consider *Samkhya*, *Yoga*, *Nyaya*, and *Vaisesika* to be neither orthodox nor unorthodox, since they originated independently of the *Vedas*—that is, without accepting or rejecting them. It may also be noted that in their original forms *Samkhya* and *Yoga* are atheistic, whereas *Nyaya* and *Vaisesika* are theistic; however, the former is theistic in their later developments. From another point of view, some scholars combine the orthodox schools in pairs: *Yoga-Samkhya*, *Nyaya-Vaisesika*, and *Mimamsa-Vedanta*. The basis for this coupling is that the first element of each of the three pairs pertains to practice, and the second to theory. Thus, *Yoga* is essentially a practical discipline of physical and mental training for the realization of the truths taught by the theoretical system of *Samkhya*; similarly, *Nyaya* is primarily methodology, whereas *Vaisesika* is the metaphysical system upheld by *Nyaya*. Similar considerations hold with respect to *Mimamsa* and *Vedanta*.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Puligandla, 5–6.

<sup>8</sup> Puligandla, 10–11.

### C. Sources of Knowledge Entertained by Indian Philosophers

Knowledge can be valid or invalid, valid knowledge is called *prama* and non-valid knowledge is known as *aprama*. *Prama* is valid means of knowledge and its important means include perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*), verbal testimony (*śabda*), comparison (*upamāna*), postulation (*arthapatti*) and non-apprehension (*anupalabdhi*). Different schools of Indian thought accept or reject different ones of these methods. All methods are accepted by *Advaita* and *Mīmāṃsā*; only perception, inference and testimony by *Yoga*; only perception and inference by Buddhism and *Vaiśeṣika*; and only perception by *Cārvāka*.

#### 1. Sense Perception

Sense-experience is certainly one of the ways of how we come to know. It is not only just one way, but certainly the chronologically first and most basic way of man's coming to know anything at all. Certain philosophers maintain that this is not the case since of certain things we have 'innate ideas' independently of any sense-experience. Generally, all schools of philosophy, except for certain forms of Western Rationalism, accept sense-experience (perception) to be genuine means of knowledge -- even though, dependently on their respective psychology, they explain its 'mechanism' differently. There are some who maintain that only sense experience is genuine source of knowledge, thus denying any knowledge of what is not sense-perceptible or at least, of what is not verifiable or falsifiable by sense observation (empiricism). Some other maintain that our knowledge of God, and religious language, though possible, take other origin from sense-experience. It is clear how these positions affect- though in a different way - our understanding of religious faith and belief. It is not difficult to say that since our senses often deceive us, the senses, or sense-experience, are not always reliable source of knowledge. The fact of this

possible deception simply proves that it is not the senses which 'know,' it is humans who know, by means of their senses.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. Inference

*Vaisesika* recognizes only two *pramanas*- perception and inference and reduces comparison and verbal testimony to inference. But *Nyaya* system recognizes all the four *Pramanas* namely perception, inference, verbal testimony and comparison.<sup>10</sup>

## 3. Testimony

*Sabda* is defined as the statement of a trustworthy person (*aptavakyā*) and consists in understanding its meaning. It is based on the words of trustworthy persons, human or divine. A person is trustworthy if he knows the truth and conveys it correctly. *Sabda* is interpreted as *aptavacana*. Testimony is valid if the source is reliable. It may come not only from the scriptures, but also from persons who are trustworthy (*apta*). Testimony is of two kinds- *Vaidika* and secular (*laukika*). The *vaidika* testimony is perfect and infallible because the *Vedas* are spoken by God. Secular testimony, being the words of human beings who are liable to error and, therefore, are fallible.<sup>11</sup>

## 4. Comparison

---

<sup>9</sup> J.M. Mohanty, "Oriya Literary Heritage: A Study of Religious Perception," *Indian Literature* 39, no. 2 (172) (1996): 136–49; Zhihua Yao, "Dignāga and Four Types of Perception," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32, no. 1 (2004): 57–79.

<sup>10</sup> K.N. Hota, "'Dharma' in the Vaiśeṣika System," *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute* 68/69 (2008): 383–90; V. N. Jha, "Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika Theory of Meaning," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 77, no. 1/4 (1996): 281–84.

<sup>11</sup> Rodney J. Parrott, "The Worth of the World in Classical Sāṃkhya," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 71, no. 1/4 (1990): 83–108; Olena Lutsyshyna, "Classical Sāṃkhya on the Authorship of the Vedas," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 40, no. 4 (2012): 453–67.

It is knowledge derived from similarity. It has been defined as the knowledge of the relation between a word and its denotation. According to the *Nyaya* philosophy, comparison (*upamana*) is the third source of valid knowledge. The expression ‘*upamana*’, is derived from two words, ‘*upa*’ and ‘*mana*’. The word ‘*upa*’ means similarity or ‘*sadrusya*’ and the word ‘*mana*’ means ‘*cognition*’. Thus, generally, *upamana* as a source of knowledge is derived from the similarity between two things/objects. It is a source of knowledge of the relation between a word and its denotation (what the word refers to).<sup>12</sup>

### 5. Presumption

The term *artha* means fact and *apatti* means ‘*kalpana*’ which is understood as ‘*supposition*’ in English. Thus, etymologically speaking, *arthapati* is that knowledge which resolves the conflict between two facts. It entails a presupposition which solves the problem that occurred between two facts. *Arthapati* is the assumption of an unperceived fact in order to reconcile two apparently inconsistent perceived facts. When a known fact can’t be accounted without another fact, we have to postulate the existence of third fact. The valid and justified knowledge of the third fact is known as *arthapati*.<sup>13</sup>

### 6. Non-apprehension

*Anupalabhi* is the immediate knowledge of the non-existence of object. For example, an umbrella which is expected to be seen in a particular corner of a room is not seen there. We know about the non-existence of the umbrella through a

---

<sup>12</sup> Ethan Mills, “Jayarāsi’s Delightful Destruction of Epistemology,” *Philosophy East and West* 65, no. 2 (2015): 498–541; Arvind Sharma, “‘Upamana’ as a Means of Valid Knowledge in Hindu Epistemology and ‘Qiyas’ as a Source of Islamic Law,” *Journal of the Indian Law Institute* 23, no. 2 (1981): 255–57.

<sup>13</sup> Bhairabi Prasad Sahu, “Ancient Orissa: The Dynamics of Internal Transformation of the Tribal Society,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 45 (1984): 148–60; Hans Bakker and Harunaga Isaacson, “The Ramtek Inscriptions II: The Vākāṭaka Inscription in the Kevala-Narasimha Temple,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 56, no. 1 (1993): 46–74.

separate *pramana*, i.e., *anupalabdhi*. Non-apprehension is the immediate knowledge of the non-existence of an object. An object does not exist in a particular place and a particular time. But it exists elsewhere. To perceive the non-existence of that particular object in a given situation/place is known as *anupalabdhi*.<sup>14</sup>

#### D. Carvaka Epistemology

The epistemological doctrine of the *Carvaka* School is that perception (*pratyaksa*) is the only means of valid knowledge. The validity even of inference is rejected. Inference is said to be a mere leap in the dark. We proceed here from the known to the unknown and there is no certainty in this, though some inferences may turn out to be accidentally true. A general proposition may be true in perceived cases, but there is no guarantee that it will hold true even in unperceived cases. Deductive inference is vitiated by the fallacy of *petitio principii*. It is merely an argument in a circle since the conclusion is already contained in the major premise the validity of which is not proved. Inductive inference undertakes to prove the validity of the major premise of deductive inference. But induction too is uncertain because it proceeds unwarrantedly from the known to the unknown.<sup>15</sup>

Perception itself which is regarded as valid by the *Carvaka* is often found untrue. We perceive the earth as flat, but it is almost round. We perceive the earth as static, but it is moving round the sun. We perceive the disc of the sun as of a small size, but it is much bigger than the size of the earth. Such perceptual knowledge is contradicted by inference. Moreover, pure perception in the sense of mere sensation cannot be regarded as a means of knowledge unless conception or thought has arranged into order and has given meaning and significance to the loose threads of sense data.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Lisa Allette Brooks, "Epistemology and Embodiment: Diagnosis and the Senses in Classical Ayurvedic Medicine," *Asian Review of World Histories* 6, no. 1 (2018): 98–135, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22879811-12340027>.

<sup>15</sup> Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, 42.

<sup>16</sup> Sharma, 43–44.



### E. Jaina Epistemology

Jainism divides all knowledge into two classes, the mediate (*Parokṣa*), and the immediate (*Aparokṣa*). Mediate knowledge is any knowledge which the soul comes to have by the mediation of sense organs, including the mind- in short, any knowledge whose acquisition involves something other than the soul itself. By contrast, immediate knowledge is that which the soul obtains without the intervention of the sense organs. It is clear, then, that the *Jaina* classification of knowledge is based on the manner of acquiring knowledge rather than on the objects of knowledge. Knowledge by direct perception, internal or external, which is regarded by many schools as immediate knowledge, Jainism regards as mediate, since the senses and mind (things other than the soul itself), play a role in it. Sometimes Jainism speaks of such direct perceptual knowledge as relatively immediate, as distinct from immediate knowledge, which the soul has in virtue of that consciousness which it attains by freeing itself from all the *karmic* obstacles. Such consciousness is, like the sun, self-luminous and illuminates all objects, internal and external, without the mediation of the senses and the mind. We may call the immediate knowledge “suprasensual, non-conceptual, non-perceptual, intuitive knowledge (*kevela-jnana*).” From the foregoing, it should be clear that knowledge is not something external to be grasped and possessed by the soul, but it is a state of the soul itself. We might mention in passing that Jainism, like many other Indian schools, accepts in respect of mediate knowledge the three criteria (standards, *pramanas*), namely, perception, inference and testimony.<sup>17</sup>

### F. Samkhya Epistemology

The *Samkhya*, like almost all other Indian schools, recognizes the three independent sources and criteria (*pramanas*) of valid knowledge: perception, inference, and testimony.<sup>18</sup>

### G. Vaisesika Epistemology

---

<sup>17</sup> Puligandla, *Fundamentals of Indian Philosophy*, 30–31.

<sup>18</sup> Puligandla, 132.

The *Vaisesika* epistemology is thin and meager, for the prime concerns of the *Vaisesika* are ontological. Nevertheless, since ontology can never be wholly divorced from epistemology- that is, the question of what there is cannot be divorced from how we come to know what there is- the *Vaisesika* does have some, albeit unsystematized, epistemological doctrines. The *Vaisesika* accepts two *pramanas* (criteria of valid knowledge), namely, perception and inference, and maintains that the other two, comparison and testimony, can be reduced to perception and inference. For this reason, the *Vaisesika*, unlike the *Nyaya*, does not regard comparison and testimony as independent *pramanas*.<sup>19</sup>

*Nyaya Epistemology:* According to *Nyaya*, there are four sources of valid knowledge: (1) perception, (2) inference, (3) comparison, and (4) testimony. Invalid knowledge is produced by memory, doubt, and hypothetical reasoning.<sup>20</sup>

*Advaiti Vedanta Epistemology:* *Advaiti Vedanta* recognizes the six *pramanas* (sources and criteria of valid knowledge) as formulated by the *Mimamsa* school of Kumarila Bhatta. They are follows: (1) perception (*pratyaksa*), (2) inference (*anumana*), (3) testimony (*abda*), (4) comparison (*upamana*), (5) postulation (*arthapatti*), and (6) non-cognition (*anupalabhi*). The *Advaita Vedanta* treatment of perception, inference, and testimony is essentially the same as that of the *Nyaya* School. But as regards the other three *pramanas* its views are somewhat different from those held by the *Nyaya* thinkers.<sup>21</sup>

## H. Prophetic Knowledge

The prophetic way is a much easier and simpler path. One need not take any action to receive the divinely given universals; the only requirement seems to be the possession of a strong soul capable of receiving them. While the philosophical way moves from the imagination upward to the theoretical intellect, the prophetic way takes the reverse path, from the theoretical intellect to the imagination. For this

---

<sup>19</sup> Puligandla, 174–75.

<sup>20</sup> Puligandla, 185.

<sup>21</sup> Puligandla, 228.

reason, knowledge of philosophy is knowledge of the natures of things themselves, while knowledge of prophecy is knowledge of the natures of things as wrapped up in symbols and the shadows of the imagination.<sup>22</sup>

## I. Muslim Philosophers

Muslim philosophers agree that knowledge is the theoretical intellect that passes through stages. It moves from potentiality to actuality and from actuality to reflection on actuality, thus giving the theoretical intellect the respective names of potential intellect, actual intellect and acquired intellect. Some Muslim philosophers explain that the last is called ‘acquired’ because its knowledge comes to it from the outside, and so it can be said to acquire it. The acquired intellect is the highest human achievement, a holy state that conjoins the human and the divine realms by conjoining the theoretical and agent intellects. Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja and Ibn Rushd believe that the theoretical intellect is potential by nature, and therefore disintegrates unless it grasps the eternal object, the essential universals, for the known and the knower are one. Ibn Sina rejects the view that the theoretical intellect is potential by nature. He argues instead that it is eternal by nature because unless it is, it cannot grasp the eternal objects. For him, happiness is achieved by this intellect’s grasping of the eternal objects, for such grasping perfects the soul. Muslim philosophers who believe that eternity is attained only through knowledge also agree with Ibn Sina that knowledge is perfection and perfection is happiness.<sup>23</sup>

Muslim philosophers agree that knowledge is possible. Knowledge is the intellect’s grasp of the immaterial forms, the pure essences or universals that constitute the natures of things and human happiness is achieved only through the

---

<sup>22</sup> R. Walzer, “Al-Fārābī’s Theory of Prophecy and Divination,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77, no. 1 (November 1957): 142–48, <https://doi.org/10.2307/628647>; Hanan A. Al-Sanasleh and Bassam H. Hammo, “Building Domain Ontology: Experiences in Developing the Prophetic Ontology Form Quran and Hadith,” in *2017 International Conference on New Trends in Computing Sciences (ICTCS)*, 2017, 223–28, <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICTCS.2017.35>.

<sup>23</sup> T. J. DeBoer, *The History of Philosophy in Islam*, trans. Edward R. Jones (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1983), 136.

intellect's grasp of such universals. They stress that for knowledge of the immaterial forms the human intellect generally relies on the senses. Some philosophers, such as, Ibn Rushd and occasionally Ibn Sina, assert that it is the material forms themselves, which the senses provide, that are grasped by the intellect after being stripped of their materiality with the help of the divine world. However, the general view as expressed by Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina seems to be that the material forms only prepare the way for the reception of the immaterial forms, which are then provided by the divine world. They also state that on rare occasions the divine world simply bestows the immaterial forms on the human intellect without any help from the senses. This occurrence is known as prophecy.<sup>24</sup> While all Muslim philosophers agree that grasping eternal entities ensures happiness, they differ as to whether such grasping is also necessary for eternal existence.

### **J. Muslim Philosophers on Nature of Knowledge**

Muslim philosophers are primarily concerned with human happiness and its attainment. Regardless of what they consider this happiness to be, all agree that the only way to attain it is through knowledge. The theory of knowledge, epistemology, has therefore been their main preoccupation and appears chiefly in their logical and psychological writings. Epistemology concerns itself primarily with the possibility, nature and sources of knowledge. Taking the possibility of knowledge for granted, Muslim philosophers focused their epistemological efforts on the study of the nature and source of knowledge. Muslim philosophers consider knowledge to be the grasping of the immaterial forms, natures, essences or realities of things. They are agreed that the forms of things are either material (that is existing in matter) or immaterial (existing in themselves). While the latter can be known as such, the former cannot be known unless first detached from their materiality. Once in the mind, the pure forms act as the pillars of knowledge. The mind constructs objects from these forms, and with these objects it makes judgments. Thus, Muslim philosophers, divided knowledge in the human mind into conception (*tasammur*), apprehension of

---

<sup>24</sup> DeBoer, 114.

an object with no judgment, and assent (*tasdiq*), apprehension of an object with a judgment, the latter being, according to them, a mental relation of correspondence between the concept and the object for which it stands. Conceptions are the main pillars of assent; without conception, one cannot have a judgment. In itself, conception is not subject of truth and falsity, but assent is.<sup>25</sup>

In Islamic philosophy, conceptions are in the main divided into the known and the unknown. The former is grasped by the mind actually, the latter potentially. Known conceptions are either self-evident (that is, objects known to normal human minds with immediacy such as 'being', 'thing' and 'necessary') or acquired (that is, objects known through mediation, such as 'triangle'). With the exception of the self-evident conceptions, conceptions are known and unknown relative to individual minds. Similarly, Muslim philosophers divided assent into the known and unknown, and the known assent into the self-evident and the acquired. The self-evident assent is exemplified by 'the whole is greater than the part', and the acquired by 'the world is composite'.<sup>26</sup>

### K. Sources of Knowledge in Islam

In Islamic philosophy there are two theories about the way the number of unknown objects is reduced. One theory stresses that this reduction is brought about by moving from known objects to unknown ones, the other that it is merely the result of direct illumination given by the divine world. The former is the upward or philosophical way, the second the downward or prophetic one. According to the former theory, movement from the known objects of conception to the unknown ones can be affected chiefly through the explanatory phrase (*al-qawl ash-sharib*). The proof (*al-burhan*) is the method for moving from the known objects of assent to the unknown ones. The explanatory phrase and proof can be either valid or invalid: the former leads to certitude, the latter to falsehood. The validity and invalidity of the

---

<sup>25</sup> DeBoer, 111.

<sup>26</sup> Max Horten and V. June Hager, "The System of Islamic Philosophy in General," *Islamic Studies* 12, no. 1 (1973): 1–36.

explanatory phrase and proof can be determined by logic, which is a set of rules for such determination. Ibn Sina points out that logic is necessary key to knowledge and cannot be replaced except by God's guidance.<sup>27</sup>

By distinguishing the valid from the invalid explanatory phrase and proof, logic serves a higher purpose, namely that of disclosing the natures or essence of things. It does this because conceptions reflect the realities or natures of things and are the cornerstones of the explanatory phrase and proof. Because logic deals only with expressions that correspond to conceptions, when it distinguishes the valid from the invalid it distinguishes at the same time the realities or nature of things from their opposites. Thus, logic is described as the key to the knowledge of the natures of things. This knowledge is described as the key to happiness, hence the special status of logic in Islamic philosophy.

*Empirical Knowledge:* Empirical knowledge is that type of knowledge which is confirmed by the evidence of senses or which is gained by senses.<sup>28</sup> The view that knowledge comes from the senses is known as empiricism. By seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling, and tasting we form our picture of the world around us. Knowledge, therefore, is imposed of ideas formed in accordance with observed empirical or sensed facts.

*Rational Knowledge:* Reason is a source of knowledge from which we derive universally valid judgments that are consistent with one another.<sup>29</sup> The principles of formal logic and pure mathematics are paradigms of rational knowledge. Those who stress reason as the important factor in knowledge are known as rationalists.

---

<sup>27</sup> DeBoer, *The History of Philosophy in Islam*, 132.

<sup>28</sup> C. I. Lewis, "The Given Element in Empirical Knowledge," *The Philosophical Review* 61, no. 2 (1952): 168–75, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2182907>; Laurence Bonjour, "The Coherence Theory of Empirical Knowledge," *Philosophical Studies* 30, no. 5 (November 1, 1976): 281–312, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00357928>; Laurence Bonjour, "Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1978): 1–13.

<sup>29</sup> Igor Douven, "Assertion, Knowledge, and Rational Credibility," *The Philosophical Review* 115, no. 4 (November 1, 2006): 449–85; Mark Jago, "The Problem of Rational Knowledge," *Erkenntnis* 79, no. 6 (June 1, 2014): 1151–68, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10670-013-9545-1>.

According to rational approach, the method of pure reason is most accurate way of giving knowledge. All Muslim philosophers believe that above the senses there is the rational soul. This has two parts: the practical and theoretical intellects. The theoretical intellect is responsible for knowledge; the practical intellect concerns itself only with the proper management of the body through apprehension of particular things so that it can do the good and avoid the bad. All the major Muslim philosophers, beginning with al-Kindi, wrote treatises on the nature and function of the theoretical intellect, which may be referred to as the house of knowledge.

*Intuitive Knowledge:* Intuitive knowledge is the output of intuition. Intuition is perhaps the most personal way of knowledge. Intuitive knowledge is knowledge that a person finds himself in a moment of intuition.<sup>30</sup> Intuition is by no means the monopoly of mystics, saints and gurus only. It is believed that scientists, artists, philosophers, and religious leaders, who have experienced moments of deep contemplation all testify to the fact that some of their most creative accomplishments have occurred following sudden insights or moments of inspiration. Mystical writings, paintings, autobiographies, mystical poetry and personal essays are the reflections of intuitive knowledge.

*Revealed Knowledge:* Simply put, revealed knowledge may be described as knowledge that God discloses to man. In his omniscience God inspires certain men to record and write his revelation in permanent form, whereby it may become accessible to all mankind.<sup>31</sup> In layman's language, we may say that knowledge which is revealed by almighty God on any human being is known as revealed knowledge

---

<sup>30</sup> Elijah Chudnoff, "Intuitive Knowledge," *Philosophical Studies* 162, no. 2 (January 1, 2013): 359–78, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-011-9770-x>; Janine Swaak and Ton de Jong, "Measuring Intuitive Knowledge in Science: The Development of the What-If Test," *Studies in Educational Evaluation* 22, no. 4 (1996): 341–62.

<sup>31</sup> Eric Sikander, "Interpretation, Revealed Knowledge and the Human Sciences," *Islamic Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1991): 77–97; Wan Mohamad Nasir Wan Othman, "Integration of Revealed Knowledge (Naqli) And Rational Science (Aqli) in The Design of A Dental Curriculum," *Ulum Islamiyyah Journal* 11 (2013): 65–77, <https://doi.org/10.12816/0008074>.

e.g., the Taurah, the Zabur, the Injeel and the Qur'an was revealed by God on his different messengers.

Empirical knowledge, Intuitive knowledge and Rational knowledge are all fallible human tool for discovering truth or grasping reality. Although reason aims at the truth, it may fall short. Only the Revealed knowledge is infallible, hence always truth and reality is received through it.

## **L. Conclusion**

While it is an open question whether an explicit and systematically worked out Islamic epistemology exists, it is undeniable that various epistemological issues have been discussed in Muslim philosophy with an orientation different from that of Western and Indian epistemology. Today attempts are being made to understand the basic epistemological issues in terms of that orientation. This is a valuable effort that deserves our interest and encouragement. However, it can be fruitful only if the practice of rigorous analysis is kept up, with close attention to the precise definition of the various concepts involved.

In the Islamic theory of knowledge, the term used for knowledge in Arabic is "ilm". 'Knowledge' falls short of expressing all the aspects of 'ilm. Knowledge in the western world means information about something, divine or corporeal, while 'ilm is an all-embracing term covering theory, action and education. There is no branch of Muslim intellectual life, of Muslim religious and political life, and of the daily life of the average Muslim that remains untouched by the all-pervasive attitude toward "knowledge" as something of supreme value for Muslim being. It may be said that Islam is the path of "knowledge." No other religion or ideology has so much emphasized the importance of 'ilm. In Qur'an the word 'ilm has occurred in 140 places, while al-'ilm in 27. In all, the total number of verses in which 'ilm or its derivatives and associated words are used is 704. The aids of knowledge such as book, pen, ink etc. amount to almost the same number. Qalam occurs in two places, al-kitab in 230 verses, among which al-kitab for al-Qur'an occurs in 81 verses. Other words associated with writing occur in 319 verses. It is important to note that pen



and book are essential to the acquisition of knowledge. The Islamic revelation started with the word “iqra’ (‘read!’ or ‘recite!’). According to the Qur’an, the first teaching class for Adam started soon after his creation and Adam was taught ‘all the Names’. Allah is the first teacher and the absolute guide of humanity, according to Islamic teachings. The Qur’an is the holy scripture of Islam, believed by Muslims to be the direct and unaltered word of God, revealed on Muhammad (SAAS) through angel Gabriel, hence the ultimate source of and the only valid source of knowledge. The Sunnah consists of the religious actions and quotation of the Islamic prophet Muhammad (SAAS) and narrated through his Companions to the latter generations.

Indian philosophers also give much importance to the Sabd which is available in the form of Vedas. That is why almost all the Indian philosophical schools have their foundations on this very important source of knowledge. However, while the spirit of philosophy is universal, eternal and transcendental, its manifestations have always been cultural, historical and situational. All philosophical evolution is carried out through a specific cultural paradigm and historical frame of reference. Nevertheless, a more mature and more sophisticated understanding and appreciation of philosophical concerns can be obtained if we can undertake a cross-cultural or comparative analysis of Western, Chinese, Indian, Muslim, and other philosophical traditions and bring out the motivations behind the genesis and rise of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Vedanta religion, Sufism, Zoroastrianism etc.

## References

- Al-Sanasleh, Hanan A., and Bassam H. Hammo. “Building Domain Ontology: Experiences in Developing the Prophetic Ontology Form Quran and Hadith.” In *2017 International Conference on New Trends in Computing Sciences (ICTCS)*, 223–28, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICTCS.2017.35>.
- Bakker, Hans, and Harunaga Isaacson. “The Ramtek Inscriptions II: The Vākāṭaka Inscription in the Kevala-Narasimha Temple.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 56, no. 1 (1993): 46–74.
- Bonjour, Laurence. “Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1978): 1–13.
- . “The Coherence Theory of Empirical Knowledge.” *Philosophical Studies* 30, no. 5 (November 1, 1976): 281–312. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00357928>.

- Brooks, Lisa Allette. "Epistemology and Embodiment: Diagnosis and the Senses in Classical Ayurvedic Medicine." *Asian Review of World Histories* 6, no. 1 (2018): 98–135. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22879811-12340027>.
- Chudnoff, Elijah. "Intuitive Knowledge." *Philosophical Studies* 162, no. 2 (January 1, 2013): 359–78. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-011-9770-x>.
- DeBoer, T. J. *The History of Philosophy in Islam*. Translated by Edward R. Jones. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1983.
- Douven, Igor. "Assertion, Knowledge, and Rational Credibility." *The Philosophical Review* 115, no. 4 (November 1, 2006): 449–85.
- Hawking, Stephen, and Leonard Mlodinow. *The Grand Design*. New York: Bantam Books, 2010.
- Horten, Max, and V. June Hager. "The System of Islamic Philosophy in General." *Islamic Studies* 12, no. 1 (1973): 1–36.
- Hota, K.N. "'Dharma' in the Vaiśeṣika System." *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute* 68/69 (2008): 383–90.
- Jago, Mark. "The Problem of Rational Knowledge." *Erkenntnis* 79, no. 6 (June 1, 2014): 1151–68. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10670-013-9545-1>.
- Jha, V. N. "Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika Theory of Meaning." *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 77, no. 1/4 (1996): 281–84.
- Lewis, C. I. "The Given Element in Empirical Knowledge." *The Philosophical Review* 61, no. 2 (1952): 168–75. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2182907>.
- Lutsyshyna, Olena. "Classical Sāṃkhya on the Authorship of the Vedas." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 40, no. 4 (2012): 453–67.
- Mills, Ethan. "Jayarāṣi's Delightful Destruction of Epistemology." *Philosophy East and West* 65, no. 2 (2015): 498–541.
- Mohanty, J.M. "Oriya Literary Heritage: A Study of Religious Perception." *Indian Literature* 39, no. 2 (172) (1996): 136–49.
- Parrott, Rodney J. "The Worth of the World in Classical Sāṃkhya." *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 71, no. 1/4 (1990): 83–108.
- Puligandla, Ramakrishna. *Fundamentals of Indian Philosophy*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985.
- Sahu, Bhairabi Prasad. "Ancient Orissa: The Dynamics of Internal Transformation of the Tribal Society." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 45 (1984): 148–60.
- Sharma, Arvind. "'Upamana' as a Means of Valid Knowledge in Hindu Epistemology and 'Qiyas' as a Source of Islamic Law." *Journal of the Indian Law Institute* 23, no. 2 (1981): 255–57.
- Sharma, Chandradhar. *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*. Reprint. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2009.
- Sikander, Eric. "Interpretation, Revealed Knowledge and the Human Sciences." *Islamic Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1991): 77–97.
- Stroud, Barry. "Epistemology, the History of Epistemology, Historical Epistemology." *Erkenntnis* (1975-) 75, no. 3 (2011): 495–503.

- Swaak, Janine, and Ton de Jong. "Measuring Intuitive Knowledge in Science: The Development of the What-If Test." *Studies in Educational Evaluation* 22, no. 4 (1996): 341–62.
- Walzer, R. "Al-Fārābī's Theory of Prophecy and Divination." *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77, no. 1 (November 1957): 142–48. <https://doi.org/10.2307/628647>.
- Wan Othman, Wan Mohamad Nasir. "Integration of Revealed Knowledge (Naqli) And Rational Science (Aqli) in The Design of A Dental Curriculum." *Ulum Islamiyyah Journal* 11 (2013): 65–77. <https://doi.org/10.12816/0008074>.
- Yao, Zhihua. "Dignāga and Four Types of Perception." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32, no. 1 (2004): 57–79.