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Foundational Beliefs of Muslim Scholars with an Emphasis on Avicenna's Ideas

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Abstract

Following Avicenna's assertion about the "justification" of beliefs, Muslim scholars divide human beliefs into two categories: primary self-evident truths and non-self-evident primary truths. In this approach, primary premises are intrinsically affirmed and understood by perceiving the components of the preposition and the connection of the components with each other. Moreover, non-primary premises are confirmed through assertion and reasoning. This study assessed the approach adopted by Muslim scholars, especially Avicenna, and addressed its possible ambiguities. The findings showed that this approach can be used as an effective solution for justifying beliefs based on foundationalism theory.

Keywords: *Foundational Beliefs; Inferential Beliefs; The Principle of Non-Contradiction (PNC); Concept, Affirmation*

Introduction

Foundational beliefs or self-evident truths are the most important epistemological issues that philosophers have addressed in their works and books. Aristotle considers self-evident principles useful for establishing all subjects and they are assessed through knowledge that examines "the existence because it exists" (Aristotle, 2000: 96). Following Aristotle, Islamic thinkers have accepted some concepts and affirmations as "self-evident truths".

Muslim philosophers have divided knowledge into immediate knowledge and attained knowledge. Attained knowledge, including concepts and affirmations, is based on self-evident concepts and confirmations without the need for definitions and assertions. These self-evident concepts and affirmations are the starting point and foundation of the primary true human knowledge. Accordingly, Avicenna believes some facts underlie concepts that are conceived instinctively, and they are not referred to through a definition of the unknown but rather a description of their attributes (Avicenna, 1984:29).

Self-evident conceptual and assertive truths in Avicenna's epistemological system are important as it is not possible to know some issues without such truths. Moreover, if every concept needs a preceding concept, the multiplicity of concepts leads to a vicious circle (Avicenna, 1984: 29; Avicenna, 1994: 130-129). This is to argue that if self-evident truths are not rooted in concepts and affirmations, objects cannot be logically characterized through perfect and imperfect definitions and descriptions - and the affirmative knowledge of real sciences will not be achieved through arguments. Especially, the denial or doubt about the principle of non-contradiction as the main source of other propositions and the key role of this principle in the human epistemological system that underlies other sciences - especially self-evident truths and theories - causes a fall in skepticism and the trap of fallacies and ignorance.

Hence, according to Avicenna, systematic sciences and knowledge are connected with some principles that are not asserted by that science itself. Moreover, if needed, they should be established and asserted based on a more general science. Thus, sciences have a kind of longitudinal epistemological relationship with each other, and these longitudinal hierarchies can be used as a basis for assessing the authenticity of other sciences. Accordingly, basic science is prime philosophy (Avicenna, 1983: 165) Thus, according to Avicenna, scientific principles are either evident and self-evident, or they require assertion by relying on a more general science. Scientific principles can be conceptual and assertive or both, and these principles sometimes govern knowledge branches and sometimes account for the common principles of a specific type of knowledge. In his opinion, these principles are not specific to a scientific field, but they can account for any type of knowledge, whether systematic knowledge, such as mathematics and geometry, or other categories of knowledge.

Upon the analysis of many traditional foundational approaches, one might think that all the traditional views have been developed into one mold. However, a detailed analysis of these perspectives including Avicenna's ideas indicates that despite the commonalities with other traditional foundational views, they have idiosyncrasies that can distinguish them from other perspectives, keeping them secure from the objections and criticisms directed against other foundational approaches.

This study aims to analyze Avicenna's perspectives as the most important theorist of the Aristotelian school recognized by Muslims and address any possible ambiguities as detailed below:

1. How we can base a wide range of epistemological geometries of classical philosophy on a limited number of a priori self-evident propositions?
2. Given the disputes among Muslim scholars about the number of self-evident truths, how can self-evident truths be distinguished from non-self-evident truths?
3. How can we justify primary self-evident premises? What are the main criteria for distinguishing primary self-evident propositions from non-self-evident primary propositions?

Conceptual explanation of self-evident truths

In theological and philosophical books, knowledge is divided into two categories: immediate knowledge and attained knowledge. Immediate knowledge is the presence of the object itself recognized by the scholar and perceiver. However, attained knowledge means that the object itself cannot be directly understood by the scholar and perceiver, but a form of it can be assumed to exist by the scientist and perceiver. Attained knowledge is either self-evident or theoretical. Because all acquired sciences cannot be self-evident. Otherwise, we must know all matters and do not miss anything. On the other hand, all acquired sciences cannot be theoretical. Otherwise, they can lead to a vicious circle and as a result, we cannot know anything.

Azdaluddin Eiji defines a self-evident truth as something that cannot be acquired by a human being (Eiji, 1971: 92). Thus, a self-evident truth cannot be proved through argumentations because any argument shall be proposed by referring to other self-evident truths. According to Avicenna and especially other Muslim scholars, self-evident truths underly a science that is not established through thoughts or argumentations (Avicenna, 2004: 5, Razi, n.d.: 10, Mulla Sadra, 1981: 205, Suhrawardi, 1994: 51). Moreover, Avicenna considers self-evident truths as a rule that conforms to the real world, indicating that self-evident truths have both affirmative and assertive conformity with the real world.

Mulla Sadra believes that self-evident knowledge is attained at the beginning of human creation and the ability to perceive self-evident truths is a common feature and undeniable requirement in all humans. Moreover, he believes that understanding primary premises does not need any mediation and other factors such as feeling, experience, testimony, frequent evidence, etc. In addition, primary premises are perceived through propositional terms (the subject and attribute in the apophantic propositions and antecedent premises in hypothetical propositions) and the connection between the terms (Mulla Sadra, 1998: 518/3)

Theoretically, thinking means the systematic arrangement of self-evident concepts and reasoning in propositions and affirmative matters. Thus, it can be argued that acquired knowledge cannot be attained through thinking which is the process of arranging the known premises to perceive the unknown. In addition, self-evident conceptual truths are not established via essential description, and assertive self-evident truths are established without the need to refer to arguments.

Although scholars and logicians have proposed different definitions for self-evident truths, all those definitions are correct and not mutually exclusive. Since the concept of self-evident truths is one of the secondary logical concepts that does not require definitions or essential descriptions, all definitions are pseudo-definitions or definitions of the requirements.

Classification of self-evident truths

Muslim logicians have divided self-evident premises and assertive knowledge into six categories (Mozafar, 1993: 125/2-136):

1. Primary premises (self-evident truths): Propositions that are self-evident and are intellectually recognized. Thus, intellect does not need immediate knowledge to accept them (e.g. the whole is greater than its parts).
2. Perceptible (observable premises): Propositions that are confirmed through intrinsic and extrinsic senses (e.g., snow is white and I am happy).
3. Experiences: The propositions that are confirmed by the intellect through senses and as a result of repeated sensory observations (e.g., any fire is hot).
4. Successive premises: Propositions that create definite knowledge due to the testimony and frequent narration of many people, without the possibility of any collusion or secret alliance between them (e.g., Golestan is a book written by Sa'adi).
5. Intuitive premises: Propositions that can be confirmed by humans through guesswork (e.g. a scientist in the past had guessed that the moon gets its light from the sun by observing the evidence).
6. Instinctive premises: Propositions that carry their proofs with themselves. In other words, the analogy by which propositions are confirmed is accompanied by the propositions themselves (e.g. $2 = 4 \div 2$).

Muslim scholars and logicians have some controversies over the number and types of self-evident truths. Avicenna divides self-evident premises into six categories, i.e. observations, intuitive premises, primary premises, successive premises, experiences, and instinctive premises (Avicenna, 1991: 219/1). Qutb al-Din al-Shirazi divides observations into perceptible and sensory truths, thus proposing seven categories of self-evident truths (Shirazi, 1990: 446-445). Suhrawardi divides self-evident premises into primary premises (intuitive premises), observations (intuitive and sensory premises), and intuitive premises (experiential and successive premises) (Suhrawardi, 1994: 118). Azdaluddin Eiji has divided self-evident premises into eight categories: primary premises, instinctive premises, sensory observations, subconscious knowledge, experiences, intuitive premises, successive premises, and estimative premises (Eiji, 1991: 36-42/2).

It seems that the disagreement between scholars and logicians on the number of self-evident truths is a superficial issue because some of them have placed some self-evident truths under other categories and some of them have considered logical and rational premises to be the same thing. It should be noted that logical premises can be proved through reasoning. However, although rational premises cannot be established through reasoning due to their internal structure, they are confirmed by scholars and philosophers.

Avicenna divides self-evident truths into primary and secondary types. For him, primary self-evident truths are the same as “primary premises”, while secondary self-evident truths refer to “intrinsic and extrinsic perceptions”, experiences, intuitive premises, and successive premises”. He divides self-evident truths into extrinsic and intrinsic self-evident truths and considers intrinsic requirements to be rational and non-rational. Moreover, he divides intellectual necessity into pure and non-pure intellect, and non-pure intellect into instinctive and non-instinctive intellects (Avicenna, 1994: 20). It seems that extrinsic necessity is a necessity that can be established through both intellectual reasoning and external evidence such as sensations, experiences, and successive premises.

In his books “Shifa” and “Esharat”, Avicenna did not classify intuitive premises as part of self-evident truths but categorized them under experiential premises (Avicenna, 1983:35; 1971: 218/1). However, this categorization does not seem very reliable because intuitive premises to be valid, unlike experiences, do not require the frequency of observations. Thus, despite the controversy among Muslim scholars over the number of demonstrative syllogisms, how can self-evident propositions be distinguished from non-self-evident propositions? Some Muslim scholars consider perceptible, experiential, intuitive, instinctive, and successive premises as self-evident truths, and others disagree on whether some or all of these categories are among the constituents of demonstrative syllogism or not (Avicenna, 1991: 213/1, Mulla Sadra, 1981: 583-584, Tabatabai, 2008: 68-69, Tusi, 1982: 346). In response, it should be argued that the controversy among Muslim scholars over the number of self-evident truths is because they have learned the categories through induction, not through rational arguments. Moreover, intellectual issues have nothing to do with the acceptance or rejection by others, and everyone should decide on the correctness or incorrectness of those propositions upon contemplation. In addition, Muslim scholars agree on the authenticity of primary premises, and any disagreement can be resolved with further clarification and exemplification.

Some people may argue that primary self-evident truths (primary premises) due to their limited number, cannot serve as a basis for establishing non-self-evident and inferential propositions. In response, it should be argued that Euclidean geometry with its huge domain has been developed based on five self-evident propositions (thematic principles) and a small number of definitions. Thus, it seems logically reasonable if certain issues of classical philosophy are established based on only a few self-evident propositions (e.g., the principle of contradiction and causality), and a few definitions. In particular, according to foundationalism, non-self-evident propositions do not need to be directly established by referring to foundational and self-evident propositions. Rather, non-foundational propositions should lead to foundational and self-evident propositions, although via several intermediate propositions. It may be argued that Euclidean geometry has been violated by other geometrical systems and is ineffective today. In response, it should be argued that firstly, metaphors are not arguments. Secondly, Euclidean geometry has not been violated with its foundational concepts and within its framework, or by other competing geometrical systems, and it is still a reliable scientific branch (Fisher, 2010: 253).

Conceptual explanation of primary premises

Muslim scholars and logicians have not provided a similar definition of “primary premises”, but all the definitions have something in common. Avicenna has defined primary premises as propositions that are established through intellectual reasoning automatically and without external mediation. These propositions are established as soon as the intellect knows their attributes (subject and attribute in apophantic propositions and antecedent in hypothetical propositions). Thus, in such cases, the confirmation of these propositions is not dependent on anything but perceptions and their compositions. Some of the primary premises are evident to everyone, and some are slightly unclear. Thus, their minorized and majorized terms can be understood upon contemplation. Thus, the obscurity of minorized and majorized terms of such propositions leads to their concealment. However, understanding such primary premises is not difficult for bright and intelligent minds (Avicenna, 1991: 214/1). Accordingly, Avicenna believes that all propositions are not clear-cut and well-defined but may have varying degrees of clarity.

In his book *Al-Asfar al-Arabah*, Mulla Sadra suggests that self-evident truths are primary premises that do not require to be established by intermediate premises, feelings, experiences, observation, frequency of evidence, and the like (Mulla Sadra, 1981: 449). This definition resembles the definition proposed by Avicenna, stating that primary premises are confirmed by perceiving their terms (subject and attribute in apophantic propositions and antecedent in hypothetical propositions). Mulla Sadra also argues that it is impossible to establish conceptual and assertive primary premises through definition and proof because confirming the principle of non-contradiction (PNC) through other self-evident propositions and proof is a prerequisite to the principle of non-contradiction (PNC). Moreover, the connection of proof and other self-evident propositions with the principle of non-contradiction (PNC) is like the relationship between the possible beings to the self-existent being, whose realization requires a self-existent being. Thus, it can be argued that the denial of the most fundamental premise, i.e. the principle of non-contradiction (PNC), can lead to its establishment because it cannot be either accepted or rejected (Mulla Sadra, 1998: 443/3).

According to Avicenna, common sense not plagued by doubts and fallacies immediately confirms primary premises upon perceiving their attributes and components (Avicenna, 1991: 214/1, Bahmanyar, 1996: 95). For example, if someone imagines the two opposites instead of two contradictories, he doubts the impossibility of the contradictories. Alternatively, if someone does not know the correct meaning of the existence of two contradictions, he doubts that their existence is impossible because time, place, and a single subject are the requirements for the denial of the existence of two contradictions.

Significance of primary premises

Avicenna considers self-evident truths as the basic principles underlying all sciences. He believes that the foundations and antecedents of sciences are sometimes the foundations of one science, sometimes the foundations of several sciences, and sometimes the foundations of all sciences. The general and absolute foundations of science are those foundations on which all sciences are based and no science can be established without relying on them. These general principles do not have an intermediate premise, that is, their confirmation - whether affirmative or negative - establishes the authenticity of the premise without an intermediate principle. Thus, the premise is not dependent on an antecedent. Such a premise is not arguable. The argument is provided when the premise is the outcome of the argument and we want to know the relationship between the subject and the attribute through an intermediate premise. However, if there is no intermediate attribute between the two components of the premise, the assignment of the attribute to the subject is without an intermediate argument. Thus, such a premise does not yield itself to arguments (Avicenna, 1983: 184).

Some may argue that human errors in recognizing things cannot be ignored, as such errors are even observed in calculation and argumentation. In response, it should be argued that, first, self-evident truths (primary premises) such as the principle of contradiction and the principle of identity cannot be refuted in any way. Secondly, there are two requirements for argumentation: 1. Argumentation must be in the form of analogy or it must have a form that leads to the first form. 2. Argumentation has affirmative and self-evident antecedents. Thus, argumentation conforms to reality, and it is permanent and indestructible. Furthermore, it has self-evident antecedents. Thus, if an error is observed in an argument, the content and constituents of the antecedents and the form of the analogy of that argumentation should be checked to see if it is following scientific and logical laws or not. Thus, any possible errors should be first resolved. Because even experts may make mistakes in applying the rules of logic.

Some may suggest that self-evident and non-inferential propositions cannot be accepted because, in rational sciences, all propositions must follow definite proofs. First, this is to argue that if any premise shall be asserted by other propositions, then there would be an infinite regress and as a result, no premise can be established. Secondly, it would be perfectly reasonable if premises were established in different ways. Some premises are confirmed through assentation and argument and some are confirmed intuitively and some by reference to the interconnected elements of the premise. Third, the basis of Islamic epistemology and foundationalism is knowledge, not skepticism. Thus, some propositions are certainly true and their truth does not need assertion, and their assertion and reasoning - such as the principle of non-contradiction (PNC) - are impossible.

It should be noted that although the establishment of self-evident affirmations does not require an intermediate premise, they may be established or not established through other premises. On the other hand, self-evident affirmations are acquired, as they are the product of sensory and intellectual perceptions.

Another point is that whenever a premise has a cause, it can be confirmed through the identification of its cause. Thus, knowledge that is not acquired through the identification of its causes is not considered affirmative knowledge. In other words, acquired knowledge of a certain premise, when it has a cause, will be hypothetically assertive as the acquired knowledge will be established through that cause because if that knowledge is established in another way, it is ascertained through “possibility” not “essentiality”. That is, if the essentiality of permanently assigning the attribute to the subject or the necessity of permanently removing the attribute from the subject has a cause, and through that cause, “essentiality” is not established between the subject and the attribute, then the knowledge will not be acquired through essentiality. For example, if someone says: Every human being smiles and every smiling person can speak, it does not mean that every human being can speak because laughing is caused by the ability to speak. Thus, as long as the ability to speak and consequently the ability to laugh is not established, there would be no human who cannot laugh (Avicenna, 1994: 72). It should be noted that affirmation here means logical affirmation, in the sense that, parallel to assertive premise implying attributive predication to the subject, there would be another type of affirmation. Thus, no primary affirmation would exist at some point in time.

Arguments and primary propositions

According to Avicenna, if “everything is unknown”, this preposition itself must also be unknown, leading to a contradiction. Hence, the proposition that “everything is unknown” is not possible and as a result, we have no choice but to accept foundational propositions that may be either evident or non-evident.

Avicenna believes that all foundational propositions have necessary truth and essentiality, sometimes involving extrinsic necessity and sometimes intrinsic necessity. The extrinsic necessity of foundational propositions is established through senses, experience, or frequent evidence. Moreover, the necessity of perceptible and experiential propositions is established through senses and experience, as well as rational assumptions, but intrinsic essentiality is established through either reason or other propositions. The intrinsic essentiality established only by the intellect is called “primary essentiality”. Like the preposition “every whole is greater than its part”. Moreover, the premises used to establish intrinsic essentiality are called instinctive premises if they are affirmed instinctively for human beings: like “every four is even”. Moreover, if other premises are intrinsically established, then the preposition needs assertion and references to extrinsic evidence and is not considered a basic principle. Thus, there are five basic argumentation principles: perceived premises, experiences, successive premises, primary premises, and instinctive premises. These principles have all the characteristics of argumentative propositions, i.e. necessity, generality, consistency, primacy, and certainty. According to Avicenna, the principles of knowledge are not limited to primary propositions but also involve other premises.

Avicenna suggests that the most important and the primary self-evident confirmation of primary propositions is the principle of non-contradiction (PNC), and every argument should be validated with a reference to this principle. This general principle governs both subjective and external realities, as it corresponds to reality and is extracted from the essence of objects, and the essentiality of this principle shows the necessity of reality underlying this principle (Avicenna, 2007: 63)

Avicenna believes that general scientific principles may be both potential and factual. The general potential principles are assumed to be true and should be established if needed. For example, if an argument involves minor and major premises, it can be established and supported by the principle of non-contradiction (PNC), even if it is not specified. In the absence of the principle of non-contradiction (PNC), the major premise may be revoked. Thus, the outcome of the argument will not be final. Moreover, if the general principles are factual, sometimes the principle of non-contradiction (PNC) itself is applied, and sometimes its equivalent meaning is applied in special sciences. In other words, sometimes the principle of non-contradiction (PNC) itself is applied as one of the antecedents of analogy, and sometimes its equivalent is applied. For example, the preposition "every quantity is either distinct or common" is applied in geometry. Of course, this is the case if the terms "distinct" and "common" contradict each other (Avicenna, 1983: 156-157).

What is taken for granted is that sciences must follow fundamental principles, but such principles cannot be affirmative and error-free. Thus, the main question that arises is: What is wrong with the basic principles being hypothetical? It should be argued that if scientific proofs originate from a few hypothetical principles, then the sciences themselves and all scientific findings will be hypothetical and not definite and self-evident. Because affirmative findings can only be extracted from an affirmative source that leads us to certain outcomes and achievements. In addition, the denial of basic scientific principles requires skepticism. However, it should be noted that sometimes there are subjective scientific principles that must also be established based on self-evident sciences.

Another question is how one can understand the "truth" of a self-evident premise from its clarity, while the clarity of the premise is related to the narrator of the premise, and the truth of the premise is related to the implied meaning of the premise (what the premise implies). In other words, how is a proposition that is clear to the speaker consistent with the real world? This is to argue that a premise is described as truth because it follows reality, and after describing it as truth, we understand the truth of the premise. That is, affirmation is the same as understanding the truth of the proposition, and a clear proposition is the one with clear affirmation. In other words, the clarity of the proposition is indeed the relationship between the proposition and its narrator, but the clarity of the proposition is the clarity of acknowledgment of that proposition or a clear understanding of the truth of that proposition. Another question is how we know that the speaker's understanding is correct. According to the definition of primary premises, the truth of primary premises is documented by these propositions because if we correctly perceive the subject and attributes of the primary propositions and recognize the content of their compositions, we can judge their truth. In other words, we can understand whether the primary propositions are true or false by assessing their subject and attributes and examining their compositions. Moreover, since other philosophical propositions can be established by reference to primary propositions, the problem with "clarity of the premise" and "truth of the premise" is resolved.

It should be noted that the primary propositions intended by Muslim scholars are not synonymous with Kant's analytical propositions, but they are generally and peculiarly correlated. That is, the primary propositions are more general than Kant's analytical propositions. According to the definition of the primary propositions, perceiving the subject and attributes is adequate to confirm such propositions. However, analytical propositions can be confirmed by perceiving their subject, extracting their attributes, and establishing their unity with the subject.

The significance of subjective premises and primary affirmations

According to Avicenna, the primary propositions on which all kinds of knowledge are based are formed intellectually in humans. Primary propositions are simply confirmed by reference to the essence of those propositions and their affirmation does not need any intellectual activity such as analogy or induction. They may need reminders though. In other words, the self-evident nature of these types of propositions is due to the perceptibility of their subject and attributes, and for this reason, these types of propositions have conceptual foundations. The faculty of intellect proves the authenticity of such propositions by using simple meanings that it acquires through senses or fantasies (Avicenna, 1985: 64-65; Avicenna, 1984: 29-30).

In other words, some affirmed premises are recognized as primary principles, and other propositions are affirmed through them. Thus, if these primary premises are not self-evident and are not inherently understood, we will not be able to perceive the propositions affiliated with them. Moreover, some subjective premises are considered conceptual principles that are inherently perceptible. If every conceptualization needs a preceding idea, the cycle of perceptions will continue to infinity, leading to a vicious circle, and thus, we will never have a justified belief which will lead to skepticism.

Sometimes primary self-evident truths (primary premises) need to be prompted because humans cannot perceive them, and this imperceptibility can either be due to developmental defects caused by a specific event or disease or a specific age such as childhood and old age or can be due to anxiety induced by accepting some accepted or famous ideas. It can be also attributed to incomprehensible terminology or because of complicated and misleading meanings that should be replaced with simple language and meanings. Such imperceptibility can also be due to more general and abstract concepts. Thus, inferring details and presenting some examples can shed light on the meaning of such self-evident truths (Avicenna, 1983: 111). Nevertheless, just as the affirmative ascending hierarchy should lead to self-evident principles, the negative descending hierarchy also leads to basic and foundational sciences. In other words, just as positive major premises lead to primary positive major premises, negative major premises also lead to primary negative major premises.

The formation of primary premises

The question is how humans learned scientific principles. Did man know scientific principles since the beginning of creation? If yes, why they are not aware of them, especially since knowledge of scientific principles should be stronger and more emphatic than science itself? Avicenna does not specify how primary premises are formed. He sometimes states that humans do not have any subjective knowledge or affirmations. The first pieces of information are obtained by humans obtained through sensory perception. Senses only show us the forms of tangible objects, and these forms create affirmative information in the material intellect of humans, and this affirmative information should have positive forms. For example, the human rational faculty can understand that this tangible form is itself. Moreover, two noticeable forms are not the same as the previous form. Thus, the first primary premises are developed from these perceptible forms. Avicenna attributes this conscious action to memory and the recognition of objectivity and alterity (otherness) to the intellectual faculty. These primary premises are self-evident, as they do not need to be confirmed through immediate knowledge. They are also not acquired through other affirmations. However, they are acquired as the product of sensory and intellectual powers. Avicenna considers the role of sensory perceptions in the creation of primary premises as merely preparing the human soul to accept primary premises from a being called “active intellect” (Avicenna, 1994: 331). He also argues that the main difference between a talking animal and a non-talking animal is the intellectual faculties owned by the former. The intellectual faculty is originally a “material intellect” whose rational premises are obtained in two ways: First, through inspiration and divine grace and without teaching, and these rational perceptions are self-evident primary premises. Second, rational premises originate from human senses and develop into intrinsic and extrinsic knowledge/recognition and then are divided into abstract concepts. Finally, these premises are extended into propositions with their analogies and terms (the minorized, majorized, and intermediate terms). Although Avicenna followed Aristotle in addressing the role of sensory perception in the emergence of self-evident truths (primary premises), unlike him, he does not directly introduce the acquisition of tangible forms in the soul as the cause of the emergence of primary premises. Rather, he considers the attainment of tangible forms to be merely the cause of the preparation of the soul to accept the primary premises of the “active intellect” (Avicenna, 1985: 122, Avicenna, 1979: 201-203).

An analysis of Avicenna's ideas suggests that he does not accept innate knowledge, both conceptual and assertive. Moreover, he argued that primary premises are not the outcomes of sensory perceptions, indicating senses and induction are not involved in confirming the primary propositions. It does not mean that sensory perceptions have no role in establishing primary premises. In other words, senses and sensory perceptions are involved in the formation of the components of primary premises (subject and attributes), but they do not play a role in affirming or developing the components of primary premises. That is, sensory perceptions are the source of perceived premises, and such premises are the source of scientific affirmations.

One of the arguments that supports Avicenna's rejection of innate knowledge is that he divides material intellect into intellect in disposition, actual intellect, and acquired intellect. According to him, “material intellect” is the first intellectual order, which is only the ability to accept knowledge and has no actuality. When the primary premises are established for humans, they develop “intellect in disposition” followed by “actual intellect” when they acquire sciences through descriptions and analogies. This is the stage where the human acquires the power of thinking (Avicenna, 1979: 57-56, Avicenna, 1984: 97-98) Thus, given the intellectual orders and especially the features of material intellect, this is a wrong argument that humans have innate knowledge that antecedes experience.

Another issue that confirms the negation of innate knowledge by Avicenna is the concept of abstraction which is not separable from rational premises in Avicenna's philosophy. According to him, rational premises are established through the abstraction of perceptive premises, confirming the role of the senses in establishing perceptible premises. To address Aristotle's statement, “Anyone who does not have senses does not have any knowledge”, Avicenna declares how intellect uses senses in establishing perceptible premises and confirms the role of abstraction. Avicenna has divided beings into two categories; self-rational and self-perceptible premises. Self-rational premises are those abstract premises that are free from matter and form and cannot be perceived by senses and thus, there is no need for abstraction to rationalize them. However, self-perceptible premises are perceptible in their essence, and they need cognitive activity and abstraction to become rationalized (Avicenna, 2007: 221).

The criteria for establishing self-evident truths

After defining the concept of self-evident truths, an issue of interest is to specify the criteria for establishing primary self-evident concepts and affirmations and determine the characteristics and features of primary self-evident concepts and affirmations that make it possible to establish them without resorting to intellect. A contemplation of Avicenna's ideas suggests that simple or non-compound concepts that are not composite and cannot be broken into multiple meanings, will not need to be defined and are self-evident (Avicenna, 1983: 26).

Thus, according to Avicenna, the main criterion for definability is to have components and the ability to decompose. Accordingly, if something cannot be divided into subjective components and is simple, then it cannot be defined. This is to argue that concepts such as existence, unity and multiplicity, necessity, possibility, and causality which are simple or noncompound concepts without components, are self-evident and general and cannot be defined. However, their correct understanding may require reminders.

Mulla Sadra also uses the simplicity of self-evident concepts as the criterion for distinguishing self-evident concepts from non-self-evident concepts. Therefore, any concept that is simple and lacks inherent and analytical components will be self-evident and need no definition (Mulla Sadra, 1981: 165). The Islamic scholars' focus on axiomaticity shows that simple or noncompound concepts cannot be defined, explained, or described and self-evident concepts cannot be understood by analyzing them into constituent elements. However, it should be noted that defining self-evident concepts by describing their characteristics reasonably does not contradict their self-evident nature.

After establishing the criteria for distinguishing self-evident concepts, we should look for the criteria for recognizing primary self-evident affirmations. According to Avicenna's definition of self-evident truths. the primary self-evident premises are propositions that are established intellectually without referring to any external reasons. In other words, self-evident premises are propositions that the intellect has no choice but to acknowledge by referring to their components. This is to argue that the main criterion for recognizing primary self-evident affirmations from other affirmations is that primary self-evident premises are verifiable intellectually without the need to refer to other affirmations or arguments. Thus, such propositions are confirmed after their components and antecedents are recognized intellectually.

It should be noted that any proposition should be confirmed intellectually. Thus, primary self-evident truths are established by recognizing their constituent elements. Moreover, perceptible premises are confirmed through the evidence gained by the senses. Finally, theoretical premises are confirmed through arguments and other affirmations.

Given that establishing all sciences does not require primary self-evident truths and affirmations, the main question is: What are the criteria for establishing primary self-evident truths? Can simplicity as the requirement for establishing self-evident perceptible premises be also used to establish primary self-evident truths? It should be argued that affirmation is a subjective and sensual action required to establish the voracity of propositions and since propositions are composed of some elements and attributes, they are not deemed as simple or non-compound concepts. Thus, such propositions cannot be established by referring to the simplicity assumption. Avicenna believes that primary self-evident premises are intellectually and intrinsically essential and their existence is not conditional upon external causes. He further says that the premises whose confirmation is essential and self-evident only intellectually are primary premises. Thus, they are essentially and intrinsically affirmed. An example is: The whole is greater than the parts (Avicenna, 1994: 84). Thus, according to Muslim scholars and logicians, primary self-evident propositions can be established internally by recognizing the elements of the premise and their interrelationships. That is, establishing the attributes of a subject does not need external reasons and arguments.

Accordingly, the main requirement for establishing self-evident truths (whether perceptible premises or affirmations) does not need intellectual reasoning or arguments, and this requirement is not mutually exclusive. In other words, some self-evident premises can be established by reasoning and arguments, and some premises are not established through reasoning. Therefore, self-evident truths are divided into two primary and secondary premises. Reasoning for self-evident primary truths is impossible, and their denial requires their assertion. Primary assertive self-evident truths are premises whose establishment or denial is self-evident and need no argument. An example is the impossibility of the existence of two contradictions. Because if their establishment needs an argument, the argument also needs antecedents, and the validity of the antecedents is established through self-evident truths, leading to a vicious cycle. In addition, reasoning needs an intermediate argument while in self-evident truths, the connection between the attribute and the subject is inherently affirmed without mediation and does not need any argument (Farabi, 1987: 19/1).

However, it is preferable to present other tangible criteria for establishing and distinguishing primary self-evident truths from other premises rather than arguing that such primary self-evident truths can be established intellectually without the need for any reasoning or argument. However, providing such criteria is intellectually very challenging. On the other hand, the establishment of secondary assertive self-evident truths does not need any arguments, but they can be proved via arguments. As for instinctive premises such as the premise “The number four is even”, it can be argued that the number four is divided into two equal numbers. Then, any number that can be divided into two equal numbers is even, so the number four is even.

The primary perceptible self-evident truths are simple/non-compound and do not have a more general concept such as existence. However, secondary perceptible self-evident truths convey more general concepts such as “heat” where “existence” is more general than it (Malasadra, 1998: 3/403)

Conclusion

Overall, this study showed that the epistemological geometry of classical philosophy can be rationally assumed to be based on a limited number of primary self-evident truths. It was also revealed that if primary self-evident truths are rejected, then no scientific principle will be established or discovered, leading to skepticism. The findings also showed mistakes made by scholars in philosophical arguments can be attributed to their failure to correctly apply logical criteria, including the failure to apply the first form of analogy or use self-evident and affirmative antecedents. Thus, a profound understanding of the approaches adopted by Muslim scholars, especially Avicenna, shows that these approaches, along with other competing approaches, are effective and acceptable approaches to accounting for beliefs in foundational theory and coping with possible criticisms.

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