

Two Interpretations of the Synoptic Knowledge (*al-‘Ilm al-Ijmālī*) in Avicennian Philosophy and its Ability in Resolving the Complicated Formulae Objection Refuting the Mental Existence

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Abstract: Some objections to the mental existence that are proposed by the western philosophers are still unknown to Muslim philosophers. For example, Husserl's complicated mathematical formulae objection says that no man can imagine e.g. polygons with several million sides. So, there is no mental existence for the complicated. Although imagining the complicated, in its general sense, in mind has not been argued as a philosophical problem by Muslim thinkers, sometimes some of them have proposed a number of similar issues, maintaining that we are of the synoptic knowledge about them. The first resolution to suggest, on the basis of the well-known principles of Muslim Philosophy, especially of Avicennian Philosophy, is the very synoptic knowledge. But, can the synoptic knowledge and/or its reconstruction be a worthy response to the complicated? The synoptic knowledge itself can be interpreted in two different ways: (1) actual uncompounded knowledge – that is unconscious; (2) potential knowledge. We will argue that the former (1) cannot be accepted eventually. Thus, we will refute unconscious knowledge absolutely – either unconscious knowledge of Muslim philosophers or that of such western philosophers as Leibniz – by means of several proofs. But the latter (2) is acceptable by itself. So, after finding the precedence of (2) in Ibn Sīnā and interpreting it, we will show that such a knowledge sometimes can be found in us and also such things as the scientific art can be analyzed by means of the very potential knowledge. Finally, we will investigate the very acceptable potential synoptic knowledge and the degree to which it can be applicable in the case of the complicated formulae objection.

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Introduction: Husserl, in particular in “Intentional Objects”, tries to refute the mental images absolutely. He claims that it is a theoretical fiction to say that every presentation relates to its object by means of a mental image/picture (geistiges Abbild). Mental images of complicated systems of formulae (komplizierten Formelsystemen), for example, cannot be found for the mathematician (Husserl, 1894, p. 305; Husserl, 1994, p. 347; Husserl, 1999, p. 252). So, polygons with several million sides, for example, cannot be imagined.

Some Muslim thinkers have said, in some similar issues, that we are of the synoptic knowledge (*al-‘ilm al-ijmālī*) about the complicated. Khānsārī, for example, in the case of the *large numbers* emphasizes that: since it is hard to mention all units of the large numbers, their synoptic knowledge will be tended (Khānsārī, 1999, p. 541).

Some Muslim thinkers here even have emphasized that the synoptic knowledge is unconscious knowledge. But, can the unconscious synoptic – that is a precedence for the unconscious resolution of Leibniz - be a worthy response to the complicated? In fact, Husserl himself was aware of such resolutions. Because, he says that if one refers to the unconscious (Unbewußtes) or the unnoticed (Unbemerkt), then one makes a use of these always available hypotheses rather immodestly, without concern for the rules of sound probability (Husserl, 1894, p. 305; Husserl, 1994, p. 347; Husserl, 1999, p. 252). So, the unconscious too will be evaluated and rejected.

Methodology Our main method in this paper is logical and rational analysis. Nonetheless, comparative and historical methods are employed as well. Because, we are comparing Muslim philosophers with such Western philosophers as

Husserl and Leibniz and trying to find the arguments about the issue in the history of philosophy and logic.

Findings: Most of our findings are critical evaluations. *Some* of them are shortly offered here: Leibniz says that at every moment there is in us an infinity of perceptions, unaccompanied by awareness/apperception or reflection (Leibniz, 1996, p. 53; Leibniz, 1896, p. 47). To hear the roaring noise of the sea, for example, we must first hear the noises of every single of its parts – i.e., of the little waves – confusedly, unnoticedly and faintly; “otherwise there would be no perception of a hundred thousand waves, since a hundred thousand nothings cannot make something.” (Leibniz, 1996, p. 54; Leibniz, 1896, p. 48)

Leibniz’s claim can be criticized in various ways:

The first is the fact that, if the parts of our knowledge are conceived merely unconsciously, then it itself

will be conceived merely unconsciously.

The second, and more important, is the fact that there are simple alternative explanations. Suppose, for example, that someone looks at a jungle with 100000 trees and sketches it and draws a painting that is merely schematic, not detailed. Clearly, he has not painted every single of those 100000 trees. It can be easily proved – especially by means of, e.g., a magnifying glass. Now, perhaps the mental images too are just like the outlined and undetailed painting; i.e., they are of a relative similarity and correspondence, not absolute correspondence, to the facts.

So, since such examples as the sounds of sea waves and the jungle are confusing phenomenon and noumenon (mind and external being), it is falsely suspected that the complicated are in the unconscious in detail.

Another critical evaluation is the fact that, assuming the unconscious, one can claim

that perhaps *everyone* unconsciously knows *everything*! It is of course so extravagant claim that everyone can be omniscient.

Again, the difference between conscious and unconscious knowledge can be considered, e.g., in this way that conscious knowledge must be stipulated to be noticed and intended as well while the unconscious can not to be. But the problem of the stipulation is that “being noticed and intended” itself is some kind of knowledge: conscious *knowledge* is a kind of knowledge that is stipulated to be some kind of *knowledge*. So, it is begging the question and annoying from some kind of circularity. And there is also an *infinite regress*. Because, “being intended” is some kind of conscious (not unconscious) knowledge. So:

“Being intended” =
“conscious knowledge” =
“knowledge + being intended”
= “knowledge + “conscious knowledge”” = “knowledge + “knowledge + being

intended”” = “knowledge + “knowledge + “conscious knowledge”” = “knowledge + “knowledge + “knowledge + being intended””” = ...

Discussion and Conclusion:

We have shown that the uncompounded and unconscious resolution cannot be accepted eventually. That is, we have refuted unconscious knowledge absolutely by means of several proofs:

We have had some critical evaluations of Leibniz’s unconscious.

Also, we have shown that, assuming the unconscious, one can claim that perhaps *everyone* unconsciously knows *everything*!

Again, there will be a circularity and an *infinite regress* in unconscious knowledge.

But if the synoptic knowledge is interpreted as potential knowledge, then it can be acceptable by itself. Nonetheless, this potential knowledge cannot be a correct resolution to *some* of the

complicated refuting the mental existence.

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