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REASON AND ITS EPISTEMOLOGY IN AVICENNA'S PERSPECTIVE

GHOLAMREZA REZAI SERAJI

Department of Sufi Muslim and mystics, Islamic Azad University, Tehran Science and
Research Branch, Tehran, Iran

ABSTRACT

There is no doubt that issues of reason and episteme have been the most controversial amongst other philosophical discussion. Especially in few recent years, this has been recognized and reached its climax among Western philosophers, such that Motahari considers three origins for the European philosophical issues: knowledge value, ways to acquire science, and determination of science scope. The same discrepancy can be observed among rationalists some of who believe that there is no space for innate assumption in the presence of reason. One of the Descartes' contemporaries, for example, in opposition to his innatism, states that reason does not need theoretical innate assumptions or certain common principles because thinking is enough to explain its acts. The present study is an attempt to explore the stance of one of the famous characters of Islamic Philosophy, Avicenna on the above discussion of reason and epistemology. Conducting this exploration in the works of empiricists (either the former ones like Locke, Berkeley, and Hume or later ones like Russell, Ayer and Quine) is also necessary and useful and can bring about important achievements.

Keywords: Epistemology, Avicenna's Perspective

INTRODUCTION

The importance of reason is clear to everyone because it is due to the valuable gem of reason that human is endowed with "respect" and "superiority" and can acquire divine knowledge, human knowledge like quantum, astronomy, originology, and eschatology. Reason is the means of

obtaining happiness in the both worlds and evaluating truth and falsehood, right and wrong, and beauty and ugliness. Reason also helps with understanding of divine rules from the scriptures and the prophets and their followers and regulating the individual and social life, whereby human takes divine, social, and moral

responsibilities, and his power and instinct will be controlled by the superego, and he will step towards the peak of humanity. Therefore, it is highly recommended to know it more and step towards its perfection (Behdashti, 2010). In the present study, we aimed at exploring reason based on Avicenna's semantics and epistemology. We hope we could have taken a step forward in understanding self-knowledge which is the most useful knowledge.

After Aristotle, reason found a different place in the philosophers' thinking. They specified the place of reason in accordance with the need in their philosophy. Plato considered the generalities as substantive, abstract, and constant and are not tangible in the world. He did not feel any need for reason. As opposed to his professor; however, Aristotle believed that generalities are tangible things. Since Aristotle has discussed reason ambiguously and in comparison with sense, he did not need the presence of reason in specifying the general meaning. After him, interpreters extracted reason from his works, or like Alexander of Aphrodisias, considered it as a transcendent being and god, or like Islamic philosophers such as Farabi and Avicenna, placed it out of human soul in order to resolve the issue of the relationship between plurality and unity and not to leave the issue of episteme unanswered. On the other hand,

philosophers like Thomas Aquinas in the Middle Ages, although being influenced in regard with reason discussion by many of these philosophers, took a different stance and provided a different explanation for Aristotle. They considered reason as a part of the soul. For Avicenna, reason had the same place as that in Plotinus view, such that in the field of ontology the relation among the ten intellects and tangible issues, the origin, and the world plurality is material. And in the field of epistemology, emanation is the form of the generalities and rationalities of the rational soul, and its conversion from potentiality to actuality is one of its implications (Khedri & Kakaee, 2012).

According to this introduction, in order to respond to the given problems, it is suggested to explore the relation between reason and the essence in Avicenna's works, whose philosophical system is a combination of the most important basic elements of peripatetic-Aristotelian philosophy and some specific Neoplatonic worldview on Islamic and religious worldview because with the depth and extensiveness of his works he can be an appropriate representative for Islamic philosophy. Following paragraphs present an overview of his works and his attempts to answer the question whether the essence is the same as reason or not.

The semantics of reason

Different definitions have been proposed for reason. The Arabic equivalent is "aqil" which means "xerad", "andisheh", and "housh" in Persian (Behdashti, 2010). Reason is retrieved from the Latin word "ratio" and "intelligentia". In English, there are "reason" and "intelligence" equivalents. And in French, "rason" and "intelligence" have the same meaning (Saliba, 1987).

"Aqil" in Arabic means "to hold" and "to tie". The Arabic sentence "Aqil al-ba'ir" (Al-Mu'jam al-Wasit, 1984) means "he tied the knee of the camel" and "I'taqillisanohu" (Johari, 1989) means "he could not speak". In Sabah (morning) Prayer that is attributed to Imam Ali (AS), we say "God, these are the reins of my soul I have bound them with the ties of Thy will" (Mafatih al-Janan: 82). Here, "aqil" is used in its literal meaning.

A. General term: Terminologically, reason means the locus or faculty of perception (Alias, 1979) and perception of objects refers to their real aspect. Reason is used to perceive the reality of objects (understanding and determining). In Arabic the sentence, "Ma fa'altuhazamozaqlatu" (Al-Majma' al-Wasit: 616) means I have not done this since I reached perception and determination (of good and bad and beauty and ugliness). Therefore, a terminological meaning of reason is to distinguish between good and bad objects, referring to practical

reason. Another meaning of reason refers to its theoretical and perceptive aspect, perceiving the affairs and realities of life as they are, which refers to the distinctive line between it and ignorant unreal perceptions.

B. In Quranic words: RaghebIsfahani says, "Reason refers to a faculty whereby human can accept science, it also refers to the knowledge that human acquires this way." He continues, "Wherever God blames infidels for not having reason, the second meaning is meant", for example, "Like those infidels ... who do not use their reason." And whenever He exempts the servants, the first meaning is meant" (Ibid).

The background of reason theory

The issue of reason has many different meanings and definitions in the ideology of the interpreters and even Aristotle's followers. In this regard, Avicenna is Farabi's follower. Both of them have considered reason to be detached from the soul and constant for all human beings. They have assigned an extensive active ontological and epistemological role for reason.

According to the written history, the background of the philosophical discussion of reason dates back to the pre-Socratic period. Every philosopher has attempted to discover a unity principle behind the apparent pluralism of the world. Anaxagoras named this principle as reason. He believed

that reason is abstract, extensive, and different from physical issues and considered it as the principle of movement beginning (Aquinas, 1994). His view can be counted as an introduction for Plato's speech. Aristotle defines reason in comparison to sense and stated that there is a factor that is object for every category and there is another factor that is the cause of the agent and the creator of everything. Likewise, there are two factors in the soul.

Thomas considered reason as an individual thinking ability. Thinking is an activity involving no physical organ because it is detached from the body. This faculty; therefore, belongs to the soul (Kenny, 1995). In his book "contra errores infidelium", Thomas says: Aristotle has considered reason as a part of human soul (Aquinas, 2009).

Major reasons for proving the presence of reason by Avicenna are:

1. According to Avicenna, human can perceive generalities that are per se separate from material and physical objects. That is, they are not like the body and physical beings; therefore, they cannot be perceived with physical organs. Therefore, perception of reasonable rationalities in which the form of the act can be observed (Avicenna, 1953). As he states:

The relationship of reason with essence is like that of the sun with

our eyes, that is when reason dominates over the details of the imagination, the light of the reason shines on them and separates them from other objects and are matched within the rational soul. The forms are not transmitted from imagination into reason. Observing the forms prepares the soul to add an abstract form from reason to them (Avicenna, 1983).

2. The soul of wise human is potentiality and needs an agent to become an actuality. This agent should essentially be actual and the same as the object. This agent is called active reason, as compared to potential reason that has turned into actuality (Avicenna, 1975).

3. Sometimes after the soul has perceived a form, it forgets it and remembers it again. Now, there is a question, "Where is the rational form that is forgotten by the soul stored?"

A. It does not exist in the soul because firstly rational form means its perception and the soul cannot ignore it anymore, and secondly assuming the soul as its location, it can be concluded that all rational forms are available in the actual soul. However, the quality of achieving them is for the potential soul not for the actual soul.

B. It is not located in the body because the presence of rational forms in the body is in contradiction with their abstraction.

C. The rational forms cannot exist independently. Therefore, the restoration place for the rational soul is the active reason (Avicenna, 1975). Aquinas responds to this argument of Avicenna this way that reason possesses memory and memory is not a different faculty from reason (Aquinas, 2009).

4. During childhood, the rational soul is empty from any type of rational forms; however, after some time initial rationalities and axioms will form without any training. The agent of these rationalities is not sense and experience nor thinking and deduction; it has another source which is reason (Avicenna, 1952).

Levels of reason

Avicenna compares the levels of reason with the levels of writing potentiality that is an absolute power in children and has not actualized. In the next phase, the child grows up and gets familiar with pencil, paper, and writing preliminaries, which is called possible power. And the perfection of the faculty is when the individual learns how to write and does so whenever he/she likes to (Avicenna, 1952). However, while writing, this faculty turns into actuality.

The relation between theoretical reason and perception of rationalities is the same:

Material reason: "Sometimes it has an absolute potential relationship with the theoretical (reason) faculty with abstract forms, such that the soul does not receive anything of the related perfection, which is called material reason" (Behdashti, 2010).

Internalized reason: "Sometimes its relationship is potential and it is when some initial rationality in the material reason enters the phase of secondary rationality. By initial rationalities, I mean those that are proved without acquisition and the notice of the individual who was once empty of the proof, like our belief that "the whole is bigger than the detail" and "objects that are equal to another object are equal to each other." Therefore, internalized reason is when this level of reason has been achieved" (Behdashti, 2010).

Actual reason: "Sometimes it is related to the faculty of perfection, and it is when the initial rational form has also formed. However, it examines and refers to it in an actual way, but the form is stored, and whenever it wants to examine it, it thinks about and understands it. This is called the actual reason" (Behdashti, 2010).

Acquired reason: "Sometimes its relation is absolute actual and it is when the rational form presents in and is examined by the reason through actual thinking, and the reason knows that it thinks about it in an

actual way. This is called acquired reason" (Behdashti, 2010).

1. Theoretical reason is one of the faculties of human soul, and actual reason is a different faculty, and Avicenna has stated this with different interpretations. In the mentioned sentence of treatment, the Sheikh's interpretation was:

The faculties of the human's rational soul are divided into theoretical and practical faculties (Avicenna, 1952).

A clearer interpretation was provided by the Sheikh as follow:

Human possesses a faculty that is specifically utilized for general decisions and another one for details (Avicenna, 1952).

Avicenna has provided a very clear interpretation of the separation of theoretical and practical reason in his books "Rescue".

In this book, he says:

Each of these faculties (theoretical and practical) is mutually called reason (Avicenna, 1952).

In his writing on "soul" he writes:

Both [faculties] are called reason the same way (Avicenna, 1952).

However, the term "mutuality" should not cause us to misunderstand the theoretical and practical faculties as a single entity.

2. Theoretical and practical reasons are both among other faculties of human soul.

3. According to the fact that practical and theoretical reasons are among faculties of the rational soul, it can be understood that the rational soul has its special nature and reality, and the theoretical and practical reasons are not the nature and reality of the soul but are considered as a part of it. This issue will be further explained bellow.

4. The levels of reason are the transfer process from potentiality to actuality in relation to perception and understanding of rationalities. In his different works, Avicenna's explanations of this point involve some degrees of ambiguity because the distinction between the forms and the proofs is not clear in these levels. His explanation depends on the ability to understand rational forms. On the material reason, for example, he says:

Sometimes the relation of theoretical faculty (reason) with abstract forms is absolutely potential.

Or, on the actual reason, he says:

Sometimes the initial rational forma have also formed within it, but it does not examine them.

Or, on the acquired reason, he states:

And sometimes, the rational form exists inside and is examined by the reason.

Reason divisions

Reason can be divided based on two aspects: ontological aspect and epistemological aspect

A. Ontological aspect: According to the narrations of Imams (AS) and logical and experimental investigations conducted by scholars, it can be stated that from an ontological perspective, reason possesses two levels: innate reason and acquired reason that can be gained through life experience and the growth of innate reason.

B. Epistemological aspect: theoretical and practical reasons: Scholars have proposed this division based on the activity type of the reason because a part of the reason activity is related to understanding the actualities of the universe and things wherein, in other words, it determines the human's attitude towards the universe. In this perspective, the reason is called theoretical reason.

Reason from the perspective of Avicenna's epistemology

In Avicenna's works, there are arguments on proving the fact that reason is the direct source of human arguments. In his writing on the soul, he believes that experience cannot be the basis for thought and general principles cannot have root in experimental evidence. They must be acquired from outside of nature and from a divine source that is connected to the rational soul (Davidson, 1993). Upon the birth, human soul is abstract and empty of any thoughts and is a mere thinking faculty. Avicenna differentiates the phases of human reasons.

Material reason is a phase that is potentially absolute towards abstract forms and has not received any traces (Avicenna, 1984).

Avicenna believes that active reason is an abstract entity and has the opportunity to take the material reason to actuality, like the sun that shines and helps the eyes see (Avicenna, 1975). Until the constant attention of the soul to the active reason, emanation of the generalities occurs in the soul, and when the connection interrupts, the active reason stores the form of the generalities inside the rational soul (Avicenna, 1980). That is, rational forms place in a fixed repository that cannot be the same as the soul because the soul cannot ignore the forms that shaped inside it. Therefore, Avicenna considers the reason as the repository of the abstract concepts and theoretical issues and initial principles.

For Avicenna, reason is an entity outside human soul, and the last level of separate reasons and the world forms are influenced by divine powers and human reason. By relying on feeling and imagination, human reason cannot by itself abstract the forms from the objects, rather these faculties create ability that helps with the connection with the active reason, whereby the forms will be emanated within the reason. Compared to Aristotle's books, likening the reason to the light in Avicenna's works has change a little. Avicenna has likened it to

the sun that has a substantive entity and is the source of light, grace, and illumination, this shift is due to his thoughts (Davudi, 2008).

CONCLUSION

Aqil (Arabic word for reason) which actually means "to live" and "to hold" is in accordance with actuality and is also called rational perceptions. Aristotle has explained reason in comparison with feeling and assigned features for it, which caused discrepancy among his interpreters. One of these features was separation. In Avicenna's view, separation means separation from the soul. And likewise, he explained the epistemology of the reason. Epistemologically, reason is the most important means of human knowledge, which determines good and acceptable deeds and orders to do them. On the other hand, general knowledge of the forms and proofs is collected by the reason which is called practical reason, from the first perspective, and theoretical reason, from the second. Based on the phases of knowledge acquisition, reason is divided into material, internalized, practical, and acquired reasons. Avicenna acknowledged the role of faculty and acts in explaining the performance of the reason in epistemology, and it benefits from the emanation of the forms from the reason to the soul. In fact, according to Avicenna, reason possesses rational forms

appropriate to the understanding that human resorts to. It is also a faculty of the rational soul whereby truth and falsehood, right and wrong, and beauty and ugliness can be distinguished from one another, and general principles and forms will be perceived. True perceptions that are not the source of issuing the forms from material entities.

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