



Intuitive Knowledge according to Allamah Tabatabai and Rejecting Claims Disaffirming its Validity

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Abstract

Alongside acquired-conceptual knowledge, intuitive knowledge, as one of the instances of knowledge holds a very important position among Islamic philosophers as well. Allamah Tabatabai also mentions presential knowledge with importance while discussing acquired knowledge, and ultimately, considers presential knowledge to precede acquired knowledge. In this paper, using an analytic method, we have tried to explain his theoretical foundations regarding presential-intuitive knowledge and rationally defending its cognitive validity. An important finding of this paper is that presential-intuitive knowledge, apart from being the base of acquired knowledge, also provides a convincing rational defense regarding cognitive validity. The basis of this validity is that accessing reality is the main goal of knowledge and if we can verify that reality itself is available to us in presential-intuitive knowledge, we would have no further concerns epistemological concerns. According to Allamah Tabatabai, just as sensory intuition creates a certainty of being in accordance with reality in ourselves, presential-intuitive knowledge also contains similar dominance over reality. At the end of this paper, some instances of views that claim to disaffirm the validity of presential-intuitive knowledge have been addressed, analyzed, and explained so that the epistemic validity of presential-intuitive findings is objectively proven.

Keywords: intuitive knowledge, cognitive validity, acquired knowledge, according to reality, the fallibility of knowledge, knowledge- by- presence.

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Introduction

Islamic philosophers, being aware of the findings of past philosophers, have made valuable innovations regarding knowledge. In the works of Avicenna, Suhrawardi, and Mulla Sadra there are priceless and authentic points regarding presential-intuitive knowledge and they have opened up new areas in intuitive knowledge and have paid attention to its rational explanation. One of the important epistemological elements in the ideas of Allamah Tabatabai is this very type of knowledge.

In this paper, we have strived to explain the theoretical foundations of Allamah Tabatabai regarding presential-intuitive knowledge, rationally defend its cognitive validity, and refute the claims that disaffirm its validity using an analytical method. The important finding and result of this study is that, apart from being the base of acquired knowledge, a claim to knowledge cannot be made without presential-intuitive knowledge because the real agent of knowledge is the human immaterial soul that provides a convincing rational defense regarding epistemic validity.

Intuitive knowledge according to Allamah Tabatabai

Terminologically, intuition (*shuhūd*) is direct knowledge that is achieved in the soul as soon as it is directly received, considered, and reflected upon. Such specific knowledge that manifests with purification and self-refinement is not of the category of concepts. Rather, it is attained through existential connection and unity with reality and is not directly attributed to truth or falsehood and other mental concepts. To reach such a level, the soul requires complete and sincere attention to God and to stay away from worldly diversions. It is in this case that it can gain dominion over reality when encountering it through the illuminative power it has achieved and control over it.

It is with intuitive knowledge that the witness arrives at a level of insight and perfection where he observes the realities in the Imaginal realm and in the form of images and at a higher level, is able to witness intelligible realities and ascends. It is in this case that knowledge becomes intelligible.

Explaining the foundations of intuitive knowledge

According to Allamah, the relation between the material world and the realms above the material is the relation between imperfections to perfection and diluted reality to reality. According to him, exoteric realities that are observed cannot be without intuitive knowledge of the esoteric because the exoteric existence is a manifestation of the esoteric existence and is its link. Thus, by witnessing the exoteric, intuitive knowledge of the esoteric is attained. Allamah considers the human intuition of his own essence as one of the most important instances of presential-intuitive knowledge and presents intuitive knowledge of the reality of the soul as one of the meanings of the narration, one who knows his self knows his Lord and shows its dependency on God considering this narration. It is in such a state that he considers his own actions to be complete dependence on the real agent and the intuition of such a reality takes the witness to a higher level of perfection and in the next step, takes him to a higher level of intuitive knowledge where he sees his own attributes as absorbed into the attributes of God to the extent that he becomes the interpretation of the famous narration of Imam al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) about whom God has stated: I am the ears, eyes, tongue, speech and hands and feet of my beloved. Arriving at such a potential is achieved through the grace of God and presential-intuitive knowledge.

The precedence of presential-intuitive knowledge over acquired-conceptual knowledge

Allamah Tabatabai holds that presential knowledge precedes acquired knowledge such that acquired knowledge is based upon knowledge-by-presence. Pure rational concepts, which are abstract concepts such as cause and effect, substance and accident, are not obtained through quiddites; rather, the soul discovers their referents through presential-intuitive knowledge and then attains a concept from them. In other words, when the soul arrives at a reality and truth and existentially connects to it, at another level, the faculty of imagination transforms that presential intuitive knowledge into acquired knowledge and forms and archives an image of it in the memory. Thus, the basis and foundation of all our acquired knowledge is presential-intuitive knowledge and its criterion is the existential unity and connection of the soul with the reality of the perceived thing.

Refuting some views that claim to disaffirm the validity of intuitive knowledge

According to Allamah Tabatabai, presential-intuitive knowledge always corresponds to reality; however, some do not accept such a view and present views refuting this and we will address some of those views here. In some instances, perceiving biological perceptions such as the feeling of hunger and thirst can be fallible, or you have knowledge of pain, itchiness, and burning of an amputated limb, and sometimes, as a side-effect of taking medication, one has unreal perceptions, and even though every person's knowledge is presential in relation to his own soul; however, there are differing opinions on whether they are material or immaterial and all these instances show the infallibility of presential-intuitive knowledge. In response to the aforementioned disaffirmed instances, it can generally be said that the sources of perceiving unreal biological perceptions, are interpretations and explanations that are attained through acquired knowledge and this is unrelated to the fallibility of knowledge-by-presence. Preciseness regarding knowledge-by-presence and its contents reveals the negation of supposed errors.

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