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EPISTEMOLOGICAL INTEGRATION BETWEEN SUFISM AND KALAM

Ahmad Sa'd Ibrahim

Abd al-Rahman 'Uthman (Al-Damanhouri)

Introduction

The search for truth persists despite the divergence of paths.

Doctrines and philosophies are mostly embraced for emotional and heartfelt reasons rather than philosophical, logical, or demonstrative ones—or let us say, the larger part of them is emotional and heartfelt. Therefore, philosophers have established conditions that they could not fulfill, as indicated by Hujjat al-Islam al-Ghazali in 'Deliverance from Error' (Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal), while in reality, they adhered to diverse and contradictory opinions and philosophies!

The reasons for this are twofold:

1- On the one hand, there is the inherent limitation of human intellects, and on the other hand, man is not pure intellect. Seeking to construct creeds and opinions solely upon the products of intellects and their proofs is not a fully human endeavor, because man is a composite of reason and emotion together. Nor is it a complete endeavor, because perfection lies in combining both aspects. By 'creed' (aqidah) here, we mean its beginning and its completion, which encompasses both assent (tasdiq) and submission (idh'an)—assent and certainty (yaqin), which stands above mere submission. Thus, we do not mean mere knowledge, for knowledge is not faith (iman), as established by the People of Truth (Ahl al-Haqq).

2- Perhaps the problem that prompted walking this path is that the products of emotion are undisciplined, cannot be adjudicated, and are fluid. Thus, they sought complete adherence to intellectual proofs and logical rules, but they were unable to do so due to an inherent limitation related to the human makeup! Knowledge of the rules of logic and its proofs, and knowing valid syllogistic forms and logical fallacies, or 'the scales of the Merciful and the scales of Satan,' as Hujjat al-Islam al-Ghazali expresses it, does not necessitate invoking all of this in every issue, nor does it guarantee correct application in every particular instance. Therefore, complete adherence was conditional upon two prerequisites: First, that man be a perfect and complete intellect. Second, that he be pure intellect or intellect alone—that is, devoid of emotion. Neither condition is actualized in reality. Hence, it is necessary to place the logical, demonstrative aspect within a human context—that is, one that aligns with the reality of man: his limitations, and his composition of both reason and emotion. This context means the proper employment of proofs so that they serve as a protective fence or border guards, preventing religious creeds from turning into human superstitions, or preventing fluid emotion from overreaching and inventing what is not real. Emotion and overflowing feelings must exist within a circle, bounded by a perimeter that encompasses them or governed and restrained by a preventing wisdom. This preventing wisdom is definitive intellectual proof (al-burhan al-'aqli al-qat'i), and both aspects complete the dimensions of the picture!

It was out of the wisdom of Allah Almighty that He established religion upon Faith (Iman = doctrines/creeds) and Excellence (Ihsan = Sufism). Therefore, the Mutakallim (theologian engaged in Kalam) finds in Sufism vast horizons that he cannot find elsewhere and cannot attain through intellectual arguments; he does not experience the coolness of faith and the sweetness of certainty except within it. Conversely, the Sufi finds in Kalam—that is, the definitive, agreed-upon parts of it—what protects him from misguidance and deviation, so that Kalam serves as a protective framework guarding him against the manipulations of devils! The grandeur of the Qur'an is manifested in its simultaneous address to both reason and conscience, and its complete adherence to what each requires.

It stimulates the human intellect, binding it, and penetrates the depths of the soul and the core of the heart, subduing them. Through this, the Qur'an brought about a revolution whose effects humanity continues to witness!

First: The Search for Truth Between Philosophy, Kalam, and Sufism

1) Philosophy is the love of wisdom—that is, knowing the truth of this world, both its higher and lower realms. A philosopher is a lover of wisdom who affirms its existence and works to attain it, in contrast to the Sophist who:

• Denies realities,

• Denies the possibility of reaching them, or

• Says, 'I do not know what the truth is.'

Philosophy is divided into practical and theoretical fields. Theoretical philosophy is further divided into:

- Metaphysics (Ilahiyyat), which they divided into:

• Metaphysics in the general sense: Its subject matter is existence qua existence—that is, absolute existence without the condition of materiality or consideration, in which they investigate the necessary (al-wajib) and the contingent (al-mumkin), which constitutes the 'Beginning of Wisdom' (Bidayat al-Hikmah).

• Metaphysics in the specific sense: Its subject matter is the Necessary Being alone (Allah, Glorified be He), which constitutes the 'End of Wisdom' (Nihayat al-Hikmah).

- **2.** Mathematics, whose subject matter is number.

- **3.** Physics (Natural Sciences), whose subject matter is the physical body.

Practical philosophy is divided into:

• Ethics, whose subject matter is the soul.

• Home Economics (Domestic Governance), whose subject matter is the affairs of man within his home regarding organization.

• Politics (Civic Governance), whose subject matter is the affairs of the community in the city regarding organization.

What remained specialized within philosophy after the evolution of sciences are the fields of: Ontology (Existence), Epistemology (Knowledge), and Axiology (Values).

2) When the books of philosophy were translated during the era of Al-Ma'mun, they preoccupied the people. Al-Maqrizi states: 'Al-Ma'mun, 'Abd Allah ibn Harun al-Rashid, the seventh of the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad, due to his infatuation with the ancient sciences, sent messengers to the lands of the Byzantines (Rum) to translate the books of the philosophers for him. They brought them to him in the year two hundred and fifteen AH. Consequently, the doctrines of the philosophers spread among the people, and their books became famous across all regions. The Mu'tazilites, Qarmatians, Jahmites, and others turned towards them, frequently reading and examining them. This brought upon Islam and its adherents indescribable affliction and trial in religion. The misguidance of innovators grew immense through philosophy, increasing their disbelief... The schools of various sects became famous, including

the Qadariyyah, Jahmiyyah, Mu'tazilah, Karramiyyah, Kharijites, Rawafid, Qarmatians, and Batinites, until they filled the earth. Every single one of them looked into philosophy and followed whichever of its paths they chose.' The final phrase is profoundly expressive.

3) One of the effects of the earth becoming filled with philosophy and its sciences was that a large group of scholars became occupied with it. We can classify them into several categories:

First: The Peripatetics (Al-Masha'iyyah—meaning that thought walks toward its objectives, or they think while walking to stimulate the mind). Their primary reliance in verifying matters is intellectual speculation (al-nazar al-'aqli). They are represented primarily by Abu 'Ali Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Al-Farabi, Al-Kindi, and Ibn Rushd, among others. They generally follow the path of the one they call the First Teacher: Aristotle of Greece. Similar to this school among Western thinkers are Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz.

Second: The Gnostics/Mystics (Al-'Irfaniyyah). These individuals seek to reach knowledge of realities through internal purification and spiritual witnessing (al-shuhud al-batini). Researchers usually place the Greatest Sheikh, Muhyi al-Din Ibn 'Arabi al-Hatimi, within this school due to his reliance on this method, although the Sheikh (may Allah be pleased with him) represents a unique case outside of these classifications, and his words among his admirers are not considered a form of philosophizing. Similar to him in his epistemological method is Plato among the Greek philosophers. Following his path among Westerners are Pascal and Henri Bergson.

Third: The Illuminationists (Al-Ishraqiyyah). These sought to combine the intellectual and experiential/taste-based (dhawqi) schools, while prioritizing spiritual taste (dhawq) in case of conflict and at the beginning of knowledge, while drawing benefit from the religious wisdom embedded in Quranic verses and prophetic Hadiths. They are represented by Al-Suhrawardi (the executed), author of 'The Philosophy of Illumination' (Hikmat al-Ishraq). It is said that Plato followed this path as well. Similar to them among Westerners is Pythagoras.

Fourth: The School of Transcendental Wisdom (Al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah). It is like the preceding school, but they differ in certain foundational principles, such as the primacy of existence (asalat al-wujud). It is represented by Mulla Sadra and Al-Allama al-Tabataba'i, author of 'Bidayat al-Hikmah' and 'Nihayat al-Hikmah'.

4) Philosophers claim that their arguments are demonstrative—meaning definitive—and they use this to tower over others. They did indeed aim for that, but not everyone who aims for something achieves it. Therefore, Abu Hamid [al-Ghazali] stated in 'Al-Munqidh' what amounts to: 'They established conditions for demonstration; yet when they reached religious objectives, they became lax and were unable to fulfill those conditions.'

The theologians (Mutakallimun) do not make such a claim. Their arguments are mostly persuasive and dialectical, but the results of their investigations were more beneficial and consistent. This is because they combined the 'light of reason'—in which they were equal to the philosophers—and then added to it the 'light of revelation.' Thus, they investigated their objectives through the lens of revelation and with regard for its realities, bearing fruits in the lives of Muslims that others did not.

If you ask: What is the difference between the practice of the School of Transcendental Wisdom and its origin, and the practice of the scholars of Kalam, since both claim to combine reason and transmitted text (naql)?

I say: The difference is that the theologians make the text the primary axis around which they revolve

and with which they begin, interpreting it according to its literal meaning (zahir), or allegorically (ta'wil) if the literal meaning is impossible. Allegorical interpretation in this case is neither a postponement of the text nor a prioritization of reason over it, nor is it a distortion or a denial of its implications. As for the people of Illumination and their counterparts among the people of Wisdom, they begin with spiritual taste or reason, and the text for them is subordinate to spiritual taste or subordinate to the tasting reason; it is not a primary foundation around which they revolve like the theologians.

Furthermore, the primary focus of the theologians is investigating what binds the opponent; hence, they do not consider unveiling (kashf), spiritual taste (dhawq), inspiration (ilham), or visions (ru'ya) to be sources of knowledge or means of cognition in their theological research, even if they respect those sources in other contexts. As for the philosophers, their goal is to reach knowledge of realities by any means possible.

The summary of what the philosophers possess—as viewed by the people of Kalam—is an immersion in affectations and conjectures for which there is no proof other than pure thought, or non-demonstrative issues that do not follow the rules of demonstration, or it is a spiritual taste unique to its possessor that does not bind anyone else. Some of their statements and treatments of the texts resemble the actions of the Batinites, if they are not identical.

The summary of what the people of Kalam possess—as viewed by the philosophers—is a dialectic that breeds doubt more than it breeds knowledge of the truth, and many of the premises of their sciences are not demonstrative but rather dialectical and persuasive.

The summary of what both groups possess—as viewed by the people of Gnosis ('Irfan)—is darkness, or as the author of 'Al-Futuhat al-Makkiyyah' (7/541) states: 'The sciences of the theologians regarding the Essence of Allah and those who immerse themselves in it are not lights.'

5) Everyone is searching for the 'Truth,' the 'First Cause,' or 'God'... seeking knowledge of His Essence, uncovering the secret of existence, and aspiring toward the world of the Unseen. These three are their ultimate goals; around them their research revolves, their minds wander, and their souls aspire. However, reaching goals requires means, and the accuracy of the path and the attainment of the goal depend on the soundness of the means. Their sources for attaining what they sought varied:

- The philosophers relied on two proofs: Senses and Reason, with detailed elaborations on the meaning of senses and reason. Those among them who counted 'Report' (al-khabar) made it a witness rather than a foundational source, if the literal text of revelation agreed with their views; otherwise, they interpreted it allegorically.

- The theologians relied on the proof of 'Report' along with them, making it a foundational source just like reason, with varying degrees among them regarding its estimation.

- The Sufis experienced what others did not, because the sources of knowledge they relied upon were broader than those of others, as they added to the theologians' triad (senses, report, and reason) 'Divinely-bestowed knowledge' (al-'ilm al-laduni), which encompasses unveiling (kashf) and inspiration (ilham).

After employing these sources to reach the truth, their methodologies, paths, and research results differed regarding knowledge of the reality of the soul, the universe, and the Creator of the universe. However, in the end, after a thousand years of research, everyone returned to acknowledge human incapacity, admitting that what they had reached—if they reached anything at all—was nothing more than a drop in an ocean, which they waded into while the Prophets stood on its shore; meaning that their

knowledge did not reach the knowledge attained by the Prophets. They are swimming, while the Prophets have arrived.

This incapacity was acknowledged by the philosophers by necessity and reality, because they imagined that their minds could encompass everything and know the essence of everything. Consequently, they fell into many disagreements and returned to where they started after hard work and fatigue, their sole capital being 'so-and-so said' and 'such-and-such said,' along with doubts and illusions, with no significant benefit to mention.

This incapacity was acknowledged by the theologians by choice, because from the beginning, they recognized the limitation of human intellects and surrounded themselves with the fence of revelation. This protected them from much error and extravagance. Thus, they did well by limiting their functions to defending the true creeds using reason, even if philosophy swallowed the research of their later scholars, leading them into the narrow straits of thought and futile mental exhaustion over what cannot be perceived by the mind and breeds nothing but fatigue.

This incapacity was recognized by the Sufis through spiritual taste (dhawq), by means of silence, isolation, hunger, and staying awake. Thus, they achieved a complete realization of human limitation, weakness, and destitution. They did well by making their goal the knowledge of their own souls first, proclaiming the famous saying:

مَنْ عَرَفَ نَفْسَهُ فَقَدْ عَرَفَ رَبَّهُ

"He who knows himself knows his Lord."

However, some of them deviated from the right path when they aspired to what was above their capacity and failed to observe the etiquettes of the Divine Presence, which strictly requires submission to poverty and absolute destitution, as stated in the Holy Verse:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ أَنْتُمُ الْفُقَرَاءُ إِلَى اللَّهِ ۖ وَاللَّهُ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ

"O mankind, you are those in need of Allah, while Allah is the Free of need, the Praiseworthy." (Surah Fatir, 35:15)

6) What we believe is that the Truth is exalted by the nobility of the objective, and that the Truth can be reached through every possible path, not through one specific path alone!

If we say that the goal is reaching the truth in this world and salvation in the Hereafter for those who affirm it, then seeking the truth requires seriousness and stepping outside the familiar. Whoever seeks the truth will find it, God willing, not through a specific route or a pre-drawn path. Allah is too vast to be encompassed, and so are the paths to reach Him, as explicitly declared in the Book of Allah:

وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِهِ عِلْمًا

"...while they encompass Him not in knowledge." (Surah Taha, 20:110)

Allah Almighty is All-Vast; He makes Himself known to His servants in countless ways, to the extent that it has been said: 'Allah Almighty never made Himself known to two individuals through the exact same path, nor through any single path to one individual twice.'

As for the non-Muslim, Allah has placed within him the light of 'Reason' and provided him with 'Senses' through which he knows this world, thereby recognizing his Creator. Then, his reason guides him to Prophethood. Once he submits his face to Allah, it suffices him to submit to what is in the Qur'an and

Sunnah. Furthermore, through the remembrance of Allah Almighty, adherence to asceticism in this world, and attachment to the Hereafter, the doors of knowledge will open for him—regardless of the titles of those knowledges, their details, or the methods of their attainment.

Then, after attaining some of it, he ought to present what he obtained once again to the Qur'an; for the Qur'an is at the beginning and the end.