

1. First approach to the relativity of knowledge

The study of the absoluteness or relativity of knowledge is related to a branch of philosophy called “epistemology”. Since more than 25 centuries, scholars have differed on whether one’s understanding, judgment and beliefs have absolute credibility or not. Sophists, who used to live in Greece approximately 5 centuries before the Common Era and from whom the word “Sophistry” was derived, were of the opinion that man can never arrive at a certain and dogmatic faith as everything can be doubted. After them, the skeptics, agnostics, subjectivists, and relativists also expressed such an inclination.

This inclination towards the relativity of knowledge and understanding has not emerged recently. It is as old as written philosophy. Today, it is true that in the Muslim world we do not know of any prominent philosopher who is a skeptic but in America and other Western countries, there are different types of skeptics and relativists, skepticism being essentially regarded as a source of honor for man!

Undoubtedly, if we really want to academically delve into the inclination towards the relativity of knowledge, skepticism or the notion that man can never acquire certainty in knowledge, we have to spend a lot of time dealing with this broad philosophical subject. The only thing we can do at this moment is to present some subjects which are suitable for our listeners.

By saying to us, “You should not consider your view, understanding and interpretation as absolute,” do they mean that one should not have certainty of faith in anything and that the acquisition of knowledge is actually limited for man and we cannot find any knowledge about which we can *logically* be certain [*yaqin*]? Or, do they mean that one cannot have certain knowledge of some cases and accounts? We used the adverb “logically” because sometimes man has dogmatic faith in a thing and he has no doubt about it, but after sometime he realizes that he is wrong.

Such certainty which is actually wrong and inconsistent with reality is called psychological certainty. In this case, man experiences a psychological state in which he develops dogmatic faith in a thing in which he has no doubt although he might be wrong and experiencing complex ignorance,¹ by holding a belief that is falsifiable. But if the dogma or belief is logically certain and correct, it is never falsifiable. For example, the mathematical statement “two times two is equal to four” ($2 \times 2 = 4$) is logically correct and

absolute and nowhere in the world does two multiplied by two become five or six. So, the credibility of this mathematical statement is absolute and logically correct, and it is not only a personal belief.

If they mean that man cannot acquire certain faith in any case or account, I shall state briefly that this claim is inconsistent with the natural disposition [*fitrah*] of man and all religions. We never hear anyone say: "I am not sure whether planet earth exists or not. Perhaps, its existence is nothing but an illusion!" Or, say: "I am in doubt whether there is any man living on earth or not. I am doubtful whether a country named "France" really exists in the continent of Europe or not. Apart from the fact that I am in doubt, such a thing can never be proved!" If we really meet such a person, what judgment will we have about him?

Certainly, we will tell him to consult a psychiatrist because a rational and mentally sound person will never entertain such a doubt. So, if by saying, "You must not consider as absolute your opinion and understanding," they mean that no belief or conviction must be treated as absolute and one cannot pass an absolutely accurate judgment concerning any case or account. The concise reply to them is that this claim is clearly against reason and all religions. And I do not think that there is anyone among my audience both inside and outside the country who thinks so. As such, it is futile and senseless to discuss it.

1. Complex ignorance: ignorance of one's own ignorance. [Trans.]

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