

Chapter 2: Living Awake

Further into the Night

[In order] to create Light!

In the previous chapter, I shared with you examples of some thinkers who worked on issues of existence, but whose solutions to such thought produced unfavourable outcomes.

In this chapter we will start waking up to ourselves in order to create light for us, and those around us, who may be in need of this light.

Firstly, let me share with you two positive examples of thinkers who also worked on issues of life, and in managing to find satisfactory answers to their questions, resulted in a more positive outlook on life.

I think, therefore I am!

René Descartes was a French philosopher and mathematician of the 17th century AD. He is sometimes called the father of modern philosophy.

Before his time, philosophy had been dominated by the method of Scholasticism, which was entirely based on comparing and contrasting the views of recognized authorities. Rejecting this method, Descartes stated, "In our search for the direct road to truth, we should busy ourselves with no object about which we cannot attain a certitude equal to that of the demonstration of arithmetic and geometry."

He therefore determined that one should hold nothing true until grounds had been established for believing it true. Descartes reviewed all his knowledge from sensible and perceptible as well as rational and traditional sciences.

He then invalidated all this knowledge, which resulted in all his knowing platforms from sensible to rational collapsing, leaving him swimming in the suspense of the ocean of doubt and uncertainty.

As he was drowning in his whirlpool of doubt, he realized that whatever else he doubted, he could not

doubt his doubt. He said to himself: “God, I doubt myself, my senses, my mind and the world around me, but I cannot doubt that I doubt.”

He immediately concluded that if one doubts, one is able to doubt.

From this single fact which he expressed in the famous words, ‘*Cogito, ergo sum*’, “*I think, therefore I am*”, he began his investigations.

Throughout his investigation and sincere search for truth, he studied different schools of thought, which were accessible to him. He confirmed through the conclusions reached from this investigative work, his belief in the existence of God, and accepted Christianity as the best religious path available to knowledge, at that time.

He did however agree, that there could be a better religion than Christianity, giving the land of Persia (Iran) as an example of a place where one might be able to find such a religion which at that time, he was not aware of, to believe in!

We will investigate the validity of this famous saying later in this chapter.

The Inner Intuition

Al-Ghazali (also known as Algazel in the West) the most famous Iranian Muslim Sufi of the mid 11 and the early 12th century AD, is an eastern example of this same intellectual journey in search for truth.

Although honored by his appointment as a Professor at the **Nizamiyah University** of Baghdad, which was recognized as one of the most reputed institutions of learning in the golden era of Muslim history,

At the age of 53, he gave up his academic pursuits and worldly interests in search of truth. This was a time of mystical transformation and occupied about 10 years of his life.

In his book “*The Rescuer from Delusion*” (Al-Monqeth Menal-Dhalal) which is his account of his spiritual journey in search for truth, he states that his journey began with doubting all his sensible and rational knowledge.

He writes: “I could not convince myself that one’s whole life in this world is not a mere dream. Did not the Prophet (of Islam) say: “*People are asleep, they wake up when they die* ”? If so, what do we have to guarantee that we are not sleepwalkers!

This situation was so puzzling to me that I ended up in bed for about two months until, my heart was enlightened by the sparkle of a divine light which needed no rational explanation.”

He solved the puzzle of his existence in his famous words: “Our existence is what we are aware of and find within ourselves”. He later called this fundamental bedrock of knowledge ‘*The Inner Intuition* (Al-

Kashf).

Avicenna Vs Descartes

Abu 'Ali al -Hussain Ibn 'Abd-Allah Ibn Hasan Ibn 'Ali Ibn Sina, (which was Europeanised into Avicenna), the Iranian Muslim philosophy genius, mathematician and physician of the late 10th and early 11th Century AD, discovered the fallacy of Descartes' famous words of "I think, therefore I am", more than six centuries before the birth of Descartes.

In the third section of his book "Hints & Notices" (Al-Esharat Wa Tanbeehat), he argues: "If anyone claims that 'he thinks therefore he exists'; he has fallen into the trap of creating a vicious circle of circumstances for himself, because, he is trying to prove his own existence by means of his own thought.

In other words, to accept that 'you' think or 'you' doubt, you would already have needed to accept 'you' exist, which is exactly the original claim."

Therefore, the expression of '*I think, therefore I am*' is not the first platform of knowledge.

The fallacy of Descartes' so-called single sure fact can be shown by means of propositional logic utilising the truth-table method.

The meaning of Descartes' statement in a logical structure is:

Premise 1: All those who think, exist.

Premise 2: I think.

Conclusion: I exist.

However, the fallacy of Descartes' theorem is shown by, the need to admit to the existence and accuracy of self-evident arguments of formal logic, before admitting his thinking.

Axiom (Self-evident knowledge)

In order for us to truly answer the question of our existence or any other question about the existing world, we need to know the fundamental source of human knowledge. With exception of Sophists, most philosophers, whether eastern or western, contemporary or ancient, agree that human knowledge is divided into two categories:

- Self-evident knowledge
- Theoretical knowledge

Axiom or *Self-evident knowledge* is the type of knowledge that we accept as true without the need of proof or reasoning.

Examples of axioms are:

- “No sentence can be true or false at the same time.” (the principle of contradiction)
- “If equals are added to equals, the sums are equal.”
- “The whole is greater than any of its parts.”

The most certain of human knowledge is mathematics. Pure mathematics begins with axioms from which other theorems are driven. This procedure is necessary to avoid circularity, or an infinite regression in reasoning and as such it is impossible to provide any proof for them.

An Axiom can be defined as ‘self-evident truth’ for it does not need any analysis. Rather it is the bottom line and foundation for all types of human analysis and acquired knowledge. All it requires is attention, sound mental health, and lack of fallacy.

Theoretical knowledge is a type of knowledge, which requires thinking and reasoning. An example of this would be algebraic equations.

If you would like a better understanding of the types of human knowledge mentioned above, then take the example of your personal computer. In order for you to run your PC for any other application, your PC needs to have an operating system by which the computer can be run.

The operating system is what the manufacturer installs in your computer and you are advised not to delete it from your machine, otherwise you will not be able to run any other application.

I believe that self-evident knowledge, especially the ‘*impossibility of the conjunction of contradictories*’ (the law of contradiction), is the very fundamental human platform for obtaining knowledge.

Even the Sophists claim, that without such a platform, any human knowledge, would not be possible. I will endeavour to provide you with more explanation in regard to the fallacies of the Sophists and Skeptics.

Therefore, Al-Gazaali's experience of ‘inner intuition’ to prove his own existence is more accurate than that of Descartes' theorem.

If you still find the above explanation a bit too obscure, let me put it to you like this:

Consider this theorem:

All Aussies are mortal. We evaluate the truth of this sentence in the following manner:

-All humans are mortal.

-All Aussies are humans.

All Aussies are mortal.

The validity of the first premise is also known from another theorem, which is:

- All animals are mortal.

-All humans are animals.

All humans are mortal.

Similarly, the validity of the first theorem is also known from yet another theorem, which is:

- All living creatures are mortal.

- All animals are living creatures.

All animals are mortal.

The ladder of theorems will continue until you end up to a premise which is in itself so self-evident that you do not need proof, otherwise a vicious circle or infinite series of theorems will emerge, both of which are impossible.

[Immanuel Kant: Prolegomena to Any future Metaphysics, Section 45]

Philosophy Vs Sophism

Let us first define 'Sophism'. Sophism is derived from the Greek 'sophisma' meaning acquired skill or clever device. It is different from the word 'Sufi' which is from the Arabic *f*, literally meaning "woolen" (perhaps because of their woolen garments).

The rise of philosophy was in fact a response to the fallacies of Sophism. Contrary to Sophists who deny or doubt the existence of the external world, philosophers believe in the reality of this world and that this reality- whether partial or total, is accessible and communicable.

Types of Human Perception

Philosophers divide human perception into three main categories and explain that the task of a philosopher or a logician is to distinguish between them.

1) **Real Perceptions:** Consist of perceptions that have real existence from the human mind.

2) **Agreed Perceptions** (E'tebariat): Such as the term 'human being' which is a common perception driven from all examples of human kind. E'tebariat, therefore, exists only in the mind but its examples and applications exist in reality. In other words, there is no '*human being*' in the external world. What exists in the outer world are examples of human beings.

The concept of the 'human being' is something that our mind extracts from previous experiences of numerous examples of human beings. What exists in reality is tom, dick and harry. The generic term 'human being' is an extractive concept that we derive from those examples.

Thus, 'human being' has no existence out of our mind and imagination except in the form of its examples. Another example is numbers. What we have in real life is 'apple', or 'apples', then we extract the concept of 'one apple' or 'two apple' etc. Thus, numbers don't exist by themselves in reality.

3) **Illusion and imagination** – have no real existence, such as a man born with two snakes on his shoulders! 1

Rebuking the Sophists

Instinctive Knowledge

1. Instinctive knowledge is the knowledge with which we are born. Like the ROM (Read Only Memory) of the computer. In computer science, semiconductor-based memory is that which contains instructions or data that can be read but not modified. To create a ROM chip, the designer supplies a semiconductor manufacturer with the instructions or data to be stored. The manufacturer then produces one or more chips containing those instructions or data.

2. When we study the biography of the most skeptics or sophists, we without exception find, that none of them were actually born sophist, not believing that nothing exists or if it exists it is not comprehensible, otherwise they would not have sucked the milk from their mothers' breast.

3. Have you ever known any sophist cry when it is time to laugh, use his hands to watch something, or hear a voice with his eyes?! We know, as mentioned in the previous chapter, that it is related that Pyrrho acted on his own principles to such an extreme, that to safeguard him being run over by carriages or falling off a cliff, his friends were obliged to accompany him wherever he went.

Even if we accept the validity of his argument, based on the principle of 'uncertainty' one could have asked Mr. Pyrrho how would he be able to guarantee that his friends would be able to save him? What proof did he have of the likelihood of a real carriage running by?

Thus, it is obvious that the arguments of the Sophists are mere fallacy and no doubt all sophists are realist in their practical life. I would dare any sophist to jump from a cliff if there is no real life and certainty, or if life is a mere dream.

4. Any Sophist who expresses his or her opinion, have unconsciously admitted that they have tongue to talk with, there is someone around them to talk to and there is a means of communication. These facts are against the so-called principles of Sophism.

Answers to Dreams and Illusions

The fact that we know we have dreamed is a proof by itself that there must be a real life that we have already experienced which is comparable to what we have learned about the dream world. Similarly, the fact that we know there are many optical as well as other types of illusions, is enough to prove that there must be real sight which in comparison to it, we conclude illusions.

The same explanation can be sited about the following arguments, which although logically sound true, we know to be false. Indeed, without having any distinct and real measurement, how would it be possible for us to distinguish truth from falsehood?

Have you ever seen anyone forge a \$15 note? Of course not, simply because there is no such thing as a \$15 note to counterfeit from. Hence, contrary to sophist's fallacy, we may say all dreams and illusions are indirect proof of the real world around us.

In conclusion, the fact that we make mistakes in some of our thinking or seeing does not denote the validity of our knowledge overall. In fact, the task of various types of science from philosophy and logic to physical sciences is to help us learn from those mistakes.

Consider the following statement: 'Some dogs are Dalmatians; therefore all dogs are Dalmatians!' Obviously the conclusion that was reached is incorrect. However, we all know the physical explanation of why and how a mirage happens or why a stick looks broken in the water by an optical law of refraction. 2

Answers to Logical fallacies

Formal logic was founded by Aristotle to create a mathematical basis for disclosing the fallacy of the Sophists' theorems. The fallacy of all the examples mentioned so far and a logician can easily disclose many other such fallacies.

In the following examples, I will just show you the fallacy of the first example used in the first chapter and leave the rest to your interest in logic. However, before you indulge too much into logic, remember again the fact that you are able to identify that the theorems were false, even though you can't necessarily explain why. This again is further proof for instinctive self-evident knowledge.

In the first example, a Sophist fooled us by the means of a conjuncture only. Let us revise the theorem again:

– *Water is fluid (flowing).*

– *Ice is from water.*

–*Ice is fluid!*

The fallacy of the theorem is easily disclosed when the conjuncture 'from ' is highlighted in a different colour. Obviously, ice cannot be water in order to apply all the characteristics of water on it, rather it is **from** water.

Let me show you the fallacy of the theorem in a very clear, mathematical way:

All A = B

Some C = A

All C = B

Now it is obvious that the theorem is a mere fallacy and there is no truth in it. As a matter of fact, if there were no reality and there was no self-evident knowledge within each and every human, do you think we would be able to unveil the falsehood?

Before I end this chapter with the last part of the Simile of The Cave, which would answer the first part, one should remember that if some thinkers do not follow the rules set, even those set by themselves, whether in logic or philosophy, this does not surmise that logic or philosophical rules are useless; rather we should blame those who infringe the law on us, not the law itself.

The Simile of the Cave (Last Part)

'Then think what would naturally happen to them if they were released from their bonds and cured of their delusions. Suppose one of them were let loose, and suddenly compelled to stand up and turn his head and look and walk towards the fire, all these actions would be painful and he would be too puzzled to see properly the objects of which he used to see the shadows.

So if he was told that what he used to see was mere illusion and that he was now nearer reality and seeing more correctly, because he was turned towards objects that were more real, and if on top of that he were compelled to say what each of the passing objects was when it was pointed out to him, don't you think he would be at a loss, and think that what he used to see was more real than the objects now being pointed out to him?'

'Much more real.'

'And if he were made to look directly at the light of the fire, it would hurt his eyes and he would turn back

and take refuge in the things which he could see, which he would think really far clearer than the things being shown him.'

'Yes.'

'And if, I went on, 'he were forcibly dragged up the steep and rocky ascent and not let go till he had been dragged out into the sunlight, the process would be a painful one, to which he would much object, and when he emerged into the light his eyes would be so overwhelmed by the brightness of it that he wouldn't be able to see a single one of the things he was now told were real.'

'Certainly not at first,' he agreed.'

'Because he would need to grow accustomed to the light before he could see things in the world outside the cave. First he would find it easiest to look at shadows, next at the reflections of men and other objects in water, and later on at the objects themselves.'

After that he would find it easier to observe the heavenly bodies and the sky at night than by day, and to look at the light of the moon and stars, rather than at the sun and its light.'

'Of course.'

'The thing he would be able to do last would be to look directly at the sun, and observe its nature without using reflections in water or any other medium, but just as it is.'

'That must come last.'

'Later on he would come to the conclusion that it is the sun that produces the changing seasons and years and controls everything in the visible world, and is in a sense responsible for everything that he and his fellow-prisoners used to see.'

'That is the conclusion which he would obviously reach.'

'And when he thought of his first home and what passed for wisdom there, and of his fellow-prisoners, don't you think he would congratulate himself on his good fortune and be sorry for them?'

'Very much so.'

'There was probably a certain amount of honour and glory to be won among the prisoners, and prizes for keen-sightedness for anyone who could remember the order of sequence among the passing shadows and so be best able to predict their future appearances.'

Will our released prisoner hanker after these prizes or envy this power or honour? Won't he be more likely to feel, as Homer says, that he would far rather be "a serf in the house of a landless man", or indeed anything else in the world, than live and think as they do?'

'Yes,' he replied, 'he would prefer anything to a life like theirs.'

'Then what do you think would happen,' I asked, 'if he went back to sit in his old seat in the cave? Wouldn't his eyes be blinded by the darkness, because he had come in suddenly out of the daylight?'

'Certainly.'

'And if he had to discriminate between the shadows, in competition with the other prisoners, while he was still blinded and before his eyes got used to the darkness – a process that might take some time – wouldn't he be likely to make a fool of himself?'

And they would say that his visit to the upper world had ruined his sight, and that the ascent was not worth even attempting. And if anyone tried to release them and lead them up, they would kill him if they could lay hands on him.'

'They certainly would.'

'Now, my dear Glaucon,' I went on, 'this simile must be connected, throughout, with what preceded it.'

This is a more graphic presentation of the truths presented in the analogy of the Line. In particular, it tells us more about the two states of mind identified in the Line Analogy as Belief and Illusion.

We are shown the ascension of the mind from illusion to pure philosophy, and the difficulties, which accompany its progress. The philosopher, having achieved the supreme vision, is required to return to the cave and serve his fellows. His very unwillingness to do so, however, being his chief qualification.

The simile is the moral and intellectual condition of the average man from which Plato starts, and though clearly the ordinary man knows the difference between substance and shadow in the physical world, the simile suggests that his moral and intellectual opinions often bear as little relation to the truth as the average film does to real life.

Now if you would like to enlighten your life as well as your fellows, and if you would also like to raise yourself from the present world situation with all its calamities, meaningless, doubts and hectic properties, to rest forever in the ocean of peace, tranquility and certainty, then join me in this intellectual journey and read the following chapters thoroughly and carefully and think about them.

The choice is yours!

1. This imaginary character was named 'Zahhak', in the ancient Iranian tale.

2. The change in direction that occurs when a wave of energy such as light passes from one medium to another of a different density, for example, from air to water.

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