

The methodology of Ibn Sina in acquisition of religious knowledge

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Abstract:

There are many discussions about philosophical methodology of Ibn Sina. However, this study aimed to investigate the methodology of Ibn Sina in acquisition of religious knowledge. The acquisition of religious knowledge in a specific school and system is associated with the method of acquiring knowledge; i.e. what resources are used to achieve knowledge and what are the barriers to understanding and knowledge. Understanding his philosophical methodology which also includes the religious knowledge, the methodology of Ibn Sina in acquisition of religious knowledge may be revealed. This study investigated the knowledge sources, especially religious knowledge and their limits, the harmony between religion and intellect, and the interpretations of this harmony to find the methodology of religious knowledge acquisition.

Keywords: Methodology, Religious Knowledge, Ibn Sina, Intellect, Intuition, Religion.

Knowledge sources of Ibn Sina:

1. Intellect

The intellect is one of the most important knowledge sources in philosophical system of Ibn Sina. The knowledge which is obtained from this source is correct and certain. In any discussion, the true knowledge will be obtained through true argument.

يجب ان يسلك في كل بحث و معرفة حقيقة الصحيح و حقيقة الدليل الصحيح الذي هو البرهان (ابن سينا، 1326 ص 116)
Ibn Sina uses argument to state all philosophical problems. With the help of intellect, he proves the unnatural, unusual, and religious affairs. Even, he uses discursion and argument to discuss about religious affairs.

According to Ibn Sina, however, this knowledge source has many limitations; it cannot be the only knowledge source in his philosophical system.

According to Ibn Sina, if the intellect may prove something as abstained, it has the right to reject it; otherwise, it cannot reject them and is required to declare that it has no idea about them.

فالصواب أن تسرح أمثال ذلك إلى بقعة الإمكان- ما لم يذك عنه قائم البرهان- و اعلم أن في الطبيعة عجائب- و للقوى العالية الفعالة- و القوى السافلة المنفعلة- اجتماعات على غرائب (ابن سينا، 1375، ص 161)

In this statement, Ibn Sina speaks about strange things in natural world and strange activities of unnatural subjects. However, he suggests this rule that when the intellect does not have the ability to reject or prove something, it should not continue to explore it. In some cases the intellect may be unusable due to not having understanding about the issue; therefore, another source such as religion, discovery, and intuition may prove or disprove it.

Khaje explains that Sheikh refers to the people who reject the subjects which are not in the realm of science, wisdom, and philosophy.

الغرض من هذه النصيحة- النهي عن مذاهب المتفلسفة- الذين يرون إنكار ما- لا يحيطون به علما و حكمة و فلسفة- و التنبيه على أن إنكار أحد طرفي الممكن من غير حجة- ليس إلى الحق أقرب من الإقرار بطرفه الآخر من غير بينة- بل الواجب في مثل هذا المقام التوقف- ثم ختم الفصل- بأن وجود العجائب في عالم الطبيعة ليس بعجيب- و صدور الغرائب عن الفاعلات العلوية- و القابلات السفلية ليس بغريب ابن سينا، 1375، ج3، ص 419

In some cases, therefore, intellect has many limitations and may not prove some issue; other knowledge resources should be used in these cases. The limitation is especially more in supernatural issues. Ibn Sina acknowledges this limitation that most of the afterlife issues are not clear to us.

فان اكثر امر الاخرة خفى علينا (ابن سينا، 1371، ص 203)

According to him, the knowledge of God is not impossible, but there are many limitations which make it difficult to know God. He states that the knowledge of God is possible by having chaste heart and prosper soul (Gorgian et al., 2012, p. 113).

The human faces limitations in knowledge acquisition. These limitations are associated with both tangible and intangible issues.

Therefore, Ibn Sina states that the human is not able to understand the objects. He/ she just may understand one part and one property of science properties.

الإنسان لا يعرف حقيقة الشيء البتة لأن مبدأ معرفته للأشياء هو الحس. ثم يميز بالعقل بين المتشابهات و المتباينات و يعرف حينئذ بالعقل بعض لوازمه و أفعاله و تأثيراته و خواصه فيندرج من ذلك إلى معرفته معرفة مجملّة غير محققة بما لم يعرف من لوازمه إلا اليسير.. (ابن سينا، 1404 ص 82)

2. Discovery and Intuition

Considering the philosophical system of Ibn Sina, it can be said that the discovery and intuition is not his knowledge sources. He is known as a discursive philosopher. However, some points make us to consider discovery and intuition a knowledge source of his philosophical system. In the introduction of *Manteq-Ol- Mashreqi*, he introduces a book with different methodology; he pays special attention to mysticism and mystics' position in last three styles of *Esharat* and some other books such as *Resale Eshq*; also, he acknowledge that true knowledge is acquired from mysticism. All of these show that the mysticism has an important position in philosophical methodology of Ibn sina.

According to Ibn Sina, therefore, the discovery and intuition may be knowledge source. However, the place of discovery and intuition in philosophical system of Ibn Sina will be addressed in the following.

3. Religion

The religion may be considered one of the knowledge sources of Ibn Sina. He pays special attention to intellect; due to limitations of intellect, however, he uses religion, too.

Discussing the Resurrection, Ibn Sina uses religion knowledge source.

وجب ان يعلم ان المعاد منه ما هو منقول من الشرع و لا سبيل الى اثباته الا من طريق الشريعة و تصديق خبر النبوة و هو الذي للبدن عند للبعث (ابن سينا، 1404، ص 423، 1379، ص 682)

According to Ibn sina, the religion complements intellect; these two together may cause religious knowledge acquisition.

و هي متممة بالعقل فان كل ما لا يتوصل العقل الى اثبات وجوده او وجوبه بالدليل فانما يكون معه جوازه فقط فان النبوة تعقد على وجوده او عدمه فصلا و قد صح عنده صدقها و يتم عنده صدقها (ابن سينا، 1326 ص 116)

Ibn sina uses the Quranic verses and traditions in explaining different philosophical issues (creation of universe, eternal universe, first creation of Allah, and etc. (Ibn Sina, 2004, pp. 11-13) (Ibn Sina, 1400, p. 255). This shows that the religion is one of his knowledge sources.

Summary:

Three knowledge sources including intellect, discovery and intuition, and religion may be considered as knowledge sources in philosophical system of Ibn Sina. In this system, all of these knowledge sources are used and each has its own place. However, the philosophical methodology and religious knowledge acquisition method of Ibn sina will be discusses in the following.

1. Philosophical methodology of Ibn Sina

The intellect, discovery and Intuition, and religion are knowledge sources of Ibn Sina. The use of a resource to make clear a problem does not mean that the philosophical method changes according to used sources. It is clear that if we ignore some parts of *Esharat* and other books which are written using discursive style, the methodology of Ibn Sina is discursive; in other

words, he uses intellect in judgments and interpretations. In these books, he sometimes uses other knowledge sources for judgment; for example, in discussion of Resurrection.

2. Position of religion

The interpretation of Ibn Sina about Resurrection may be considered to know his philosophical methodology. Ibn Sina sometimes states that resurrection is physical and sometimes, he states that it is spiritual.

In his book entitled (Al-Azhuye) (Ibn Sina, 2003, p. 92-99), he states that the Prophet Mohammad has mentioned the facts in the form of allegory and metaphor; therefore, he does not accept the physicality of resurrection. In his book (Shafa), he confirms the physicality of resurrection. This confirmation is not on philosophical basis; rather, he says that the physical resurrection is not unacceptable rationally, but we should trust to words of Prophet.

وجب ان يعلم ان المعاد منه ما هو منقول من الشرع و لا سبيل الى اثباته الا من طريق الشريعة و تصديق خبر النبوة و هو الذي للبدن عند للبعث (ابن سينا، 1404 ص 423) (ابن سينا، 1379 ص 682)

He almost uses intellect everywhere; but his discussion on resurrection consists of two intellectual and religious arguments; this is due to limitations of human intellect (Meshkati, 2010, p. 184).

Is the preference of religion, rather than intellect due to the limitations of human intellect or conflict between intellect and religion? It seems that it is not due to limitations of human intellect; because in other works, he uses intellect to prove the spirituality of Resurrection (Ibn Sina, 2003, pp. 92-98). However, in his book entitled (Shafa), he uses both intellect and religion to prove the spirituality of resurrection; since religion ascertain the physicality of resurrection, he prefers it.

In this discussion, Ibn Sina uses another source of knowledge and due to religious beliefs, he accepts physical resurrection. Therefore, the religion is preferred; this preference is intellectual, too (Ibn Sina, 1947, p. 116).

In (Shafa), he states that the resurrection has two parts; one part is cited in religion and other part is understood by intellect.

The religion prove the resurrection of bodies. The intellect proves the resurrection of souls which is also confirmed by prophets. However, we are not able to imagine and understand it.

Ibn Sina does not believe in intermediate world (Hassanzadeh, 1417, p. 259). He states that the emergence of good or bad deeds in the face in intermediate world requires the existence of body. When the body is destroyed, subsequently the face disappears and only the immaterial soul remains. Therefore, it is the soul that enjoys or is prevented from enjoying intellectual pleasures (Hosseini Tehrani, 1976, vol. 6, p. 62). Therefore, he rejects physical resurrection.

If Ibn Sina uses discursive methodology, why he do not prove physical resurrection using this method? It can be said he believes that the physical resurrection cannot be proved by philosophical approach (Seraj, 2013, p. 98).

It is not correct to say that Ibn Sina uses religion to prove physical resurrection and this contradict with his philosophical methodology. It should be noted that the philosophical methodology of Ibn Sina should be considered as a unit. In other words, the philosophical

methodology of Ibn Sina should be determined considering all of his knowledge sources, rather than one source or one discussion.

Due to limitations of intellect, Ibn Sina believes that religion complements it (Ibn Sina, 1947, p. 116). In other words, if intellect cannot help, the religion may be considered. So, he uses both sources to acquire knowledge. He uses intellect as far as possible to interpret philosophical issues; however, the religion, discovery, and intuition also have a special place in his interpretations.

The concern about coordination between philosophy and religion is one issue that should be considered in discussing religious methodology of Ibn Sina. For some reasons, he tries to make harmony between philosophy and religion.

1. Some philosophical problems contradict with religion such as the creation of universe, the creation of the universe before this world, and resurrection. He tries to make harmony between philosophy and religion by preference of religion or interpretation of Quranic verses and traditions.
2. Due to the slurs and excommunication of scholars (Sadeghzadeh, 2003, p. 10).

He tried to provide philosophical justification for natural and unnatural affairs. He provides philosophical arguments and justifications for angels, demons, commandments, and worship (Ibn Sina, 1405, pp. 443-451).

The most notable harmony between philosophy and religion is in Resurrection discussion. Due to the conflict between intellect and religion, he accepts physical resurrection. His interpretations about Quranic verses and traditions try to make harmony between philosophy and religion.

Ibn Sina uses traditions in different philosophical discussions such as discussing about (No one is created God). This shows that he considers the religion knowledge source in interpretations and creation of harmony between philosophy and religion.

The intellect alone rejects physical resurrection; but along with religion, the intellect confirms it. Since Ibn Sina cannot interpret religion's idea about physical resurrection, he accepts it. This acceptance is not bad and shows his greatness.

Some proponents of physical resurrection believe that his confirmation is due to his fear of excommunication and not due to acceptance of religion. And, the opponents blamed him for involving religion in intellectual issue. However, both groups ignore this fact that Sheikh believes in religion, the harmony between religion and intellect, and limitations of intellect; therefore, the confirmation is not due to fear of excommunication (Saedi, 2004, p 191).

In many philosophical issue, Ibn Sina is affected by Aristotle. However, he does not consider Aristotle ideas about the creation of world. It seems that Sheikh separated from his Greek counterpart due to his theological and religious concerns (Molla Yousefi and colleagues, 2011, p. 77).

The religious motivation was the main motive that prompted Ibn Sina not to remain faithful to Aristotle. As a Muslim, Ibn Sina could not be uninterested to religious teachings. He believed in inner and outer powers and aimed to use inner power (or intellect) to review the teachings of outer power (or Prophet). Since his faith had taught him the prophet is honest and true, therefore he tried to make harmony between his philosophy and intellect and the religion (Ibid., P. 98).

Therefore, the religious knowledge which is apparently contrary to intellect is not necessarily contrary to intellect. In this case, the religion complements intellect and the religious knowledge which is obtained in this way is certain. According to Ibn sina, if the intellect cannot prove something, it can be proved using religion knowledge source and it will also be certain.

و اما الشقاوة الروحانية فان العقل طريق اليها من جهة النظر و القياس و البرهان و الجسمانية تصح بالنبوة التي صحت بالعقل و وجبت بالدليل و هي متممة بالعقل فان كل ما لا يتوصل العقل الى اثبات وجوده او وجوبه بالدليل فانما يكون معه جوازه فقط فان النبوة تعقد على وجوده او عدمه فصلا و قد صح عنده صدقها و يتم عنده صدقها فيتم عنده ما صح و قصر عنه من معرفة (ابن سينا، 1326، ص 116)

Position of mysticism:

There are many arguments about the relationship between discovery and intuition and philosophical methodology of Ibn Sina:

1. The mystical discussions in the works of Ibn Sina are not the result of his discovery and intuition. He was aware of mystical issue due to being contemporary to mystics. Ibn Sina is the one who reports the findings of mystics (Gorgians and others, 2012, p. 111).

There is no discovery and intuition in his available works (Zekavati, 1991, p. 34).

Considering the writings which are attributed to Ibn Sina book (Mashregiyyin), Sohrevardi states that although Ibn Sina attributes these writings to Mashregiyyin, they are exactly the rules of Perpatetics and common philosophies, except some changes in some claims (Sohrevardi, 1992, p. 195).

In philosophical issues, Ibn sina uses discussion. In some cases that he states the material using discovery and intuition, in fact he states the findings of mystics. Unlike Mulla Sadra who states some issues with intuition and says that I find and I witness, Ibn sina states that the mystics say....

2. Acceptance of discovery methodology:

It is known that the philosophical methodology of Ibn Sina is intellectual argument. However, Ibn Sina was not committed to this philosophical method until the end of his life. He changed his philosophical methodology in some of his books and in last three styles in Esharat. In these works which are written late in his life, other knowledge sources than intellect are entered to his philosophical methodology; i.e. discovery and intuition.

Due to conceptual proximity of wisdom to mysticism and his familiarity with some Sufis such as Abu Sa'id Abu al-Khair, Ibn Sina got interested in mysticism and wrote books which used mysticism as one of the knowledge sources; for example, Resaleye- Eshgh.

In eighth style in Esharat, he states mystical issues and considers the mystics as informed of true knowledge who enjoy from intellectual and great pleasures (Ibn Sina, 1996, p. 139).

Khaje also acknowledges that Ibn Sina has integrated discussion and discovery and considers discussion weaker than intuition. The issue that Ibn Sina considers it as one of the great wisdom issues is explained by discussion and discovery. Then, the wisdom that includes these knowledge sources is better than argument wisdom.

و إنما جعل هذه المسألة من الحكمة المتعالية- لأن حكمة المشاءين حكمة بحثية صرفة- و هذه و أمثالها إنما يتم مع البحث- و النظر بالكشف و الذوق- فالحكمة المشتعلة عليها متعالية بالقياس إلى الأول.(ابن سينا، 1375، ج3، ص 401)

The importance of discovery and intuition and its value for Ibn Sina is clear in following statement:

و من أحب أن يتعرفها فليتدرج إلى أن يصير من أهل المشاهدة دون المشافهة، و من الواصلين إلى العين دون السامعين للأثر... (ابن سينا، 1375 ص 147)

In the introduction of mantiq al Mashregiyyin, Ibn Sina states that:

و ما جمعنا هذا الكتاب لنظهره إلا لأنفسنا أعني الذين يقومون منا مقام أنفسنا و أما العامة من مزاولي هذا الشأن فقد أعطيناهم في كتاب الشفاء ما هو كثير لهم و فوق حاجتهم و سنعطيههم في اللواحق ما يصلح لهم زيادة على ما أخذوه... (ابن سينا، 1405، ص 4)

أحبنا أن نجمع كتابا يحتوي على أمهات العلم الحق الذي استنبطه من نظر كثيرا و فكر مليا و لم يكن من جودة الحدس بعيدا و اجتهد في التعصب لكثير فيما يخالفه الحق فوجد لتعصبه و ما يقوله وفاقا عند الجماعة غير نفسه و لا أحق بالإصغاء إليه من التعصب لطائفة إذا أخذ يصدق عليهم فإنه لا ينجيهم من العيوب إلا الصدق (همان ص 5)

Considering his respect for mystics, his admiration of mystics, and his statements that suggest the methodology without discovery and intuition is weak, therefore, the tendency of Ibn Sina toward mysticism may be understood.

However, it should be noted it seems that the methodology of Ibn Sina is not mystical. He may will change his methodology in his future works. As in Hekmat al Mashregiyyin, he states that:

ان الغاية القربى منه هو المقبول على اكمل بالامكان و هو المعنى الذى يسميه الصوفية بالاتحاد.

In this book, Ibn Sina apparently accepts and ascertain discovery and intuition methodology (Ibn Sina, 1400, p. 393).

In the introduction of Mantegh al Shafa, he states that:

In addition to Shafa and Lavaheq, I have wrote another book about oriental philosophy. In this book, I have explained explicitly the truth of philosophy without considering the Perpatetics and do not hesitate to express my opposite ideas. Everyone who wants the truth, he/ she should refer to this book (Ibn Sina, 1405, p. 10).

Ibn Sina also distinguishes between perception and observation. He considers observation superior to perception.

لكن الادراك شىء و المشاهدة الحققة شىء و المشاهدة الحققة تاليه للادراك اذا صرفت الهمة الى جانب الحق. ابن سينا، 1978، ص 44)

Ibn Sina acknowledges the intuition ability to achieve the superior facts (Ibn Sina, 1996, p. 375).

Ibn Sina considers the mystical experiences of mystics as revelation. As the prophets' revelation has epistemological value, the mystical experience also has high epistemic value.

ان الابرار الاتقياء كيف لهم الهام شبيه بالوحى و كرامات تشبه المعجزات. (ابن سينا، 1326 ص 114)

3. Interpretation:

The interpretation is one of the important issues which should be considered in discussing about religious methodology of Ibn Sina. At the end of revelation discussion, Ibn Sina refers to meaning of interpretation.

According to Ibn Sina, all principles of monotheism are based on metaphor.

ولهذا ورد التوراة تشبيها كله، ثم لم يرد في القرآن من الإشارة الى هذا الأمر المهم شيء، و لا أتى بصريح ما يحتاج إليه من التوحيد بيان مفصل، بل أتى بعضه على سبيل التشبيه في الظاهر، و بعضه [تنزيها مطلقا عاما] جدا لا تخصيص و لا تفسير له.

Therefore, other beliefs will be based on metaphor, too (Alazhoyieh Fi Maad, p. 98).

فظاهر من هذا كله ان التشريع واردة لخطاب الجمهور بما يفهمون مقربا ما لا يفهمون الى افهامهم بالتشبيه و التمثيل. (ابن سينا، 1382 ص 103)

Ibn Sina state that the interpretation is necessary to be conducted; otherwise, the things and affairs will not be accepted.

ان الامور الواردة عن هذا الموضوع في الشرايع اذا اخذت على ما هي عليها لزمها امور محالة و شنيعة (همان، ص 105)

Conclusion:

Ibn Sina uses intellect, discovery, and religion as knowledge sources of acquiring religious knowledge. However, each has its special position and limitations. According to him, the intellect is not enough to acquire religious knowledge. The discovery also has been used limitedly in philosophical system of Ibn Sina. He uses religion for interpretation. He even explains some non-philosophical issues in the form of philosophical methodology. He also uses this source for conclusion. Therefore, it can be said that Ibn Sina consider the religious knowledge which is acquired through intellect (of course, the conclusion should not be in conflict with religion) as real knowledge.

Since Ibn Sina is a Muslim, he considers religion in his philosophical system. However, he tries to conclude with intellect knowledge source. In some cases, he also uses religion and discovery and creates harmony between intellect and religion.

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