

Ilm and Marifah from Perspective of Ibn Arabi

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Abstract: In Ibn Arabi's opinion, ilm (science) was persistent revelation of god to heart which had not been veiled by worldly occupations. True ilm was accompanied with practice and its outcome was intangible paradise. He believed that ilm had a divine nature and marifah (knowledge) had a lordly nature. Therefore, according to him, ilm was superior over marifah. Based on this difference, marifah is from the universe of creation and ilm is from the universe of imperative. So, this study aims to explain ilm and marifah from perspective of Ibn Arabi. For this purpose, first Ibn Arabi's opinion on ilm and its difference with marifah and finally, features of ilm are described.

Key words: Ilm (science), marifah (knowledge), benefit of ilm, opinion, Arabi's

INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, Ibn Arabi has been one of the most influential Muslim thinkers in the last seven centuries. Although, he didn't found any school of thought there have been a number of prominent writers who have considered themselves as being inspired by him or who have found it inevitable to address what Ibn Arabi and his advocate introduced in their works. Among the most important topics Ibn Arabi discussed are those of ilm and marifah. He believed ilm was the noblest attribute which if human has his/her soul governed by it and modifies his affairs according to it will lead to human's salvation and redemption. According to Islamic thought, ilm and marifah have the same meaning unless context requires otherwise. However, Sufis have enumerated some differences between them as they use them in Sufic terms. Some considered applied knowledge as marifah and the abstract knowledge as ilm. Others believed that what is acquired by reason was ilm and what was obtained by intuition was marifah. However, Ibn Arabi as a thinker explained the being based on pantheism which led to difference between him and his Sufi predecessors in terms of definition of many mystic terms. Accordingly, given the multiplicity of Ibn Arabi's relevant works and that he attached very much importance to ilm, we studied his views on what marifah was and how important marifah was and also what the concept of benefit of ilm.

IBN ARABI'S VIEW OF ILM

Ibn Arabi usually used ilm to refer to knowledge, rather than marifah which is a close synonym for ilm and which has often been translated in English translations of Sufic works as "Gnos". Overall, Ibn Arabi considered ilm

in a broader and more transcendental sense, maybe because ilm is an attribute of God in Quran while marifah is not so mentioned in Quran. Notwithstanding, following republic of Sufis, he used the term "mystic" to refer to "high profile mystics" that means the person who have attained a marifah as referred to by this famous hadith: "the one who has known him/herself has known his/her God". Ibn Arabi believed that there was no ultimate goal beyond ilm: "no level is higher than that of ilm" (Fotuhut Makiah). "No dignity is higher than that of ilm and no level is higher than that of divine perception". "Although, gifts from God are beyond estimation, no gift is bigger than ilm", "the most virtuous thing endowed by God to his creatures is ilm. Whenever God endows ilm to a creature, he actually endows the best of attributes and the biggest of gifts to him/her", "god called his profit on and said, "say, my God, increase my ilm" (Quran/Taha 114). Because ilm is the noblest attribute and purest property", "ilm is the cause of salvation ... the level of ilm is so high. That is why God called his profit not to seek too much of anything except for ilm". Also, Ibn Arabi believed that ilm was attribute of both God and the world and since it was possible that God and the universe share the same attribute, ilm was only literally shared between God and universe in terms of truth and limit. Similarly, concept of existence is also literally shared only, that is, if existence is attributed to world, it is not the same existence which is attributed to God. Existence is one and that is God and everything other than God is absolute nonexistence; the universe is not something other than God but it is different manifestations of that one existence. This is why Heydar Amoli believed that absolute ilm was not definable because the absolute of ilm include ilm of sublime necessity and the ilm of possibility. Definition of ilm of necessity is different from that of ilm of possibility. Ilm of

God is actual, essential, true and eternal while ilm of possibility is passive, contingent, virtual and acquired (Amoli, 1989). In a passage from *Fotuhah Makiah*, Ibn Arabi considered ilm as being the opposite of ignorance and since ignorance had two meanings, then ilm also had two meanings. If ignorance is considered in negatively which has an abstract essence, then everything other than God is ignorant, i.e., ignorance is the requirement of their existence; because anything other than God doesn't have knowledge. In this case, ilm means knowledge. This is why Quran calls on prophet as a perfect human to seek ilm as much as possible. However, if ignorance means false believe in something which is true, then, ilm would be something which is only endowed to divine people.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ILM AND MARIFAH

Ibn Arabi considered ilm to be superior over marifah. His specific account was that marifah had a lordly level while ilm had a divine one. Marifah has a lordly level and unlike ilm it is related with faith and belief, rather than with ilm and intuition. Ibn Arabi stressed that his difference with those who considered marifah to be superior over ilm was a literal difference, rather than an essential one that is the meaning that most Sufis consider for marifah is referred to by Ibn Arabi as ilm and the meaning that they considered for ilm was referred to by marifah by Ibn Arabi. However, there is another difference as well which is their difference in terms of their answer to the question that who holds this superior level which is called ilm by Ibn Arabi and marifah by most Sufis and whether they share the same states. According to Ibn Arabi, the answer to this question was in negative that is the holder of this level doesn't necessarily have to have all of these states; rather, the major and main condition is holding of ilm while states may be held if required by God. Therefore, if a research Sufi says that holder of such level has all of levels, he means ilm, rather than hal, although he may have mystic states as well. However, having mystic states is not a condition and if someone considers it as a condition, then, it is just a falseclaim which is not based on knowledge obtained through divine ways and Prophets. Such claim can be criticized by saying that the more perfect the level of a person, the more deficient his mystic states in this universe and not in the other world in the same way that intuition makes human needless of sight of other, level deteriorates states; because level is persistent while states may disappear. Therefore, according to Ibn Arabi, mystic is only the place of intuition of divine name of God but alim (scholar of ilm) is the one in whom the essence and divinity of God have been revealed. Therefore, all names of God are

intuited. According to this difference, marifah is from the universe of creation and ilm from the universe of imperative and also, mystic has mystical states while alim does not experience those states. On the other hand, God is described as alim while mystic is not an attribute of God. What is the attribute of God is better, then, ilm is better than marifah. According to Ibn Arabi, marifah is more specific than ilm. Marifah's knowledge of the one God because in Arabic language which was language of Prophet Mohammad, ilm becomes transitive by one object while ilm which becomes transitive sometimes by one objective and other times by two objects, sometimes refers to one God and other times to something other than one God. Therefore, two terms of marifah and ilm have the same advantage in meaning as they did originally. Therefore, marifah is a name of ilm because ilm is original; ilm is an attribute of God; while marifah is not a name of God and no derivative of marifah, such as arif (mystic) are attributed to God in shariah. Although, it is possible to provide the same definition for both marifah and ilm, marifah is a name of ilm and mystic means the scholar who has knowledge of the one God.

Definition of ilm: General, Ibn Arabi and his followers provided definitions for ilm in their works which can be considered to be either literal or formal. Some of them are discussed below: Ilm is to understand perceptions as they are. This definition is reminiscent of Prophet Mohammad's famous prayer, "O God, show me the things as they are". However, Ibn Arabi stressed that this definition of ilm applied to perceivable subjects and for unperceivable thing, definition of ilm is lack of understanding of them as it has been said that "inability to comprehend the comprehension is already to comprehend". Therefore, ilm of God is non-comprehending him. However, is there anything but God. Therefore, under pantheism which Ibn Arabi insisted on in his works, understanding anything other than God is the very understanding of God because all objects are different manifestations of God and human understands a manifestation of God which is nothing but God, by comprehending objects which are manifestations of God. In fact, in the said prayer, Prophet Mohammad asked for true ilm. In a commentary on this prayer, Ibn Arabi stated, "By objects, the Prophet meant things separate from God. The Prophet actually meant to say, "O God, get me know things other than you so that I obtain knowledge of object, so that, I could find out if they are you or separate from you; if they are eternal or contingent, eternal or mortal. When God shows himself to the Prophet as something separate from God, the Prophet will see the things as they are without the things signifying

something other than God. This means that the Prophet sees the object as the essence of God, without those things have any quality, place and name. Therefore, essence of God, i.e., what is called the level of invisibles under mysticism is not comprehensible), knowledge of comprehension of desired essence is knowledge in itself, whether it is existence or inexistence, negation or confirmation, denial or possibility and requirement. This definition is similar to famous definition provided by Baghlani great Ashari thinker who defined ilm as “obtaining knowledge of what has occurred”. Ilm constitute acquisition of something by heart as the thing is in itself, whether it is something known or existent, then ilm is a property which results in acquisition by heart and scholar of ilm is the heart and the known is the acquired thing”. There is an important point in this definition which didn't exist in previous definitions that ilm is something related to human heart. Unlike philosophers who considered human as talking animal and considered the reason as the distinction between human and animal, Ibn Arabi believed that human was in fact the heart that is a divine fine things which is placed between divine soul and body.

Features of ilm

Ilm is recall: Like some Sufis, Ibn Arabi believed in recall theory. According to this theory, God has embodied ilm of everything in human (Ibn Arabi) then humans have forgotten their ilm in material world so that they have forgotten the testimony they made on the day when God asked them, “I am your God?” and they said, “Yes”. Thus, human ilm is not acquired but recalled. In fact, this belief is one of the results of pantheism and theory of manifestation of names of God and divine attributes under mysticism theory. God is ilm, scholar of ilm and object of ilm and nothing but diversified one realizes in the universe. That is God is essentially one and multiple in terms of his names. According to Ibn Arabi, each of cosmoses were manifestation of a name of names of God and each divine name was called with all names of Allah, then each creature in the universe holds all truths and a priori knows them.

ILM IS PERSISTENT REVELATION OF GOD TO HUMAN SOUL

Ilm is persistent revelation of God to human soul. Ibn Arabi believed, based on ongoing creation theory that human and general every object of perception has a new ilm at any moment. In fact, it the true ilm which is revealed to the heart of its receivers on an ongoing basis; however, some heart are in an non-essential veil and so they cannot

receive it, like nonessential blindness and deafness which prevent human from seeing and hearing. When the Prophet said that heart can be rusted as iron is rusted (Ghazali), he meant that heart may be attached to something other than God which would prevent revelation of almighty God to it because God is manifesting himself on an ongoing basis and there is no way he is veiled from us and if human heart receives anything but God that thing is construed as rust, lock, puss and the like.

THE PLACE OF HUMAN ILM IS IN HIS/HER HEART

Like Abouhamdeh Ghazali (Ghazali) believed that place of ilm was in human heart. Heart is a polished mirror whose rust is nothing but occupying oneself with ilm of means and such occupation prevents revelation on almighty God to it. According to Ibn Arabi, place of such faith is in heart and the heart must be cleaned from impurities by endeavor and leaving one's interests. Human heart has the capacity to accommodate divine magnificence. Then, one must leave all things that keep him/her from God. Then, God will give him/her his light and endows him/her a divine ilm through observation and revelation which is beyond capacity of the universe. So God said: “Indeed, this contains a notice for whoever has a heart” (Gh). This holy verse speaks of heart and nothing else; because heart, like divine manifestations is not in a stable state and its state is always changing. Then, the person who fails to observe God's manifestations by his/her heart will deny them; because reason and other human faculties are limited. It is only heart that is not limited and may change at any moment rapidly. Thus, Prophet Mohammad said, “He places a heart in believer and he changes it as he wishes”. Therefore, the heart is constantly changing with divine manifestations in forms. Thus, knowledge of God can only be obtained by heart rather than by reason.

HOLDING ILM WHILE NOT APPLYING IT CONSTITUTES IGNORANCE

Ilm constitutes ignorance if it is not applied. Researcher Sufis always distinguish between practitioner of ilm and the person who only narrates ilm. Distinguishing between ilm and describing of ilm, they consider the ilm to be true when it leads human to the right acts. According to Ibn Arabi as a result of the truth of ilm, holder of it cannot help practicing it. Therefore, the term ilm is used to refer to two things one that is ilm and the other that is ignorance whose holder mistakenly think that it is ilm (Ansari, 2007).

THE RESULT OF TRUE ILM IS INTANGIBLE PARADISE

According to Ibn Arabi, paradise is like the world and human. As the world is divided to invisible and visible, fine and coarse or soul and body and as human has body and soul and ilm and practice, there are two types of paradise: intangible paradise and tangible paradise. Intangible paradise is the result of ilm therefore, it is like soul for tangible paradise and tangible paradise is the result of practice and it is like body for intangible paradise. This is because ilm is the soul of practice and practice is its body. Mystics who have not reached the level of ilm of almighty God devote themselves to practice only and consider practice as their objective; they enjoy tangible paradise and its formal gifts. According to Ibn Arabi, they have high place but they don't have high status (Einolghozat, 2007). However, mystics who have ilm and practice at the same time will enjoy intangible paradise and its spiritual gifts. It is evident that they enjoy tangible paradise as well; however, its enjoyments are so low compared with spiritual enjoyments that making them is considered to be painful and lover of convenience is not found in this paradise (Kharazmi, 1985).

UNION OF ILM, SCHOLAR OF ILM AND OBJECT OF ILM

From discussions of Ibn Arabi which are based on pantheism, one can certainly find out that he believed in union of ilm, scholar of ilm and object of ilm because there is only one existence and being which comprises ilm, scholar of ilm and subject of ilm. This applies to manifestations of that truth as well and human which is the manifestation of the most perfect name of God, i.e., servant of God and caliph of Allah is ilm, scholar of ilm and subject of ilm. In fact, God's ilm of cosmos which is manifestation of him is God's ilm of himself and human ilm of God is also nothing but human ilm of him/her because God is the truth of human and all cosmoses. According to Gheisari, the one identity is manifest in worldly levels in the same way that it is manifest in divine levels. Therefore, human ilm of other objects is also ilm of God or in other words, ilm of him/her. This is why Ibn Arabi said in interpretation of holy verse "There is no object but the one that praises it" (Asra) that it refers to object. He believed that whenever an object is praising itself, it is praising God and whenever it is praising God, it is praising itself. On this basis and given praise requires ilm, it can be said that everybody who obtains knowledge of one's self or other object actually obtain knowledge of God or more precisely of apparent identity of God which is manifested

as him/her or other objects (Kharazmi, 1985). Therefore, all types of God's ilm and human ilm mentioned by philosophers are in fact God's ilm of himself.

IBN ARABI'S OPINION ABOUT BENEFIT OF ILM

According to Islam, benefit indicates benefit things for afterlife, rather than transient worldly phenomena. Beneficial ilm is only the one that benefits human in his/her return to God. Therefore, any ilm which fails to have such benefit directly or indirectly is not desired ilm is not prescribed by Quran and may not be considered to be Islamic ilm and may even not be below human position to devote his/her life to acquire it. Every person inevitably acquires various ilms depending on his/her individual and social status, therefore, human must avoid acquiring the ilm which would lead to any nobler ilm. According to a famous saying, secondary ilm the ilm acquisition of which has not benefit for afterlife, must be acquire only to the extent required, therefore, if human devotes him/herself to acquisition of secondary ilms exclusively (or mostly), he/she will commit by so doing overt blasphemy of God because so doing results in oblivion of human nature and diversion from teachings which are revealed to human through Prophets. Ibn Arabi said, "Human has no honor but to know God". In a letter to famous Kalam scholar and commentator, Fakhroddin Razi, Ibn Arabi spoke in detail of benefit of ilm, differentiating true and necessary ilm and other types of ilm to which ignorant people (and some kalam scholars) devote themselves. Noting that original and proper ilm is only obtained as gift and observation, in fact, he intended to say that true ilm may not be obtained by reading books. In other words, such ilm is not acquired but is a divine gift. Ilm of object, to put in terms of recent texts is of the type of practical ilm rather theoretical ilm. Ibn Arabi mentioned the verses of Quran in which God encourages human to become prepared to receive gifted ilm, including verse 282 of sura Al-Bagharah which stresses on importance of piety: "Assume divine piety may that God forgive you". In his letter to Fakhroddin Razi, Ibn Arabi wrote: "Rational human should only choose the ilm which returns him/her to his soul and brings him/her to his origin which is but ilm of almighty God as gift and through observation. Indeed, you don't need medical science unless in the universe of diseases because, when you are transferred to the universe where there are no diseases, then, you will not need medical science. The same is true of any ilm which will become irrelevant when human is transferred to the other world. Then, rational human should study such ilm only to the extent required and endeavors to procure what are transferred to the other universe with him which are two ilms: ilm of God

almighty and ilm of afterlife and what its levels require and to acquire these two ilms so that, he/she puts step in the other universe as he/she stepped into this world and not to deny anything". The question which raises here is what ilm of rules and ahkam (decrees) prescribed by shariah means and whether such ilm is necessary. The answer is: yes to the extent required. When human passes out to afterlife, knowledge of shariah, like knowledge of other sciences has not any benefit for him/her. Ibn Arabi usually stress that upon death, he/she is discharged from duty. In afterlife, everybody appreciate God by their essences rather than by formal knowledge of shariah-based acts which characterize believers in this world. Therefore, such ilm is important because it guides individual's devotional acts and it is evident that such ilm has no benefit in afterlife. Acquiring such ilm in this universe is only necessary to extent required. In the following case, Ibn Arabi stressed again that ilm of Allah and afterlife is prior to other ilms:" Beware that demand of soul for ilm is much more than demand of body for food. There are two categories of ilm one which is needed in much the same way that the body needs food and which so must be acquired moderately and to the extent required. Such ilm is ilm of religious rules which must receive attention only to the extent required. In fact, another ilm whose acquisition must have no limit is ilm of God and places in day of judgment. The person who knows such places deserves a place depending on his/her ilm. In that world when the veils are removed, God almighty becomes essentially desired and that day (Day of Judgment) is the day of separation. "The rational human should gain insight into his/her affair, be accountable to him/her and others and be accountable where he/she is held answerable". Ibn Arabi provided several arguments to support his view on giving priority to acquisition of ilm of Allah and afterlife. These arguments are rooted in ontology, theology, anthropology and psychology as read under Islamic tradition. The most essential argument of Ibn Arabi was the anthropologic one, that is, it was rooted in understanding of phenomenon of "human". The main belief here is that:" God created human as his form" or in Quran's terms:" God taught all names of God to Adam". Since, human symbolizes a "form" of a meaning, i.e., God, or in other words, human was endowed with ilm of all objects, therefore, human soul is essentially infinite. It seems that this is the only way to explain why human is eternal in afterlife. God who manifests himself in human form creates universe (or what is separate from God). Thus, the universe is infinite because God is the eternal

creator. So, human ilm of the universe is infinite in the same way that his/her ilm of the creator is infinite. Besides, ilm of the universe is the very ilm of Allah. Ibn Arabi impliedly referred to a joke in Arabic language and wrote: "We call universe as universe to show that it is a sign of God". Ilm of the universe, however, can function as veil in the path to union with God because the more the human becomes interested in signs (without recognizing their signification), the more he/she becomes ignorant and the more becomes deprived of seeing the truth of those signs. From this view, any ilm of the university which ignores divine signs and signs of God are not acknowledged and recognized as they are does not deserve to be called as ilm and is nothing but deviation, veil and ignorance disguised as ilm.

Following in ilm: One of reasons Ibn Arabi provided to demonstrate futility of any attempt to attain real ilm was based on concept of "following". All ilms are derived from factors which are outside of essence of soul. We learn ilm from teachers, books, media, scholars and also from our senses and faculties which all are outside our rational essence. We inevitably have to follow scientific authority of others. The reasonable way is to follow God because he is the only one who know. With his aid, we would be able to perceive and understand anything. Ibn Arabi wrote: "Nobody deserves ilm but the one [Allah] who has perceived them in essence, then, anybody but him holds ilm of objects and non-objects only through following him. Therefore, as it was demonstrated that what is separate from God cannot hold ilm of objects unless through following, then, we have to follow God, especially with regard to ilm of him of himself". True and gifted ilm of God is possible through Prophets. However, given the extent of prophetic ilm that can be perceived by human depends on individual capacity, we are here faced by the same problem. There is no doubt that faith is a gift which makes doubts disappears but faith is not the ultimate capacity of human. Beyond faith, there is gifted and intuitive ilm. Ibn Arabi referred to a Quran's verse in which God asks Prophets about judgment day and they answer that they know nothing about it. Ibn Arabi believed that this was a general rule which applied to all humans. "The day when God gathers his Prophets and asks them what will they answer? They will say, "We have no knowledge of it. Indeed, you don't know about the invisible" (Maidah/109). This is truth. Then, nobody knows about judgment day unless he/she is taught about it by God. There is decree of shariah is not needed unless in wono way but divine teaching, i.e., overcoming doubts

or interference of ilm and certainty with illusion because all ways leading to ilm are affected with doubt. The pure soul who is informed by God of such doubts is certain that no knowledge can be obtained from them. Ilm is only obtained through divine ways because as God says: "If you assume divine piety, God will empower you to distinguish the right from the wrong" (Anfal/29), also says: "He created human and taught him/her clear proof" (Al-Rahman/29) (Einolghozat, 2007). Briefly, the only genuine ilm, i.e., ilm of almighty God is beneficial and is worth attachment and attention of human. Every other type of ilm must follow this ilm. This true ilm may not be obtained but by following God. Ibn Arabi didn't intend to describe a way to acquire ilm in which objects are interrelated outside divine realm as are in other types of knowledge. However, apart from their contribution to true ilm, these ilms have no other true benefit because they see the universe only from their narrow perspective. In Ibn Arabi's opinion, when it comes to knowledge, no method or position is able to eliminate its limitations unless the position that recognizes the relative validity of each method and at the same time, doesn't limit itself to any particular method. He called such position "position of no position" on some occasions and "position of research" on other occasions.

CONCLUSION

Ibn Arabi considered ilm as persistent revelation of God to the hearts which is the truth of human. The outcome of ilm is intangible paradise and as a result, paradise is tangible. Since, true ilm is accompanied with practice, ilm has both paradises but mystics who are only practice, they will ultimately attain tangible paradise. Ibn Arabi considered ilm to be superior over marifah and considered alim to be more perfect than mystic. In his opinion, marifah was the procedure and ilm was the reason; ilm is an attribute of God while marifah is a royal, sensual and lordly attribute.

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