

Ayatollah Javadi Amoli on the Positive Criterion of Truth of Propositions

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Abstract

Human being faces various kinds of knowledge throughout his life, and knows that all of this knowledge is not completely right and in correspondence with the reality. In case we want to have an exact cognition, we need to have a criterion, Otherwise, we will never be able to come to an honest, true and true understanding. Regarding fixed knowledge criterion of the same views, the pragmatists, confirmation theories, relativity and empiricism have been expressed which were against the correspondence theory. Islamic scientists such as Javadi Amoli, following Aristotle, considered the knowledge as the exact one which was corresponding to the inherent essence. Ayatollah Javadi Amoli criticized opposite viewpoints and considered the best knowledge reality theory as the one which is corresponding to the reality and inherent essence. This study investigated and explored fixed knowledge criterion from Ayatollah Javadi Amoli view and criticized various views according to his point of view.

Keywords: Fixed knowledge criterion, Inherent essence, Reality, Ayatollah Javadi Amoli

INTRODUCTION

Man is a searching being that seeks to reach realities and truths and at the same time, this being has various knowledge and episteme in which he cannot trust in a decisive manner; because some of these are not correspondent to reality and do not have any epistemic value. Accordingly, this question is raised that with which principles and rules should we know that our understanding and knowledge is correspondent to reality? However, where we understand the reality itself by presence as mystics suggest, reality is discovered in an immediate way though there is no discussion of the correspondence with reality; because the reality itself has been touched by man in a presential way. The issue of correspondence can be raised in a place where we have two things: i.e. the knower and the known. Therefore, some of our knowledge and episteme have a hundred percent value and are completely correspondent with reality while part of our knowledge is not certain and cannot be absolutely trusted.

As to the criterion of knowledge, there are two basic discussions: i) explanation of the positive criterion of correct knowledge as compared to the incorrect knowledge, ii) analysis of the demonstrative scale of identification of the right from the wrong. As to the first discussion where we are dealing with the positive criterion of knowledge, we have to answer the question what is truth? What can be true and correspondent with the reality? In the second discussion, we are concerned with the demonstrative criterion of the knowledge. In other words, how could we distinguish the

correct and right knowledge correspondent to reality from the incorrect and wrong knowledge that fails to be correspondent to reality.

In current article, we are focused on the positive criterion of knowledge according to Ayatollah Javadi Amoli. Amoli believes that the best theory as to the positive criterion of knowledge is that of the correspondence with the reality and fact-itself. Nevertheless, in recent times some new views have been offered by western thinkers and epistemologists. These views will be critically reviewed from the point of view of Ayatollah Javadi Amoli and accepted theory will be outlined.

POSITIVE CRITERION OF TRUTH OF PROPOSITIONS:

Before identifying the right from the wrong, man should be able to distinguish the correct knowledge from the incorrect

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knowledge well. Then, he can turn to identifying realities and separating them from the illusions otherwise it is impossible for man to distinguish between the right and the wrong. For example, if we do not have a dependable knowledge of gold and silver we cannot know whether this is gold or something else; then, we have to have a correct knowledge of something first and after it we can distinguish between the reality and unreality.

Ayatollah Javadi Amoli states that every knowledge requires both positive and demonstrative measures. However, its necessity is occasional and this why we have various types of knowledge which cannot be integrated into a unique whole^[1]. Anyway, the present essay seeks to study the positive criterion of the truth of propositions, i.e. the epistemic criterion developed by Ayatollah Javadi Amoli. Some epistemologists have identified this as the criterion of knowledge and some have not distinguished between the criterion of knowledge and standard of knowledge; in other words, they have confused between the criterion of knowledge and standard of knowledge. Some thinkers have discussed the issues related to the positive and demonstrative criterions of knowledge under the title of value of knowledge. Anyway, there are some discussions as regards the criterion of knowledge that are concerned with the truth of knowledge, truth, correspondence with the reality and the fact-itself to which Ayatollah Javadi Amoli has referred as the positive criterion of knowledge.

Amoli does not consider the analysis of the epistemic criterion possible without the truth of knowledge. He states, “analysis of criterion of correct and dependable knowledge that revolves around one of the many features of knowledge is not possible without paying attention to the truth of knowledge insofar as familiarity with the truth of knowledge is contingent upon the worldview and will be achieved in the light of study of the known (object)”^[1]. Then, without indication of the meaning of knowledge and without paying attention to the circle of the knowledge the explanation of positive criterion of correctness will be difficult.

Definition of Truth;

Although the scope of human knowledge is limited, his knowledge is not restricted to the sensory entities rather it also includes things other than the sensory. Man has different types of knowledge including rational and intuitive knowledge that go beyond time and space and cover the immaterial affairs. Sufficing to external senses engulfs man in the swamp of nature in a form that one cannot demonstrate the reality of the sensory objects in the outside world and as a result, he becomes bogged down in the vortex of skepticism even in the domain of sensory affairs. Acceptance of the validity of reason leads man to realism.

According to Aytollah Javadi Amoli, truth has an extensive scope and one should restrict it to the domain of nature and matter. As to epistemology in Quran, he states, “truth of the known has an extensive scope and is not limited to nature and matter but some believe that the known is merely restricted to

the matter. These people contend that correct knowledge is the one that is correspondent to a material being outside the mind and speaking of an entity that resides in the world of ideas or reason is nonsense; because there is no basis for demonstration of correspondence”^[1].

He criticizes this narrowminded interpretation that refers to a limited worldview; because firstly, this interpretation introduces heavenly knowledge, immortality of moral issues and also theology as nonsense, meaningless and baseless; secondly, the lack of criterion in some mathematical issues that do not have any external extension just like the secondary intelligibles that lack any criterion for correctness in the outside world; because none of them has any material correspondent unless they are interpreted in another way so that the judgments of the primary intelligible are applied to them and can be correspondent to material world^[1]. Anyway, various views have been offered regarding the truth of knowledge each one of which has been criticized by Ayatollah Javadi Amoli and we will review them here.

- **Theory of Pragmatism:**

Some do not consider knowledge to be something other than exploitation of its object including man and world. These people do not pay attention to the revealing aspect of knowledge rather they just underline the utility of knowledge no matter if it is correspondent to reality or not. William James as one of the founders of Pragmatism suggests that is the useful idea in human practical life. According to James, being true is tantamount to being useful not being correspondent to reality^[2, 3]. Bergson and Edward Lora are among the thinkers who defend this theory^[4]. Wittgenstein, his followers and so called linguistic philosophers, also have the same theory as regards truth. They believe that one needs to assay the use or functionality of a proposition or a theory in practice not whether they are true and correspondent to reality or not.

Criticism of Pragmatism:

In criticism of this theory, Ayatollah Javadi Amoli states, “The basis of this interpretation is confusion of the means with the end; in other words, knowledge is a means for taking advantage of man and world not that the true knowledge is nothing but a means of benefit rather the truth of knowledge has been the presentation of reality and revelation of the known is its essential constitution”^[1]. He suggests that this interpretation requires that firstly, the knowledge that does not have a practical use lacks positive criterion of correctness and veracity, e.g. eternity of the world, because this type of knowledge does not have any effect in the outside world and has no avail in empirical issues, e.g. industry, chemistry and etc. Then, if a knowledge is practically useful it is true and if it is not of any practical avail it is false. To put it otherwise, thus conceived, knowledge is equal to taking advantage.

Secondly, whatever is useful in practice is true even if it is not correspondent with the reality and on the contrary, whatever is not of any practical use is false though it is

correspondent with reality; because based on this interpretation, knowledge is not evaluated based on reality so that the correspondence or lack of correspondence would be the criterion of veracity and correctness rather the criterion of correctness of thought is its functionality or unfunctionality. For example, some mathematical issues though do not have any external effect, e.g. geometrical figures and subatomic particles composing the bodies, they serve practical causes in the outside world and then they are true and correct. Rather it is these bodies that have practical use and mathematical thinking of them is true and correct.

Thirdly, there is no difference between theoretical sciences and practical science; in other words, the knowledge related to the theoretical sciences, e.g. natural issues and mathematics, and knowledge related to practical issues like ethics and law, share the epistemic content while there is a substantial difference between these two branches of knowledge. The positive criterion of the truth or falsity of practical sciences, e.g. ethics and law, is their real usefulness in achieving human perfection including the individual or society and if the positive criterion of veracity and correctness of theoretical sciences is being useful in practice – although this action provides material needs instead of realization of human perfection – there will be still a lack of distinction between theoretical and practical sciences.

Consequently, the idea that the truth of knowledge lies in its practical use is a deviation from the central core of the fairness just like the idea that theory is the essence of truth of knowledge that causes the practical sciences, e.g. law and ethics, to be neglected and this is also an act of moderation^[1]. Anyway, Ayatollah Javadi Amoli does not side by Pragmatism.

- **Theory of Endorsement:**

A group of scholars do not tolerate any of the two significant issues in epistemology because they accept neither the positive criterion nor the demonstrative criterion; for they do not believe that knowledge reveals the reality rather they think that truth constructs the reality. In other words, the reality is what is accepted by the scholars and reality never has a share of existence without the ideas of the thinkers rather what is scientifically accepted by the thinkers of an age is the reality and what is correspondent with the reality.

This theory has been explained by August Comte (d. 1857) who is the founder of philosophy of Positivism. August Comte states, “Truth is the very idea on which the people in an age are unanimous^[5]. As Felicien Challaye in his Scientific Philosophy states, truth owes its existence to the consensus of the individuals in the society. Sunni thinkers also share this view in the form of the idea of “jurisprudential consensus”. According to Sunni Muslims, when the Islamic scholars are unanimous of the permissibility of something, that thing is really permissible, and when they insist on its impermissibility the thing is really impermissible because mere consensus over an issue is not identical with its truth.

Criticism of the Theory of Endorsement:

According to Ayatollah Javadi Amoli, this sense of relative reality is other than evolving and changing realities; because in that case though the reality itself is evolving, it is still the ideas of the scholars that serve as the touchstone of the evaluation of the reality. Thus, the ideas of thinkers are the positive and demonstrative criteria of truth and their ideas will not exceed the reality rather they are identical with the reality as such.

Ayatollah Javadi Amoli criticizes the aforementioned idea by suggesting that even if we suppose that there is no reality other than what is constituted by intellectual consensus this will lead to confusion of generic and mentally posited issues; because in the issues related to mentally posited sciences like laws and regulations one can acquire the consensus and use the latter as a criterion of truth but in theoretical issues, e.g. natural and mathematical issues, the reality of which does not depend upon man and society one cannot make the reality subordinate to the consensus of thinkers, scholars or individuals^[1].

Consensus is only possible in the main and basic issues of religion and in other cases, there is no possibility of consensus of all scholars. Of course, the proponents of consensus resort to reason as a source of argument and state that the scholars in an age who have different views and live in different places are impossible to be unanimous on the false. Ayatollah Javadi Amoli adds, “this argument is partial because even if we any consensus is achieved though the idea of conspiracy is not probable in this field, this does not render the possibility of collective error improbable because there would be an error shared by the whole^[1].

According to Ayatollah Javadi Amoli, “if truth of knowledge is not the revelation of the outside reality beyond the scope of the thought of the thinkers rather whatever is shared by the scholars of an age is taken to be the criterion of truth and falsity, even if this would mitigate the agony of toleration of the problems of knowledge in view of the positive and demonstrative criteria of reality and unreality, truth and falsity and right and wrong, there will be no place for novel ideas”^[1].

Nevertheless, by no means we can consider consensus to be the criterion of truth of knowledge rather the truth of knowledge refers to the known and revelation of something else. Then, there will be a paradox as Ptolemaic theory of earth as the center of the world that was accepted as a truth some three centuries ago is now in conflict with the idea of solar system that insists on the centrality of sun. No doubt, one of these two theories is wrong while the other is truth.

- **Theory of Relativism or Materialism:**

Relativists believe that knowledge is done just by sensation and the sensory neurons in addition to being affected by the external phenomena influence them too and reality is the result of these action and reaction. In other words, there is

synthesis of a thesis and an antithesis. Then, reality and object of knowledge will be the synthesis. The positive criterion of veracity and falsity is the reality that sets the thesis and antithesis in front of each other and by the combination of these two, synthesis occurs. Therefore, they believe that truth consists of the knowledge, perception and consciousness that happens as a result of the contact of perceptual system with the external world [6].

According to the principles of dialectic, nothing has a monotonous and fixed influence in the nature and everything has its own impact based on its specific situation and condition; because nature is continuously changing. Therefore, it has different effects. This change of situation and condition exists both in the outside world and in the neural system of the brain. Then, they believe that truth is the result of the interaction of external objects and neurons. Every man would find truth in a different form. In other words, someone would deem the world in a form that differs from the way that others deem. Thus, we do not have any absolute truth and reality rather truth is whatever we know as a result of the contact of the perceptual system with the outside world [7].

Accordingly, regardless of the relative or absolute nature of truth, human understanding will be something relative and periodical; because everyone's knowledge is neither immediate nor a direct understanding where the intention of the speaker is intended rather it takes form as a result of the contact of perceptual system with the external object [8]. For example, when man sees a person who lies before him or finds the book before his eyes while reading it knowledge is acquired for him. Then, as long as no external object is set before his perceptual system or brain, no knowledge is acquired.

Criticism of Relativism:

The definition offered by the materialists of truth can be challenged in many ways. Ayatollah Javadi Amoli believes that some of these criticisms are correct. According to Amoli, firstly, the problem of materialists is that the knowledge has been considered to be limited to the sensory tools and neurons while knowledge has other tools like reason, intuition and etc, and it is not the sense alone.

Secondly, knowledge as an abstract and immaterial entity will not be identical with the synthesis which have emerged via the contact of the perceptual system with the external object rather it is the physical activities that prepare the ground for the emergence of the metaphysical. In the words of Ayatollah Javadi Amoli, "intuitive knowledge of the soul itself is not only the most important way of knowledge which is associated with the levels of nature, idea and abstract reason rather through triple stages of knowledge it paves the path for the revelation of different degrees of reality for soul" [1]. Of course, this point is required to be added that in the intuitive knowledge that man has of himself no error can be deemed.

Thirdly, if knowledge is created through the contact of the perceptual system with the external world, everyone's truth should be specifically for him and no common reality would be found between the humans; because everyone's synthesis is other than that of others. Thus, no thinker is informed of the ideas of the other while this is not the case. Many thinkers are well informed of the ideas and thoughts of others and if they match their thought they would accept them otherwise they just decline them though everyone's neural system is different and everyone sees the external objects through his own perspective [1].

It needs to be mentioned that relativity has different meanings and the relativity that is intended here is the contact of the perceptual system with the outside world; because there are absolute and fixed realities in the world but they do not lie within the scope of human knowledge unless in a relative form. Therefore, relativity in this sense is one of issues of the first degree sciences part of which is related to ontology while the other part is concerned with epistemology and this together form philosophy in general sense. According to Ayatollah Javadi Amoli, relativists with such a criterion can never reach certainty neither through nature nor through the supernatural. Finally, doubt will prevail everywhere [8].

- **Theory of Empiricists:**

A group of scholars believe that the positive criterion of knowledge is reached only through the practical experience; an idea is true if it is acceptable based on a practical experience. The truth and falsity of an idea depends on its consistency or inconsistency with practical experience. Some thinkers who are considered to be empiricists like Locke believe that knowledge is acquired through experience. We just know a thing that we have already experienced it not that we have accepted it based on trusting others. The most important theory of Locke regarding perception and knowledge is that we never experience the world in a direct and immediate way [9].

Criticism of Empiricism:

Ayatollah Javadi Amoli criticizes this perspective and suggests that many types of knowledge that we have are not possible to be experienced in a practical way and for this reason, they lack any positive criterion of truth and falsity, e.g. many propositional foundations that are the basis of many propositions like the principle of noncontradiction, impossibility of simultaneous existence of two opposite things or two similar things, impossibility of circle, impossibility of regress and so on and so forth, none of which is known through practical experience while every scientific proposition and theme should be trusted only through certain series of propositions [1].

The other objection raised by Ayatollah Javadi Amoli suggests that whatever is experienced or not has its own particular feature and judgment and theoretical sciences like philosophy, logic and mathematics can never be similar to practical and empirical sciences like ethics, law and physics

so that their realities would be related to human action, behavior and experience. Moreover, if we accept this theory one will not be able to experience past or future because they are absent now and experience cannot touch what does not exist in concrete form. Then, neither theoretical sciences are consistent with experience nor the nonexistent things like the past and future ^[1].

• Theory of Fact Itself:

No single one of the cases that have been discussed so far is a criterion for knowledge according to Ayatollah Javadi Amoli rather each one of these theories can be criticized. Ayatollah Javadi Amoli believes that the best theory for explanation of the criterion of veracity and tenacity of knowledge is the one that pays an equal attention both to the immateriality of the thought and comprehensiveness of universe and its combination of natural, ideal and rational realms. This theory is what suggests the thought must be correspondent with the fact itself ^[1]. Then, true knowledge is the knowledge that is based on the fact itself while the false knowledge is the one that is not correspondent with the fact itself.

Fact-itself has various meanings a number of which have been explained in the books of logic and philosophy; but according to Ayatollah Javadi Amoli, fact itself in every possible sense refers to the pure reality that is the shadow like external reality; because the fact itself in view of its manifestations has been referred to as “thing-in-itself” while some others have described it as the world of intellect that is the realm of absolute immaterial entities as well as the divine knowledge. However, mystics in their works have preferred the term “divine knowledge”. Anyway, in all three readings the reality owes its very existence to the Divine Presence ^[8, 10].

Ayatollah Javadi Amoli believes that fact-itself represents the thing in itself regardless of every accident, attribute and its realization in the mind of the thinker or in the outside world. This fact does not undergo through any change ^[1]. In other words, fact-itself is a comprehensive meaning that includes both the mind and the outside world ^[11]. For example, “sun is greater than earth” is a proposition correspondent with the reality and fact-itself; in other words, it is this way in the outside world that sun is greater than earth or “John is nonexistent”, this proposition refers to John’s state of being nonexistent. The truth of this proposition lies in its correspondence with the reality of John’s being nonexistent. What are the applications of the notions and propositions? Ayatollah Javadi Amoli in his lectures of *Tamhid Al Qawaed* states that notions or the hypothetical forms that are woven by the imagination arise neither from the reality nor relate the latter. Then, no one can speak of the criterion of truth and falsity of them, because part of them is mere ideas while the other part is conditional individual and combination. The other point is that what is in a combined form is of compositional nature not indicative; for they neither reveal the reality nor represent the reality rather there are irony,

humor, rebuke and so on and so forth, which are not subject to truth and falsity; because these imaginary intentions and issues are propositions not judgment ^[12]. In this case, those propositions that lack judgement are not subject to the issue of the criterion of truth and falsity.

What we have discussed so far was different notions of the truth of knowledge some of which did consider use and utility the truth while the others considered consensus as the touchstone of truth and falsity and others insisted on the contact of perceptual system with the outside world and some of them underlined practical experience as the positive criterion of truth and falsity of propositions. Finally, Islamic thinkers have accepted fact-itself as the positive criterion of truth and falsity of the proposition. In this regard, Ayatollah Javadi Amoli suggests that “Fact-itself and determination of the absolutely immaterial entity as the treasure of the truths that are correspondent with mental propositions that lack objective extension are current in divine worldview otherwise in secular material worldview there is no criterion for the truth and falsity of this type of propositions ^[12]. Of course, some have criticized the theory of fact-itself based on certain reasons that are required to be outlined.

Critical Review of Fact-Itself:

- 1- Sometimes it is said that fact-itself should be eliminated; because man cannot have access to the reality and truth of things, i.e. their noumenon rather it just perceives the attributes of the things, i.e. phenomenon. Then, fact-itself cannot be the criterion of truth and falsity.
- 2- Taking fact-itself as the criterion of truth and falsity does not solve any problem; because this question remains that with what this type of propositions are evaluated so that their veracity and falsity is proved.
- 3- Some things are like geometrical figures that either do not exist in the outside world or exist but are nonexistent for now, e.g. historical events. Moreover, some things are not fixed and undergo through continuous change. How could we determine their veracity and tenacity in such a condition?

Ayatollah Javadi Amoli’s Answer to the Criticism of Fact-Itself:

Ayatollah Javadi Amoli in his “Epistemology in Quran” answers all three objections.

Answer to First Criticism: This idea is incorrect; because, firstly, one can touch the essence of some things, e.g. human presential knowledge of his nature as well as his intuitive knowledge of his own perceptual apparatus. He also understands his own actions and physical and spiritual attributes in an intuitive and presential form and he also perceives everything that is an effect of it. Having said these, limiting human knowledge to the phenomena is due to the negligence of his presential knowledge. Secondly, even if we restrict the sciences to phenomena and apparent attributes, these phenomena and attributes in their turn have fact-itself; because the phenomenon though is a phenomenon in view of

its subject, it has still a truth and fact-itself; for those things regardless of their attributes have a reality.

Answer to second objection: this objection is partial; because firstly, those who have raised the idea of fact-itself see it as the positive criterion of the veracity of true and mental propositions, and if there is any ambiguity it is related to the demonstrative level of truth and falsity of propositions not their positive level; secondly, even if it is a theoretical task to identify what is the nature of something regardless of the mind and outside world it still ends up in the self-evident and the difficulty of the level of demonstration should not be related to the level of positive existence; thirdly, the study of the essential features of the objects and their internal constituents should be analyzed regardless of the mental and the external though the locus of their analysis is mind. Their mental existence is not the axis of correspondence rather it should be explained in a way that the mind just has a local aspect not the basis of comparison and there is a huge difference between these two.

Answer to the third criticism: if the only way of demonstration of the truth and falsity of knowledge is sensory test this objection can be raised and its conclusion is that mathematical, mental and historical issues are not demonstrable but our discussions is about the positive criterion of veracity not about demonstration. This objection is concerned with the demonstrative discussion of the correctness and veracity of the knowledge and practical experience is part of the ways of demonstration of knowledge [1]. In this case, we cannot limit our ways of knowledge to sensory test rather there are still other alternative ways of knowledge that lead us to the identification of correct and incorrect. Therefore, the aforementioned points suggest that the criticisms raised against the idea of fact-itself are not correct. Then, theory of fact-itself is the best theory about the criterion of knowledge.

CONCLUSION

- I) If someone wants to have a knowledge of something and provide a criterion for its truth and falsity, this will not be possible without having a knowledge of the truth, as suggested by Ayatollah Javadi Amoli. Then, it is the truth of knowledge that is the basis of our discussions of the known (object) and it constitutes the very essence of epistemological issues of correspondence.
- II) The truth of knowledge refers to the known and discovery of another thing that is the object of knowledge; in other words, knowledge is equal to the discovery of truth and representation of reality. The truth of the known has an extensive scope and it cannot be limited to the natural and material domain though some scholars insist on this materialistic view. Otherwise, there will be no room for speaking of the truth of the ideal or rational worlds because there is no basis for correspondence test here.
- III) Different views have been raised by Pragmatists, August Comte, relativists or materialists, empiricists

and linguistic philosophers lately. None of these views has addressed the truth of knowledge in a correct way and this is indeed an evasion of the issue of the value of knowledge and the question should be asked that whether this type of criteria is correspondent with the reality and the fact-itself or not?

- IV) The best theory in explanation of the criterion of veracity of knowledge is the one that is both based on the immateriality of the thought and includes all levels of the world including the nature, ideal world and the reason, i.e. the idea that the thought is correspondent with the fact-itself. Fact-itself no matter in which sense is understood owes its reality to the divine God who is the absolute truth. Fact-itself regardless of every attribute and accident and its realization in the mind of the thinker or the outside world has a truth and reality and no change occurs in it.
- V) Although some scholars have criticized the theory of fact itself, this type of criticisms as regards the fact-itself are not acceptable and Ayatollah Javadi Amoli has answered them. The fact-itself as such regardless of every accident and attribute and its realization in mind or outside world has a determinate reality and truth in which no change occurs.

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