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The Question of 'How Are Synthetic A Priori Judgments Possible' in Contemporary Islamic Philosophy

Seyed Ali Taheri Khorramabadi

Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy of science, Sharif University of Technology, Tehran, Iran. ataheri@sharif.edu

Abstract

Original Research

According to Kant, the lack of progress in metaphysics is due to the fact that philosophers tried to solve metaphysical problems without examining the limits of our reason, and the outcome of these endeavors has been a dogmatic metaphysics fraught with contradictions and tensions. Then, after examining the types of cognition, he concludes that in order to determine the limits of reason's capacity, one must answer the question: "How are synthetic a priori judgments possible?" Some contemporary Islamic philosophers have sought to answer this question inspired by the teachings of Islamic philosophy. One solution involves resorting to conceptual relations that make the synthetic a priori judgments possible, while another solution is to deny outright the a priori/a posteriori and analytic/synthetic distinctions of cognition. In this paper, using a comparative-analytical method, I demonstrate that these two solutions are unsuccessful. The proposed alternative is to consider the possibility of such propositions as fundamental and in no need of further explanation. This suggestion seems to be simpler and fully consistent with the teachings of Islamic philosophy.

Keywords

synthetic, a priori, accidental, self-evident, primary.

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Introduction

Kant's central question in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is: "How are a priori synthetic judgments possible?" Answering this question not only explains how we attain knowledge of mathematics and pure physics but also uncovers the root of metaphysics' failures. According to Kant, because all metaphysical judgments are synthetic a priori, and because their possibility is in doubt, the legitimacy of metaphysics hinges on receiving an acceptable answer to this question. Some contemporary philosophers, inspired by the teachings of Islamic philosophy, have endeavored to address this Kantian challenge. In this article, I examine several of these proposed solutions and show that none are satisfactory. I then offer an alternative answer, drawn from Islamic philosophical doctrines, which appears both simpler and more convincing than the other proposals.

The Kantian Question: The Possibility of Synthetic A Priori Judgments

Immanuel Kant (1998, p. 109) maintains that metaphysics has yet to enter the "secure path of science." Evidence for this failure lies in metaphysics' repeated retracing of the same ground, a persistent lack of consensus, and endless disputes. To locate the source of this malaise and, perhaps, discover a more felicitous route, Kant undertakes an "analysis of human cognition." In doing so, he seeks to determine whether pure reason is at all capable of solving metaphysical problems, and this hinges on answering the question: How are synthetic a priori judgments possible?

Let me clarify the question first. Kant divides human cognition into a priori and a posteriori (Kant, 1998, p. 136). The former is independent of all experience and sensory impressions; the latter derives from experience. However, a priori cognition can be mixed with experience; for example, the proposition "every alteration has its cause" is a priori, but it is not purely so because the concept of "alteration" can only be obtained from experience. There are two signs of a priori cognitions. The first is *necessity* (Kant, 1998, p. 137). Our cognition of a necessary judgment or proposition is non-empirical because although experience shows us actual things, it can never be learned from experience that something must be so or cannot be so. Another sign of a priori cognition is *strict universality*. If a proposition is universal in such a way that no exception can be imagined for it, our cognition of that proposition is a priori because only relative universality can be obtained through experience (induction).

Moreover, Kant (1998, p. 141) distinguishes judgments as analytic or synthetic. An analytic judgment is one in which the predicate is already contained within the subject concept (e.g., "All bodies are extended"). Synthetic judgments, by contrast, add something to the subject that is not contained in it conceptually (e.g., "All bodies have weight"). In other words, the content of an analytic judgment (positive) is the identity of the subject and predicate, and therefore these types of propositions are merely explanatory, but in synthetic judgments, there is no identity between the subject and the predicate, and therefore these types of propositions extend our knowledge beyond the concept of the subject. Analytic propositions are a priori, for to accept an analytic judgment, nothing more than the grasp of its concepts is needed, and since a priori judgments are necessary, all analytic propositions are also necessary.

In contrast, all a posteriori (empirical) judgments are synthetic. The fact that a judgment requires experience shows that its predicate is not contained in the subject; otherwise, experience would not be necessary for that judgment. Experience is a collection of intuitions, for example, color, size, shape, etc., which incidentally belong to each other. It is through experience that the predicate can be added to the subject, whose relation to the intuitions of experience I have found.

Is there a judgment that is both synthetic and a priori? The response is positive. All judgments of arithmetic and geometry are necessary and therefore a priori (Kant, 1998, p. 144). Likewise, in these judgments, the predicate is beyond the subject and therefore, they are synthetic propositions. The concept of 12 in "5+7=12" is not the same as the concept of the sum of 7 and 5, because though the second concept means a single number that results from the union of 5 and 7, being 12 is not included in this concept. Similarly, the proposition "a straight line is the shortest distance between two points" is synthetic. For the subject "Straight line," refers to the *quality* of the line, and the predicate "shortest...," refers to the *quantity* of the line. Since the quality and the quantity of a thing could not be identical, this proposition should be a synthetic one. In addition, some propositions of physics are among synthetic a priori propositions (Kant, 1998, p. 145). The proposition "in all alterations of the corporeal world the quantity of matter remains unaltered" and the proposition "in all communication of motion, the effect and counter-effect must always be equal" are examples of these synthetic a priori judgments in natural science.

Therefore, a priori synthetic judgments play a crucial role in our knowledge. Attaining the main goals of theoretical knowledge in the field of natural science and mathematics hinges on the existence of a priori synthetic judgments. But surely the more important ones are those synthetic a priori propositions in metaphysics, where we pursue knowledge beyond the boundaries of experience.

Important issues such as God, human free will, and his immortality are the chief problems of metaphysics, and none of them can be resolved by experience. The proposition "the world must have a beginning" is a synthetic a priori proposition whose truth or falsity should be decided in metaphysics.

But in general, there is a problem with these types of judgments. On the one hand, these judgments are synthetic and their predicate is beyond the subject; on the other hand, they are a priori and therefore have no empirical source. Going beyond the concept of the subject requires a middle means, just as experience is the means in a posteriori synthetic judgments. It is through experience that I can attribute a predicate beyond the subject to it. But in a priori synthetic judgments, what does the middle mean applicable by understanding to attach the predicate to the subject? In other words, one must ask: "How are a priori synthetic judgments possible?" (Kant, 1998, p. 146). This general question includes more specific questions: "How is mathematics possible?", "How is pure natural science possible?" etc. Since metaphysics does not hold a place like mathematics and pure natural science, its possibility cannot be assumed. The "poor progress" of metaphysics calls into question its very existence. All the efforts made to answer metaphysical questions have been accompanied by unavoidable contradictions. Therefore, we must investigate the ability or inability of reason to deal with metaphysical issues and find out whether the domain of pure reason can be extended to this field or whether its domain should be limited. Thus, the more specific question related to metaphysics is: "How is metaphysics possible as a science?" The latter question has not been raised by philosophers, and no effort has been made to answer it. All the explorations that have been done have been to create a dogmatic metaphysics. Therefore, according to Kant, the unstable status of metaphysics is due to the unresolved issue of how metaphysics is possible. In the next section, I will discuss the solutions that contemporary Islamic philosophers have proposed.

Appealing to Conceptual Relations

Although Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi (2004, pp. 250–251) does not explicitly pose Kant's question about synthetic a priori judgments in his treatment of primary self-evident propositions, he seeks to overcome the Kantian challenge. He argues that to establish the truth of these first principles, one must clarify how their subjects and predicates could be unified into a proposition, and he thinks that their analytic character, grounded in *knowledge by presence* (*ʿilm ḥuẓūrī*), reveals the secret of their possibility. Thus, at least in part, the possibility of these judgments rests on a conceptual link between the subject and the predicate. Since I have discussed this view and its difficulties in detail elsewhere (Taheri

Khorramabadi, 2014), I will not discuss it here.

Hosein Ghaffari (2007, pp. 228–238) develops a similar but distinct answer, explicitly drawing on Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā) and Khwaja Tusi. He contends that contrary to what Kant thought, these earlier philosophers already raised—and answered—the general question of how synthetic a priori judgments are possible. According to these philosophers, scientific[1] propositions must be necessary; otherwise, the sciences will lose their demonstrative character. Similarly, these philosophers believed that in these propositions, the predicate should not be constitutive and part of the essence of the subject; that is, they must be synthetic (Ghaffari, 2007, p. 235).

According to Ghaffari, to use Mulla Sadra's expression, the above contention can be expressed as follows: The scientific propositions must be of the type "common predication" (*ḥaml shāyiʿ*). Let me clarify what Mulla Sadra means by that phrase. In all categorical judgments, the subject is either an instance by which the predicate has been exemplified or else the subject and the predicate are the same things without any difference in reality. The former kind is called "common" or "accidental" predication, in which the subject and predicate are not identical. In these types of propositions, the subject and predicate are united in some instances, that is, the predicate is instantiated by the subject. These propositions are *common* in that they are predominant in the sciences. For example, the proposition "water is a composition of simpler elements" is of the common predication type.

The second kind of predication is called "primary" (*ḥaml awwalī*), in which the predicate *is* or *belongs* to the essence of the subject. These propositions are *self-evident* since their affirmation does not require anything other than their apprehension. For example, "man is an animal" and "man is a rational animal" are instances of the primary predication type. "Primary predication is completely identical with Kant's analytic proposition by definition" (Ghaffari, 2007, p. 229), and, just as analytic propositions do not extend knowledge, primary predication also has no cognitive benefit. Similarly, Sadra's "common predication" parallels Kant's synthetic proposition.

Now let's go back to Avicenna and Tusi. We saw that, according to them, while scientific propositions must be necessary, the predicate should not be constitutive of the subject. In other words, in scientific propositions, though the predicate must be necessary for the subject, the predication must be common. But how is it possible for a non-constitutive predicate to be necessary for the subject? In Kant's language, Avicenna and Tusi believe that scientific propositions must be a priori synthetic propositions, and the question now is

1. In their terminology science is not limited to empirical disciplines.

how it is possible for a proposition to be both synthetic and at the same time, a priori and hence necessary. It seems that Kant's and Avicenna's questions coincide (Ghaffari, 2007, p. 233).

Avicenna's answer to the above problem is that necessary predicates are not limited to those constitutive of a thing, and some non-constitutive predicates are also necessary for their subject, which are called *necessary accidental* predicates. Let us clarify the *essential/accidental* distinction between predicates first. A predicate is essential (*dhatī*) to the subject if it is not possible to conceive the subject lacking the predicate. A predicate is accidental (*ʿaraḍī*) if the subject is conceivable without having the predicate. In other words, while the conception of the subject requires the conception of the essential predicates, there is no need to have a conception of the accidental predicate to have the conception of the subject. (Ghaffari, 2007, pp. 231-232). Being three-sided is an essential predicate for a triangle, and its specific area is an accidental predicate.

Now some accidental predicates are *concomitant* or *inseparable (ʿarḍiyyāt lāzim)*. They are non-constitutive and non-separable from the subject; in other words, these accidentals are necessarily predicated on the subject. For example, being odd is an accidental predicate of the number 3, since we can have a conception of the number 3 without a conception of its being odd. At the same time, being an odd number is necessarily predicated on the number 3; its negation seems contradictory. Therefore, its being odd is a concomitant accidental predicate of the number 3. However, there are some *separable accidentals (ʿarḍiyyāt mufariq)* too, which are both non-constitutive of and separable from the subject. The specific color of an apple is an instance of separable accidental predicates. In scientific propositions, the predicate is a concomitant accidental predicate of the subject. Therefore, while those propositions are necessary, the predicate is not essential to the subject, and the predication is common. In Kantian language, these propositions are synthetic a priori.

The above Avicennian answer is not a complete answer to Kant's original question, however, Ghaffari completes it (Ghaffari, 2007, pp. 239-249). In addition to their original and natural essence, things sometimes acquire *constructed/artificial quiddities* (*māhīyah jāʿilīyah*). Whenever we compare an object's natural quiddity with another quiddity, the mind constructs a new composite quiddity. For instance, a triangle's original quiddity is triangularity; its constructed quiddity might be "the triangle compared to a right angle." The new quiddity correspondingly has essentials that can be known immediately or with reasoning. For example, we discover via some argument that one of the essentials of "the triangle compared to a right angle" is "the sum of the angles of the triangle compared to a right angle *is* twice the right angle." This essential is predicated on the original quiddity of the triangle, too. However, since it is

not essential for the original quiddity of a triangle, its predication adds something to the subject and expands our knowledge of it. Nevertheless, this new predicate is a concomitant and necessary essential for the original quiddity. Therefore, a proposition in which the predicate of the constructed quiddity is attributed to the original and natural quiddity is a synthetic a priori proposition. The proposition "the sum of the angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles" and the proposition "the number 6 is even" are of this kind.

Making a new quiddity for something is nothing but comparing it with another quiddity. In the previous examples, we compared the triangle with a right angle and the number 6 with the number 2. The comparison between quiddities or concepts plays the same role that experience plays in a posteriori synthetic propositions. To perform this operation, we never consult the outside world, and therefore, the resulting proposition is a priori. On the other hand, since we compare essence quiddity with *another* quiddity, the proposition resulting from this comparison expands our knowledge, that is, it is synthetic.

One can ask, 'What is the basis for choosing the quiddity to which the original quiddity is compared?' The response, according to Ghaffari, is that we *guess* the quiddity we choose to put in comparison with the original quiddity. To illustrate this, we compare the concept of 'contingent being' with the concept of "cause," and the constructed concept is "contingent being compared to cause." The familiarity with metaphysical concepts provides us with the subjective probability that the concept of 'contingent being' has a special tie with the concept of 'cause', and hence, the philosopher compares the two concepts. Afterward, he finds out that the constructed quiddity "contingent being compared to cause" has the concomitant essential predicate "requiring a cause." The resulting metaphysical proposition is that "every contingent being requires a cause," which is a synthetic a priori one.

As we saw, Ghaffari's remarkable solution is designed to answer the general issue of how a priori synthetic propositions are possible. However, I think this answer cannot solve the issue properly. First of all, it is not clear what is meant by the "constructed/artificial quiddity." In the Islamic Philosophy, real essences are independent of the human mind; that is, they exist in the objective world.[1] Human beings are not able to create and make a real essence. Certainly, we can make some mental concepts of quiddities, and it is likely that "constructed quiddity" is a tolerant expression of the "constructed concept of a quiddity."

The second point is related to the question of why Ghaffari seeks to accomplish the Avicennian answer. The necessity of the concomitant accidental

1. However, the advocates of the Primacy of Existence think that the quiddity posseses a secondary level of objective reality.

predicates could be explained without resorting to constructed quiddities. I think that Ghaffari has realized that the Avicennian answer amounts to nothing more than that the secret of the possibility of a priori synthetic propositions is the comparison between concepts. But if a proposition were to be derived from the comparison of concepts, then would it not be analytic? To avoid this problem, Ghaffari introduced the issue of constructed quiddities. While a proposition in which the concomitant essential is predicated of the constructed quiddity is analytic, the proposition in which the first is predicated of the original quiddity is synthetic; for the latter proposition is not derived from the comparison of its constituents but from the comparison of the predicate with another concept.

Now, according to this solution, the comparison between the concept of the predicate and the constructed concept is the middle means we are looking for in a priori synthetic propositions. However, since the fabricated concept is not the subject of the sought-after synthetic proposition, the mentioned comparison does not explain the possibility of the desired a priori synthetic proposition. The only way for Ghaffari is to connect the constructed concept with the subject of the synthetic proposition, in such a way that comparing the constructed concept with the predicate is sufficient for ascribing the predicate to the subject. But he has done nothing to fill the gap, and hence his solution cannot properly answer the Kantian question.

The third and most important problem with this resolution is that it doesn't address the core of Kant's problem. The Kantian problem is epistemological and highlights a gap in our knowledge regarding synthetic a priori judgments: if the predicate is not identical with the subject, and experience is not involved in judging, how do we know the connection between the predicate and the subject? The right response to this question should include something that fills this epistemic gap. When the predicate is the same as the subject, that is, in analytic propositions or primary predications, there is no knowledge gap. But in cases where the predicate is not the same as the subject, we face the question: How do we understand the connection between two concepts that are not identical? In many synthetic propositions, we learn that the subject and predicate are related through experience. In synthetic a priori propositions, we know the connection without experience.

Kant's question seeks an explanation for our cognitive ability to find the connection between the subject and predicate in *some* propositions; asserting simply that we find this connection by comparing concepts does not explain why *in some propositions, simply by comparison of concepts, we come to know the subject-predicate connection* while in synthetic empirical propositions, only by experience we can come to know that warmness is a concomitant essential of fire, for example.

Denying the Distinction Between A Priori and A Posteriori Knowledge

Mehdi Qavam Safari takes a distinct path to solving the problem of the possibility of metaphysics. In his view, Kant's problem is grounded in the a priori /a posteriori distinction on one hand, and in the analytic and synthetic distinction on the other. Both of these distinctions are based on an incorrect assumption: That there are two independent sources of human knowledge, perception, and intellectual reasoning (Qavam Safari, 2007, p. 164). However, these are not two independent sources of human knowledge, and the two distinctions are baseless. Noticing that perception and intellectual reasoning are not two independent sources of knowledge, the distinction between rationalist and empiricist philosophies disappears, too. Finally, we can explain the possibility of metaphysics without having to answer Kant's question.

According to Ghavam Safari, human beings have a single faculty for understanding, and it only takes on different names because of its different functions, which can be carried on simultaneously (Ghavam Safari, 2007, p. 198). This single faculty is called 'perception' since it can perceive things through the senses and at the same time, it is called 'intellect' since it can extend its knowledge via intellectual reasoning. However, Sensory perceptions and intellectual reasoning are mutually dependent: no sensory perception occurs without intellectual reasoning, and on the other hand, no intellectual reasoning occurs without the help of sensory organs. Likewise, the sensible and the intelligible are distinct from each other, though the intelligible is found within the sensible and they are entangled with each other (Ghavam Safari, 2007, pp. 168 & 200). A sensible color is always accompanied by intelligible matters, and seeing that color is also accompanied by an intellectual understanding of those intelligible matters.

Qavam Safari offers two reasons for the association of perception and intellectual reasoning and their mutual dependence. The first argument arises from the status of the *principle of identity*, that is, 'what is, is,' or generally, 'A is A' (Ghavam Safari, 2007, p. 21). Accepting this principle is not the result of reasoning or inference; rather, it is the most self-evident principle, and therefore it can be called the 'principle of principles' (Ghavam Safari, 2007, p. 100). The principle of identity is distinct from the principle of non-contradiction and precedes it because the latter includes being of a thing, non-being of that thing, and their conjunction. Thus, the principle of identity, which only includes the being of a thing, is a part of the principle of non-contradiction, and the part precedes the whole.

Now, Qavam Safari's first argument runs as follows: On one hand, no conception or judgment is obtained without the principle of identity, and

therefore, understanding this principle precedes all human knowledge. The reason why all human knowledge needs this principle is that conceiving anything – sensible or intelligible – is impossible without understanding this principle. I indeed see a book with my sensory organ, but I can only have a concept of this book as *this* book if I know that this book, while it exists and is itself, is not other than itself. On the other hand, while the principle of identity is the clearest of all axioms, it cannot be understood without sensory perception. It is only via sensorily encountering external objects that human intellect intuitively grasps and accepts this principle. The result is that neither sensory perception is possible independently of intellectual reasoning, nor is intellectual reasoning possible independently of sensory perception. Therefore, the idea of the independence of perception and intellect from each other is unfounded.

His second argument derives from the need for sensory concepts to have the concept of 'existence' (Ghavam Safari, 2007, pp. 243-247). Just as no sensory or non-sensory concept is possible without the principle of identity, no sensory or non-sensory concept is possible without the concept of existence. Whenever we conceive something, we conceive it as an existing thing, and without conceiving of its existence, we have no conception of it. That is why we consider everything we perceive to exist. Thus, it can be said that existence is *accidentally sensible*, that is, though it does not affect the sensory organs, it is grasped by the intellect along with the perception of the *essentially sensible,* namely, something, like the yellow color, which affects the sense organs. It is clear that perception and intellectual reasoning here are names for a single faculty and are not distinct from each other.

The above two arguments show that perception and intellectual reasoning are not two independent sources of human knowledge. Therefore, the separation between a priori and a posteriori knowledge or judgments is also incorrect. It is impossible to believe in any proposition without the mediation of perception (Ghavam Safari, 2007, p. 267). Even a logical truth such as 'If the pine tree on my left is taller than the maple tree on my right, then the maple is shorter than the pine', is not an a priori truth. This is so because grasping and accepting this truth requires at least grasping the two concepts 'taller' and 'shorter,' and grasping these two concepts requires sensory perception. Consequently, there is no knowledge or justification prior to any experience (Ghavam Safari, 2007, p. 355). Similarly, since every judgment requires a human encounter with reality, the analytic-synthetic distinction is also incorrect, and every judgment is synthetic (Ghavam Safari, 2007, p. 356).

With the collapse of the a priori-a posteriori and analytic-synthetic distinctions, the distinction between the two philosophical traditions of rationalism and empiricism also collapses (Ghavam Safari, 2007, p. 164). In addition to being incorrect, this distinction has had harmful consequences for

philosophy, including accepting innate concepts or principles. Kant, who had accepted the above incorrect distinctions, was forced to consider the twelve categories of understanding as a priori to solve the problem of synthetic a priori judgments, which implies their being innate. By being innate, it is meant that they precede all sensory perceptions. But as we know, there is no perception or knowledge without and prior to sensory perception. Another incorrect result of this distinction is the acceptance of empiricism and the denial of the possibility of metaphysics, as we see in Hume's philosophy.

Thus, Qavam Safari argues that the possibility of metaphysics does not face Kant's challenge, and the possibility of metaphysics can be shown without answering that question. By explaining that the principle of identity is a description of reality and then listing and explaining other concepts that are descriptions of 'being,' he shows that knowledge of 'being qua being,' or metaphysics, is possible. This science can deliberate on everything that exists, and the attributes that are proven for 'being' in this science can be applied to every being.

I believe that Qavam Safari's solution is not satisfactory in several respects. The first objection concerns the denial of the distinction between perception and intellectual reasoning. To support his claim, he draws on the famous phrase in Sadraean philosophy, "The soul, in its unity, is all faculties" (*an-nafs fī waḥdatihā kull al-quwā*). However, the above expression is a rejection of a specific Avicennian view, according to which the soul had multiple faculties as accidents in one substance. In Sadraean philosophy, the faculties of the soul are not accidents; rather, there is just one simple and immaterial substance that is ontologically identical to its various faculties. Thus, the mentioned expression indicates a kind of multiplicity within simplicity. What Sadraean philosophy denies is the ontological separation of the faculties from each other and the soul; it does not deny their multiplicity and plurality. The soul, while diverse and multiple in functions, is ontologically one and simple. How reasonable and acceptable this is requires an independent discussion. But the point is that the famous Sadraean thesis cannot be a reason to deny all kinds of distinctions between the faculties of the soul. The outcome is that the lack of independence of perception and intellectual reasoning from each other cannot be derived from this Sadraean idea. Sensory and intellectual reasoning are two distinct functions of the simple soul, and the mere simplicity of the soul is not a mark of their being the same faculty.

The second objection is that sensory perception does not require the principle of identity. This is so because a simple concept, does not include any predication, including attributing itself to itself. A concept is simply a conscious state in the mind, and to possess it is nothing more than the presence of the

(mental) *form* of a thing in the mind. Therefore, an attentive child, upon seeing the color purple, has a concept of it without being able to predicate it to itself or distinguish it from other things. Likewise, a simple concept, does not require grasping the concept of existence. Again, a child can see the color purple and have a simple concept of it without needing to have the concept of 'being'. This is not the psychological claim that in sensory perceptions, a concept could be obtained without any accompanying judgment. The latter issue is not within the scope of this article and is irrelevant to the present topic. Rather, I mean that the concept is intrinsically independent of any judgment or the concept of existence, and therefore, acquiring a simple concept does not require applying the principle of identity or having the concept of existence.

The third objection is against the denial of the distinction between analytic and synthetic. Qavam Safari's argument shows that in his view, synthetic judgment is made possible through encountering reality, and analytic judgment is made possible without encountering reality. But in this conception, the analytic-synthetic distinction turns out to be identical to the a priori-a posteriori distinction, and hence it is not the same as what Kant and many later philosophers mean by this distinction. Of course, some empiricists have limited a priori judgments to analytic ones and denied synthetic a priori judgments, but this does not mean that being analytic is the same as being a priori. As a result, denying the analytic-synthetic distinction – even assuming its correctness – will not be a *more* objection to Kantian claims about synthetic a priori judgments.

The fourth objection concerns the rejection of a priori knowledge. The independence of a priori knowledge from experience is not absolute. In the introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant acknowledges that having the concept of 'alteration' in the proposition "every alteration has a cause," requires experience, but he thinks that although this requirement precludes the proposition from being 'purely a priori' nonetheless it is a priori (Kant, 1998, p. 137). Likewise, contemporary epistemologists, in formulating a priori knowledge or justification, emphasize that a priority is the justification's independence from experience, and that is compatible with requiring experience to grasp the content of beliefs (Lemos, 2007, p. 182; Audi, 2011, p. 115; BonJour, 2010, p. 74). Thus, the fact that we need sensory perception to have the concepts 'taller' and 'shorter' is not incompatible with the a priori nature of the logical truth 'If the pine tree on my left is taller than the maple tree on my right, then the maple is shorter than the pine.' Now, the question is whether synthetic a priori knowledge in the intended conception does exist. Qavam Safari cannot deny a priori knowledge in one meaning by resorting to another one. In conclusion, one cannot deny the distinction between perception and intellectual reasoning and hence, between rationalism-empiricism and disregard the Kantian question about synthetic a priori judgments.

A Solution Derived from the Teachings of Islamic Philosophy

A simpler and better way to address Kant's problem is available in light of the teachings of Muslim philosophers. To address Kant's question through the lens of Islamic philosophy, we must first identify which notions in the Islamic tradition correspond to "synthetic a priori judgments." In the Islamic logical tradition, knowledge (*ʿilm*) is divided into acquired (*kasbī*) and non-acquired (*ghayr kasbī*) sciences (Tusi, 1963, p. 192). Acquired knowledge is attained through other knowledge, while non-acquired knowledge does not require other knowledge. There is non-acquired knowledge, since if all knowledge were deduced from other knowledge, then a chain or chains of knowledge would be formed that would either be infinite or circular. Since a circular or infinite deductive chain is unacceptable, there must necessarily be knowledge that initiates deductive chains.

On the other hand, among affirmative cognitions, which consist of judgments, the only cognition that is intrinsically desirable is a demonstrative assertion (*taṣdīq burhānī*) because the demonstration is an argument whose premises and conclusion are both certain (Tusi, 1367: 342-343). Therefore, from the perspective of logicians in the tradition of Islamic philosophy, knowledge must be demonstrative, and consequently, the *first principles* of demonstration must also be certain (Ghavam Safari, 2007, pp. 345-346). Thus, it can be said that in Islamic philosophy, the starting point of knowledge is the first principles of demonstration, namely, *primary propositions* (awwalīyyāt), *perceptual propositions* (*maḥsūsāt*), *experiential generalities* (*mujarrabāt*), *testimonial certainties* (*mutawātirāt*), *intuitive apprehensions* (*hadsiyyāt*), *and propositions with innate syllogisms* (*qaḍāyā qiyāsatihā fiṭrīyyah*) (Tusi & Hilli, 1984, pp. 199-202).

The three categories of perceptual propositions, experiential generalities, and testimonial certainties are propositions in which judgment requires perception. This is because perceptual propositions are those, knowledge of which is attained through external senses or through the internal sense. The propositions "the sun is radiant" and "I have a thought" are examples of perceptual propositions. Similarly, experiential generalities are those in which the affirmation requires repeated observation, and therefore, they could not be known without the help of the senses. We affirm the proposition "all crows are black" only if we have observed enough black crows and have not seen any crows that are not black. Likewise, testimonial certainties imply a large number of individuals who testify to the truth of a proposition. Therefore, knowing a testimonial certainty proposition requires sensory perception of the testimony of numerous individuals. Some propositions related to historical events, such as the existence of Shah Abbas I of the Safavid dynasty, are examples of

testimonial certainties that we know through hearing and reading the testimonies of numerous individuals.

The other two categories of the first principles of demonstration are propositions for which knowledge does not require perception. This is because primary propositions are propositions in which judgment arises from pure reason (Avicenna, 2012, p. 64). In other words, as soon as the concept of a primary proposition occurs in the mind, its affirmation will also occur (Tusi & Hilli, 1984, p. 200). An example of this is the proposition that "the whole is greater than the part," in which knowing requires nothing more than grasping the parts of the proposition. Also, propositions with innate syllogisms cannot consist of premises whose affirmation is dependent on perception, otherwise, syllogisms could not always be present in the mind. Therefore, this category of propositions—such as "the number two is half the number four"—is also deduced from primary propositions and its affirmation is independent of perception.

Thus, we can say that in Islamic philosophy, primary propositions and propositions with innate syllogisms are a priori propositions. Likewise, inferential propositions whose argument premises consist solely of the latter two categories are among the a priori propositions. Now we turn to synthetic propositions. As Ghaffari explained (in the second section of this article), synthetic propositions are propositions in which, according to the terminology of Islamic philosophy, the predicate is accidental to the subject and predication is common. This is because all propositions in which predication is primary (*awwalī*) are analytic and therefore outside the realm of synthetic propositions. Consequently, we can say that synthetic a priori propositions are primary propositions, propositions with innate syllogisms, and propositions inferred from them, provided that their predication is common. However, according to Islamic Philosophy, our knowledge of propositions with innate syllogisms and all our inferential knowledge depends on our knowledge of primary propositions. Therefore, the answer of Muslim philosophers to the question of how we know synthetic a priori propositions must be sought in the answer to the question of how we know primary propositions in which predication is common.

To find the answer to this question, we must see what type of relationship exists between the predicate and the subject in this category of propositions. According to Muslim philosophers and logicians, the predicate in these propositions is an *apparent accidental* (*ʿaraḍī bayyin*) for the subject. Concomitant accidentals are either apparent or unapparent (Avicenna, 2014, pp. 50-57). Apparent concomitant accidentals are those which, though not constitutive of the subject, the subject cannot be conceived lacking them. The predicate in the proposition "every number is either identical to another number or different from it" is an apparent concomitant accidental for the subject; since though this predicate does not constitute any number, no number can be

conceived without this characteristic. The point of the primacy of propositions consisting of a subject and its apparent concomitant accidental is this: since the subject cannot be conceived as lacking the predicate, acceptance of the proposition consisting of such a subject and predicate is indispensable and requires nothing more than understanding the proposition.

Thus, the question of how this category of propositions is possible is a question of why some predicates are apparent concomitant accidentals for the subject. We know that there are concomitant accidental predicates for subjects, affirmation of which requires argumentation. For example, the equality of the square of the chord with the sum of the squares of the other two sides is a concomitant accidental for a right triangle. But accepting this proposition requires an argument; in other words, this accidental is not apparent to its subject. Therefore, it is a reasonable question to ask what features in some necessary accidentals make them apparent. It also seems that to answer this question is to know how the synthetic a priori propositions are possible. For a judgment in synthetic a priori propositions is nothing but a judgment in primary propositions, and since primary propositions are self-evident, the question of how a judgment is made in primary propositions is nothing but the question of why the predicate of these propositions is an apparent accidental for the subject and why the propositions are self-evident and primary.

Previously, in section 2, I mentioned that the Kantian question is directed at a knowledge gap that seems to exist regarding synthetic a priori propositions. Given what I said in the paragraph above, some elucidation is necessary for a deeper understanding of the Kantian question. Recall that the problem lies in the fact that in synthetic judgments, the predicate is not included in the subject and adds something to it, while there is no factor, such as experience, that enables us to know the existence of a connection between the subject and the predicate. If we consider the problem to be limited to this, someone might think that the self-evidence of primary propositions is an answer to the knowledge gap. Judgment in synthetic a priori propositions is due to the self-evident connection between the subject and the predicate, and it is this self-evidence that fills the knowledge gap. But it is very far-fetched to assume that Kant denied the self-evidence of some synthetic a priori judgments or was even unaware of it. On the contrary, it seems that Kant's question is directed at a deeper layer. This issue seeks *a metaphysical explanation of synthetic a priori propositions that make knowledge possible.* In other words, though the affirmation of this type of proposition is indeed made possible by self-evidence, the secret of self-evidence is still an open question; and this issue is a metaphysical-epistemological gap that must be filled. In the language of Islamic philosophy, what is the special feature of apparent accidentals that makes judgment in primary propositions possible?

Muslim philosophers have not raised such a question, and therefore, in one sense, it is true that the issue of the possibility of synthetic a priori propositions has no answer in Islamic philosophy. But this is not to say that the path to answer this question is closed in Islamic philosophy. Contemporary Islamic philosophers can respond in this way: The self-evidence of primary propositions is a fundamental matter. That some accidentals are apparent for their subject is a brute fact about which no further explanation or clarification can be given. Being accidental is a metaphysical fact, and being apparent is epistemological. Islamic philosophers can, with this answer, somehow deny the very existence of a metaphysical-epistemological gap.

Let me clarify the point. One of the major tasks of philosophers in metaphysics is to explain the higher layers of reality with the underlying layers. For example, according to realists, the basis of the observable phenomenon of the similarity of things in some attributes is the existence of universals that are inherently repeatable. Therefore, universals such as humanity or redness explain the similarity of Farid to Hassan, as well as the similarity of a tulip to an apple. In other words, these similarities are due to the existence of the universal of humanity or redness. Likewise, according to some philosophers, the laws of nature are rooted in the powers and dispositions of things. Therefore, there is no independent thing called the law of nature, and what seems to govern nature is nothing but the forces and capacities existing in the things themselves that shape the governing flow of nature. Therefore, the forces and dispositions of things explain the observable phenomenon of the regularity of nature.

One can ask these philosophers why universals—repeatable things—exist. And most realists will probably say that this question has no answer because the existence of the category of universal in the world is a fundamental matter. Also, one can ask the philosophers who reduce laws to the powers and dispositions of things, what explanation there is for the existence of these powers and dispositions in things. They would probably answer that the existence of these powers and dispositions is fundamental, and there is no further explanation for it. Fundamental facts are the deepest layers of the world, and since there is no deeper layer, there is no answer available about why they exist. These fundamental matters are inevitable, and if they are not accepted, no phenomenon can be explained.

Kant himself is committed to some fundamental facts. He explains the existence of some synthetic a priori judgments in pure physics by appealing to pure concepts of understanding. According to him, these judgments are possible because these concepts exist a priori in the structure of our mind and they make experience, applying those concepts to intuitions, possible. But one can ask why these concepts exist in our minds. Is there anything in the world that explains this particular structure of the human mind? Most likely, Kant will say in

response that there is no answer available to this question and that this is a brute fact in the world. Therefore, commitment to inexplicable fundamental facts is common in philosophy.

Someone might say that this solution once again confronts us with the problem of the lack of progress in metaphysics and the contradictions and conflicts of philosophers in metaphysical discussions. Recall that Kant's question originated from the observable phenomenon in metaphysics that –unlike mathematics and physics- disagreements remain and it seems that no issue is resolved. Kant ultimately explains this phenomenon by saying that philosophers in transcendent metaphysics go beyond the limits of experience and apply concepts to matters outside the realm of possible experiences. However, since knowledge is obtained by applying concepts to intuitions, the mind's attempt to gain knowledge in matters beyond experience is doomed to failure. The effort of philosophers in transcendent metaphysics involves applying concepts in a realm outside the bounds of possible cognition, and therefore this effort is considered a transgression of the limits of the mind's ability. Thus, disagreements remain, and arguments become subject to conflicts and contradictions. But Muslim philosophers who consider primary propositions to be fundamental must explain why there is no progress in metaphysical issues. If metaphysical knowledge is the result of deduction from primary propositions, why is the disagreement among philosophers in this field continuous?

Among contemporary Islamic philosophers, an answer to this question can be found in the works of Ayatollah Motahhari (Motahhari, 2011, p. 33; 2018, p. 85). According to him, the root of disagreement is the difficulty of conceiving metaphysical issues. The difficulty of conception is because some of the concepts involved are complex, and various propositions are intertwined. The complexity of the concepts and the merged nature of a seemingly single proposition make philosophers not have the same understanding of the issue, and this difference in understanding leads to disagreement. But provided there is a correct and uniform conception and understanding of a single proposition, affirmation in metaphysical issues is not difficult, because they rely on primary propositions and are deduced from them. Thus, the root of disagreement and lack of consensus among philosophers is the difficulty of conceiving and understanding metaphysical propositions, which is consistent with their reliance on primary propositions.

The second possible answer to this question is that the source of disagreement is the failure to separate the different stages of deduction from primary propositions. Sometimes the deduction of a proposition from primary propositions is lengthy and consists of multiple steps. Philosophers often do not separate these stages from each other, and there are hidden steps in their

arguments. If these premises are revealed, many disagreements will disappear. For this reason, some contemporary Muslim philosophers have sought to reveal all the steps of the arguments on the issue of the existence of the necessary being (Ubudiyyat, 2004).

The third answer to this question is that the claim of continuous disagreement and lack of progress in metaphysics is exaggerated. Muslim philosophers agree on many philosophical issues. That a contingent being requires a cause, the immateriality of the rational level of the soul, and the existence of a necessary existent and some of its attributes, are among these issues. Philosophers may rely on different arguments in believing these propositions, but there is agreement in believing the result of those arguments. Therefore, the phenomenon of disagreement in the metaphysics of Islamic philosophy is different from what Kant portrays.

Conclusion

In this article, I divided the responses of contemporary Islamic philosophers to Kant's question about how synthetic a priori propositions are possible into two main categories. One answer is that the relationships between concepts make such judgments possible, and the other is to deny the presuppositions of the question. I argued that neither of these two ways has been successful. Then I proposed another solution that seems to be derivable from the teachings of Muslim philosophers. According to this solution, the question of the possibility of synthetic a priori propositions is the question of why some accidentals are apparent for their subject, and the answer is that this is fundamental and, like other fundamental facts, does not require explanation. Finally, I addressed the problem of why disagreement persists in metaphysics and there seems to be no progress in it. The answer is that, firstly, disagreement can be explained in a way that is consistent with the fundamental nature of the possibility of synthetic a priori propositions. Secondly, it is doubtful that the scope and extent of disagreement and lack of progress in the metaphysics of Islamic philosophy are widespread.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no competing interests.

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