

EbneSina and Sohrawardi: Philosophical Self-Knowledge

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Abstract:

Many people have attempted to recognize the “I” or soul or self. More than all are the psychologists and philosophers who have tried to know it. The way and type of philosophers’ and psychologists look are not the same; therefore, their results are various, too. The framework of Ebne Sina, from the Iranian philosophers is Aristotelian; but in various searches his discourse is modern and even incompatible with Aristotle. One of those places is his philosophical self-knowledge. Ebne Sina expressed a hypothetical experience to find that there is an “I” and it is abstract not materialistic; and the other Iranian philosopher, Sohrawardi edited and perfected it. In this article, we first compare some self-knowledge matters of Aristotle and Ebne Sina. Second, we report and criticize the experience of “The Suspended Man in Space” of Ebne Sina. Third, we review Sohrawardi’s “the experience of emancipation from body and self-consciousness in the waking” and for the fourth we evaluate and judge the experiences of Ebne Sina and Sohrawardi.

Key words:

Ebne Sina, Sohrawardi, Self-knowledge, soul, I.

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Introduction:

Any student of humanity field has heard this word of Descartes “I think then I am”; and also, Descartesren owned in the world by it. The essence of I in the sentence “I think then I am” is just thinking and from the perspective of Descartes thinking included thinking, imagination, sensation, doubt etc. (Descartes, 2008, the second meditation). “I” is the knowing subject and the word “object” is opposed to it. The subject has been placed of everything’s center and the modern era emerged. The Descartes’s perspective about this matter that “who the I is”, were examined in different studies and several philosophical schools were born from it.

Before Descartes, Iranian philosophers have spoken just the opposite of Aristotelian philosophical tradition about the “I” or soul and attempted to identify it. Ebne Sina and Sohrawardi are two of Iranian philosophers who have spoken some new and unprecedented statements about the “I” or soul. Although in comparison to Descartes, the statements of these philosophers have not been explored and researches done in this field are very limited.

The framework of Ebne Sina’s philosophy is from Aristotle but he cannot be called as the only commentator of Aristotle because in some cases he has some new statements which not only they are new ,but also incompatible with Aristotelian thought. One of the newviewpoints of EbneSina is on philosophical psychology.

Aristotle calls the body as the matter and the soul as the form and the composition of the soul and the body from his viewpoint is of the kind of the composition of the matter with the form and it can never be considered that the soul and the body are independent from each other; but they are two aspects of one thing (Aristotle, 1987,

412a –414b). From his perspective the soul and the body are appeared and disappeared with each other. In Aristotle’s idea affections such as anger, distress, joyance, fear etc. are from something which is composition of the matter and form not just the formal one. Professions and the other abilities are not only from the soul but from the matter and the form. The soul and the body are one thing and this is the composition of the soul and the body which is called “I” not just the form (the soul) (Davudi, 1970, page 25 – 26 & 344). This is just the opposite point of Descartes who calls the “I” as the thing which is the opposite of the body because the essence of the soul is thinking and the essence of the body is extension (Descartes, 2009, the second meditation).

From the viewpoint of Ebne Sina the soul is the substance which is separated from matter by itself, but it is related to the body and effects on it meanwhile is affected by it. From Ebne Sina’s idea, although the soul in generation depends upon a special capacity which appears in the special matter called body, but it is not the accidental light of it in its consistency (Ebne Sina, 1404, Theologies, page 60, Himself, 1404, The soul, pages 22 - 23).

From the viewpoint of Ebne Sina, affections such as anger and distress and professions and arts are the special actions of the soul, not the actions in common between the soul and the body; in other words, these affections and actions are belonged to the soul because the manifestation of them in the soul is not always simultaneous with their bodily effects; and on the other hand, the intellect can prevent from special affections (related to the soul) like distress or joyance, but it cannot prevent from special pleasures or pains (Davudi, 1970, pages 275 and 345). From the idea of Ebne Sina, the soul is the same “I”.

In this article, on the basis of “The Suspended Man in Space” first the perspective of Ebne Sina

is explored, then the perspective of Sohrawardi on self-knowledge is studied and finally these two perspectives are compared with each other and it is declared that which is more stable and has weighty results.

1 – Ebne Sina:

Ebne Sina for proving that there is an “I” and it is something except the body brings several reasoning. In addition to those reasoning, he has an experience named “The Suspended Man in Space” (Ebne Sina, 1996, The soul, page 347, himself, 1989, pages 159 – 160), Or “The Flying Man” (Alfakhouri, 1988, page 467). Some peoples have remembered these experiences as demonstration; such a title undoubtedly is false and we call it the experience, an interior and general experience.

In this experience he attempts to prove that there is a soul or an “I” and it is something out of the sensible body and the effects are from it not from the body. He names four conditions to prove that there is an “I”: three real conditions and one hypothetical one:

1. Waking condition: it is when the external and internal senses are active and I am aware of the objects around me and also I am aware of my soul because I am not aware of other things unless I am aware of my soul or my own “I”.
2. Sleep condition: in this case external senses cannot sense the sensible objects but internal senses are active.
3. Intoxication and drunkenness condition: in this condition, neither the external nor the internal senses reactive; however, the drunken person is aware of his own soul.

In these three conditions human is aware about his own soul and also he can be aware of other objects.

4. The Suspended Man in Space condition: in this case, the human is just aware of himself not anything else; because in three first conditions the external internal senses are rather active but in the fourth one no one of them is active; although, the human is aware of himself. This hypothetical condition is such as below:

Let’s suppose that a human has been created all at once and perfect, too; he has healthy mind and healthy body. He is suspended in the air and does not sense anything; neither his around objects nor his own members of body. Such a human in such a condition of existence is aware of his “I” and his own soul and verifies that he is. In other words, we find ourselves without the need of the body and physical matters and never unconscious about ourselves; then, I am not something from the kinds of body and physical matters.

In the experience of the suspended man in space who is the perceiver? An external senses cannot be as a perceiver of the soul; because according to the supposition they are inactive. B. it is internal senses; the very perception as the internal sense is in tow kinds: first immediate internal senses like intellect which does not need to mediate in its thinking; mediated internal senses such as imagination and fiction which percept immediately. The awareness of the “I” is not possible through the mediated internal senses because in this supposition there is not any mediator because we supposed that the human is ignorant from all of his external and internal faculties. Therefore, the perceiver is the soul itself and the perceived object is itself, too; and there is not any duality and separation between the perceiver and the perceived object.

Now we should see that what is this “I”? This “I” from the viewpoint of Ebne Sina neither is the whole of the body nor all of individual external members of the body like the hand and the foot

and nor internal members like the heart and the liver; because in this supposition the human is suspended in the air and is not aware of any of them. Therefore, this “I” is some un-physical and nonmaterial thing.

Perhaps EbneSina is criticized because we recognize our “I” and soul or essence through the acts of the soul such as sensation and thought; because we sense and we think then we become aware of our essence and our “I”. But from the viewpoint of Ebne Sina, we have not any mediator to understand our essence and soul; but the thought and the sensation are mediator themselves.

The solution of EbneSina is that the meaning of act can be two things; one of them is as following, it is absolute act so that such an act needs to an absolute actor not a special actor that is “your” essence, or you think about your act, like, I think, I work, that in this case your essence is except your act, then your essence is prior to your act or is along with your act, so your essence is not proved by your act and your essence is proved by itself. The result of the above demonstration is that the various effects are from the soul. The soul is the same “I”; and the soul or the “I” is a nonmaterial substance that manage the body. In other words, the essence of the soul or “I” is the being nonmaterial.

This experience is facing several problems:

- a. The experience of the suspended man in space is only a supposition and cannot logically prove by that an existing thing.
- b. Only because the perceiver and the perceived object are something except from the body, it cannot be said that it is a nonmaterial thing. Maybe the soul is a subtle body different from earthy body or maybe it is a kind of energy or an unknown body.

- c. The second condition, sleeping human and the third one, drunken human, do not indicate that the human is not aware of his external and internal senses; because only if I feel that I am ignorant of my external and internal senses, this does not prove that it is really such that.
- d. Your reasoning result is that the soul is a nonmaterial substance and it is not even known through its acts. Now say that what does mean the nonmaterial substance? In other words, you proved that there is something non-physical and non-corporeal; now say that what is that thing? From our perspective, EbneSina in the experience of the suspended man in space finds his own existence not his self and “There is a distance from the earth to the sky” between these two; and also the result of the experience is incompatible with the experience itself because EbneSina reaches to his own existence through this term that “he is never non-conscious of himself” then (The awareness is not equal to the existence); and this inference is false clearly and true conclusion would be that he reaches to the self-consciousness from the case that “He is never non-conscious of himself” meaning (from consciousness to the self and from self to the consciousness). From our viewpoint the experience of the suspended man in space has not logical and epistemological value because its conclusion is more hidden than the premises; that is to say the “I” is equal to the nonmaterial substance. The reason that EbneSina has failed in explaining some matters, is his logical method. The method of peripatetic for knowing things is conceptual knowledge. From their viewpoint you can know something when you have known its genus and its

differentia and also in this experience the soul is known in this way: the nonmaterial substance.

This inference is false in several cases: 1- The nonmaterial substance is more unknown than the "I" and according to this matter we get far from our "I" by this experience and the "I" becomes more hidden to us. 2- The genus of "I", the substance, is a general concept and you can never know an extension by any concept. 3- The differentia of the "I", nonmaterial, is a negative concept and according to the peripatetic philosophy nothing can be known by the negation.

2 -Sohrawardi:

Sohrawardi, the other Iranian philosopher described the framework of peripatetic philosophy false and he himself has created a philosophy named the philosophy of illumination by new and stable thoughts. He does not like the discourse of peripatetic and constructs a new system himself. We communicate and analyze the Sohrawardi's viewpoint with a short introduction as following.

Sohrawardi classifies everything from God to the most inferior things first to the two parts of light and darkness and then each of them to the substantial and accidental one, because everything is light in itself or is darkness in itself. The thing which is light in itself or independent from another thing and is subsistent in itself, such a light is the pure and incorporeal light. All over the world of intellect and the human and spherical soul, is the substantial pure and incorporeal light; or the light is depended on another thing which such a light is the accidental light. The accidental light itself is divided into two groups: one group which depends on the

bodies like the sun light etc. and are added to the substance of these bodies, the other group is depended on the pure and incorporeal lights such as light of the low level which receives it from the top level. What which is darkness in itself, that is independent of the locus which is the same dusky substance or it is a state for another thing which is called dark state (Sohrawardi, 1998, vol 2, pages 107 – 108 and 117) (Shirazi, 2005, pages 277 – 279) (Shahrouzi, 2001, pages 192 – 288).

The pure light is self-conscious because it is present to itself, and the accidental light is not itself-conscious because it is not present to itself (Sohrawardi, 1998, page 113). From the viewpoint of Sohrawardi the most apparent pure light is everybody's himself, because everybody finds himself immediately and whatever is such that, is self-conscious (Sohrawardi, 1998, vol 2, page 114).

He indicates two experiences to prove his words: 1- emancipation from the body (Sohrawardi, 1998, vol 1, page 115) and 2- self-consciousness in awakening (Sohrawardi, 1998, vol 2, pages 115 – 117, 484 and 403 – 404. himself, 1998, vol 2, pages 110 – 112).

1-Sohrawardi in the experience of "emancipation from the body" says that when I emancipated myself from my body and looked into myself, there was only me and nothing else; I found in myself neither the substance nor the remedy of body like that EbneSina has said.

We saw that the peripatetic's define the soul with the genus and the differentia. Sohrawardi insisted on this point that in the experience of "emancipation from the body" there were no sign of those genus and

differentia then I am myself the same “existence” not anything else.

On the other hand, we know that Sohrawardi utilizes many of the logico-philosophical terms in an incompatible way to the peripatetic's. One of those terms is the “existence” which in peripatetic philosophy has one definition and in the viewpoint of Sohrawardi another definition. The existence in the thought of Sohrawardi is the same consciousness and nothing else (Sohrawardi, 1998). Then, in fact through this experience Sohrawardi reaches the consciousness and EbneSina reaches the existence and these two are so far from each other and one should not assume those the same; because A) The experience of Sohrawardi is a possible experience and at least it has taken place for him and many of the wise but the experience of EbneSina is an impossible and supposed one and the epistemological value of those is not equal. B) The consequence of Sohrawardi's experience is reaching to the consciousness and the consequence of Ebne Sina's experience is reaching the existence. C) Sohrawardi reaches one thing that is consciousness but EbneSina reaches a combined thing that is the substance which manages the body. Perhaps we would be criticized that also EbneSina has reached one thing which two different concepts is perceived from that; the “I”: the substance as manager of the body. This criticism is failed because the “I” is an external thing but the concept a mental thing and this indicates that EbneSina is engaged with the conceptual way of knowing things which is an Aristotelian legacy.

2- The experience of consciousness in awakening is the spirit of Sohrawardi's philosophy and without recognizing it, the recognition of his

philosophy is impossible. To clarify the basic statement of Sohrawardi we should explain the intuitive and empirical knowledge.

Philosophers describe knowledge in two types (EbneSina, 1989, unknown page) (Sohrawardi, 1998, vol 1, pages 484 – 489): intuitive knowledge and empirical knowledge. In intuitive knowledge there should be three matters to getting the knowledge: a. someone who knows; knower. b. imagination of the known object in the knower's mind, knowledge (representation). c. the object which is known; object known. All of the empirical knowledge and our knowledge of the external world are such that. Now the question is that: is the time of consciousness of anyone of himself, like our consciousness of external objects or not? How is it and why is it from another kind?

Everyone's consciousness of himself is not like the knowledge of the first kind. I saw that there are three things in the first type of knowledge: the knower, representation of the known and the object known. There are two things in the intuitive knowledge: the knower and the object known. Myself and I. It is clear that the “I” and “myself” are not two separated things but one thing and that is the same knowledge, light and visibility and according to this, whatever I am not aware of it, is not a part of me; and the “I” is not essentially dividable and it is the simple light, without any genus and differentia.

Sohrawardi indicates this experience in the frame of concept and in other words proves it; he explains with several reasons that I, the knower, cannot find myself, the object known, through my own representation:

A) The representation of “I” is not myself but is something else (he) and the known object is

the representation of “I” and is not “I” and such a thing equals to this matter that I am aware of myself through the awareness of something else and it is clear that this is false (Sohrawardi, 1994, page 23. Himself, 1998, vol 1, page 484. Himself, vol 1, page 111). b) I know that this is my representation or do not know. If I know then I know my representation before it then I do not require my representation anymore, and if I do not know that this representation is my representation then I have not known myself (Sohrawardi, 1998, vol 2, page 111).

c) Every notion is universal and along with thousands of other notions, it does not become particular and does not find any particularization. Also “the notion of I” is universal and the “I” is something particular, therefore this cannot be known through that and the knowledge of this is only by itself (Sohrawardi, 1998, vol 1, page 484). d) When my hand is cut, without the consciousness of the tear of the skin, I feel the pain. Knowledge of the pain is intuitive which I am aware of this without the knowledge of the tear of skin (Sohrawardi, 1998, vol 1, page 485).

We accept that the human cannot find his soul through his representation, but can he find his soul through his other attributes? In other words, I am an essence that is unconscious, able, alive etc. and I myself find my essence through these attributes. From his viewpoint this reasoning is baseless because I do not know whether these attributes are mine or not unless I am conscious of myself (Sohrawardi, 1998, vol 2, page 111).

From what was said it is clear that everything which has a self-conscious essence, finds itself without mediation of any attribute, whether it is the consciousness or forgiveness

or etc. The objects which we do not find intuitively such as hand and foot etc. are not the “I”. The pure lights are self-conscious which the closest of them to the human is the everybody’s self and Sohrawardi investigates on the world of lights through the soul of anybody (the same, page 112).

The method of Sohrawardi is the vision and the method of peripatetic creating concepts. Each of these methods has some gains. The peripatetics according to their method have to know the soul which is a simple and unique thing through the multiple concepts. For example EbneSina brings following reason to prove the soul: there are some bodies which in addition to being body, they have sensation, voluntary movement, feeding, growing and generation. This attribute is not from the body’s being body otherwise all of the bodies should be such that, so, it should be something in the body which this attribute comes from it and that thing is the same soul (Ebne Sina, 1404, page 27); then the soul is the substance or the thing which turn the matter into the plant, animal and the human. Here, the genus of the soul is being the thingness or substance and its differentia is the management of the body. Sohrawardi does not accept being substance and thingness as a part of the soul.

From the viewpoint of Sohrawardi substantiality has only four meanings: perfection of its quiddity, denial of subject, denial of locus and an unknown meaning. If you consider the substantiality by its first meaning, it is a concept of being of reason and nothing else (Falsafi, 2012, the first foreword). If it is considered in the second and third meanings, it is negation and the negation is a concept of being reason (the same, the first foreword); and in the fourth meaning it is an impossible thing because

anyone is always conscious of himself and that unknown substance neither is all of human essence nor a part of it, then from the viewpoint of Sohrawardi the spirit of human is just the same self-consciousness and nothing else; in other words the spirit of human and everything like it is only the same self-consciousness. The self-consciousness neither is the attribute which is added to the human's essence nor a part of the human's essence because that part is unknown for the human.

Also, thingness is not a part of the human's essence and it is not true to say the human "is a self-conscious thing"; this is true to say that the human is the same "self-consciousness". Self-consciousness is the same self-clearness; in other words, it is clear for itself not "it is something having is attribute of the self-consciousness and light because it has nothing except the self-consciousness and light. The knowledge of anything is depended on your own self-consciousness and self-clearness and in other words the recognition of the other things except you yourself, is an attribute for you".

We here to fore evaluated and judged the Ebne Sina's experience of the suspended man in space and the Sohrawardi's experience of emancipation from the body; and it became clear that the of Sohrawardi's experience is more stable than the Ebne Sina's one in any aspect. From our perspective the experience in awakening of Sohrawardi is unequalled and stable, too; and in comparison with the conceptual definition of EbneSina it is more stable. Peripatetics know everything with its genus and differentia based on their selected method. This method is only usable in empirical knowledge and they use it in intuitive knowledge unintentionally and get engaged with sophistry because according to

their own words showing and using of something in place of something else is sophistry. In intuitive knowledge, we first visit our known object and then find its notion; then in the experience of vision there is no sign of notion.

Conclusion

It can be concluded from what was said that EbneSina has not followed Aristotle in the field of self-knowledge and the consequence of this matter has been the new construction. Notwithstanding, since he was engaged with the Aristotelian method, he could not find the depth of the self and he only could stick to the notion. In opposition to him, since Sohrawardi utilized another method meaning illumination, he succeeded in self-knowledge.

The other conclusion is that although it is true that anyone is present to himself and no one is closer than himself to himself, but the knowledge of the "self" is a difficult work. The ultimate conclusion is that respecting the great does not mean to follow their perspective but the most approvable respect is to criticize and analyze them; the task which Sohrawardi did and came to significant results.

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