

# KNOWLEDGE, WISDOM AND A “SOPHIOLOGICAL” EPISTEMOLOGY

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## ÖZET

### BİLGİ, BİLGELİK VE “SOFYALOJİK” BİR EPISTEMOLOJİ

Girişte, bilgi ve bilgelğin kavramsal analizi yapılmaktadır. Birinci kısımda, Antikçağda ve Ortaçağ Batı ve İslam dünyasında bilgi ve bilgelik arasındaki yakın bir diyalog olduğu vurgulanmaktadır. İkinci kısımda, modern dönemde bilgi ve bilgelik diyalogunun Batı dünyasında bilgi lehine, İslam dünyasında ise bilgelik lehine bir tavır aldığı savunulmaktadır. Üçüncü ve son kısımda ise, çağdaş epistemolojik krizlerden ve dikotomilerden kurtulmak için, bilgi ve bilgelik diyalogunun yeniden tesis edilmesi ve hatta “sofyalojik” (bilgelikbilimsel) diye nitelendirilebilecek yeni bir epistemoloji yaklaşımının geliştirilmesi gerektiği savunulmaktadır.

*Anahtar Kelimeler: Bilgi, bilgelik, epistemoloji, “sofyaloji”.*

## ABSTRACT

In the Introduction, we deal with the conceptual analysis of knowledge and wisdom. In the first section, it is emphasized that there was a constructive dialogue between knowledge and wisdom in Ancient era and Medieval Islamic and Western age. In the second section, it has been advocated that this dialogue was broken off unfortunately for the sake of knowledge in the West and for the sake of wisdom in the Islamic world. In the third and last section, we try to defend that, in order to escape from contemporary epistemological crises and dichotomies, we should re-establish this dialogue, and should even develop a new epistemological approach which could be called as “sophiological” epistemology.

*Key Words: Knowledge, wisdom, epistemology, “sophiology”.*

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Both knowledge and wisdom have many definitions and it is difficult to give a commonly accepted definition for them. Generally speaking, while knowledge is an intellectual product of the mental activity of human beings concerning mainly the true description of the related objects or states of affairs, wisdom is an intellectual, emotional, volitional and spiritual characteristics of some human beings in relation not only to the true knowledge of the objects but also to the true knowledge of the self, and to the valuable words and virtuous actions. People usually think that they know what knowledge is or what is meant by it; but the concept of wisdom is more controversial. According to *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, "wisdom may be defined as the direct, practical insight into the meaning and purpose of things that comes to 'shrewd, penetrating, and observant minds, from their own experience of life, and their daily commerce with the world. It is the fruit not so much of speculation as of native sagacity and wit. Consequently, while philosophy appeals only to the intellectual *élites*, wisdom appeals to all who are interested in life and have understanding enough to appreciate a word of truth well spoken."<sup>1</sup> According to Ibn Sina's definition, one of the greatest Muslim philosophers, "wisdom (*hikma*) is the passage of the soul of man to the perfection possible for him within the two bounds of science and action." It includes, on the one hand, justice and, on the other, perfecting of the reasoning soul, in as much as it comprises the theoretical and practical intelligibles.<sup>2</sup> It is understood, therefore, that although they are closely related to each other, while knowledge is more theoretical and intellectual, wisdom is more practical and experiential, on its own or on the basis of knowledge.

Knowledge has been a branch of philosophy called epistemology since the 17th century; and epistemology deals with such issues as the nature and derivation of knowledge, the scope of knowledge, and the reliability of claims to knowledge. Shortly speaking, "epistemology is concerned with the founda-

<sup>1</sup> A. R. Gordon, "Wisdom," *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, Vol. XII, (Edinburgh: T&T. Clark, 1921), p. 742.

<sup>2</sup> A. M. Goichon, "*Hikma*," *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, New Edition, ed. By B. Lewis, Vol. III, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, London: Luzac&Co., 1979), p. 377.

tions of science"<sup>3</sup> or of knowledge scientifically and systematically for several ages. But, unfortunately, wisdom has still not been as lucky as knowledge to be an independent discipline of philosophy and so to be researched, discussed and developed by many scholars systematically and permanently. For us, it is time to develop a science, philosophy or theory of wisdom, and to give it a proper name, similar to epistemology and other philosophical or scientific disciplines, that is to say, "Sophiology" (sophia-logy). Sophiology has perennial insights for enduring epistemological and ethical problems. We will try tentatively to determine the basic characteristics of a sophiological epistemology, and put forward that such an epistemological approach can solve many problems or crises of contemporary epistemology better than current dichotomic alternatives such as foundationalism and anti-foundationalism, or objectivism and relativism.

## 1 The Dialogue of Knowledge and Wisdom in Ancient and Medieval Times

*a. Knowledge and Wisdom in Abrahamic Religions and Ancient Philosophy:* When looked at the relationship between knowledge and wisdom from the historical perspective, it is seen that they are accompanying concepts and in a complementary and productive dialogue. There are lots of verses in the Bible and the Qur'an concerning knowledge and wisdom, and some of them are stated together. Just a few examples among many are those: "To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness ..." (Ecclesiastes 2:26). "Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians ' : 2-3). "... We gave him (Joseph) wisdom and knowledge, thus We reward the doers of good ..." (Qur'an 12: 22). These examples show that knowledge and wisdom are neither identical nor unconnected concepts. They emphasize and encourage both the relationship between each other and their relationship with virtue, happiness, and eschatological reward.

Wisdom is a common intellectual concept and a cardinal moral value in all the major religions and philosophical systems. According to the Qur'an, to have a very good quality of a human being is closely connected to the degree of wisdom he or she has: "He granteth wisdom to whom He pleaseth; And he to

<sup>3</sup> W.V. Quine, "Epistemology Naturalized," in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1969, p. 69.

whom wisdom is granted receiveth indeed a benefit overflowing; But none will receive admonition but men of understanding” (Qur’an 2: 269). In terms of the Bible, “wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness” (Ecc. 2/13). In Christian sacred texts, people who lack wisdom are advised to ask it from God: “If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you” (Jas., 1/5). There is no need to say that in Eastern religions, too, wisdom is regarded as extremely important. It is even difficult to distinguish Indian wisdom from philosophy, and philosophy in turn from religion; each shares in the character of the others.<sup>4</sup> It is also known that various moral qualities singled out by the classical writers are reduced by Confucius to the five cardinal virtues, and one of them is wisdom.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, wisdom is an intellectual value and an experiential virtue for all the major religions of the world.

There is a close relationship between knowledge and wisdom in Antique philosophy, too. As everybody knows, the etymological meaning of the word of philosophy is the love of wisdom. Socrates conceives the love of wisdom as the pursuit of self-knowledge. He “locates the intersection of things human and divine in the task of self-knowledge. His dedication to self-knowledge as the subject of philosophy is achieved through an act of memory. In declaring that life is to be examined, Socrates remembers what is already stated on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, attributed to the Seven Sages: *gnothi seauton*, ‘know thyself.’ The second famous inscription – *meden agan*, ‘nothing too much’ – indicates that self-knowledge requires proportion or harmony, more specifically *sophrosyne*.”<sup>6</sup>

Plato built up his majestic system of ethical idealism, with its four cardinal virtues - wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. Of these, wisdom is the highest phase of virtue, for it inspires and regulates the whole inner life. A distinction vaguely apprehended by Plato was sharply drawn by Aristotle. Practical wisdom, prudence, or good sense deals with matters of ordinary human interest; speculative wisdom, which is wisdom *par excellence*, deals with the first prin-

<sup>4</sup> Kurt Rudolph, “Wisdom,” *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, Vol. 15, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company; London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1987, p. 399.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon, “Wisdom,” p. 744.

<sup>6</sup> Donald Phillip Verene, *Philosophy and the Return to Self-Knowledge*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997, p. 204.

ciples of things. The former enables a man to apply the right rule to every line of activity, whether professional, civic, or strictly moral; the latter leads, by a union of science and intuitive apprehension, to the knowledge of those things which are most precious in their nature.<sup>7</sup> The productive dialogue of knowledge and wisdom kept on going later Hellenistic philosophers, Neo-Platonists, and early Christian thinkers.

*b. Knowledge and Wisdom in Medieval Times, Particularly in Islam:* According to a widespread conviction among the Muslims "there have been many expositions on the nature of knowledge in Islam more than in any other religion, culture and civilization, and this is due to the preeminent position and paramount role accorded to *al-'ilm* by God in the Holy Qur'an."<sup>8</sup> Islam is "essentially and fundamentally a religion of moderation; its epistemoloji is neither exclusively rationalist, nor empiricist, nor intuitionist. It employs all the sources of knowledge – reason, sense-experience and intuition – to arrive at the knowledge of truth, and integrates the relative truth supplied by them with the absolute truth revealed by God to the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS)."<sup>9</sup> In Islam and the civilization which it created "there was a veritable celebration of knowledge all of whose forms were, in one way or another, related to the sacred extending in a hierarchy from an 'empirical' and rational mode of knowing to that highest form of knowledge (*al-ma'rifah* or '*irfan*) ..."<sup>10</sup> In other words, Islamic epistemology "is an integrated whole of rationalism, empiricism and intuitionism, under the overriding authority of the knowledge revealed by God to the Prophet (SAWS)."<sup>11</sup> In Islam, reason and experience are "valid channels by which knowledge is attained – knowledge, that is, at the rational and empirical level of normal experience. We maintain that there is another level; but even at this other, spiritual level, reason and experience are still valid, only that they are of a transcendental order."<sup>12</sup> In order to attain a true and comprehensive knowledge "we must integrate the findings of reason, sense-perception, intuition and reve-

<sup>7</sup> Gordon, "Wisdom," p. 745.

<sup>8</sup> Syed Muhammed Naquib al-Attas, *Islam, Secularism and the Philosophy of the Future*, London, New York: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1985, p. 136.

<sup>9</sup> B. H. Siddiqui, "Knowledge: An Islamic Perspective," ([http://www.crvp.org/book/Series02/IIA-3/chapter\\_x.htm](http://www.crvp.org/book/Series02/IIA-3/chapter_x.htm)) (09.07.2003), p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and Sacred*, New York: Crossroad, 1981, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> Siddiqui, "Knowledge: An Islamic Perspective," p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> al-Attas, *Islam, Secularism and the Philosophy of the Future*, p. 155.

lation into a well-knit whole. Light from only one direction does not and cannot illumine the whole of reality in all its manifestations, temporal and spiritual.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the Qur’an regards both *anfus* (subjective, experiential, transcendental knowledge) and *afaq* (objective, empirical, scientific knowledge) as the veritable sources of human knowledge [41: 53; 51:21].

In addition, certainty or truth in Islamic epistemology is not a matter of either absoluteness as in the case of extreme foundarionalism or almost nothingness as in the case of extreme relativism and nihilism; rather, there are at least three levels of certainty. “The knowledge obtained through the discursive movement of thought is certain only epistemically (*ilm al-yaqin*) [102:5]. It does satisfy the mind of its certitude, but possesses theoretical certainty at best, as opposed to what the Qur’an calls the certainty of sight (*ain al-yaqin*) [102:7] characteristic of personal observation. The highest degree of certitude belongs to the knowledge revealed by God to the prophets which the Qur’an calls truth of assured certainty (*haqq al-yaqin*) [69:51].”<sup>14</sup>

However knowledge is regarded as very important in the Qur’an, it “seldom speaks of *kitab* (knowledge) alone, but pairs this with *hikmah* (wisdom). [Qur’an, 1:129; 3:164] The book gives us knowledge of the true objective of the creation of man. Wisdom makes us realise the rationale, value and importance of this knowledge for ordering our life, individual and collective, in accordance with it. This consists in reflecting on what we already know, and implies extension in depth, in internalising knowledge, rather than in extending the frontiers of knowledge.” In Islamic perspective, “every wisdom is at the same time knowledge, but every knowledge is not wisdom. This gives knowledge an edge over wisdom, but it is wisdom, not mere knowledge, which has sole value in the eyes of God. ‘Whosoever is given wisdom, is given abundant good,’ [2:269] says the Qur’an.”<sup>15</sup>

For most of the Medieval Muslim philosophers, too, wisdom has been related both to knowledge and philosophy and to religion and morality. For example, “Ibn Rushd tried to substantiate a cultural vision of wisdom so that it could be acceptable both in the tradition of Islam (religion), and in the tradition

<sup>13</sup> Siddiqui, “Knowledge: An Islamic Perspective,” p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Siddiqui, “Knowledge: An Islamic Perspective,” p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Siddiqui, “Knowledge: An Islamic Perspective,” p. 4.

of logic (philosophy), thereby removing a possible contradiction between faith and proof (reason). He aspired to consider the rational scope of Islamic culture as a necessary condition of ideal moderation. He regarded this as a method of overcoming sectarianism and dogmatism, lies and defects, and establishing a rich unity of truth and virtuoueness."<sup>16</sup> For him, "this was an historical-cultural form of mastering the various attempts and possibilities of the synthesis of reason and wisdom, development of rational wisdom and wise rationalism, which, in turn, were nothing else but the wholeness of the moral spirit or monism."<sup>17</sup>

## 2 Breaking off the Dialogue of Knowledge and Wisdom in Modern Times

The dialogue of knowledge and wisdom has broken off in modern times both in the Western world and in the Islamic world. But their preferences have been different; one has preferred knowledge and neglected wisdom, and the other has done the reverse.

*a. Breaking off in the Western World for the Sake of Knowledge: Rationalism, Empiricism, Positivism, Etc.:* As modern Western philosophy has developed since Descartes, "the connection of philosophy to mortality and its accompanying concern with self-knowledge have been set aside. Philosophy as the love of wisdom that considers the true to be the whole has been replaced by the pursuit of method and the truth of the part. The Renaissance humanists' attempt to discover the connections among wisdom, eloquence, and prudence has been given up. In regard to the Socratic tradition of self-knowledge and the humanist tradition of seeking to form thought and human action as 'wisdom speaking,' philosophy has lost its way."<sup>18</sup> The spirit of the modern philosophy is extremely rationalistic in the sense that it makes human reason the highest authority in the pursuit of knowledge, and naturalistic in that it seeks to explain the inner and outer nature without supernatural presuppositions. "Religious humanism is replaced by a humanism of the scientific sort which puts human interests above every-

<sup>16</sup> Maitham al-Janabi, "Islamic Culture as Search of a Golden Mean," in *Values in Islamic Culture and the Experience of History*, ed. by Nur Kirabaev, Yuriy Pochta, Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2002, p. 252.

<sup>17</sup> al-Janabi, "Islamic Culture as Search of a Golden Mean," p. 253.

<sup>18</sup> Verene, *Philosophy and the Return to Self-Knowledge*, p. ix.

thing else, making man the source of all knowledge – the knowledge of what is materially useful, as well as of what is morally good.”<sup>19</sup> For the ancients, the philosophical search was identified with the pursuit of the Good, the True and the Beautiful. Whereas, the modern philosophy and especially “the twentieth century has tended to prefer more modest and more prosaic goals: ... It has been more at home in the area of knowledge than in the area of ethics and, as a result, its command of technology has found more and more deeply corrupt applications in both war and peace. Perhaps worse, where it *does* give lip-service to ethics, it is to an ethics divorced from moral sensitivity.”<sup>20</sup> In this case, “it has to be admitted that contemporary western philosophy has very little to offer in the way of reflection or insight in relation to either practical or philosophic wisdom. Instead it tends to be constrained in a narrow professionalism that detaches itself deliberately from the world.”<sup>21</sup> At the end, knowledge without wisdom has made modern man spiritually homeless, alien to himself or herself, and has made the humanity and the earth challenged by many global cultural, ethical and environmental crises. Rationalist and positivist epistemology followed by an atheist and naturalist ontology and by relativist and nihilist ethics have really brought to modern world more knowledge but probably less wisdom, more power but less virtue, and more pleasure but less peace.

*b. Breaking off in the Islamic World for the Sake of Wisdom: Mysticism, Fideism, Dogmatism, Etc.:* Islam played the dominant role in the shaping of world history from the time of its advent onwards at least for a thousand years. The Western counter-attack came gradually beginning with the scientific revolution in Western-Europe in the 13th century and its gradual growth in subsequent centuries in military and economic power. The geographical expansion of Western Europe eastward and westwards and the establishment of its trading posts in the Indian Ocean in the 16th century caused grave economic repercussions in the Muslim world. Together with this kind of external factors, some internal elements “had made possible the Western colonization of a significant part of that world from the 17th century onwards till our own times.”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Siddiqui, “Knowledge: An Islamic Perspective,” p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> Brenda Almond, “What’s the Meaning of All This?,” (<http://www.philosophynow.demon.co.uk/almond.htm>), (24.01.2003), p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Almond, “What’s the Meaning of All This?,” p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> al-Attas, *Islam, Secularism and the Philosophy of the Future*, p. 98.



In 17th century, the contemporary philosopher of Descartes (1596-1650) in Islamic World was Mulla Sadra (1571-1640) and he made his preference from the side of wisdom rather than knowledge in comparison to Descartes. One of his major philosophical works is 'Transcendental Wisdom', better known as 'The Four Journeys' (*al-Asfar al-Arba'ah*). He distinguishes between two categories of ancient Greek philosophers. The first category starts with Thales and ends with Socrates and Plato, the second starts with Pythagoras, who received wisdom from Solomon and from the Egyptian priests. Among the 'pillars of wisdom', he mentions Empedocles, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. All the above-mentioned Greek 'pillars of wisdom' are said by al-Shirazi to have received the 'light of wisdom' from the 'beacon of Prophethood'.<sup>23</sup> Roughly after the dates of Mulla Sadra, the dialogue and balance of knowledge and wisdom could not have been kept on in Islamic world as well. The spirit of the last centuries in Islamic world has been mainly mystical rather than rationalistic or balanced one, and many people have seen practical wisdom enough for living a good life. As Iqbal said, "The more genuine school of Sufism have, no doubt, done good work in shaping and directing the evolution of religious experience in Islam; but their latter-day representatives, owing to their ignorance of the modern mind, have become absolutely incapable of receiving any fresh inspiration from modern thought and experience."<sup>24</sup> At the end, wisdom without knowledge has made Muslim man and woman materially homeless, scientifically and technologically backwards, and culturally fragile. Mystical and practical wisdom followed by an idealist ontology and universalist ethics brought to Muslim world more wisdom but less knowledge, more virtue but less power, and more internal peace but less international prestige.

### 3 Contemporary Need for a "Sophiological" Epistemology

*a. Contemporary Epistemological Crises and Hopeless Dichotomic Proposals:*

<sup>23</sup> Majid Fakhry, *A Short Introduction to Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1998, pp. 115-16.

<sup>24</sup> Mohammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1986, p. v.

Neither Western nor Islamic world, which brought off the dialogue of the accompanying and complementary concepts of knowledge and wisdom for three centuries, could not have escaped from various crises and could not have arrived at totally a more ideal situation. Muslim intellectuals (the modernists and some others) became aware of the crisis in their world about 100-150 years ago; and Western intellectuals (the postmodernist and some others) became aware of their crisis about 50-100 years ago. But, in our view, the searches for solution do not give so much hope in either world; because the solutions are too simple, that is, to reject the past approach completely and to offer the other extreme edge of the dichotomy excessively. For most of the postmodernists (Westerners or Muslim followers), such concepts as foundation, knowledge, reason, rationality, reality, truth, objectivity, science, universal values and virtues, etc., are taboo and reactionary concepts; everything is relative and 'anything goes.' "Many prominent philosophers of this century may beter be described as anti-philosophers because of their tendency to see philosophical problems merely as linguistic muddles and their conviction that the human mind is incapable of actually knowing anything; nihilists like Richard Rorty even say that 'the best hope for philosophy is not to practice Philosophy' and that we must 'drop the idea . . . that Truth is 'out there' waiting for human beings to arrive at it."<sup>25</sup> There are many contemporary Muslim entellectuals repeating the same ideas in Islamic world as a solution. As just one example, one can mention the last sentence of the paper of Turkish philosopher in a symposium on Knowledge and Value carried out in the year 2002: "The source of values is 'natural' languages in the last analysis; and Heidegger and Derrida are right: there is nothing outside language."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Roy Abraham Varghese, "Introduction: A Return to Universal Experience," in *Great Thinkers on Great Questions*, ed. by R. A. Varghese, Oxford: Oneworld, 1998, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Hüsamettin Arslan, "Bilgi, Naturalizm ve Değerler," *Bilgi ve Değer: Muğla Üniversitesi Felsefe Bölümü Sempozyum Bildirileri*, ed. Şahabettin Yalçın, Ankara: Vadi Yayınları, 2002, p. 100. See for the evaluation and reasonable criticisms of this sort of philosophical ideas, Tran Van Doan, *Reason, Rationality and Reasonableness*, Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2001; chapters II and III. According to Doan, for example, "The fact is that language is limited, and sometimes, cannot Express all human acts, especially human aesthetic life. It is not true that the world is limited by language, but rather, the reverse, i.e. language is limited by the world." (p. 110). In addition, Heidegger's "insistence on eternal return of reason, in the sense of Nietzsche's, analogous to the return to the original, authentic Being, seems to be sheer rhetoric. It lacks concreteness and thus it is of little help in the context of a real, functional society." (p. 8).

For most of the modernist, too, such concepts as wisdom, heart, spirituality, goodness, subjectivity, belief, faith, traditional values and virtues are almost taboo and reactionary concepts; and everything is dependent on science and reason, and nothing is allowed to go except their permission. As just one example of this sort of ideas defended in the symposium mentioned above, one can mention another Turkish philosopher's last words quoted from a poem written in 1911:

The empty belief will sink to the bottom of the earth, will extinct,  
By the ability of reason, the great sorcerer, I believed.  
One day technology will make that black soil golden  
Everything will become through the power of science ... I believed.<sup>27</sup>

These two alternative proposals seem to be the simple projection of what Brenda Almond describes in general: "Professional and academic philosophy has become identified at the end of the twentieth century with a choice in the area of knowledge, between irrationalism and empty logic-chopping, and in the area of morality, between moral nihilism and a shallow utilitarianism."<sup>28</sup> Whereas, in our view, as she has been rightly says, "against these prevailing trends, it is only possible to repeat that the true mission of philosophy is, after

<sup>27</sup> Bedia Akarsu, "Değişen Dünyada Bilim ve Değerler," *Bilgi ve Değer: Muğla Üniversitesi Felsefe Bölümü Sempozyum Bildirileri*, ed. Şahabettin Yalçın, Ankara: Vadi Yayınları, 2002, p. 29. See for the summary of the evaluations and criticisms of this sort of ideas in contemporary philosophy, Doan, *Reason, Rationality and Reasonableness*, chapter I. See also, Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983, Part One, and Part Two; Derek Stanesby, *Science, Reason and Religion*, London: Croom Helm, 1985, Part I; Nicholas Maxwell, *From Knowledge to Wisdom: A Revolution in the Aims and Methods of Science*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984, Ch. 2, and ch. 3; Jonathan Dancy, *Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985, Part II.

<sup>28</sup> Almond, "What's the Meaning of All This?," p. 2. In the area of religion, too, there seem to be a similar dichotomy. Science, particularly when championed by the logical positivism of philosophers such as A. J. Ayer, has often appeared to be the enemy of religion. It is, therefore, perhaps hardly surprising that some should willingly embrace postmodernism, as a way of rescuing religion from the overbearing claims of science. "This is, however, a terrible mistake." Roger Trigg, *Rationality and Religion: Does Faith Need Reason?*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, p. 2.

all, the pursuit of wisdom – an understanding which is in keeping with the initial and etymological meaning of the word.”<sup>29</sup> Thus there seem to be an urgent need for a new or renewed type of epistemology.

*b. Towards a “Sophiological” Epistemology:* A better way of solution for the epistemological crises and of total development seems to be in the recovery of the dialogue of knowledge and wisdom. First of all, wisdom should be an independent branch of philosophy (“Sophiology”) and so should be studied in detail everywhere permanently and systematically. As a part of this proposal, one can speak of “sophiological epistemology” (particularly in the context of the Western philosophy) and “epistemological sophiology” (particularly in the context of the Islamic philosophy and mysticism). We will deal just with the former here briefly.

“Sophiological epistemology” may be described in general as an epistemological approach looking at the philosophical problems concerning knowledge from the perspective of wisdom. Although there may be different versions of wisdom in different cultures and civilisations, it has a global and perennial essence common in the well-known traditions of philosophy and religion in all over the world. We will try to determine tentatively some of the basic characteristics of this approach starting from the philosophical wisdom in the ancient philosophy, particularly from the etymological analysis of the word ‘philosophy’, and the two statements on the Temple at Delphi, which is well known among the philosophers since the time of Socrates.

1. *“Philio-sophia”: Knowledge between Foundationalism and Anti-Foundationalism, Objectivism and Relativism:* Against the prevailing contemporary trends such as absolutist, objectivist foundationalism and irrationalist, subjectivist anti-foundationalism, “the true mission of philosophy is, after all, the pursuit of wisdom – an understanding which is in keeping with the initial and etymological meaning of the word.”<sup>30</sup> Pythagorien story about the choice of the word as philio-sophia and not as only sophia is very illuminating for the solution of the foundationalism debate. Human beings are neither God who has got absolutely true knowledge and who can perform absolutely good actions nor animals that are completely dependent on their insticnt and environment. The

<sup>29</sup> Almond, “What’s the Meaning of All This?,” p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> Almond, “What’s the Meaning of All This?,” p. 2.

conscious and deliberate choice of the word philosophy shows rightly that philosophical inquiry of a wise human being should be neither after objective certainty and absolute truth as in the case of major trends of modern philosophy nor in a submission and condemnation to the subjective uncertainty and historico-cultural limitations as in the case of some trends of postmodern philosophy. The name of the philosophy is very wisely chosen and the story behind it is very illuminating for many contemporary epistemological debates and dichotomic crises.

Despite the fact that nihilism afflicts much of modern philosophy, it must be said that not all present-day philosophers, scientists and theologians "have turned their backs on reality, rationality and truth."<sup>31</sup> This does not mean that they turned back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' exclusivist rationalism and positivism, either. There is always a third way, a wiser or sophiological way to accept.

Colin Gunton, for example, has drawn our attention to the contemporary epistemological dilemma mentioned above. On the one hand is modernity's longing for foundationalism, the titanic quest for universal and certain knowledge – in Gunton's terminology, the search for the One. On the other hand is post-modernity's form of the assertion of anti-foundationalism, the dissolution of knowledge into private and particular points of view expressed through fideistic assertion or the playing of an idiosyncratic language game – in Gunton's terminology, the role of the Many. Today, the former does not convince, and the latter does not satisfy. Gunton seeks a middle way. "The quest must therefore be for non-foundationalist foundations: to find the moments of truth in both of the contentions, namely that particularity and universality each have their place in a reasoned approach to the truth."<sup>32</sup>

Alvin Plantinga seems to have similar ideas. In his view, too, there are three approaches on this matter. First is classical foundationalism. For them, life without sure and secure foundations is frightening and unnerving; hence Descartes's fateful effort to find a sure and solid footing for the beliefs with which

<sup>31</sup> Varghese, "Introduction: A Return to Universal Experience," p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Colin Gunton. *The One, the Three and the Many*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, esp. Chap. 5; quoted from John Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an Age of Science*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998, p. 123.

he found himself. Hence also Kant's similar effort to find an irrefragable foundation for science. Second is postmodernists. They "nearly all reject classical foundationalism; in this they concur with most Christian thinkers and most contemporary philosophers. Momentously enough, however, many postmodernists apparently believe that the demise of classical foundationalism implies something far more startling: that there is no such thing as truth at all. No way things really are." In this case, "the thing to do," for postmodernists, "is despende with the search for truth and retreat into projects of some other sort: self-creation and self-redefinition as with Nietzsche and heidegger, or Rortian irony, or perhaps playful mockery, as with Derrida. So taken," according to Plantinga, "postmodernism is a kind of failure of epistemic nerve." There is a third approach between them. Such thinkers as Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Kuyper "recognize that there aren't any certain foundations of the sort Descartes sought – or, if there are, they are exceedingly slim, and there is no way to transfer their certainty to our important non-foundational beliefs about material objects, the past, other persons, and the like. This is a stance that requires a certain epistemic hardihood: there is, indeed, such a thing as truth; the stakes are, indeed, very high (it matters greatly whether you believe the truth); but there is no way to be sure that you have the truth.... This is life under uncertainty, life under epistemic risk and fallibility.... That is simply the human condition..."<sup>33</sup>

Scientist theologian John Polkinghorne is another example. According to him, the success of the apparently objectified account of science should not tempt us to commit the Enlightenment error of rejecting the subjective as a source of real knowledge. Our thoughts far exceed an impersonal evaluation of logical entailment. Kurt Gödel has taught us that even pure mathematics involves an act of intellectual daring, as we commit ourselves to a belief in the unprovable consistency of the axiomatic system under consideration. The Cartesian programme of seeking to found knowledge on the basis of clear and certain ideas has proved to be an unattainable ideal. But this conviction does not cause him to pass into the extreme edge of the opposite pole. He says rightly and wisely that "I do not think that this realisation of the necessary precariousness involved in human theorising, condemns us to a post-modernist belief in the personal or communal

<sup>33</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Pres, 2000, pp. 236-37. Cf. Richard Swinburne, "Relativism," in *Great thinkers on Great Questions*, ed. by R. A. Varghese, Oxford: Oneworld, 1998, pp. 23-25.

construction of a variety of views from which we are free to make our a la carte selection. *There is a middle way between certainty and relativism*, which corresponds to the critical adherence to rationally motivated belief, held with conviction but open to the possibility of correction."<sup>34</sup>

2. "*Know Thyself*": *Knowledge Oriented to Self-Development, Ethics and Action*: Socrates conceives the love of wisdom as the pursuit of self knowledge. He locates the intersection of things, human and divine in the task of self-knowledge. His dedication to self-knowledge as the subject of philosophy is achieved through an act of memory. "In declaring that life is to be examined, Socrates remembers what is already stated on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, attributed to the Seven Sages: *gnothi seauton*, 'know thyself.' The second famous inscription – *meden agan*, 'nothing too much' – indicates that self-knowledge requires proportion or harmony, more specifically *sophrosyne*."<sup>35</sup> In terms of this concept of philosophy and epistemology, the central concern of almost all kinds of knowledge should be related to the self-knowledge, self-development and self-realization.

But, of course, we do still continue on the whole to teach our students to be critical rather than trying to encourage them to be wise; to perform moral gymnastics rather than to take seriously the search for a meaningful life. All the same, being wise may well mean looking to the past and being willing to learn from it, rather than parroting dubious refutations of philosophers' arguments. "For in the end, it is only by learning to transcend the narrow limitations of one's own epoch – both to look backwards and to think forwards – that there can be any hope of gaining some sense of what we like to call 'the meaning of life'."<sup>36</sup>

For philosophy to achieve its rightful place as a guide to life "it must re-examine the relation between word and action that is present in the classical and humanist conception of prudence."<sup>37</sup> There is a prudential sense of wisdom (*phronesis*) that is crucial to moral goodness and that connects knowledge to ac-

<sup>34</sup> John Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an Age of Science*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998, p. 15; (italics are mine).

<sup>35</sup> Verene, *Philosophy and the Return to Self-Knowledge*, p. 204.

<sup>36</sup> Almond, "What's the Meaning of All This?," p. 3-4.

<sup>37</sup> Verene, *Philosophy and the Return to Self-Knowledge*, p. xiii.

tion. Indeed, “the opposition between theory and practice – the opposition between knowledge and action – has been denied and overcome by Socrates, raising it in a synthesis to a new level. Socrates seems to reject the opposition; for him all knowing is doing.”<sup>38</sup> And as such, “knowledge is directed toward an ordered reality – ours and that of the entire globe – the central questions are not merely epistemological, but ontological and ethical, namely, what is the global whole in which we exist, and how can we act in relation to other peoples and cultures in ways that promote a collaborative realization of global community in our times?”<sup>39</sup>

Knowledge of the self or subjective knowledge should also be considered as a source and criteria of knowledge; and the development of the self (and of the human conditions in general) should be considered among the main aims of getting knowledge. There should be a close relationship between all kinds of knowledge and human discourse and action, and knowledge should have a quality of being a guide to life and of finding a meaning in life.

3. “*Nothing Too Much*”: *Knowledge Originated from Various Complementary Sources*: “Sophiological” epistemology requires not being in extremist and exclusivist in one source or in one criteria of knowledge; by contrast, it requires a pluralistic, holistic, complementary or integrative perspective in all the epistemological problems. It usually requires a middle way between the opposite poles or extreme edges. This point of view is valid and useful in solving several problems of contemporary epistemological debates such as the problems of empiricism, rationalism and mysticism, objectivity and subjectivity, foundationalism and anti-foundationalism, universalism and particularism, certainty and relativism, etc.

Unfortunately, philosophy as the love of wisdom that considers the true to be the whole has been replaced in modern period by the pursuit of method and the truth of the part.<sup>40</sup> In the words of S. H. Nasr, “The unifying vision which related knowledge to love and faith, religion to science, and theology to all the

<sup>38</sup> Verene, *Philosophy and the Return to Self-Knowledge*, p. 23.

<sup>39</sup> George F. McLean, “Globalization as Diversity in Unity,” in *Philosophical Challenges and Opportunities of Globalization*, Volume II, ed. By O. Blanchette, T. Imamich, G. F. McLean, Washington, D.C., The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2001, p. 456.

<sup>40</sup> Verene, *Philosophy and the Return to Self-Knowledge*, p. ix.



departments of intellectual concern is finally completely lost, leaving a world of compartmentalization where there is no wholeness because holiness has ceased to be of central concern, or is at best reduced to sentimentality." But, as he pointed out, "in such a world those with spiritual and intellectual perspicacity sought, outside of the confines of this ambience, to rediscover their traditional roots and the total functioning of the intelligence which would once again bestow upon knowledge its sacramental function and enable men to reintegrate their lives upon the basis of this unifying principle, which is inseparable from both love and faith."<sup>41</sup> John Polkinghorne rightly defends the similar ideas when he says that "as a passionate believer in the ultimate integrity and unity of all knowledge, I wish to extend my realist stance beyond science to encompass, among many other fields of inquiry theological reflection on our encounter with the divine."<sup>42</sup> Consequently, a sophiological epistemology does not see sense experience, reason and intuition, or empiricism, rationalism and mysticism, or science, philosophy and religion as mutually exclusive and conflicting sources of knowledge; by contrast it regards them as mutually supportive and complementary sources.

As a result, first, the recovery of the old productive and constructive dialogue of knowledge and wisdom, secondly, making wisdom as an independent branch of philosophy as "sophiology", and finally, a contemporary approach of "sophiological" epistemology may really contribute to the solution of our personal, social and global problems no matter we live in the West or East, North or South. There is no need to waste of more time in the alternative and exclusivist extreme edges of modern and postmodern epistemological dichotomies such as objectivism, relativism and the others. Knowledge without complemented by wisely action is insufficient to prevent or lessen the sufferings of human beings and to promote their self-knowledge and self-realisation. In the same way, practical wisdom or just free action without originated and supported by firm knowledge is not secure and sound enough for the same purposes, either. Then, we should try to develop a "sophiological" epistemology which has a global and perennial foundation in all the great cultures and civilisations of the world. Only in such a case, we can say sincerely the two beautiful hope at the same time:

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<sup>41</sup> Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, p. 48.

<sup>42</sup> Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an Age of Science*, p. 110.

Tomorrow there will be fewer things we don't know; and tomorrow there will be less evil we can't prevent.