**Religious Epistemology:**
**A comparative study of Ghazi Azud al-Din Iji and Allameh Helli's views**

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**Abstract:**
There is no doubt that religious knowledge, as part of human knowledge, could be a subject for epistemological researches and this is why a new discipline appeared called "religious epistemology". This branch of epistemology is in fact the result of application of epistemological approach to religious doctrines. Nowadays these issues are chiefly propounded by the philosophers of religion and often concern rationalism and fideism. Due to its general epistemic nature, religious knowledge is subjected to all general debates of epistemology. The peculiarities of this type of knowledge, nevertheless, have caused some particular issues to be propounded as to it beside the general and common issues and these new issues would have no application in other epistemic domain.

It seems that the concerns regarding consistent delineation of issues of religious epistemology are more colorful to Moslem theologians as compared to Moslem philosophers. Epistemology is less noticeable indeed in comprehensive philosophical works and issues of such bent are unsystematically dealt with in logic and through discussions concerning knowledge and psychology while among theologians one can see earnest endeavors to address these issues concerning religious knowledge.

The evidence to this is the fact that in most of theological works in middle and modern ages we find systematic collection of such debates; part of them are general epistemological issues like the essence of knowledge, kinds of knowledge, the quality of knowledge acquisition, skepticism, epistemic limitations, and so on and so forth, and some of them concern religious knowledge such as the necessity of deliberation on religious issues the first epistemic obligation and the like. For example, Nobakhti in the oldest Shiite theological books, i.e. *Al-Yaghut*, has discussed epistemological issues though in the shortest fashion.

Regardless of the value of specific ideas offered by theologians in this regard, it is noteworthy that in Islamic tradition theologians are more concerned regarding epistemological issues than philosophers. Theologians' debates of the definition of knowledge, its divisions, possibility of religious knowledge, skepticism, sources and

methods of knowledge, truth, justification and the like, provides a suitable ground for analysis of theological ideas.

Considering the necessity of addressing the issues of religious epistemology according to theologians, this essay seeks to switch a comparative study of the epistemological ideas of Allama Helli and Azud Al-Din Iji. The results of this study show that both theologians have turned to significant issues in the domain of epistemology (in general) and religious epistemology (in particular) including the definition of knowledge, its kinds, the possibility of knowledge acquisition, definition of theory, the necessity of theory and so on and so forth. Although these two theologians share much regarding many epistemological issues there is still a point of diversity, i.e. their takings of the necessity of theory making. Following the mainstream Ashari thinkers Iji defends of the necessity of theorization as a Shariah prescribed reality but Allama Helli being a Shiah theologian who believes in rational good and evil sees this necessity as a rational one.

Needless to say this research is the first step taken in a course which does direly need to be noticed and trodden as before turning to the works of contemporary Moslem epistemologists and comparing them with the works of their western counterparts it is necessary to shed light on the neglected sides of the ideas of Moslem theologians and their strength in a systematic fashion. This essay is supposed to show the potentiality of Islamic epistemology for taking part in contemporary epistemological debates.

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