



*In the Name of Allah
the All-Merciful,
the All-Compassionate*

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Epistemology In Classical Islamic Thought

Selected Readings And Texts

Farshad F. Saniee



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PREFACE

Epistemology, in general, is the study of knowledge and more technically is the branch of philosophy which deals with the nature, scope (possibility and limitations), modes and sources of knowledge. Epistemology, as a single coherent field in Western philosophy, arose in the twentieth century and became increasingly professional over the last fifty years. Apart from this turning point, however, reflection on knowledge and its characteristic features has been for centuries, during the ancient and medieval periods, at the core of philosophical considerations traceable back to its origin in the early Greek philosophers' works. In traditional Islamic thought, particularly, in the classical Islamic philosophy and theology (*falsafa* and *kalām*), epistemology was not an explicitly developed discipline and there was no technical term equivalent to "epistemology" but the truly great Muslim philosophers (*falāsifa*) and theologians (*Mutakallimūn*) were interested in problems related to human knowledge and developed some implicit theories of knowledge. Knowledge (*ilm* and *ma'rifa*) and the related concepts have been widely used in various fields of Islamic thought. As Franz Rosenthal points out "there is no branch of Muslim intellectual life, of Muslim religious and political life, and of the daily life of the average Muslim that remained untouched by the all-pervasive attitude toward "knowledge" as something of supreme value for Muslim being".¹

This book is an attempt to represent some of the main concepts,

¹. Rosenthal Franz, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*, (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 2.

theories and approaches in the study of classical Islamic epistemology, conceived as the Islamic theory of knowledge. It is based on various investigations during the twentieth century and especially in past several decades. This book contains 54 Readings as well as 11 Texts which are organized in 4 Parts and 20 Chapters. Each Part opens with an introduction that provides an overview of the central points in the Chapters. The Readings are selected from a wide range of significant articles and books written by contemporary scholars in the field of classical Islamic thought, they are edited, entitled and prepared for the relevant Chapters in accordance with the overall structure of the contents of the book. Apart from the Readings, each Part (except for Part 4) has a "Texts Section". These texts are selected from some seminal works (books and epistles) by well-known and influential major figures in classical Islamic thought – figures such as al-Fārābī, Avicenna, Mullā Ṣadrā and Tūsī. They have been chosen and collected from their original Arabic sources which are translated in recent decades by the experts in the field.

One point deserves to be mentioned here, in many cases, the titles and subtitles of the Readings (and the titles of the Texts) are not mentioned in the original sources, they are added to the selections chosen for this book, where editing and structure of debate required it.

In the end, I must add an expression of sincerest gratitude to Dr. Seyyed Mohsen Miri for his patience, encouragement, criticisms and kind moral support during this work. My special appreciation and thanks goes to Pirooz Fatoorchi for his substantive help, advice, guidance and generous constant support.

Farshad F. Saniee