

Knowledge and Belief: Comparative Approach

Bilgi ve İnanç: Karşılaştırmalı Bir Yaklaşım

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Abstract: In this paper, I discuss the legitimacy of using the term “to know” in morality and I develop an approach based on Kantian morality. In my analysis, I take the notion “to know” in the sense that Timothy Williamson does. That is to say, I regard it in opposition to the perspectives that claim “knowledge is justified true belief”. Therefore, in the first part, I briefly introduce “knowledge first epistemology”. In the second part, I build a perspective pointing to the strong correlation between acting and knowing. After that, I provide an analysis of Kantian morality in connection with my discussion. I show how Kant argues for a lawful certainty in morality that allows us to use the verb “know” (in the sense that is evaluated in the first part of this paper). In the next part, I comment on the un-analyzability of knowing in the practical sphere with reference to free will. In my conclusion, upon a general review of the paper, I introduce very briefly an alternative epistemology from Islamic thought regarding the theoretical and practical sphere distinctions.

Keywords: Knowledge, Timothy Williamson, Kant, practical cognition, belief.



1. To Know as an Un-analyzable Term

Tim Williamson describes knowing as a state of mind in which we are in a mental relation with a certain fact, state of affairs or object. It is such a state that when we claim to know something, it entails that we also confirm that this thing is true. Nevertheless, we cannot claim to be able resolve this mental state in to its constitutive components (Williamson, 2002, s. 51). To know is a simple and factive propositional attitude according to Williamson (Williamson, 2002, s. 34). The basic argument he holds is that knowledge is not a consequence of justified true belief and in an entailment thesis is not the consequence but antecedent. That is to say, Williamson takes “to know” as a “fundamental concept, as the primary implement of epistemological inquiry” (Williamson, 2002, s. 185). His position emphasizes the primitiveness of knowing and regards knowing as an unanalyzable term. Therefore, it is obvious to see that for Williamson to know has a “pre-theoretic” use that is not apt to be fully explained. After this brief introduction I want to deal with two aspects of knowledge first epistemology in accordance with my main issue of discussion.¹ These are:

- a) Empirical realism as the ground of knowledge first epistemology
- b) The question whether to know is propositional or not

Following these explications, I will claim that there is a much stronger connection between knowing and acting in opposition to general association of our actions and beliefs.

a) Williamson (and other holders of the view knowledge first epistemology) develop their position upon a non-skeptical and empirically realist world view. Williamson points in *Anti-Luminosity* Chapter that we do not have a clear and distinct epistemic access to our mental states. Nevertheless, he underlies a certain difference that we are capable of recognizing between any two “good and bad” cases (Williamson, 2002, s. 165). Using the term epistemic asymmetry he argues that we can distinguish whether we are in a good case (in which things actually are as they seem to be) or in a bad case (in which things are not actually as they seem to be). Here Williamson’s basic argument is against skepticism which regards no epistemic difference between good and bad cases. At this point he defends that our

¹ I will not include the debate on entailment (that to know p entails to believe p) into my scope of analysis. It does not seem to be vital in terms of my main subject of interest.



capacity to access the knowledge of the external world is the ground “to know” rather than our capacity to access our own mental states. That is to say, it is possible for us to have a factive mental state such as to know only because we are situated in a world where we are capable of relating ourselves to facts, state of affairs, objects or phenomena free of skeptical suspicions. Inarguably, knowledge has its limits as we have physical and mental limits, yet within the framework of observation, perception, inductive principles or sound memory we can claim to acquire knowledge. Radical skepticism is fruitless, and it can be helpful only if it is used with certain constraints to incite further analysis and investigation that would provide “evidence” (Williamson, 2002, s. 188). I want to underline this point as I want to build a symmetry in the second part of the paper in which I will claim “to know” in morality also needs a foundation for its validity.

Another point which I need to handle is the circularity of “knowledge” and “evidence”. This is important to see how it is not possible to differentiate knowledge as a consequent of a justification /evidence which is already another piece of knowledge we claim to know in an embedded way. According to Williamson knowledge is equal to evidence. Evidence is what we know yet there is no equation as the more we know the more evidence we own. Evidence is somehow publicly assertible character of what we know. Therefore, it is not evidence which enables us to differentiate knowledge from belief. Williamson does not provide us an explicit analysis of believing. What we have at hand to start with is that belief is not a constitutive component of knowledge. It is a distinct mental state that can be tried to be explained by starting from knowledge (Williamson, 2013, ss. 7-9). Williamson seems to claim that belief is unaccomplished knowledge or not truly successful knowledge. We can have beliefs in a neutral position with regard to what we know, or some of our beliefs can be regarded as “knowledge” at some point through a strong probabilistic support by evidence.² Belief aims at knowledge which is a factive mental state (William-

² Here I want to avoid committing a claim that beliefs can evolve into knowledge by justification. That would be ultimately the opposite of what Williamson claims (the entailment thesis that justified belief results into knowledge). As I stated earlier he claims that knowledge entails belief. Nevertheless by experience, observation or through some other channel we may start to claim that we know something –which was once regarded as belief. (Or to put it more simple, we may learn something. For example, first I believe that Ayşe



son, 2002, s. 48). As a result, it seems possible to claim that there is a hierarchy where “to know” is positioned at the top because of its immediacy, factiveness and evidentness. To know p implies that p is instantiated and p is true. Because of this, in such a situation that we are in contact with p , - and we know p -, we act in full accordance with the acceptance that p exists and it is true (in the sense that it is impossible to be false). For instance, when we know that there is a gulf ten steps ahead of us, we will not run ahead closing our eyes. To sum up, “knowledge of something” implies a certainty which commands us to regard the life as this knowledge is a necessary constituent of what life is.

b) Williamson claims that knowledge is a propositional attitude. Although he claims that to know is a primal and basic mental state, he holds the view that knowledge is propositional just like evidence is so. The basic idea behind his claim seems to be that we can attribute truth only to propositions but not to facts or objects. In chapter “State of Mind” he faces the opposition that knowing is not a propositional attitude (Williamson, 2013, s. 43). He argues even if this were the case the essence of his basic argument would not change. He opposes Vendler’s view and asserts that “it is very doubtful that there are any such things as facts other than true propositions”. Nevertheless, at this point I agree with Lucas Thorpe who claims that knowledge is a non-propositional attitude. It seems to me more consistent with the un-analyzable, primitive, evident and factual character of knowing that has been held within the overall discussion. We mentally relate ourselves to the world in such a way that this relation seems to operate in a rather unconscious, immediate and perceptual way. That is to say, epistemic anti-luminosity thesis is reasonable to defend that we fail to have omniscient access to our mental states. I cannot differentiate any “epistemological status difference” between the sentences: “I see that there is cat” and “I know that there is a cat”.³

is at home then I go home and find that Ayşe is at home). Here our evidence, our experience or observation is already equal to what we learn or start to know.

³ In his objection to propositional attitude, Thorpe’s analysis of grammatical structure of English which obligates the use of noun clauses for the sentential objects of the verb to know is very bright and mind opening. Following his examples, above I used noun clauses for both “to know” and “to see” in order to provide a grammatical symmetry. Yet in Turkish both can be uttered without noun clauses: “Orada bir kedi olduğunu görüyorum” and “Orada bir kedi olduğunu biliyorum”.



Nevertheless, there seems to be a difference from social or psychological aspects. To know attributes a more valid or valuable status to its object. One reason for this may be that we tend to agree with several philosophers who advise us to suspect perception and trust it only after rationally process or investigate it. Nonetheless, in my opinion, people also who have nothing to do with the history of philosophy would evaluate “to know” more valid than “to see”. We are less likely to expect hearing the sentence “I was wrong, there is a dog” after the sentence “I know that there is a cat over there” than after the sentence “I see that there is a cat over there”.⁴ Another reason is that “to know” has a much broader scope of use than “to see” or any other simply perceptual faculty. We already know what we perceive whereas we talk of knowing numberless things beyond our perceptual scope. We can say that “I know that you were born on 15th of May”, “I know that the Earth revolves around the Sun”, or “I know that the atomic number of iron is 26”. Therefore “to know” provides us a much more all-embracing world view than “to perceive”, beyond any comparison. Because of this, using the verb to know always implies an authoritativeness. We are apt not to question what we know and act automatically according to what we know. It is not important that many single pieces of what we know may sound irrelevant with our actions. For instance, knowing that the Earth revolves around the Sun sounds to have nothing to do with our actions. Nevertheless unnoticeably the sum total of whatever we know builds our knowledge of what kind of a place the world is. In the back of our mind, within every single action of ours we act in accordance with the knowledge of Earth’s revolving around the Sun. We do not try to challenge this knowledge. Once we know the birthday of our friend, we celebrate her birthday on that day. As we know that two plus two equals to four, we do not try to place five eggs into a four-segmented egg carton. According to me, our everyday life and all actions we carry within a day are dependent on our knowledge rather our beliefs. Except skeptical scenarios we act on what we know and knowing seems to operate in an un-analyzable, immediate and non-propositional way. All these examples serve to depict that to know has a prevalent and hegemonic status in practical sphere. It is vital

⁴ At this point the structure of Turkish which enables us to utter “yanlış bilmek” does not make much difference for my argument. “Yanlış biliyordum; orada köpek var” still implies a bigger (or more serious) falsehood than “Yanlış görmüşüm; orada köpek var”.



to remind that in the scope of this paper what is meant by knowing is not “justified true belief” as such kind of a notion of knowing does not enable me to build a direct connection between acting and knowing. We act without reference to propositions. Now, what about morality in which people have been discussing truth and falsehood for millenniums? Can we claim to know anything in moral sphere?

2. Morality and Knowing

In this section I want to argue for the validity of using the verb knowing in moral sphere. As I tried to explicate in the previous part, according to me, there is a strong correlation between acting and knowing, and this correlation is also valid in moral sphere too. My initial motivation is that, I want to bestow the epistemic superiority of knowing to our “moral actions”. Nevertheless there is no such category of “moral actions” in everyday life. We simply act. Because of this, in the course of my analysis one of the thoughts that I have in the back of my mind is that knowing and believing do not necessarily have distinct objects. It is only through our retrospection or philosophizing that we talk of such a category as knowing the right action in “morality”. I do not claim that the mental backgrounds of two distinct actions such as “placing four eggs into a four segmented egg carton” and “paying right amount of money to a blind cashier ” are ultimately the same. These two actions are the right things to do. I rather want to claim that our actions are central for our epistemic attributions too, and we are more likely to “know” things that we are habituated to act in accordance. So to say, something in me obliges me to claim that “paying right amount of money to a blind cashier” is exactly as right as “placing four eggs into a four segmented egg carton”. I can declare that I know both of them are right to do, however I attribute “rightness” not before but after I act so. In other words, I claim that practical reason also has a capacity “to know” which is un-analyzable, immediate and pre-discursive. This is in a way arguing against moral relativism but not by building arguments on the non-relativity of moral judgments but by simply trying to analyze our actions. Therefore, in the first part of this section I will introduce an “action first morality”, in the second part I will comment on “the mystery of free will” which is a component of this argument. Although I will discuss more in detail below, it is important to underline that I am aware there are



degrees of knowing (how to act or the right way to act) for different situations by practical reason just like the way when we talk of knowing anything.

2.1. Action First Morality

I know that it's wrong to steal.

I believe that it's wrong to steal.

"To know" the wrongness of doing something sounds more authoritative than "to believe" that it is wrong to act in a certain way. Nevertheless what makes us moral agents is not which judgments we believe or know. It is rather our actions what makes us moral agents. In our actions most of the time we do not seem to refer any moral propositions before we act. In everyday life a moral agent knows that it is wrong to steal and stealing something does not occur as an alternative way of acting in her mind. She simply does not steal. She questions whether or not to steal only when she feels that she is stuck in an extra ordinary situation. That is, it is more likely to not know right action in hypothetical scenarios rather than everyday life. Most of moral dilemmas seem to appear when we are speculating about hypothetical situations, however in arguably in everyday life also from time we may feel hesitant about what to do. We may not know whether or not we ought to tell a very old sick lady that her grandson had an accident. Nevertheless, in practical sphere there seems to be a ground which allows us to know what is right to do. It sounds legitimate to say: "I know that it is wrong to kill somebody without a valid reason".⁵ As to know this sounds nonrelative and prescribes us a certain type of behavior: "Thou shalt not kill". I am trying to assert that in many cases it is "evident" for us what to do. This evidentness provides us a certain legitimacy to know. Nevertheless, within a philosophical context, for the sake argumentation or just because of a social or linguistic adaptedness we talk of believing rather than knowing in moral sphere. It is possible to analyze this in two ways. First, we can claim that in moral sphere believing is not an inferior position

⁵ Here the notion of "valid reason" is a separate issue about which different evaluations are possible. Self-defence or death penalty as retaliation may be regarded as valid reasons. In fact, each and every action or state of affairs is unique and composed of numberless components which are bound with a certain time and space not allowing them to be repeated as exactly as they are. Nevertheless even out of this endless plurality of cases, we can think of a "form" of right the action.



in comparison to knowing. That means believing equals to knowing in morality. We do not expect a “knowledge-like” certainty for our beliefs to act upon them, or we do not hope them to gain this certainty through maturation, justification. As a second approach, we can consider that trying to decipher the epistemic reflections of our actions does matter or it is a vague / false effort. I will not hold the second approach as that would cancel the whole investigational motivation of this paper. Notwithstanding that, within the light of these two approaches I want hold a position that can be summarized as “action first morality based upon an un-analyzable knowing”.

To argue for the legitimacy of my position, I need to assert a foundation. The empirical realism provides a ground for knowledge first epistemologists to build their approach upon. In the following subsection of this part, I will handle some central aspects of Kantian morality in order to see if they can utilize an “action first morality based upon an un-analyzable knowing”.

2.2. Kantian Science of Morality

Kant claims that, “all our cognition commences with experience, yet it does not on that account all arise from experience” (Kant, 2005, s. 136), so that his critique of pure reason focuses on the a priori conditions of experience. Because only after that Kant suggests that we can find an explanation for the compatibility of our reasoning about external world and laws of natural sciences. What Kant himself named as “Copernicus Revolution” refers to a “rationally autonomous” subject (Kant, 2005, s. 110). That is, a priori cognitive conditions of experience in the subject becomes the laws of experience. The key term here for Kant is metaphysics. He aims to define metaphysics as a science that is derived from reason through a critique of it. Kant thinks that only such kind of a critique could provide a ground for scientific metaphysics. Kant divides metaphysics into two parts. The first part of metaphysics appears with an analysis of the a priori principles and concepts constituting the transcendental conditions of experience, sensation of the objects (Kant, 2005, s. 111). The second part of metaphysics which is ‘far more preeminent in its importance and sublime in its final aim’ deals with the concepts totally beyond the world of senses (Kant, 2005, s. 139). As Kant suggests that reason fails to cognize these



concepts since they are no more objects of possible experience and reason cannot move beyond the boundaries of possible experience scientifically. Therefore, pure reason fails to reach at universally valid and objective knowledge or theories regarding them. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore these ‘problems of pure reason’, since they are innate to reason and indispensable for providing a ‘completeness’ and satisfaction that the reason can never have staying within the boundaries of possible experience. Kant states that the objects of the second part of metaphysics, namely the problems of pure reason are God, freedom and the immortality of the soul. Kant claims that these must be removed from the first part of metaphysics certainly. However, for the second part of it, which is totally transcendental, ultimately beyond the objects of possible experience, they are functional only in a practical standpoint. This practical standpoint refers to nothing but Kantian morality. Therefore just like the laws of natural sciences, like metaphysics of physics, Kant thinks it is obligatory to provide a metaphysics for morals. The laws in the moral sphere mean “laws of freedom” or “doctrine of morals” (Kant, 2002, s. 3). To have necessity in morality, then, those laws must have their foundations on the concepts of pure reason (Kant, 2002, s. 5). That is to say, “metaphysics” of morals, in the way that the first part of metaphysics is, must have an a priori and necessary source. Only after that, the principles of “a possible pure will” can be derived. Therefore, metaphysics of morals gives an account of the laws for willing, a discipline totally cleansed from what is physical, empirical, anthropological or theological (Kant, 2002, s. 27). As a result, laws of morality can be taken from neither human nature (inclinations/ desires) nor experiences nor from needs. Practically they must be necessitated by reason as a command, to be called as an “imperative” (Kant, 2002, s. 30). In this way morality can apply sanction on the agent as “duty”. That imperative character of morality frees practical philosophy from relativism. Kant does not argue for the rightness of a specific action or a set of actions in a detailed depiction. He rather provides us a “formal” framework showing the ground of what is moral. To avoid digression from my original inquiry I want to end this brief introduction to Kantian metaphysics of morality as a science without further analysis and simply hope to underline some more points that are relevant to my basic concern.



As I summarize above, categorical imperative has its source within the very rationality of agent, namely, in practical reason. Therefore, every rational being has a direct access to it. We do not need a moral philosopher, nor a priest, nor a life coach to prescribe us what to do. In that sense, the sections of *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* are very meaningful. Kant starts with a transition from “common rational moral cognition” to philosophical moral cognition. Then he moves from popular moral philosophy to the metaphysics of morals, and the final step is the critique of pure practical reason. There is something like common rational morality even before Kant tries to build up metaphysics of morals in a theoretical attitude. As in the moral cognition of human reason Kant claims that we attain the principle of acting. That principle is always ready before the eyes of the agent as a compass telling her what to do in all cases that she confronts (Kant, 2002, s. 19). Therefore Kant claims that without any teachings or analysis one “knows” what is right or wrong to do. We are apt to get confused in hypothetical scenarios in the way the philosopher does who takes a multiplicity of considerations in to account (Kant, 2002, s. 20). Consequently, we act through seeing the needle of a compass not by a reference to judgments, books or theoretical principles. We simply act in accordance with the guidance of our practical reason, even though we cannot provide an explanation or analysis of how we know what to do speculatively or theoretically. Kant’s overall projects seems to be an effort to provide such kind of an explanation. Each step in the sections of *Groundwork* -I pointed above- serves to carry this explanation into a further level. Within each step the ambiguity of how we “know” what to do in an un-analyzable way is tried to be resolved. This is because Kant wants to unite practical and speculative reason in a common principle (Kant, 2002, s. 7). He tries to give a theoretical account of what is practical and tries to provide a groundwork or foundation of “knowing practically”.⁶ In conclusion, what I mentioned above regarding Kantian morality seems to me in conformity with my position related to knowing in moral sphere. The innateness of moral law for every rational being, besides the non-theoretical and action ori-

⁶ Lucas Thorpe’s article was helpful for me to notice the purposeful unity within the sections of *Groundwork* (Thorpe, 2006).



ented character of his morality provides me a ground for “action first morality based upon an un-analyzable knowing”. I think it is still legitimate to keep the word “un-analyzable” despite the fact that Kant’s all effort is aimed for an analysis. As in the final and the furthest step of explication for the ground of morality, namely in the transition to pure practical reason, Kant sounds to admit in some way the impossibility of the task he undertakes. I want to end this part with a quotation from the last two pages that I admire at the end of *Groundwork*.

Thus it is no fault of our deduction of the supreme principle of morality, but only an accusation that one would have to make against human reason in general, that it cannot make comprehensible an unconditioned practical law (such as the categorical imperative must be) as regards its absolute necessity; for we cannot hold it against reason that it does not will to do this through a condition, namely by means of any interest that grounds it, because otherwise it would not be a moral, i.e., a supreme, law of freedom. And thus we indeed do not comprehend the practical unconditioned necessity of the moral imperative, but we do comprehend its incomprehensibility, which is all that can be fairly required of a philosophy that strives in principles up to the boundary of human reason (Kant, 2002, s. 79).

2.3. The Mystery of Free Will

In the previous parts I tried to develop a position defending “action first morality”. The central element of this position has been the following reasoning: “If we act, we know”. In other words we first act –as un-analyzable and immediately we know how to act-, then retrospectively or speculatively we attribute values to our actions through moral judgements. The more we act in a certain way, the more we are habituated to it. Therefore from a positive perspective; the more we follow the moral compass within us the more we have mastery over its use. The series of our actions that are repeatedly acted or willed in a certain way provide us a clearer immediacy of knowing what to do. For instance, if I have not stolen anything beginning from my early childhood, I am more likely to say that “I know it is wrong to steal” compared to person who wished to experience the excitement of stealing something for a couple of times. As a result, it seems to me that our habits, inclinations or repeated action contributes to our



knowledge in morality. In other words, to act seems to entail to know⁷. Nevertheless, this entailment does not necessarily operate always and towards two sides (acting → knowing & knowing → acting).

1. I know that it is unhealthy to smoke.
2. I believe that it is unhealthy to smoke.

The first sentence sound more consistent with our knowledge of the world. Today unhealthiness of smoking is evident. Therefore, we are less likely to expect someone uttering the second sentence which implies relativity. (We would not find it odd to hear the following sentence if we utter the 2nd proposition: Some other people may believe that it is not unhealthy.)

Nevertheless, we do not find it odd if someone says:
I know that it is unhealthy to smoke, but I smoke.

Accordingly, “free will” seems to operate above knowing and believing in some sense. At this point, I want referring to two traditional views regarding the connection between acting and knowing namely, intellectualism and voluntarism.

According to intellectualism, once we truly understand what is good and right to do, we will in accordance with that knowledge. That is, will is determined by intellect. To act in a wrong way can only be the result of our ignorance (Spiller, 1904). On the contrary, voluntarism holds that it is possible to will a wrong action. To so say, the intellect does not have a hegemony over our will. Therefore, is it because, we truly do not know that it is wrong to smoke and we keep on smoking? Or we desire to smoke and act accordingly no matter what we know about the issue. At this point I want to affirm Lucas Thorpe’s position that attributes a “middle course” to Kant between Intellectualism and Voluntarism (Thorpe, 2006, s. 466). Thorpe asserts that for Kant; good is irresistible but at the same time we can choose to be bad. This is because, our notion of good do not directly arise from our intellect yet we own an understanding of goodness through our conscience. This position very well fits in to my basic arguments that I carried so far, regarding the relation between acting and knowing. When we consult our conscience, we “know” what is right to do. This knowing is

⁷ Let me remind one more time that I use the verb “to know” as continuation of the perspective I developed so far starting from the beginning of the paper.



neither theoretical nor propositional as it operates in a practical manner.

In conclusion, there seems to be a correlation between acting and knowing as follows: As we keep on acting through heeding the sound of our conscience, it would speak louder to us. The way we are habituated to act would strengthen our ability to know the right action in morality. Accordingly, if we consistently act in contrast to what our conscience prescribes us as right, our conscience would speak more and more lowly. As a result, we are less likely “to know” the right action in morality.

Conclusion

In my paper I tried to defend that in moral sphere it is legitimate to use the verb “know”. In my inquiry knowing refers to an un-analyzable and primal mental attitude parallel to the uses of knowledge first epistemologist such as Timothy Williamson and Lucas Thorpe. I tried to depict an interwoven relation between acting and knowing. To ground my approach, I made use of Kant’s explication of practical reason and morality. It is important to underline that only upon such a sound ground knowing can be valid in morality.⁸ The “nature” of practical reason and postulates of practical reason, -namely, freedom, God and immortality- build up the possibility and validity of a lawful morality. Therefore “practically knowing” our freedom, existence of God and immortality of the soul we act in accordance with the moral law which is in a mutual necessitating relation with these postulates. As mentioned earlier there are limits and degrees for knowledge in practical sphere also. In moral sphere, in one sense we may claim to know clear and distinctly in the way we can know/read the direction pointed by the needle of a compass. Without hesitation I can assert that I know it is wrong to kill. In some other cases I can be hesitant about which action is right to do: “to have a break after long hours of study and have a cup of tea with my sister” or “keep on studying and writing no matter how much I feel in need of relaxing”. In such cases there may not be a necessarily right or wrong action. In some similar cases, what we “know”

⁸ There can be other alternatives to ground knowing in morality without a reference to Kantian Morality with all of its components. For instance, Timothy Williams affirms the legitimacy of knowing within moral sphere staying faithful to his epistemological terminology. He does this without a reference to God. I did not have a chance to discuss his foundation. We can think of historical, cultural or biological foundationalism efforts. Nevertheless, according to me, none of these seems to have the certainty provided by Kantian approach.



about what we ought to do may not seem very possible to actualize. Despite this fact, we are still guided by the compass which directs us to what is good, even the best for our actions. Even though we may not feel ourselves capable of acting in the best or perfect way in certain situations, we do not give up moral ideal of being perfect. Correspondingly, prevailing above each singular actions of her, the moral agent is supposed to be holy or perfect. The sum total of her actions can be regarded as perfection through her willing.⁹

In some other layers, as for the noumenal sphere it sounds riskier to claim “practically knowing”. Even though we cannot cognize freedom speculatively, we practically consider ourselves to be free. Despite the fact that we cannot cognize immortality we have it as a necessary condition of practical reason. Therefore it seems plausible to comment that we are apt to “know”-sooner or later- that we are immortal. As for the existence of God, we are less likely to dare using the verb to know¹⁰ although our practical reason necessitates the existence of God. It impossible to know God in theoretical reason. Nevertheless, despite of the practical necessitation of our mind it is not plausible to claim knowing the existence of God even “practically”. Knowing the existence of a thing implies an instantiation. Correspondingly we cannot talk of God’s instantiation. We need to build an alternative and broader epistemology here. We cannot know God, in his Being as he is unknown for us.¹¹ We can have access to his names and attributions through observing ourselves, cosmos and revelation. The knowledge that we gain as a result of this observation in theoretical and practical layers appears in certain degrees. That knowledge which is claimed to have a metaphysical certainty is called “yaqin” in Islamic

⁹ Ibn al-Arabi (1165- 1240) presents a similiar approach by asserting that “You are what you demand (or You are what you are willing for / (“Neye talipsen o’sun). What motivates Ibn Arabi for this position is his rejection of an absolutely autonomous agency having an ultimate control over her acts and has a power to act in distinction or in opposition to will of God. This approach is a continuation of his Wahdet al Wujud (Oneness of being) theory.

¹⁰ İlhan İnan has a very mind opening article about this issue in which he analyzes existential predications as not real predicates but second order predications (İnan, 2005).

¹¹ The central character of faith (iman) in Islam is its being “beyond judgment and perception: gayb”. There are several verses in Quran to exemplify that. Here is as one :” Who believe in [the existence of] that which is beyond the reach of human perception, and are constant in prayer, and spend on others out of what We provide for them as sustenance...” (Al-Baqara,3, translated by Muhammad Asad). This implies the possibility of knowing God in his Being after death.



thought. To sum up, yaqin in its three degrees ascends from theoretical knowledge up to “ihsan”.¹² These degrees are; ilm al-yaqin [certainty of knowledge in theoretical sphere], Ayn al-yaqin [certainty of knowing through eyes of the mind / “qalb”] and Haqq al-yaqin [absolute certainty in knowledge, being identical with what is known].¹³ In this framework we cannot move towards an ultimate certainty of knowing simply by extending our knowledge in speculative sphere. We need to extend our practical knowledge through acting (morally) as I argued in the second part of this paper.

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¹² Yaqin in the ultimate sense means getting close to Allah and being in the state of ihsan. Ihsan means to transcend to an awareness of being in presence of Allah all the time, as if the person is also witnessing His (Allah’s) presence. Therefore ihsan necessitates the person to act in excellence at any instance. The Notion “ihsan” originally is derived from a hadith of the Prophet Muhammed, in which He declares three layers of religion: iman, islam and ihsan (the source of the hadith; Bukhari, Muslim; Abu Dawud, Tirmizi, Ibn Maja). Though they are intermingled, these three layers are considered to lead different disciplines and ways of thought within the religious context. Briefly, Iman has been the ground for Kalam, Islam stands for Fiqh (means deep understanding or full comprehension literally, is a discipline to analyze the social and moral principles that are stated in Qur’an) and Ihsan leads the way to Sufism. Those three disciplines correspond to body, discourse and “qalb” in the believer. That is why they are necessitated to be in full coordination. Nevertheless it is obvious that each individual may feel closer to one of the paths depending on her own character and develop an interpretation of the religion accordingly.

¹³ Those degrees of knowing are derived from Quran.the concepts of “ilm al-yaqin” and “ayn al-yaqin” are used in Surah at-Takathur, 102, verses 5-7.



Öz: Bu makalede “bilmek” iddiasının ahlak sahasındaki geçerliliğini tartışarak, Kantçı ahlak anlayışı üzerinde temellenen bir yaklaşım geliştiriyorum. Analizimde “bilmek” nosyonunu Timothy Williamson’ın kullandığı anlamda ele alıyorum. Diğer bir deyişle, bilmeyi “bilgi ispat edilmiş doğru inançtır” şeklinde ele alan perspektiflerin karşıtlığında değerlendiriyorum. Dolayısıyla, ilk bölümde “bilgi öncelikli epistemoloji” kavramını kısaca tanıtıyorum. İkinci bölümde, bilmek ve eylemek arasındaki güçlü bağlantıya işaret eden bir bakış açışı geliştiriyorum. Sonrasında söz konusu tartışma bağlamında Kantçı ahlak anlayışının bir analizini yapıyorum. Kant’ın ahlak alanında nasıl yasal bir kesinlik içerecek biçimde (bu incelemenin ikinci bölümünde ele alınan anlamıyla) “bilmek” fiilini kullanabileceğimiz iddiasında bulunduğunu gösteriyorum. Sonraki bölümde, özgür iradeye referansla pratik sahada bilmenin analiz edilebilir olmadığını değerlendirmesini yapıyorum. Sonuç bölümünde makalenin genel bir değerlendirmesinin ardından, teorik ve pratik saha ayrımlarına dair İslam düşüncesinden alternatif bir epistemolojik yaklaşıma çok kısa olarak işaret ediyorum.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Knowledge, Timothy Williamson, Kant, practical cognition, belief.

