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Intuition (ḥads)

Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā)

Epistemology

Middle term

Prophecy

Psychology

Intuition (ḥads) is a central epistemological concept in Avicenna's philosophy. Developed from brief remarks in Aristotle, it denotes the psychological operation whereby the rational faculty acquires intelligible concepts independent of instruction or discursive deliberation.

Intuition (ḥads) is a central epistemological concept in Avicenna's philosophy. Developed from brief remarks in Aristotle, it denotes the psychological operation whereby the rational faculty acquires intelligible concepts. In Peripatetic theory of science, scientific knowledge is acquired either by grasping them immediately, as in the case of axiomatic principles of knowledge, or by means of syllogistic demonstration. In the latter case, the syllogism hinges on what is called a middle term (*ḥadd awṣaf*), which provides the ground for the connection between the minor term (*ḥadd aṣghar*) and the major term (*ḥadd akbar*), or the subject and predicate of the conclusion. Aristotle's term *eustokhia* (*An. post.* I.34, 89b10), which denotes the act of grasping the middle term, was translated as "good intuition" (*ḥusnu ḥadsin*) Abū Bishr Mattā (d. 329/940), and together with possible Galenic influences, this provided the basis for Avicenna's more developed theory (Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian tradition*, 189-92).

In Avicenna, intuition becomes the human capacity of grasping the middle term spontaneously, that is, without learning it from a teacher. Since teacher-student affiliations must always be finite, intuition is also the ultimate basis of all knowledge of demonstrative truths: the teacher that initiates a lineage must have grasped the middle term through intuition before passing it on through instruction (Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 181-201; Avicenna, *Shifā': Nafs* V.6, 248-9). In his psychology, Avicenna explains intuition as a predisposition of particularly powerful material intellects to connect to the active intellect with little effort. He often says that this predisposition comes in degrees: some people intuit a greater number of middle terms than others, some intuit them faster than others (Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian tradition*, 192). People with particularly developed intuition are said to have "acumen" (*dhakā'*), which corresponds to Aristotle's *ankhinoia* (Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian tradition*, 189-90).

Although the theory of intuition seems to have been a relatively stable part of Avicenna's epistemology from the middle of his career onwards, it seems to have been subject to development. In some of his latest works, Avicenna holds that intuition denotes the state of grasping the middle term rather than a disposition or a process, and that the differences in intuitive capacity between individuals

are due to other factors, such as their experience with thinking or the ethical purification of the temperament of their body (Gutas, “Intuition and thinking”). Furthermore, in the later works, Avicenna contrasts intuition with thinking (*fikr*), or discursive deliberation, instead of instruction (Gutas, “Intuition and thinking”).

In its highest grade, the material intellect’s capacity for intuition amounts to what Avicenna calls the “sacred intellect” (*‘aql qudsī*). This capacity is exemplified in prophets, who understand all middle terms in the shortest time possible, “at once or nearly so” (Avicenna, *Shifā’*: *Nafs* V.6, 249-50). Avicenna compares this especially developed intuition to the oil in the famous light verse in Qur’ān 24:35 (Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, namaṭ III, 126). This theory of prophecy as well as the related interpretation of the light verse were adopted by important Sunnī theologians in the subsequent centuries, such as Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) (Treiger, 74-8) or Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) (Jaffer, 137-42). The epistemological concept of intuition remained influential in logic and theory of science. Evidence from the seventh/thirteenth-century author Ibn Kammūna (d. 683/1284) also shows that it was employed in scientific reasoning and identified to the mystical concept of tasting (*dhawq*) (Langermann).

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