

NOUMENON AND PHENOMENON: READING ON KANT'S PROLEGOMENA

Oleh:

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ABSTRAK

Makalah ini membahaskan satu dari isu besar yang diperkatakan oleh Kant dalam epistemologi beliau iaitu isu berkaitan 'benda-pada-dirinya' (noumenon) dan 'penzahiran benda' (phenomenon). Kaitan antara kewujudan kedua-dua hakikat ini dari segi ontologi dan kedudukan kedua-duanya dalam pengetahuan manusia dari segi epistemologi dibincangkan berdasarkan perspektif Kant. Semua ini dikupas berdasarkan penelitian terhadap suatu teks oleh Kant dalam karya agung beliau Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will be Able to Present Itself as a Science. Kant secara umumnya tidak menolak kewujudan noumenon walaupun beliau seakan mengakui bahawa pendekatan sains sekarang tidak mampu menanggapi hakikat noumenon tersebut. Huraian makalah ini membuktikan bahawa tidak semua hakikat mampu dicapai oleh sains moden. Keyakinan bahawa sains moden adalah satu-satunya jalan mencapai ilmu dan makrifah akan menghalang manusia dari mengetahui banyak rahsia kewujudan yang jauh dari ruang jangkauan sains.

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses one of the major issues dealt with by Kant in his epistemology, that is the issue related to the thing-in-itself (noumenon) and the appearance (phenomenon). The relation between these two existing realities in its ontological aspect and the place of both of them in human knowledge epistemologically is discussed from Kant's perspective. It is an attempt to read and understand a specific text from his Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will be Able to Present Itself as a Science. In general, Kant did not deny the existence of noumenon although in a way he seems to acknowledge that the modern scientific approach is unable to perceive it's reality. The presentation of this article implies that not all realities can be perceived by modern science. Therefore, to consider modern science as the only way to acquire knowledge may lead to human ignorance of many realities and existence which are far beyond the empirical scientific area.

Keywords: *Kant, Prolegomena, Noumenon, Phenomenon*

INTRODUCTION

Thinking of Kant's epistemology in general or any specific issue related to the topic in particular, there would be indeed many subjects or problems that need to be reexamined closely, especially when we are trying to project a reevaluation of the modern Western thought within an Islamic worldview. The concept of noumena and phenomena in Kant epistemology is among the fundamental subjects to start with in this kind of project. A critical survey on the topic is very important in order to grasp the concept comprehensively before we can compare it to a similar or what is seems to be a similar concept found in Islamic philosophy. This kind of survey requires a careful reading and understanding on Kant directly from his own text. This article will focus on the related text from his *Prolegomena* which dealt with the problem of noumena and phenomena, that is from the paragraph 32 to the paragraph 35.²

² This study refers to the English translation of the text by Peter G. Lucas (1953), *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will be Able to Present Itself as a Science*, Manchester: Manchester University Press as well as the Arabic translation by Nāzilī Ismā'īl Ḥussein (1968), *Muqaddimah li Kulli Mītafīzika Muqbilah Yumkin an Taṣīr 'Ilman*, revised by 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, Cairo:

NOUMENON AND PHENOMENON IN KANT'S PHILOSOPHY

An epistemology, or the question of what could we possibly perceive in particular, as affirmed by Kant himself, is one of the major fields of philosophy. It is one of the four basic questions that philosophy deals with, i.e. apart from the problems of ethic, religion and anthropology.³ In fact, this area of philosophy is what Kant concerns most and perhaps it is his most important contribution to the history of modern Western thought.⁴

The exploration of the territory of pure understanding⁵ is one of the major aims in Kant's epistemology. It is perhaps one of the most fundamental

Dār al-Kātib al-'Arabī li al-Ṭibā'ah wa al-Nashr.

³ Maḥmūd Ḥamdī Zaqqouq, (1988), *Dirāsāt fī al-Falsafah al-Ḥadīthah*, Cairo: Dār al-Ṭibā'ah al-Muḥammadiyyah, p. 234-235, hereinafter cited as *Dirāsāt*.

⁴ Cf. Hartnack, Justus (1968), *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*, transl. by M.H. Hartshorne, London, Melbourne and Toronto: Macmillan, p. 3. The term 'epistemology' or 'theory of knowledge' which derived from Greek *episteme* (knowledge) and *logos* (an account of) was not used by Kant. It appeared later in the middle of the nineteenth century. The German term *Erkenntnistheorie* (theory of knowledge) which often translated as epistemology is also post-Kantian. It is acknowledged, as Caygill stated, that although Kant's philosophy has since come to epitomize the theory of knowledge or epistemology, but he did not himself use the word or any synonym for it, see Caygill's *A Kant Dictionary*, s.v. 'epistemology'.

⁵ "Pure understanding" in Kant philosophy can be explained through his understanding of the word 'pure' and 'understanding'. Pure (*rein*) in Kant's philosophy 'is inevitably opposed to empirical, and both are aligned with matrix of oppositions which include form-matter, spontaneity-receptivity, autonomy-heteronomy, original-derived, condition-conditioned, prior-posterior, and a priori- a posteriori. [...] Although it was widely used by Kant, the concept itself is rarely thematized. Pure knowledge, for example, is defined in CPR as that which is 'not mixed with anything extraneous', although what it is in itself is harder to determine. The other example of the negative definition of purity, a representation is pure 'when there is no mingling of sensation' with it; in other words, its pure state is largely a reflex of its being mingled with sensation', see Caygill's *A Kant Dictionary*, s.v. 'pure'. And, as far as the term 'understanding' is concerned, Kant 'was concerned to separate the understanding as a faculty from both sensibility and reason. For him it was possible to 'reduce all acts of the understanding to judgement' and thus to represent the understanding as a 'faculty of judgement'. By judgement he meant the 'mediate knowledge of an object, that is, the representation of a representation of it', whether this representation be an intuition or a concept. All judgements are accordingly 'functions of unity among our representation', so the understanding may be further characterized as a faculty for unifying representations. Thus from the acts of understanding – judgements – Kant moves to the '*dissection of the faculty of the understanding* itself' in which he investigates the possibility of concepts

issues that Kant tries to understand and explain. At the beginning of a chapter entitled: “The Ground of the Distinction of all Objects in General into Phenomena and Noumena”, he expresses that although he had done thus far in his exploration and had carefully surveyed every part of the territory of pure understanding, measured its extent and “assigned to everything in it its rightful place”, it seems that the problems and mysteries concerning the reality of this realm are still far from being solved or explained⁶. He describes it as:

a priori. His ‘clue’ in the search for these basic concepts of the understanding – its basic forms of unification – is the table of judgement comprising of four classes of the quantity, quality, relation and modality of judgements. In order to characterize how it is possible for the understanding to originate its own pure concepts, Kant has to distinguish it from the other two faculties of sensibility and reason. This leads to what he himself admits are ‘various different’ definitions of understanding. It is defined as ‘a sponteinity of knowledge (in distinction from the receptivity of sensibility)’, because its concepts are modes of transcendental unity of apperception, which is original and spontaneous. It is also described as a ‘power of thought’, ‘a faculty of concepts’ in that it comprises the categories through which it gives ‘the law of the synthetic unity of all appearances’, a faculty of judgement, and the ‘faculty of rules’. In the guise of the latter, the understanding ‘is always occupied in investigating appearances, in order to detect some rule in them’. These rules, however, ‘issue *a priori* from the understanding itself’, for it is also characterized as the ‘lawgiver of nature’. On one of the readings that Kant’s description of the understanding seems to invite, the understanding is given the materials of experience by the sensibility, which it then processes by means of subsuming them under a rule. But this does not do justice to the full dignity he accords understanding as the ‘lawgiver of nature’, for it is able to ‘confer upon appearances their conformity to law, and so make experience possible’. The relationship Kant establishes between understanding and sensibility is extremely intricate and complex, and consists in bringing together the otherwise heterogeneous intuitions and concept. Both are representations, but the former originate in the receptivity of human sensibility, the latter in the sponteinity of the understanding. Intuition and concepts must be adapted to each other in a way which respects their heterogeneity, but which nevertheless permits their synthesis to be accomplished. Kant ventures to describe how this is accomplished in the schematism and in the principles. The understanding’s relationship to reason is characterized in a more straightforward way. The understanding secures ‘the unity of appearances by means of rules’ while reason pursues ‘the unity of the rules of understanding under principles’. While the understanding is restricted to the range of possible experience, reason is ‘directed always towards absolute totality in the synthesis of conditions’; this leads it to drive the concepts of understanding beyond their legitimate limits, and to generate the fallacious inferences scrutinized in the ‘Transcendental Dialectic’, see *ibid.*, s.v. ‘understanding’.

⁶ Kant, Immanuel (1965), *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transl. by Norman Kemp Smith, New York: St. Martin’s Press, B 295, A 236, hereinafter cited as *CPR*.

*“an island, enclosed by nature itself within unalterable limits. It is the land of truth... surrounded by a wide and stormy ocean, the native home of illusion, where many a fog bank and many a swiftly melting iceberg give the deceptive appearance of farther shores, deluding the adventurous seafarer ever anew with empty hopes, and engaging him in enterprises which he can never abandon and yet is unable to carry to completion”*⁷

It is, as we can see, a challenging adventure which demands high motivation and serious preparation to ensure a continuous attempt and reach at last to the end of this journey of knowledge. This is obviously what Kant tries to demonstrate in his epistemological exploration in most of his works. However, it is undeniable that, as the subject matter itself is complicated, the way Kant himself deals and expresses the problem is also complex and problematic. Consequently, it adds more and more difficulties for a researcher to grasp the reality of his thought and ideas.⁸

Among various epistemological issues, particularly in Kant's epistemology, the issue concerning the concept and reality of *noumenon* and *phenomenon* are among the major issues that raised and created numerous problems and interpretations.⁹ This, in its role, has influenced people's understanding on the reality and objects of knowledge and on how this knowledge occurred. This article is not going to elaborate all problems in detail since the subject needs a thorough investigation on Kant's works and thought. It is, as previously mentioned, an attempt to understand Kant's concept of noumenon and phenomenon from the very limited selected text of Kant, that is from his *Prolegomena*.

⁷ CPR, B 295-6, A 236-7

⁸ See Zaqqouq, *Dirāsāt*, p. 224. In this respect, it is understandable why Valentiner warned us not to deal with Kant philosophy directly from his work in the first place but instead of doing that, he suggested that the last things that we had to read, in order to understand Kant's philosophy, is Kant's works. In fact, Kant himself did not prefer to make his work easy and clear for the reader, see T. Valentiner (1960), 'Kant und seine Lehre', Stuttgart, p. 6, as quoted in Zaqqouq, *Dirāsāt*, p. 224.

⁹ See on the significance of the problem in Meerbote, Ralf, 'The Unknowability of Things in Themselves', in Beck, L.W. (Ed.) (1972), *Proceedings of the Third International Kant Congress*, Dordrecht: D. Reidel Pub. Co., p. 415.

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The question of what “reality” is, is not a new question discussed in the history of human thought. People had wondering and asking about it since the earliest period of thinking although a more systematic way in dealing with the problem was claimed to be proposed by the Greek philosophy.

“Reality” as it is in existence and as an object of our perception, could be discussed as two interrelated questions, as well as the separate and different issues. The former issue is related to the ontological and metaphysical problems whereas the latter is concerned with the epistemological. Although these two major aspects of philosophy were seems to be different, but they are actually interconnected to each other. To know or a knowledge can only be of real objects or things, whether they are of the spiritual or the material reality or of both. Thus, as far as the connection between knowledge and its objects is concerned, the question of what knowledge is, which is the topic of epistemology, must be connected to the metaphysical problem, that is the problem of what the reality is, because we cannot understand what ‘knowledge’ is unless when we realize what we know and what is known, which is the object of knowledge. This connection is, on the other hand, reinforced if the knowledge is REAL, and the real things or objects are the things that can be KNOWN.

This connection or issues related to this problem were among the fundamental topics discussed by the earlier philosophers as well as by Kant in their epistemological and the ontological discussions. In the history of philosophy, “reality” is normally referred to as “the beings of the understanding”, that is, the ‘objects’ of our understanding. Our senses, according to the philosophers, are often mistaken and are corrected by our understanding. Thus, the way something really is can be known only through our understanding and not by the senses. Moreover, it was also believed that there are two forms of existence; the phenomena and the noumena. The former is the beings of the senses, which appear and constitute the world of senses whereas the latter is the *other realm of existence*. It is a special being of understanding which constitute a world of understanding. The appearance is not considered as real existence since it was understood as merely an illusion. Therefore, the very reality refers only to the noumena, the being that makes the appearance of “a thing” possible.¹⁰

¹⁰ *Prolegomena*, § 32 (p. 75). Cf. *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, p. 308, hereinafter cited as *EP* and Soccio Douglas J. (1998), *Archetypes of Wisdom*. Belmont: Wadsworth Pub. Co., p. 394-395. It is important to state that ‘phenomena and noumena’ or ‘appearance and reality’ should not be understood as ‘two forms of existence’ in its literal sense. It is actually, as suggested, “ONE existence, but

Kant, in this respect, affirms the fact that there are actually something called "thing-in-themselves". He admits, in an ontological sense and in "the *positive* sense of noumenon", that by observing the appearances (the objects of sense), we could realize that there is "thing-in-itself", which constitute the ground for those appearances.¹¹ This is in the ontological point of view. But how does he explain it in the epistemological sense? In what he called "the *negative* sense of noumenon", Kant stresses that we do not know what "thing-in-itself" is like; in itself.¹²

AS IT APPEARS on the one hand (i.e. as it stands in a relation to a sensory or cognitive faculty) and AS IT IS irrespective of any sensory or cognitive faculty, on the other hand. One way to think of this is to remember how Ibn Sina talks about the possible existent: considered IN ITSELF it is merely possible, but considered IN RELATION to another (i.e. its cause), it is necessary. So here, we have one thing considered (1) as it is in itself, and considered (2) in terms of its relationship to our senses and minds. The problem is, for the thing to be considered, just is for it to be in some relation to our mind, or in other words, to consider something is to have it in some relation to one's mind. Therefore, Kant would say, it is impossible to consider it as it is independently of any relation to our mind. So, it is impossible even to consider it as it is in itself, which means we cannot even have an idea of what that would be. That is the noumenal. So, it is not really two forms of existence, but two considerations of one thing. One consideration entails the relation of the thing to the mind - the thing inasmuch as it relates to your mind. The other is not really a positive consideration of the thing, but just a logical possibility entailed by the first consideration. If the thing that appears (and this applies equally to appearance to the mind as well as appearance to the senses) is always the thing in a relation to cognition (since appearance is a relation), then the thing-in-itself, without regard to any relation, must be a logical possibility. But we cannot really think about that, because that is (by definition) a thing unrelated to the mind, while to be thought about is to be related to the mind. So, we can only talk about the thing-in-itself the way people talk about God in negative theology (when we say that we cannot conceive what God is like, but we can only know that He is NOT like anything we can conceive, so that, knowing God is infinite, we do not conceive infinity, but we only understand him as NOT finite, etc.). Of the thing in-itself, we can only know that it is NOT related to the mind." [The words in between the quotation marks are the comment by Edward Omar].

¹¹ *Prolegomena*, p. 75. On the very concept of an appearance in general see *CPR*, A251-2 and Caygill, Howard (1996), *A Kant Dictionary*. Oxford: Blackwell Pub. Ltd. (Reprinted edition), s.v. "appearance" and "phenomenon".

¹² *Prolegomena*, p.76. and *CPR*, A250, B307. See about the *positive* and *negative* sense of noumena in Broad, C.D. (1978), *Kant: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 202-203, hereinafter cited as *Kant* and Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary*, s.v. "noumenon". And about an explanation and justification of Kant's doctrine that things in themselves are unknowable see Merebote, *The unknowability of Things in Themselves*, p. 415-423.

Now, it seems that Kant is contradicting himself. After admitting the existence of noumenon or ‘thing-in-itself’ in its ontological sense, he stresses that this existing noumenon is unknown. But then, how could we certainly accept or believe in something that we could not perceive?

Indeed, this problem could possibly be solved if we could distinguish between the ontological and the epistemological aspect of the problem and in the same time differentiate between various sorts of knowledge.¹³ Kant elaborates that thing-in-itself is not merely undeniable but also “unavoidable”. The representation of thing-in-itself is undeniable since its appearances are perceivable by our senses. Our understanding of something, which occurred by accepting the appearance of that “something”, actually refers to our realization that there are appearances, and in the same time, that there is also a ground for these appearances. This means that we could not claim to be understood of something if we just only admit about the appearances and deny its ground, for it is absurd to believe epistemologically that something appears without any ground or basis, i.e. in an ontological sense.¹⁴ It is remarkable here that Kant talked about the ontological ground of things. He also referred to a sensible sort of perception or knowledge when he talked about “accepting appearances”. If this is the case, then it is understandable why this kind of problem raised. How could the sensible sort of knowledge reaches the purely transcendental reality?

It is clear from the above exposition that “this unknown something” (noumena or thing-in-itself or *Ding an sich*¹⁵) is “not merely admissible but is unavoidable”. Kant admits that even our critical deduction cannot exclude noumena as a reality. On the other hand, he also agreed - in answering the dilemma of knowing this “unknown” reality - that the principles of

¹³ There is also an approach in explaining the distinction between noumena and phenomena based on linguistic distinction, see Simon, Josef, ‘Phenomena and Noumena: On the Use and Meaning of the Categories’, in Beck, L.W. (Ed.) (1972), *Proceedings of the Third International Kant Congress*, Dordrecht: D. Reidel Pub. Com., p. 521-527. Also Meerbote, *The Unknowability of Things in Themselves*, p. 415-417.

¹⁴ *Prolegomena*, p. 76. Cf. Schrader, George, ‘The Thing in itself in Kantian Philosophy’, in Wolff Robert Paul (Ed.) (1968), *Kant A Collection of Critical Essays*, London and Melbourne: Macmillan, p.173-174, hereinafter cited as *Wolff*; *EP*, p. 315, Craig, Edward (Ed.) (1998), *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, London and New York: Routledge, s.v.: “Kant, Immanuel”, vol. 5: p. 182, hereinafter cited as *REP* and Broad, *Kant*, p. 201-202.

¹⁵ Kant uses ‘thing-in-themselves’ synonymously with noumena, especially in the application of pure concepts of the understanding ‘beyond objects of experience’ to ‘things in themselves’. The distinction between ‘things-in-themselves’ and the other forms of noumena refers to their property of being the ‘true correlate of sensibility’, see Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary*, s.v. ‘thing-in-itself’.

aesthetic are limited.¹⁶ He believes that these principles are not valid for all kind of things. Not all things can be transformed into appearances that are conceivable by our senses. Thus, these principles are valid only for objects of possible experience. However, since the objects of possible experience do not represent all realities, therefore there would be certainly realms which are unperceivable by our knowing ability although their very existence is undeniable. In this respect Kant states:

*Thus beings of the understanding are admitted, but under inculcation of this rule which suffers no exception: that we know and can know nothing determinate whatever about these pure beings of the understanding, because both our pure concepts of the understanding and our pure intuitions bear on nothing but objects of possible experience, which are mere beings of the senses, and as soon as we depart from these not the slightest meaning is left to those concepts.*¹⁷

This statement indicates, in a way, the language of modern empirical mind which interprets the process of knowing in an empirical sense and based on materialistic perspective. It also stresses the limitation of this kind of knowledge which depends wholly on the senses or something which some how related to the senses. This implies that whenever people believe in this narrow perception of knowledge, they could not expect themselves to realize and grasp many existing transcendent realities.

Kant seems to realize this fact. He tries to elaborate the idea further. He believes that human knowledge ability is limited since the objects of this ability are epistemologically limited. This means that there are certain areas of knowledge that human understanding could not access to. Therefore, any attempt to explore these areas by our pure concepts of understanding is considered as going "beyond all possible experience" and this is certainly a misleading attempt. In other word, all objects of understanding which are beyond the possible experience, are impossible; at least with regard to our available abilities.¹⁸

This is due to the fact that the noumenal world, including the concept of substance, force, action etc., has certain characteristics that differentiated and distanced it from experience or the phenomenon. The characteristics of

¹⁶ *Prolegomena*, p. 76. Cf. *CPR*, A254, B309 – A260, B315. "Aesthetic" in the sense of the *CPR* refers to the principles of sensibility (space and time), see *Ibid.* (footnote no. 1). Compare on the limitation of knowing thing-in-itself, *Wolff*, p. 172-181.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* Cf. *CPR*, A237, B296 – A240, B300 and *Broad, Kant*, p. 199.

¹⁸ See *Ibid.*, § 33 (p.76). Cf. *REP*, p. 182 and p. 188 and *Caygill, A Kant Dictionary*, s.v.: "thing-in-itself".

the noumenal world which were described as 1) independent of experience; 2) contain no appearance of the senses; and 3) hold a necessity of determination, had veiled it from being known or perceived by human experience.¹⁹ This latter characteristic of noumena, i.e. to hold a necessity of determination, could be understood by demonstrating the differences between the concept of cause and the experience:

“The concept of cause contains a rule according to which one state follows from another necessarily; but experience can only show us that one state of things often or, at most, commonly follows another; and can procure neither strict universality nor necessity, etc.”²⁰

Thus, Kant suggests that the scope and power of understanding are wider and higher compared to experience. This understanding sometimes goes insensibly beyond the limit of using experience, that is by adding to it “the beings of thought” which are much more transcend for the experience to deal with²¹. This might lead to a kind of confusion in human mind and perception. Therefore in order to clear up the confusion, we have to establish two important enquiries concerning the senses and the relation between our pure concepts of understanding and experience.²²

In the process of knowing and understanding, the senses play the role of grasping the schema from the object and provide it to be used by the pure concepts of the understanding. This schema is provided in its very form and not in the form of pure concepts of the understanding *in concreto*. Therefore, in order to reach to the concrete pure concepts of the objects, another process is needed. Here, the understanding plays its role in extracting concepts from materials of sensibility. This will end with a conformity of the object to the schema provided earlier by the senses in our experience.²³

This explanation reveals that there are two different realms in which two different roles and actions are needed in the process of knowing and understanding, namely the realm of understanding and that of the senses and experience. It also indicates that the role of understanding is important and it influences our knowledge. Without an effective role of the understanding, the schema given by or through the senses will remain un-conceptualized.²⁴ This is the boundary of the senses. In fact, this also

¹⁹ *Prolegomena*, p.76 and *CPR*, A252 and A249. Also Neujahr, Philip J. (1995), *Kant's Idealism*, Georgia: Mercer University Press, p. 54-55.

²⁰ *Prolegomena*, p. 77. Cf. Broad, *Kant*, p. 200-201.

²¹ *Prolegomena*, p. 77. Cf. Broad, *Kant*, p. 201.

²² Cf. *CPR*, A137, B176 and A235, B294.

²³ *Prolegomena*, § 34 (p. 77)

²⁴ *Ibid.* Cf. *CPR*, A241, B300 – A247, B303.

shows how both the senses and the understanding are working hand in hand in the process of knowledge.

Affirming the above fact, Kant in the second enquiry, stresses the importance of experience in the process. He believes that although our pure concepts of understanding and principles are essential and independent from the realm of experience, they are still in need of experience. He asserts that without experience, understanding "can do nothing but merely determine the logical form of the judgement in respect of given intuition; and as there is no intuition whatever outside the field of sensibility, these pure concepts have no meaning whatever, for there is no means of exhibiting them *in concreto*".²⁵

As a result, Kant concludes that the reality of noumenal world is nothing but representations of a problem which its object is possible in itself, although as a whole its solution is impossible.²⁶ He explains that our understanding act as a faculty that connects the available intuitions in our experience. It is not a faculty of intuition that intuits its object directly. Therefore it cannot provide itself with its own intuition. Thus, our understanding needs to acquire intuitions from another sources (i.e. from experience) and it depends solely on that particular source to analyse and to reach to a conformity between the object and its schema in experience. This requires our experience to contain all objects and intuitions for our concepts of understanding.²⁷

However, as something beyond our experience, all these concepts are meaningless for the intuition to be subsumed or included under these concepts, it needs experience as mediation.²⁸ Therefore, since our understanding is independent of experience, the problem will remain unsolved and the reality will remain unknown. If we assume that the experience happened to contain all the objects and intuitions for our concepts of understanding and therefore we could realize the objects of knowledge, these objects including the 'noumenal world', are not considered as 'the object in itself'. They are rather objects as represented by our experience. If this is the case, then it would be possible for the intuitions given by the experience to influence our understanding. And, since these given intuitions are actually not the very reality of noumena but merely representation of the object in our experience, and since our experience is not free of imagination, therefore it would be

²⁵ *Prolegomena*, p. 77-78. Cf. *CPR*, A247, B303 – A248, B305 and Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary*, p. 80.

²⁶ *Prolegomena*, p. 78.

²⁷ Cf. Neujahr, *Kant's Idealism*, p. 55.

²⁸ *Prolegomena*, p. 78.

also possible for the imagination to influence our understanding and lead it to go beyond its limit.

People may imagine many strange imagination, even that which are not understandable. The term 'imagination' itself has a negative connotation for it indicates ideas or things which are strange, unpreceivable, uncertain, *etc.* It is certainly different from understanding for the understanding is based on certain process of intellection and thinking. The major distinction between understanding and imagination is that the former knows and always aware of its very boundary whereas the latter is limitless and always goes beyond the border of understanding. Any kind of extravagance in intellection may create an imagination instead of an understanding. On the other hand, the understanding is the only mechanism that sets the boundary of human imagination. In describing the reality and value of both the imagination and the understanding, Kant says:

*The imagination can perhaps be forgiven if it is sometimes extravagant, i.e. does not carefully keep within the limits of experience, for it is at least enlivened and strengthened by such free flight, and it will always be easier to moderate its boldness than to revive its faintness. But for the understanding, which ought to think, to extravagate instead, can never be forgiven; for all help in setting bounds, where needed, to the extravagance of the imagination depends on it alone.*²⁹

An extravagant understanding, in the real sense of understanding, should not be considered as an understanding any more. It becomes more towards imagination rather than understanding. Unfortunately, our mind sometimes failed to distinguish between an extravagant understanding and an imagination, particularly at the stage where the boundary between them is faint. At this stage, many people may confuse about where or in what level they are in the knowing process; they might be wondering whether they had entered the imaginary stage or they are still remain in the level of intellection. This also explains how our understanding sometimes and unconsciously goes beyond its boundary.

It is interesting to think on how an understanding would extravagate its boundary. On one aspect, this demonstrates the mystery of the ocean of noumenal world and on the other it reminds us the face we might take when trying to swim beyond the limitation of our intellectual ability. At first the understanding distinguishes the elementary knowledge or what were known as principles. These principles are prior to all experience and they are already present in the understanding. Furthermore, they have their roles in experience. As long as it does not exceed this level,

²⁹ *Ibid.*, § 35 (p.78).

the understanding will remain within its boundary. However, any further development of human understanding later on may gradually lead towards an extravagant understanding and it is hard to prevent since it occurs within the realm of understanding.

It is from this stage that the understanding goes for a “newly thought out forces in nature” where later on a more extensive development will bring it to the “beings outside nature”; that is a metaphysical world. At this stage, our understanding will be lost in the real ocean of knowledge where sometimes we could not manage or be certain of what position to decide. It is an ocean where we feel like all sources or materials from the “outside” are unneeded since all the required materials were abundantly provided by our “fruitful fiction”. All these materials are not confirmed by the experience, yet they are also never being refuted.³⁰ This according to Kant explains “why young thinkers are so much in love with metaphysics in the genuine dogmatic manner, and often sacrifice to it their time and their otherwise useful talent”.³¹

By this statement, Kant stresses that although the metaphysical world, including noumena, is “mysterious” and full of risks, it still attracts our concern. Therefore, he believes that we should not try to warn those who concern with this mysterious world with this critical problem. We should not remind them the difficulty to solve various hidden questions of this world, or to stress on the limitation of reason or to reduce the assertions to a mere conjecture.³² As a result, he thinks that although we cannot establish this project as a truly science; i.e. as an empirical sort of science, yet we also cannot deny the existing of this kind of knowledge, no matter what name we call it.³³

REMARK AND CONCLUSION

From the reading of this limited text of Kant, and based on the discussion on the topic among scholars, we were posed with an issue of knowing unknowable thing. Among the questions raised are; how could we know it and how do we explain the fact that this unknowable thing exists or that there is an unknowable existence. All these questions might create serious confusion for the modern mind especially in the era where science or the empirical scientific explanation is considered as the only ‘legitimate’ way in

³⁰ *Ibid.*, (p.78-9). Cf. *CPR*, A248, B306 – A250, B307, *EP*, p. 308, *REP*, p. 182, *Zaqqouq*, *Dirāsāt*, p.251-252.

³¹ *Prolegomena*, p. 79.

³² *Ibid.*, § 35 (p.79).

³³ *Ibid.*

acquiring knowledge, and where other than science is labelled as unscientific and therefore it is not a knowledge.

As we can see, the problem is not about the very nature of science and the scientific explanation in itself. Science and scientific explanation had played significant role in human development even though it has its limitation since it focuses only on the empirical issues and problems. Science and the scientist will continue playing their role and create no problem as long as they work within their specific scope and limitation. It is only when they go beyond their limit and “extravagate” the boundary that all these confusions and problems occurred and this explains how science and the scientific explanation were sometimes being criticised. As a result, we heard about the anti-sciences who rejected this scientific approach and argued for the limitation of science in its very nature.

In our time, the empirical scientific approach is very influential and it is accepted as unquestionable approach in acquiring knowledge. The expression of “beyond all possible experience” which refers to the sensible or the intellectual experience, always creates problems for the modern mind. It implies that there would be no process of knowledge on anything or any realm is taking place beyond the level of experience. Human will know nothing of that realm. Therefore it is impossible to know the “unknown” reality. And since they acknowledged that human knowledge ability is limited, they jumped to a conclusion that we know nothing about the metaphysical reality. On the other hand, they believed that if we would like to understand the reality of this realm we have to ‘transform’ metaphysics into “science”. But to ‘transform’ metaphysics into science means to reduce the transcendental nature of metaphysics into the material empirical reality and this will make metaphysics a non-metaphysics.

As we can see, the major issue here is not the nature of metaphysics or the limitation of science. Both the transcendental nature of metaphysics and the limitation of empirical sciences are facts and we should not reject any of these facts in order to accept the rest and *visé versa*. However, even to accept both facts as truth is also problematic especially for those who believe in *scientism*, that is to believe that science is everything and the only fact.

This is the epistemological dilemma faced by the modern mind. To have knowledge means to know something. This means that in the knowing process there must be a subject and an object of knowledge. On the other hand, different objects need different channels of knowledge. Therefore, to believe in the possibility of knowledge means actually to believe that all channels of knowledge we have are applicable for all available objects

of knowledge; each channel leads to a certain appropriate knowledge. The question is does the modern mind acknowledge and recognise all channels of knowledge? Does it realize that the objects of knowledge are vary and do not belong only to the physical empirical world? Moreover, is the connection between each channel with its appropriate object of knowledge perceived properly?

The epistemological dilemma facing by the modern scientific minds as demonstrated above is due to their misconception of the said questions. When they recognize only a single channel of knowledge and reject the others, their knowledge will be limited only on that of a particular channel. Similarly, when they limit the objects of knowledge in this physical empirical world, they may believe therefore in certain channel that suits to that particular object of knowledge and ignore the others. And finally when they connect a channel of knowledge with an object which is nor appropriate to that particular channel, this will lead to an unsolved series of confusions and might end up denying certain objects of knowledge that they failed to grasp them.

In Islam, this kind of misconception is clearly explained. Islam in the first place acknowledge both the empirical and the intellectual methods of knowledge. This means that all empirical and rational objects of knowledge are recognized. Apart from this, there are two additional channels of knowledge recognized by Islam, namely the intuition and the revelation. This implies that knowledge in Islam is not limited merely on the empirical and the rational, but includes the intuitional and the revealed knowledge. It also explains that, as the human being composed of both the physical and the spiritual aspects, their ability in knowldege also covers both realms, i.e. the physical world and the spiritual realm. This means that the human being is prepared to deal with all kinds of knowledge and with a proper guidance they could acquire all available levels of knowledge.

Thus, with reference to the above dilemma facing by the modern scientific minds, the Islamic solution of the problem is not to reject the transcendental metaphysical reality nor to 'transform' it into 'science', but to place them in a proper perspective and to deal with them in an appropriate way. Therefore, if we are having problem in realizing certain reality due to the limitation of certain knowledge ability, we still has chances to understand it through other channels of knowledge. On the other hand, the Muslim also realized that not all knowledge of all realities are available for us, at least in this worldly life. There are kinds of knowledge that are available only for certain people and perceived only in a specific realm and with certain conditions. Therefore, in searching for knowledge we should not limit our selves only in a particular approach or within certain framework. We should try to explore the ocean

of knowledge from different perspectives and through various channels of knowledge before we reach to its appropriate channel. By doing so, we may reach to the reality we are looking for and may not involve in any confusion concerning knowledge. We will not reject certain objects of knowledge merely due to our failure to grasp them. Similarly, since there are areas of knowledge that are inaccessible at least in this worldly life, we will not try to go beyond the limit or deny them or try to transform them into a lower category. Thus one might imagine that if the Muslim, who understand this reality, read Kant's philosophy particularly the problem of noumenon and phenomenon, they would not experience as much confusion as the modern scientific mind does.