The Qur’an, Reason, and Revelation

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Abstract:

The Qur'an places a strong emphasis on the importance of human reason, critical thinking, logical argumentation, and common sense. It values the use of human intellect to understand the world, theology, morality, and the human mind. In the Qur'an, faith and reason are seen as interconnected, like two sides of the same coin. It assumes that humans are rational beings capable of critical thought and open to persuasion. Logical reasoning and argumentation are integral to the message of the Qur'an. Rational discourse is so ingrained in the Qur'an that it becomes second nature. In contrast to some Christian theological perspectives, the Qur'an maintains a positive view of humanity's rational capabilities. The concept of reason in the Qur'anic perspective is a comprehensive concept that merges elements of Greek philosophical ideas, Enlightenment principles, Scholastic theological thinking, and Islamic tradition into one integrated whole to form a unique approach to reason and rationality. Reason and revelation are not only compatible, they are essentially supplemental.

Key Words:

Islam, Qur’an, Reason, Revelation, Logical Arguments, Rational Discourse, Logos, Argumentation, Reflection, Understanding, Common Sense, Intelligibility, Persuasion, Scholastic Reasoning, Enlightenment Reasoning, Scientific Reasoning, Relativism, Utilitarianism, Islamic Rationality, Quantitative Rationality, Qualitative Rationality, Karl Jasper, Morality Reformation, Spirituality

The Qur'an and the Importance of Human Reason

The Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, places a strong emphasis on the importance of human reason, critical thinking, logical argumentation, and common sense. It values the use of our intellect to understand the world, theology, morality, and the human mind. In the Qur'an, faith and reason are seen as interconnected, like two sides of the same coin. Let's explore how the Qur'an encourages reasoning and logical thinking in various aspects of life.[1]

The Role of Reason in the Qur'an

The Qur'an assumes that humans are rational beings capable of critical thought and open to persuasion. It frequently appeals to people and persuades them through logical arguments. Instead of merely giving commands to believers, the Qur'an often provides reasons and underlying wisdom for those commands. It encourages people to think, reflect, and ponder. This emphasis on reasoning and contemplation is evident, especially when the Qur'an refers to the wonders of the natural world as signs of God's power and beneficence. Interestingly, there is a reciprocal relationship in the Qur'an between faith on the one hand and understanding or intelligence on the other.[2]

Logical Reasoning and Argumentation

Logical reasoning and argumentation are integral to the message of the Qur'an. The text is filled with arguments and addresses

[1] See Kate Zebiri, “Argumentation” in Andrew Rippin ed., The Blackwell Companion to the Qur’an, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006, p. 267 ff

[2] See Zebiri, “Argumentation”, p. 268

protagonists, whether real or imagined. These arguments aim to provide reasons for believing certain things or for taking specific actions. While logic concerns itself with the validity of arguments, in the sphere of rhetoric, a good argument is one that effectively convinces the audience, regardless of its deductive validity.

Unlike Christianity, which often relies more on faith and less on logical reasoning in conveying its message, the Qur'an uses both logical and rhetorical reasoning to convey its teachings effectively. The Qur'an primarily seeks to provide guidance and stir a moral response in its audiences. As a result, it combines emotional, rhetorical, and logical reasoning to create a powerful spiritual impact.[3]

Integration of Rational Discourse

Rational discourse was so ingrained in the Qur'an that it became second nature. The Qur'an's rational arguments were seamlessly integrated into the broader Islamic narrative. They were so intertwined with the text's structure that they sometimes lost their separate identity. Scholars of the classical Islamic tradition did not view Qur'anic argumentation as a separate branch of Qur'anic sciences. This is likely because reasoning and argumentation were such an integral part of the Qur'an's content and structure that they influenced the consciousness of Qur'anic scholars. Zebiri notes that “In the classical Islamic scholarly tradition, Qur’anic argumentation did not

[3] See Zulfiqar Shah, Islam’s Reformation of Christianity, Swansea, Claritis Books, 2021, p. 248ff

become one of the branches of the Qur'anic sciences; a possible explanation for this is that "reasoning and argument are so integral to the content of the Qur'an and so inseparable from its structure that they in many ways shaped the very consciousness of Qur'anic scholars"."[4] Rosalind Ward Gwynne agrees with such an assessment. "Muslims have so internalized patterns of reasoning that many affirm that the Qur'an appeals first of all to the human powers of intellect."[5]

Positive View of Human Reason

In contrast to some Christian theological perspectives, the Qur'an maintains a positive view of humanity's rational capabilities. It regards humans as predominantly rational beings capable of reasoning, understanding, and comprehension. The ability to engage in analytical reasoning and acquire demonstrative knowledge enhances human reformative capacities.

The Qur'an presents reasoning, explanation, and justification as essential elements of intelligibility in God's creation. This means that humans are perceived as needing reasons for their actions and as having the capacity to change their behavior through

[4] Zebiri, "Argumentation", p. 268
[5] Rosalind Ward Gwynne, Logic, Rhetoric and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'an: God's Arguments, New York, Routledge, 2004, p. i

rational choices when presented with alternatives of demonstrated superiority.[6]

The Qur'an places a high value on human reason and rationality. It assumes that humans are rational beings capable of critical thought and persuasion. The text is filled with logical arguments and encourages believers to reflect and think deeply about various aspects of life. Unlike some other religious traditions, the Qur'an integrates reasoning seamlessly into its message, considering it an essential tool for understanding and following God's guidance.

Understanding Reason: A Journey Through History

The concept of reason is a versatile term that takes on different meanings depending on one's perspective and cultural background. In general, it refers to the human capacity to make sense of things through logical thinking, verification of facts, and the construction of beliefs, practices, and institutions based on rational thought. This post will explore the evolution of the concept of reason throughout history and its various interpretations in different cultural and philosophical contexts.[7]

The Greek Influence: Logos and Logic

One of the earliest references to reason can be traced back to ancient Greece, where it was known as "Logos." This term laid the foundation for the English word "logic." Logos in Greek

[6] See Gwynne, Logic, Rhetoric and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'an, p. ix
[7] See Shah, Islam's Reformation of Christianity, p. 248ff

philosophy had three primary meanings. First, it represented the inner nature of something, revealing its essence. Second, it referred to the theory explaining this inner nature. Lastly, Logos encompassed the verbal expression of this theory.

Greek philosophers, particularly the Stoics, developed the concept of Logos extensively. They believed that there was a rational structure to the universe and its operations. This inner rationality could be understood through theory, and this theory could be articulated through speech. Greek philosophers operated with a considerable degree of intellectual freedom, unburdened by conventional religious views. Consequently, their philosophical systems ranged from sophisticated intellectual mysticism like that of Plato to unabashed materialism like that of Aristotle.[8]

Scholastic Christianity: Reason as a Tool for Understanding Doctrine

In contrast to the Greek philosophers, Scholastic Christians viewed reason as a tool for understanding and explaining Christian doctrine. While revelation held a supreme position in their theology, Scholastic theologians used reason to reconcile religious doctrine with philosophical ideas. For instance, they grappled with theological questions, such as how the bread and wine in the Eucharist could transform into the body and blood of Christ while still appearing as bread and wine. Scholastic theologians worked to make these seemingly contradictory

[8] See John Walbridge, God and Logic in Islam: The Caliphate of Reason, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011, p. 16

ideas compatible with the Aristotelian theory of material substances.

However, Scholastic thinkers did not critically analyze or challenge the fundamental categories and premises of certain Christian doctrines. They adhered to traditional theological boundaries, limiting the scope of reason within the framework of Christian revelation and tradition. When faced with logical problems in Christian doctrines, their ultimate recourse was often mystery and paradox, as some core Christian concepts, like the incarnation and Trinity, were considered illogical, self-contradictory, and arbitrary.[9]

The Enlightenment: Liberating Reason from Tradition

The Enlightenment era marked a significant departure from the authoritative theological impositions of Scholastic Christianity. It celebrated reason as an individual's capacity to understand the world and nature independently of inherited religious and political traditions. Enlightenment thinkers rejected traditional authorities, whether religious or political and had unwavering faith in the power of human reason when freed from these inherited constraints.

Enlightenment figures did not aim to abolish Christianity but rather sought to rationalize it on logical grounds by eliminating incomprehensible mysteries and circular paradoxes. Unlike the Scholastics, Enlightenment thinkers stepped outside the theological and traditional boundaries, challenging the

[9] See Shah, Islam's Reformation of Christianity, p. 249ff

foundational categories of doctrines such as original sin, incarnation, and the Trinity. They believed that the reasonableness of Christianity, rather than its mystical or allegorical aspects, should be the guiding principle. These thinkers embraced the tripartite rationality of the Greek Logos, which included inner coherence, logical theorizing, and intelligible exposition and communication. They applied this rationality to Christian doctrines, striving for a more logical, commonsensical, and intelligible interpretation of the faith.

Scientific Era: Reason and Empirical Methods

In the Scientific Era, reason became closely associated with empirical methods, mathematical calculations, and the study of the natural world. This form of reason focused on the material and physical aspects of existence. Philosophical and faith-based claims that could not be explained through empirical and mathematical natural philosophy were often considered nonsensical or irrelevant.[10]

The emphasis shifted toward observations, experiments, empirical data, and mathematical calculations. The material aspects of human existence were prioritized, and the spiritual realms were often overlooked. This approach to reason was rooted in the materialistic trends of Greek philosophy, where anything that could not be explained through empirical and mathematical means was considered unknowable or unimportant.

[10] See Walbridge, God and Logic in Islam, p. 22

Post-Enlightenment Utilitarian Reason: A Socio-Political and Economic Phenomenon

Post-Enlightenment Utilitarian reason took on a different dimension. It was no longer primarily concerned with spirituality, religion, or science. Instead, it became a socio-political and economic phenomenon. Utilitarian reasoning emphasized efficiency, productivity, progress, professionalism, and profit.

Utilitarianism aimed to maximize human happiness, often framed as "the greatest good for the greatest number." This form of reason focused on practical organization within society, economic efficiency, and a well-organized bureaucracy. In this context, reason, efficiency, materialism, and consumerism became intertwined and often confused.[11]

Relativism: Shifting Truth to the Human Realm

Relativism introduced a new perspective on reason by bringing moral, religious, and truth claims into the human realm. It shifted the focus from objective truths to subjective inferences. In this modern approach, truth, rightness, and reason were no longer inherently connected to God or the universe but were instead products of the context in which they arose.

According to Relativism, the local norms, cultural settings, individual standards, social values, and overall framework of meaning determined the truth claims associated with any act, statement, or thing. There were no inherent, context-

[11] See Walbridge, God and Logic in Islam, p. 22-23

independent vantage points or absolutes. This approach relativized truth, making it contingent on the context.

While Relativism promoted mutual social appreciation, open-mindedness, and tolerance, it also removed authority from above, placing man and his society in an absolute position. This shift led to ethical and intellectual permissiveness, as there were no absolute principles guiding truth, morality, or reason.[12]

In conclusion, the concept of reason has evolved throughout history and has taken on various meanings in different cultural and philosophical contexts. From its origins as Logos in Greek philosophy to its role in Scholastic Christianity, the Enlightenment era's celebration of individual reason, and the emphasis on empirical methods in the Scientific Era, reason has continuously adapted to the changing intellectual landscape. Post-Enlightenment Utilitarian Reason and Relativism further shaped the understanding of reason in socio-political and subjective contexts, respectively. The concept of reason continues to evolve, reflecting the ever-changing nature of human thought and society.

Understanding Reason in the Qur'anic Perspective

The concept of reason in the Qur'anic perspective is a multifaceted one, incorporating elements from various philosophical and historical traditions. It is a comprehensive concept that merges elements of Greek philosophical ideas,

[12] See Walbridge, God and Logic in Islam, p. 24

Enlightenment principles, Scholastic theological thinking, and Islamic tradition into one integrated whole to form a unique approach to reason and rationality. This post will explore the Qur'anic sense of reason and rationality, emphasizing its focus on internal coherence, logical deduction, and intelligible communication.

The Qur'anic View of Reason

In the Qur'anic view, reason and rationality encompass the systematic and controlled use of beliefs, arguments, or actions based on well-grounded premises and valid arguments. This definition aligns with the Qur'an's perception of rationality, emphasizing logical argumentation, contemplation, reflection, reasoning, demonstration, and intelligibility.[13]

The Qur'an acknowledges that human beings are inherently rational creatures. It recognizes that tools and knowledge that enhance human comprehension capacities and reformative abilities are valuable. Thus, it encourages individuals to use their understanding and comprehension to make moral and spiritual choices. The Qur'an emphasizes collective human logic (not individual logic), reasoning, and reflection as fundamental aspects of human life.

Diverse Forms of Reasoning in the Qur'an

[13] See Shah, Islam's Reformation of Christianity, p. 252 ff

The Qur'an employs various forms of reasoning to convey its messages. These include deductive reasoning, inductive reasoning, and analogical reasoning.[14]

1. **Deductive Reasoning**: The Qur'an utilizes deductive reasoning, where a conclusion follows from stated premises. For example, in verse 3:110, the Qur'an presents the premise that "you are the best nation produced for mankind" as a basis for the conclusion that believers enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong.
2. **Inductive Reasoning**: Inductive reasoning involves formulating general laws based on limited observations of recurring patterns. The Qur'an employs this form of reasoning in verse 5:43, where it discusses the prohibition of intoxicants based on the observation of their negative effects on individuals and society.
3. **Analogical Reasoning**: Analogical reasoning, known as Qiyas in Islamic jurisprudence, is a fundamental tool in Islamic law (Fiqh). It involves reasoning from the particular to the particular. The Qur'an references analogical reasoning in verse 2:223, where it discusses the permissibility of sexual relations within marriage.[15]

Additionally, the Qur'an appeals to common sense and uses logical or quasi-logical arguments. It presents hypothetical arguments that draw analogies between God's unity and earthly kingship to highlight the need for a single unified authority to ensure order. For instance, in verse 21:22, it states, "If there were in them [the heavens and the earth] other gods besides

[14] See R. J. Sternberg, Cognitive Psychology. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth., 2009, p. 578; David Zarefsky, Argumentation: The Study of Effective Reasoning, Chantilly, VA, The Teaching Company, 2002, part 1, p. 7ff

[15] See Shah, Islam's Reformation of Christianity, p. 253ff

God, there would be ruin in both." This argument concludes that the universe's order signifies the existence of a single Lord. Other passages in the Qur'an appeal to individual reasoning, encouraging people to serve one master rather than many who are at odds with one another.

Phenomenal Arguments and the Natural World

The Qur'an's arguments are often based on natural phenomena, signs, and providence. It frequently references natural phenomena, such as the alternation of night and day, the sun and moon in their orbits, and the creation of the heavens and the earth, as evidence of God's existence, power, mercy, and beneficence. These phenomenal arguments are designed to appeal to human reason and contemplation. The Qur'an asserts that a rational discourse and contemplative mind naturally lead individuals to acknowledge God's existence.

In the Qur'anic perspective, atheism, polytheism, and paganism are considered irrational. The Qur'an portrays pagans as fickle and irrational, highlighting instances where they call upon God during times of distress but revert to idol worship when safe on dry land. The Qur'an also criticizes pagans for attributing daughters to God and sons to themselves, emphasizing their inconsistency and unreasonableness.

Human Capacity for Assessing Arguments

The Qur'an views human beings as capable of assessing arguments, weighing proofs, considering implications, and reaching proper conclusions. It idealizes individuals who

recognize their capacity for rational thought and expects them to conduct themselves accordingly. Human reason is seen as a valuable tool for discerning truth and making moral choices.

A Wide Range of Rational Arguments

The Qur'an employs a wide range of rational arguments, including categorical arguments, hypothetical arguments, and comparisons. It uses comparisons to illustrate points and encourage contemplation. For instance, the Qur'an draws analogies between God's sovereign unity and earthly kingship to emphasize the need for a single unified authority for order and stability. The natural order and cohesion are then used to prove divine unity, uniqueness, and unicity.[16]

Compatibility Between Reason and Revelation

In the Qur'anic perspective, reason and revelation are not at odds but are considered compatible. Both aim to seek truth and align with the common-sense logic of individuals. The condition for this compatibility is that human reason remains guarded against personal weaknesses, sensual whims, desires, passions, and agendas. Human reason should submit to universally agreed-upon morality and logic.

A Truth-Seeking Common-Sense Logic

Islamic rationality, as understood through the Qur'an, can be defined as a truth-seeking commonsense logic. Reason, in this context, is a human capacity directed toward the pursuit of

[16] See Shah, Islam's Reformation of Christianity, p. 253ff

truth. It serves as a means to correct errors introduced by the senses and passions. This rationality encompasses a systematic and critical orientation, transcending unrefined common sense. It includes a priori principles of logical consistency to guide understanding based on sense experience. At its core, it embodies widely accepted moral values and shared intellectual ideals.[17]

The Qur'an and Islamic tradition emphasize the importance of reason as a tool for comprehending the world, making moral choices, and discerning truth. While it employs various forms of reasoning, its arguments often draw from natural phenomena and appeal to human contemplation and common sense. In the Qur'anic perspective, reason and revelation complement each other, with both seeking to align with the universally accepted morality and logic that guide human thought and conduct.

Islamic Rationality: Bridging Revelation and Reason

In the realm of Islamic thought, reason and revelation are not adversaries; rather, they are seen as interconnected pathways to understanding the divine. Islam seeks to bridge the gap between these two, emphasizing that both emanate from God. This perspective underscores that true faith is not in conflict with human reason and intellect. The Quran refers to both the natural world (the book of creation) and its own verses (the book of revelation) as containing Ayat, or signs of God. Reflecting upon

[17] See Shabbir Akhtar, Islam As Political Religion, New York, Routledge, 2011, p. 189

and contemplating these signs can lead individuals to a deeper understanding of God.

A Comparison with Karl Jaspers' Philosophy

To illustrate this perspective, let's draw a parallel with the philosophy of Karl Jaspers, a Western philosopher. Jaspers posited that humans exist at multiple levels of understanding. At the everyday level, natural things, including people, appear to be just that – natural. However, when we transcend this level and enter what Jaspers calls *Existenz,* we encounter a different reality. In this realm, we stand before something infinitely great, which Jaspers philosophically terms "*das Umgreifende*," meaning the all-comprising. This all-comprising entity communicates with us through the natural world, which ceases to exist as mere objects but becomes symbols through which the all-comprising communicates.[18]

In essence, Jaspers suggests that the world is a vast book of symbols, accessible only to those who dwell at the level of *Existenz*. This aligns with the Quranic notion that all things are, in truth, Ayat of Allah, and their symbolic nature can be comprehended by those with intellect who can truly "think" in the spiritual sense.

Reason as a Common Human Denominator

In Islamic thought, reason serves as a common thread that unites humanity. It aids in comprehending the divine signs and

[18] See Izutsu, God and Man, p. 144

understanding the moral principles embodied in God's will. Unlike modern science and utilitarianism, the Quran views rationality as intelligibility rather than a tool for instrumental or material gain. While modern science uses reason to achieve lawful and unlawful ends, the Quran reserves reason for understanding God's will and guiding individuals toward moral choices. In the Quranic perspective, rationality serves the ultimate goals of morality, spirituality, and eternal salvation.

The Concept of Intelligibility

Intelligibility, in the Quranic context, denotes that the Creator has fashioned a structured and orderly cosmos that can be understood and decoded. The cosmos, whether knowingly or unknowingly, adheres to the universal laws set by God. These universal codes can be comprehended, analyzed, categorized, constructed, and communicated through rational means. Since humanity is an integral part of the cosmos and shares human nature with all people, personal knowledge and experiences of the cosmos' intelligibility can be translated into universal rational concepts. The Quranic notion departs from materialistic Greek philosophy by asserting that man-to-cosmos relations and comprehensions can be translated into intelligible, scientific, and rational terms, especially in the realm of man-to-man relationships, which encompasses morality.[19]

The Role of Morality in Quranic Rationality

[19] See Shah, Islam's Reformation of Christianity, p. 256ff

The Quran differs from Greek philosophy in its emphasis on the moral dimension of human existence. While Greek philosophers rarely concerned themselves with religion or morality, the Quran places morality at the core of its philosophical discourse. It introduces the moral element to the dialogue and elevates collective human reason above individual subjectivity. According to the Quran, morality, logic, and common sense provide a referential authority for both religious and political authorities.

The Enlightenment Connection

The Quran's approach to reason and revelation foreshadows the Enlightenment of the 18th century. Like Enlightenment thinkers, the Quran rejects the religious and political traditions of its time and champions individual rational capacities, freedom, and liberty in the pursuit of truth. Reason, in the Quranic perspective, is not the creator of truth but a means of accessing pre-existing truths through logic and common sense.

Qualitative Rather Than Quantitative Rationality

The Quran's view of reason emphasizes qualitative rather than quantitative rationality, recognizing that reason is part of a larger whole. Reason does not stand as an independent master over man and the universe but as a companion on the journey through God's creation. Human reason is finite, constrained by the limitations of the human condition. Additionally, the cosmos contains more entities and realities than humanity alone. These cosmic realities are interconnected, and humans cannot behave

as if they are the sole consumers, masters, or actors in the universe. Finite, isolated, material humanism is a fallacy.[20]

Supra-rational Aspects of Faith

While reason plays a vital role in Islamic thought, there are aspects of faith that transcend the scope of rationality. Some elements of faith are supra-rational, meaning they go beyond the cognitive capacities of human intellect (*Aql*). However, these supra-rational elements are not anti-rational, as seen in certain doctrines of Christianity. Rather, they simply exceed the limits of what reason can fully grasp. Concepts such as resurrection, paradise, hellfire, and angels fall into this category of supra-rational aspects of faith. While they may limit the scope of reason, they do not negate its capacity, efficacy, and freedom. Instead, reason is invited to explore, understand, and interpret these elements, working in harmony with faith.

A Harmonious Blend of Reason and Revelation

In the Quranic perspective, reason and revelation coexist harmoniously. Both are seen as avenues to access truth, morality, and spirituality. Reason is a valuable tool that allows humans to contemplate and decipher the signs of God in both the natural world and divine scripture. It is an essential component of the human journey toward understanding the cosmos and the moral principles that guide human conduct. Unlike certain philosophical traditions, the Quranic view of reason places great emphasis on moral and spiritual dimensions,

[20] See Shah, Islam's Reformation of Christianity, p. 257ff

enriching the human experience with profound wisdom and guidance.

The Role of Reason in Islamic Thought

In Islamic theology, soteriology (the study of religious salvation), and law, rational discourse played a significant role. However, it's essential to understand that reason was not seen as an adversary or something anarchic; instead, its role was primarily hermeneutical. In other words, reason was a tool used for understanding the divine intent and for constructing, formulating, and defending faith claims, rather than for deconstructing them.

Early Prophetic Theology and the Use of Reason

Early Prophetic theology relied on the exegetical use of reason to extract new insights from sacred texts, understand and explain scripture, and appreciate the rationale behind the actions of the Messenger. This approach saw reason as a means of comprehending, understanding and communicating universal moral and logical principles with the aim of seeking and supporting the truth.

Reason as a Tool for Comprehending Universal Truth

The Quran emphasized that human logic and common sense were often veiled by human passions, desires, senses, personal agendas, and traditions. Revelation served to provide extra-sensual, supra-traditional, objective, and moral messages to

enable reason to see and follow the truth. In this perspective, genuine reason and ultimate truth were mutually supportive rather than adversarial.

A Contrast with Christian and Enlightenment Views

This Islamic view of reason contrasted with both the Christian understanding of reason and the Enlightenment's use of reason. In Christianity, reason was often suppressed under the weight of irrational and unintelligible dogmas. The Enlightenment, on the other hand, assigned reason a much larger role than it could fulfill, over and beyond authentic revelation and universal truths, often leading to skepticism and relativism.[21]

Islamic Reason: A Middle Ground

Islamic reason occupied a middle ground between these two extremes. It liberated reason from the constraints of Christian suppression but also recognized its constructive role in comprehending and communicating collective moral and logical values with a sense of purpose—seeking the truth.

Reason and Revelation: Partners in Knowledge

The Quran did not view reason as self-sufficient or entirely independent. Instead, it placed reason under the guidance of divine revelation. Reason had a crucial role in understanding and explaining revelation, leading to the acquisition of authentic and certain knowledge through analytical reasoning. This knowledge

[21] See Shah, Islam's Reformation of Christianity, p. 260ff

was characterized by certitude, confidence, and permanence, elevating it above blind imitation and tradition.

Finite Reason and Limited Human Knowledge

Human beings were not endowed with infinite rational capacities. Therefore, their knowledge was finite, and this limitation was supplemented through divine revelation. The Quran acknowledged that man's limited knowledge could be enhanced through revelation, but this knowledge was to be reinforced through rational discourse. In this way, God and man, reason and revelation, became partners in the pursuit of a just moral order.

Reason in Partnership with Revelation

Reason cooperated with revelation but never superseded it. Its primary tasks included comprehending and elucidating practical and moral aspects of revelation. The Quran discouraged the use of reason for theoretical curiosity, mythological pursuits, or superstitious projects. Instead, it encouraged reason to serve the moral concerns of the Creator and to find the truth.

A Holistic View of Reason

The Quranic sense of reasoning was not limited to atomism or logical rationality. It encompassed human experience, spirituality, and even intuition. It extended beyond mere positivism or science to encompass the entire cosmos and its ultimate dimensions. The Quran assigned both spiritual and

physical realms to human intellect, with spiritual concerns taking precedence over the physical ones.

Dialectical Role of Reason

The Quran assigned a dialectical purpose to human reason, encouraging inquiry, probing, and even doubt at times regarding revelation and God. This process aimed to lead individuals to conclusions that supported the divine and revelation. Reason was meant to transcend cultural restrictions, bondages, myths, and limitations to universalize the truth by identifying agreed-upon universal values and norms in revelation.

Reason as a Competent Dialogue Partner

Reason was considered a competent dialogue partner and dispenser of revelation but not its master or rejecter. By emphasizing the secondary, exegetical, and domesticated role of reason, Islam avoided the extremes of Christian Trinitarian mysticism and Greek philosophy's disruptive positivism.

Islam's Middle Ground

Islam's perspective on reason represented a middle ground between Christian and Hellenistic extremes. It rejected the mystical and paradoxical extremes of Christianity as naïve and considered Hellenistic objections to revelation and moral imperatives as stemming from moral cynicism, human caprices, and passions, rather than true intellectual discourse. Islam emphasized moral and logical universals to challenge the local,

naïve, and superstitious Trinitarian outlook of the Christian faith and its potentially damaging legal and social implications.[22]

Qualitative, Rational, and Spiritual Enlightenment

In conclusion, the Quranic perspective on reason represents a qualitative, rational, and spiritual Enlightenment that emerged over a millennium before the English Enlightenment. It struck a balance between reason and revelation, utilizing reason as a tool to comprehend, explain, and communicate moral and logical values within the framework of divine revelation. This holistic approach allowed reason to thrive while maintaining its partnership with revelation and spirituality.

The Role of Reason in Islamic Thought

In Islamic beliefs, reason played a crucial role in understanding the universal morals and rational concepts that underpin the concept of the One and Only God. It criticized the Arab polytheists for their beliefs that localized the infinite divinity of God. The idea was that the ineffable and omnipotent God could not be limited to a physical form like that of Jesus, a feeble man, or placed in idols made of wood or stone. The argument against this was rational and made through the inquisitive mind of Prophet Abraham.

Abraham's Rational Discourse

[22] See Shah, Islam's Reformation of Christianity, p. 261ff

Abraham's rational discourse is an excellent example of this. He contemplated the possibility of stars, the moon, and the sun being divine entities but concluded that their changeability and temporariness contradicted the concept of God's infinitude. He transitioned from the finiteness of celestial bodies to the infiniteness of their creator, the unoriginated universal and unchangeable First Cause. This process demonstrated the rational approach of the Islamic tradition.

Prophets' Use of Logic

Many other Prophets engaged in logical discourse with their people. For example, Prophet Muhammad invited people to rationally reflect upon his character and mission. He asked how someone who had lived among them for forty years without lying or cheating could suddenly lie in the name of an overpowering and irresistible God. This rational approach aimed to make people think logically about the claims of his mission.

Quranic Parables

The Quran used various styles, methods, and mechanisms to make the message of Islam intelligible. It employed logical deductions and moral exhortations to awaken both reason and intellect/mind in humans. The Quranic parables were analytical and logically challenged the powers and divinities of the so-called guardian gods of the polytheists. For instance, the parable of the fly highlighted the inability of the Meccan gods to create or control even the most insignificant of God's creatures.

Reason's Role in Undoing Excesses

Reason played a vital role in undoing the excesses in Christian theology, soteriology (the study of religious salvation), and exousiology (the study of the divine will). The relationships between man and God, man and man, and man and the cosmos were founded on rational foundations. While divine mysteries remained in the supra-rational realm, the dimensions of human existence involving human interactions were brought down to a level of human understanding and comprehension.

Promoting Ethical Transformation

The Quranic approach emphasized moral and logical universals to challenge the simplistic Trinitarian outlook of the Christian faith. It aimed to promote ethical transformation in human life and society. The Quran's emotionally charged rational appeal was always accompanied by moral exhortations to realize ethical transformation.

Preserving Human Intellect

Contrary to claims that rational discourse was a later addition to Islamic thought influenced by Greek philosophy, the Quran itself laid the foundation for rational discussions. It called for dialogue and reasoned debate, reflecting Aristotelian concepts of proof. Muslim theologians like al-Ash'ari, al-Maturidi, al-Ghazali, al-Razi, and Ibn Taymiyyah used Quranic rational arguments to substantiate their theological positions. The Quran elevated

reflection, meditation, and rationalization to the status of religious virtues and duties.[23]

Preserving Human Reason

In essence, the preservation of human intellect and reason is one of the fundamental objectives of Islamic teachings. The Quran formulated the Islamic concept of God, man, society, state, cosmos, and salvation on intelligible and rational grounds, urging humans to engage in practical concerns of life while leaving aside theoretical assumptions and paradoxical confusions found in other belief systems.

In summary, reason played a significant role in Islamic thought, serving as a tool for understanding the divine and promoting ethical transformation in society. It was not a later addition but was integral to the Quranic message from the beginning, challenging and surpassing other belief systems in its rational approach.

See www.shaikhzulfiqar.com for more details.

[23] See Shah, Islam's Reformation of Christianity, p. 262ff