



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

*The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought*

## *The 2<sup>nd</sup> Muslim – Catholic Forum*

*The Baptism Site, Jordan*

*21 – 23 November 2011*

*Reason and Rationality in the Qur'an*

*Dr. Ibrahim Kalin*

The Qur'an chastises those who blindly follow their forefathers on ancestral authority without questioning the truth of their ways:

“But when they are told “Follow what God has bestowed from on high”, some answer, “Nay, we shall follow that which we found our forefathers doing”. Why, even if their forefathers did not use their reason and were devoid of all guidance” (al-Baqara 2: 170).

## Reason and Rationality in the Qur'an

### Ibrahim Kalin

This paper is based on a simple argument: far from being a self-standing entity, reason functions within a larger context of existence, intelligibility and moral thinking. It articulates as much as discloses the reality of things. Rationality arises within a context of meaning and significance that goes beyond the internal workings of the individual human mind. I shall further argue that reason by itself is neither a principle nor ground of knowledge, truth and rationality because our epistemic encounter with the world takes place in a wider context of relations and significance. Furthermore, the conceptual and linguistic affiliates of the word *'aql*, which make up a long list of interrelated epistemic terms, present a matrix of thinking wider than calculative and discursive rationality can account for. The Qur'an treats reason and rationality in such a wider context of thinking.

Any notion of rationality that can properly be called 'Islamic' operates in the context of what I call the metaphysics of creation, which assumes that the world has been created by a purposeful God. It begins with the premise that the world has a beginning and end and that “all shall perish except His [God's] Face” (al-Qasas 28:88). The beginning (*al-mabda'*) and the end or “return” to God (*al-ma'ad*) lays out a scope and horizon for our rational deliberations and moral choices. Like the universe, human beings have been created for a purpose whose fulfillment is not possible within the confines of a subjectivist ontology of human reason. The work of reason takes place against the backdrop of an ontology of rationality that links human beings to other human beings on the one hand, and to God and the universe on the other.

Furthermore, creation is God's intelligent work and reflects His creative power. Given that God creates optimally and always for a purpose, the universe has an order and intelligibility built into it. Truth, when properly accessed, is the 'disclosure' of this intrinsic order and intelligibility, which God as the Creator has bestowed upon existence. When reason investigates natural phenomena and the universe, it seeks out this order and intelligibility in them because without order, structure and intelligibility we cannot know anything. To name something, without which we cannot perceive the world, means giving it a proper place and signification in the order of things. A non-subjectivist ontology of reason, which the Qur'an advocates, construes rationality as disclosing the principles of intelligibility derived from the intrinsic qualities of the order of existence. 'Rationality as intelligibility' is thus markedly different from the current notions of instrumental rationality, which reduces the function of reason, the most fundamental trait of being human, to making logical use of available means to reach our stated ends.<sup>(1)</sup>

---

<sup>(1)</sup> Cf. Milton K. Munitz, *The Question of Reality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 124.

Rationality is then a function of existence and thinking and takes place in a communicative and intersubjective context. To say that something is intelligible means that it has a certain order and structure by which we can understand it. It also means that since it is intelligible, it can be communicated to others through language and rational arguments. This intersubjective context of rationality, which the Qur'an emphasizes on various occasions, places reason and rationality above the solitary work of a solipsistic and disengaged mind. Just as we humans are part of a larger reality, our thinking functions within a larger context of intelligibility. Using the plural form, the Qur'an explains its verses to a "tribe, nation or community (*qawm*) who thinks" and chastises "those who do not use their reason" (see for instance, al-Baqara 2: 164; al-Ma'idah 5: 58; al-Ra'd 13: 4; al-Nahl 16: 12). From disclosing the intrinsic intelligibility of things to intercultural relations, rationality emerges in a network of relations and connections that go beyond the internal procedures of the human mind.

Islam largely shares this notion of rationality with Judaism and Christianity. Subsuming reason within a larger context of existence goes against the main thrust of modern rationalism. Ever since the European Enlightenment, reason has declared its independence and developed a view of itself as the ultimate *arche* and *ens realissimum* of reality. In an age in which rationality is measured by quantifiable properties and computerized decisions, the ontological foundations of reason have radically changed, and highly idealized and eventually inhuman forms of rationality have been identified as in conformity with reason and logic. In contrast to the notion of rationality as computerization, however, our most unique human quality called reason, the very quality that distinguishes us from the rest of creation and clearly privileges us over them (al-Isra' 17: 70), functions essentially in a qualitative and axiological context. Charges of 'irrationality' and dogmatism have been launched against Islam partly because the concept of rationality as developed in the Islamic intellectual tradition negates the main thrust of modern and postmodern notions of rationality that have risen in the West since the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Motivated by religious zeal, most medieval Christians considered Islam to be against reason and saw it as grounded in blind faith, ignorance, violence and worldly pleasures. The Muslim faith attracted many followers, it was argued, not because it offered convincing arguments but because it appealed to their flesh, the lowest part of the human being. Furthermore, Islam endorsed violence on non-Muslims to convert them because it could not have produced rational arguments to convince the non-believer. Use of violence and declaration of jihad against non-Muslims showed how irrational Islam was and how Islamic faith went against the nature of things. Not surprisingly, charges of unreason and violence have survived to the modern period. Today, radically anti-Islamic and Islamophobic voices cite similar arguments to depict Islam and Muslims as irrational and violent.

History, though, has its own acts of balancing. Some medieval critics of Christianity such as Peter Bayle and Henry Stubbe defended Islam as a faith closer to reason than the Catholic Church. They praised the simplicity of Islamic faith against the complexities of Christian theology and rituals and admired the advanced state of Islamic civilization. While people like Roger Bacon claimed that the Muslim philosophers al-Farabi and Ibn Sina had produced their philosophical edifice despite Islam, not because of it, and pretended to be Muslims outwardly to avoid the persecution of an intolerant religion, the anti-Catholic thinkers of the

middle ages believed that Islam tolerated rational thinking and scientific inquiry more than others.<sup>(2)</sup>

The secular critics consider Islam as essentially incompatible with the secular-humanist ethos of modernity and thus in conflict with the supposedly rational-scientific basis of modern culture. They also point to the discrepancies between traditional religions and the modern concepts of human rights, equality and freedom. The Enlightenment reason claims autonomy and self-sufficiency and rejects any outside authority whether this is history, tradition or religion. It does not reject religion *in toto* but subjects it to the scrutiny of the individual human reason. It draws boundaries for religious belief and denies any role or authority to religion outside them.

Like the medieval critics, the secular critics of Islam link unreason and violence and allege that “Islamic terrorism” is a result of the irrational nature of the Islamic faith. The radical Orientalists add other things to the list: the oppression of women, violation of minority rights, freedom of press, even poverty, corruption, etc. are all somehow related to the Islamic tradition which did not allow free thinking and oppressed free inquiry, dissent and pluralism. Needless to say, this is a caricature of the Islamic tradition and based on political considerations rather than a sound analysis of historical facts. It is unfortunate, to say the least, that most of the current debate about Islam, reason, rationality and science in popular circles in the West is shaped by such simplistic yet powerful views.

### **The Modern Context: The Enlightenment Reason**

Modernity *via* the Enlightenment has claimed superiority over other traditions and non-Western cultures because of its claim to ground things in reason and thus create a primarily, if not purely, rational order. In contrast to the supposedly fideistic claims of Christianity, the Enlightenment *philosophes* sought to justify everything on the basis of what Descartes called “clear and distinct ideas”. The question to which Kant responded with his famous essay in 1784 summed up the relevance of reason and rationality for how we were to live in the post-Medieval world: do we live in an enlightened age? Kant believed his generation lived in an “age of enlightenment” rather than in an “enlightened age”. The subtle difference between the two is not to be taken lightly. An enlightened age is one in which the defining elements of culture, society and politics follow the principle of reason. This is presumably a mature state of humanism and rationality, a world in which reason has defeated the forces of anti-reason. By contrast, an age of enlightenment is one in which the battle for the soul of humanity continues and the forces of reason fight ignorance and darkness. It refers to a process of gradual maturity and rationality, a goal towards which humanity as a whole moves. Since the reign of reason has begun, the end of history is within our reach – and end that is certain to come when the light of reason dawns upon all humanity including non-Europeans.

Kant defined enlightenment as “man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man’s inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another”. Man’s

---

<sup>(2)</sup> See my “Roots of Misconception: Euro-American Perceptions of Islam Before and After September 11<sup>th</sup>” in *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition*\_Joseph Lumbard (ed.) (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2009, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition), pp. 149-193.

immaturity has created much of the oppression and ignorance that has shaped human history. Kant characterizes the essence of the Enlightenment as the “courage to think” for oneself freely. “*Sapere aude!* Have courage to use your own reason! That’s the motto of enlightenment”.<sup>(3)</sup>

From academic circles to populist politics, the debate about the Enlightenment reason has now become a debate about the alleged lack of rationality and humanity in Islam. In his preface to his brilliant history of the Enlightenment, Louis Dupre, “stunned by the attacks on September 11, 2001”, wondered “if there was any purpose in writing about the Enlightenment at a time that so brutally seemed to announce the end of its values and ideals”. Dupre does not mean to declare Islamic culture “unenlightened”. But he notes that “Islam never had to go through a prolonged period of critically examining the validity of its spiritual vision, as the West did during the eighteenth century”.<sup>(4)</sup> Dupre does not explain why Islam needs to revisit the “validity of its spiritual vision” but he clearly echoes an increasingly common view about the so-called “Islamic reformation”. There have been other more alarming voices calling for an ‘Islamic enlightenment’ to save Muslims from backwardness and the world from an irrational and dangerous religion.<sup>(5)</sup>

It is a common mistake to assume that reason has been the exclusive property of the Enlightenment thinking since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Traditional societies have accorded reason an important place in theology, law, politics, ethics, art and other areas of human life. The Islamic intellectual tradition, for instance, has produced an immense literature on reason, rationality, logic, thinking, contemplation, scientific inquiry, and so on. From Sunni and Shiite theology to Peripatetic philosophy and Sufism, the classical works are filled with chapters on the nobility of reason, virtues of knowledge and the spiritual blessings of using one’s reason properly. The notions of reason and rationality that have developed in this tradition, however, are radically different from their modern counterparts. Traditional societies have seen reason as part of a larger reality and placed them within the wider context of existence and meaning. In order to function properly, reason has to accept its place within an order of things that is larger than the knowing subject. As I shall discuss, the Qur’an considers human reason as part of a larger reality whose meaning cannot be encapsulated and disclosed by logical analysis, conceptual abstraction or rational discourse alone. As a rule, reality is always more than our epistemic constructions of it.

As a mark of modernity, reason has been constructed as a self-regulating principle and the arbiter of truth from the mathematical and physical sciences to social and political orders.

---

<sup>(3)</sup> Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” in *Kant on History*, ed. Lewis White Beck, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1963), p. 3.

<sup>(4)</sup> Louis Dupre, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), Preface, ix.

<sup>(5)</sup> The title of a Thomas Friedman column in the *International Herald Tribune* on December 16, 2001 read “Wanted, an Islamic enlightenment to end religious intolerance”. The American neo-cons have been keen on initiating a new enlightenment revolution in Islam. In the same week, the editors of the conservative *National Review* magazine regretted the fact that Islam did not go through the ‘chastening experience’ of an enlightenment.

One modern tribute to it reads as follows: “The virtue of *Rationality* means the recognition and acceptance of reason as one’s only source of knowledge, one’s only judge of values and one’s only guide to action.”<sup>(6)</sup> But in reality, this rarefied view of reason, so passionately defended by academic philosophers, positivists and the self-proclaimed Enlightenment rationalists, has never worked as expected. Nor has it delivered what it promised, i.e., free individuals, rational society, scientific culture, reason-bound politics, economic justice and so on. This in itself calls for a deep reflection about the reasonableness of the Enlightenment project of pure reason. At any rate, elements of ‘anti-reason’ seem to have crept into the new world order promised by the Enlightenment, and the modern capitalist society with its evasive impersonalism, crude individualism and structural violence, is a far cry from a rational social order.

Ever since the triumph of scientism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, reason as logic and rational inquiry has been hailed as a trait of modernity not because we want to grasp the reality of things in the Greek sense of the term but because a purely rational order is believed to enable us to have full control over the world. The instrumental rationality that defines our value schemes, educational systems, political orders and daily lives provides handy justification for control, predictability and dominion and gives a largely false sense of security, satisfaction and fulfillment.<sup>(7)</sup> It asserts that things are important because they have a use-value for us. The ‘rational’ is the ‘useful’. Things have no longer intrinsic intelligibility or ‘rationality’; they have only use-value which we are free to use in any way we want.

Reason in the modern period has oscillated between the two extremes of logical positivism and radical historicism. The former view, represented by the Vienna Circle and its followers, has construed reason as an absolute and timeless principle unaffected by history, custom or such human frailties as emotion and desire. Rationality simply means proving that our concepts correspond to facts. It means drawing conclusions which fit the facts at hand. In this sense, rationality is essentially ‘logical consistency’ and finds its finest and purest expression in formal logic and scientific method.<sup>(8)</sup> No other criteria count as a basis for rationality, and the value of everything from religion to art and education must be judged according to the logical and scientific dictates of this a-historic reason. Thus values by which we are to live must be derived from the facts of nature which we must investigate through rational inquiry and logical analysis. All else is to be rejected as metaphysical nonsense.

The second view, represented by the waves of postmodernism and constructivism since the 1960s, deconstructed reason to the point of turning it into a by-product of social-historical processes. Like all other human traits and enterprises, reason is a historically constructed notion whose meaning and function varies from one social setting to another. Rationality means applying the human capacity for thinking to different problem-solving situations. It has meaning only in the context of specific issues, problems or research questions. Depending on the different types of human needs, rationality takes on new meanings and new functions. The defenders of this bounded view of reason insist that this is not to belittle

---

<sup>(6)</sup> Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New American Library 1964) p. 25.

<sup>(7)</sup> For a view of modernity as control and predictability, see Albert Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>(8)</sup> Cf. Charles Taylor, “Rationality” in his *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, Volume 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 134.

the significance of reason or propose an irrational way of doing things. Rather, it is to admit the limitations of human reason. In this sense, rationality does not necessarily mean drawing conclusions that fit the facts. There are cases where the “anything goes” principle is more useful and functional than some abstract and mathematical notion of reason.<sup>(9)</sup>

The concept of reason has had a different trajectory in the Islamic tradition and avoided the extremes of positivist absolutism and radical relativism. The reason that emerged within the Islamic *Weltanschauung* proposed a different mode of thinking about existence, the universe, the human state and God. It was seen as part of a larger reality rather than a self-regulating principle and self-standing tool. As I shall discuss below, it is this integrated and wholesale view of reality that defines the Quranic mode of thinking about reason and rationality.

### ***Ratio and Intellectus***

Before moving further, a word of clarification is in order for the reason-intellect bifurcation that has come about as a result of a major philosophical transformation in the history of Western metaphysics. I shall not venture into this history as it requires a detailed treatment. It should be briefly pointed out, however, that *ratio* and *intellectus* came to designate two separate ways of looking at reality in the late Middle Ages and ever since then the two terms have taken different paths. *Ratio* has been used for logical analysis, abstraction, deduction, drawing conclusions, and other logical functions of reason. In this broad sense, *ratio* primarily constituted the basis of scientific knowledge and claimed precision and certainty. By contrast, *intellectus* came to designate intuitive and sapiential knowledge, which was now fully decoupled from rational investigation and logical analysis. By implication, it was seen as lacking a solid foundation like *ratio* because it spoke of such subjective terms as intuition, imagination, illumination but not proofs, evidence, and demonstration.

Had it not been for the later fallout between rationalist naturalism and mystical thought in the Western tradition, this may have been nothing more than a heuristic distinction. As a matter of fact, the Thomistic tradition maintained a relationship of complementarity between *ratio* and *intellectus* and held that they were not opposed to one another but addressed to different aspects of the same reality<sup>(10)</sup> But as later history shows, the two terms were employed to represent two substantially different ways of understanding the world and making moral judgments. *Ratio* became the main instrument of natural sciences, which by now had divested nature of all of its intrinsic intelligibility and symbolic significance, and claimed a separate mode of rationality. The further estrangement of *ratio* from *intellectus* meant that ‘rational analysis’ was no longer to unveil the built-in intelligibility of things, their symbolic significance, or their spiritual value. Rationality created a new domain of truth for itself and bade farewell to our holistic experience of reality. Rationalism, coupled with naturalism and

---

<sup>(9)</sup> Paul Feyerabend, who in his *Against the Method* (1975) took upon himself to debunk the absolutist claims of positivist science, is probably the most famous proponent of the second view. Richard Rorty’s *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) provides another constructivist critique of the Enlightenment project of pure reason. Rorty’s alternative is a sort of reason dissolved into human drama. For a discussion of the trails of modern reason in Western philosophy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, see Stephen Toulmin, *Return to Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>(10)</sup> See Denys Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), especially pp. 75-88.

positivism, sought to reduce reality to the analytical competencies of the human mind and identified quantitative-calculative thinking as the only reliable way of knowing the reality of things. Even though contemporary Christian theologians, Josef Pieper being a case in point, have insisted that both *ratio* and *intellectus* together make up a proper process of knowing, the bifurcation of discursive and intuitive modes of thinking has played a key role in the secularization of the modern world-picture and the profanization of nature.

Such a distinction has never occurred in the Islamic tradition. The word *'aql* means both reason and intellect in the two senses discussed above. *'Aql* is innately capable of performing the two functions of logical analysis and intuitive knowing without a contradiction. Furthermore, it is the same *'aql* that guides our will in our moral choices. It is true that in the later Islamic intellectual tradition, the philosophers have introduced a general distinction between “rational investigation” (*bahth*) and “taste” (*dhawq*), i.e., realized knowledge. The two modes of thinking, however, complement each other and help us uncover the multilayered structure of reality, which, after all, demands a multidimensional approach. In the words of Mulla Sadra who epitomizes this tradition, “true demonstration does not contradict witnessing based on unveiling (*al-shuhud al-kashfi*)”.<sup>(11)</sup>

When Muslims state, largely under the pressure of modern rationalism and out of inferiority complex against the West, that “Islam is the religion of reason/intellect”, what they mean is not that the Islamic faith, or any faith for that matter, can be reduced to human reason. Such a claim would turn faith into an empirical statement or logical proposition. Faith, by definition, must have a dimension that goes beyond reason; otherwise there would be no need for Divine revelation and the Prophets. What is beyond reason, however, does not mean anti-reason; it means supra-rational, that which transcends the cognitive competencies of the human reason. Supra-rational is not irrational because reason can admit what lies beyond its capacities. Such an admission is not illogical because it states not ignorance, agnosticism or blind faith but a self-reflective acknowledgment of limits. Reason cannot think without certain rules and principles. Freedom is not the abolishment of all limits and rules but the exercise of reason in conjunction with virtue.<sup>(12)</sup>

What is truly unique and astounding about human reason is that it can set its own limits to what it can and cannot know. The self-delimitation of reason is a rational act and points to the larger context of existence and intelligibility within which it functions. This is what al-Ghazali attempted with his critique of Peripatetic philosophy whereby he critically tried to draw the limits of speculative reason in the field of pure metaphysics which he believed

---

<sup>(11)</sup> Mulla Sadra, *al-Hikmat al-muta'aliyah f i'l-asf ar al-'aqliyyat al-arba'ah*, (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1981) I, 2, p. 315. Sadra goes on to say: “The difference between the sciences based on theory and the sciences based on vision, is like the difference between someone who knows the definition of sweetness and someone who has actually tasted sweetness; and someone who understands the definition of health and power and someone who is actually healthy and powerful.” Commentary on the Chapter al-Waqi'ah, *Tafsir*, Vol. 7, p. 10. for more on this, see my *Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy: Mulla Sadra On Existence, Intellect and Intuition*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 217-221.

<sup>(12)</sup> What Kant has to say about this is worth quoting: “If reason will not subject itself to the law it gives itself, it will have to bow under the yoke of the law which others impose on it, for without any law whatsoever nothing, not even the greatest nonsense, can play its hand for very long. Thus the inevitable consequence of declared lawlessness in thinking (an emancipation from restrictions of reason) is that freedom to think is finally lost.” Kant, “What is Orientation in Thinking?”, trans. L. W. Beck in *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason and Other Writings on Moral Philosophy* (Chicago, 1949), p. 304.



belonged to the “invisible world” (*‘alam al-ghayb*). Committing himself to a similar task but working with different premises, Kant, too, sought to lay out the limits of reason in his *Critique of Pure Reason*: “Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is not able to answer”.<sup>(13)</sup>

### **The Ontological Ground of Qur’anic Rationality**

Long before the Greek philosophical texts were translated into Arabic, Muslims had an encounter with the concept of reason/intellect as outlined in the Qur’an and the Hadith. In sharp contrast to the period of the Jahiliyyah, “ignorance”, Islam represented the era of faith, knowledge, justice and freedom all at once. Entering Islam meant leaving the mental and social habits of the age of ignorance, polytheism, injustice and immorality. It meant establishing a new socio-political order based on reason, justice, equality and virtue. It also required a new ontology of reason to overcome polytheistic logic and moral cynicism. And this was possible only by introducing a new *Weltanschauung* and a new mode of thinking.

In order to understand the place of reason and rationality in the Qur’an and the later Islamic intellectual tradition, we thus need to explore the new ontological ground of reason and the mode of thinking which the Qur’an advocates through stories, implorations, deductions, syllogisms, commands, warnings, praises, and promises of reward and punishment. The rich repertoire of logical deductions and moral exhortations purport to awaken our conscience so that we can begin to use our sensate and rational faculties in a manner that befits our humanity. The Qur’an says: “And indeed We have put forth for men in this Quran every kind of similitude in order that they may remember.” (al-Zumar 39: 27). The *mathal*, translated here as similitude, refers to metaphors and parables by which a fundamental message is conveyed – a message which may otherwise remain inaccessible to the human mind. But since no parable is devoid of cognitive content, this is an appeal both to reason and imagination so that we may “remember” what is essential.

The path of thinking which we find in the Qur’an is not comprised of assembling of facts; nor is it a pietistic enumeration of commands and prohibitions. Rather, it is a wholesome undertaking that requires setting upon an intellectual, moral and spiritual journey. It encompasses all of our being and overcomes such dualities as the sensate verses the rational, the material versus the spiritual, the individual versus the universe, nature versus culture. The integrated mode of thinking which the Qur’an embodies in its unique style reflects the nature of reality, which is interdependent and multilayered. It urges us to see the interconnectedness of things and how one thing leads to the other in the great chain of being.

The Qur’anic mode of thinking is then primarily not descriptive but prescriptive. The Qur’an does not simply describe things as facts or information; its suggestive stories, striking metaphors and vivid descriptions of God’s creation and interventions in history are meant to change the way we see things and our place in the world. It seeks to transform the human

---

<sup>(13)</sup> Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London, 1933), p. A viii.

conscience so that we can live a life based on justified faith and virtue.<sup>(14)</sup> Once this conscience is awoken and brought up to reckon with the reality of things, everything falls in place: our reason, thinking, sense organs, seeing, hearing, perceiving and moral judgments begin to come together. Reason and rationality arise within this larger context of integrated thinking and moral discernment. Far from being a principle and ground of truth by itself, reason functions within the larger context of our being in the world and the human responses we give to reality.

Owing its existence to something larger than what is purely human, reason cannot know God in the sense of ‘encapsulating’ Him because as a finite being, it cannot encircle that which is infinite. God cannot be known empirically because empirical knowledge entails limit, position, relation, relativity, etc., none of which applies to God. God can be known through reason/intelligence to the extent to which the Absolute and the Infinite can be intuited, grasped and represented through formal propositions, concepts, and metaphors. Expecting reason to do more than that would be violating its own limits. If reason, like other components of reality, is part of the order of existence and not the whole of it, then it can never fully encapsulate the whole. But this does not in any way diminish its significance or function. God is the absolute reality that encapsulates and generates everything. He is *al-Muhit*, the One who encompasses everything. Thus the Qur’an says that “Vision perceives Him not, but He perceives [all] vision; and He is the Subtle, the Acquainted” (al-An’am 6:103).

Like love, charity, wisdom, spirituality and art, rationality is a fundamental human response to the call of reality. It enables us to disclose the intelligible structure of the order of existence. It invites us to overcome our corporeal existence and connect with the world of nature in primarily rational and moral terms. It urges us to establish a socio-political order based on virtue, justice and freedom. The Qur’an presents a view of the human person according to which our humanity is formed by ‘rationality’ (*‘aql, nutq*) and those other traits that are equally central to our task to give a meaningful response to reality. In an ontological sense, this means recognizing the reality of things as they are and see them as a “trust” (*amanah*) from God. The human response to the Divine call of protecting His trust is to become His “vicegerent” (*khalifah*) on earth and thus submit to God, which is the literal meaning of *islam*. In the formal religious language, this submission is called *‘ibadah*, worship, the supreme human act that transcends the limitations of human existence and binds us to the Absolute and the Infinite.

In this regard, the Qur’anic mode of thinking is not empirical or rationalist, historical or systematic, apodictic or pedagogical, analytical or descriptive. It is none of them and all of them at once. It combines conceptual analysis with moral judgment, empirical observation with spiritual guidance, historical narrative with eschatological expectations, and abstraction with imperative command. The Qur’an is primarily a “guidance” (*hidayah*) for mankind (al-Baqarah 2: 2) and seeks to lead us from ignorance to knowledge, from darkness to light, from injustice and oppression to freedom. The Qur’anic rationality thus extends from the empirical and conceptual to the moral and the spiritual. Being rational means rejecting oppression and injustice and embracing the Divine call for justice. The Prophet of Islam has defined ‘intelligent person’ (*al-kayyis*) as one who “controls his ego and prepares for the

---

<sup>(14)</sup> Cf. Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’an* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1994), p. 22.

afterlife". (Tirmidhi, al-Qiyamah, 25). In Islamic law and theology, a person must be 'sane' or 'intelligent' (*aqil*) in order to be responsible for his/her actions because there is no religious responsibility (*taklif*) without having sanity or reason ('*aql*).

In the Islamic tradition, this forms the basis of the moral ontology of reason and rationality and establishes a strong connection between intelligence, rationality and virtue. According to Harith al-Muhasibi (d. 857), reason is "a disposition that is known through its deeds".<sup>(15)</sup> It acts as a principle of moral action and seeks to bring us closer to the Divine. If a person is really intelligent, reasons al-Muhasibi, he will seek to secure his salvation in this world and in the hereafter, for which he must use his reason properly. By basing his analysis on the "nobility of reason", which is the title of his work, al-Muhasibi wants to show the unique character of human reason for establishing a justified faith and a virtuous life. A proper use of reason, illuminated by faith, leads to rational thinking and moral behavior. Logic and transcendence work together to reveal the nature of things and realize our humanity. But this can happen only when we see human reason working in a larger context of thinking and contemplation.

### **Reason and Thinking in Context**

The verb '*a-q-l*, to intellect or to use one's reason, literally means to hold, to protect and to guard. Reason is that by which we protect ourselves from falsehood, error and evildoing. Thus *ma'qal* means 'fortress'. This is the same meaning conveyed in the English phrase "intelligent person". This basic meaning of reason is not to be taken lightly, for it underlies the essential component of thinking and contemplation as the proper human response to the call of reality. In contrast to attempts to reduce reason and rationality to logical competency and procedural ratiocination, reason as a principle of truth and as an instrument of knowledge represents an encounter with the reality of things. Thinking is not simply to enumerate the physical properties of things or the logical relations of concepts. It is more than a mere mental representation of things because, as Muslim philosophers insist, mental abstraction gives us only a picture of reality. Like all mental abstractions, however, this picture is frozen and can never fully measure up to the reality itself.

Abstract concepts are essential for rational thinking and the formation of ideas. Thinking, however, requires more than abstraction and use of concepts. It takes place in a context of encounter with reality and puts us in a relationship with something larger than us. It means seeing, observing, listening, hearing, reflecting, contemplating, and drawing the appropriate practical and moral conclusions. It means responding to what we encounter. It involves rational analysis but also moral commitment. In its deepest sense, thinking prevents us from seeing things as a means to an end. It challenges instrumental rationality on both ontological and spiritual grounds. As I shall discuss shortly, if the world has been created by God, then it cannot be reduced to utility. It has a substantive meaning and value independent of us.

---

<sup>(15)</sup> Harith al-Muhasibi, *Sharaf al-'aql wa mahiyyatuhu*, ed. M. A. 'Ata (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah), 1982, p. 19.

In principle, there is nothing essentially wrong with the idea that we attain a degree of rationality by following rules and procedures. Following a rule can certainly count as a rational act and comes handy in our daily lives, scientific explorations, economic decisions, political lives, etc. But while it has its uses, instrumental rationality moves at the surface of human subjectivity and does not necessarily relate us to reality. Following a rule is no guarantee for a rational outcome. We may follow a procedure and arrive at certain conclusions. The outcome, though, can be the most irrational thing and even a catastrophe. Like many autocracies, the Nazis, for instance, had a rule-bound, procedurally 'rational' governance of Germany. But their instrumentalist approach to religion, history, science and politics destroyed the very meaning of being human. The content and substance of what we do must also have a rational basis.

The Qur'an subscribes to a substantive view of rationality by asserting that not only our instruments and procedures but also our fundamental notions and concepts should be properly rational and conform to the reality of things. The substantive view of rationality follows from the intrinsic intelligibility of existence as God's creation. Every rational act on our part is an act of conforming to the principle of reason built into the nature of things. Whatever violates this principle lands us in the realm of the irrational.

Substantive rationality is also supported by the anthropology of reason itself. Most Muslim thinkers hold that reason responds to empirical data and abstract notions through its own innate qualities. Far from being a hypothetical *tabula rasa*, reason reflects the fundamental traits of existence of which it is a part. Raghīb al-Isfahani divides reason into two: '*aql matbu'*', "innate reason", and '*aql masmu'*', "acquired reason". *Masmu'* literally means that which is heard, referring to things learnt by hearing from others. It roughly corresponds to experience and refers to the context of human relations. Innate reason refers to our in-born ability to grasp the intelligible order and truth of things. It is through innate reason that we inhabit an intelligible world. Acquired reason is what we learn by 'hearing' from others and refers to the context of social relations and linguistic forms with which we name things.

The two are intertwined but the former takes precedence over the latter. Isfahani, who attributes this division to Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib, says that just as the light of the sun has no use when the eye is blinded, acquired reason can do no good when innate reason is corrupted.<sup>(16)</sup> Reason then works two-ways: in its innate form, it works from inside and out. It encounters and witnesses the visible world through its inborn qualities. This is part of *fitrah*, the fundamental human nature, which is our window to the world of existence and thus must be protected in order to 'see' right.<sup>(17)</sup> In its acquired form, reason moves from outside to inside and takes in bits and pieces of empirical data and impressions from the outside world. It is the combination of the two, the inner and the outer, that gives us a fuller picture of the function of reason vis-à-vis reality. This fundamental function of reason,

---

<sup>(16)</sup> Raghīb al-Isfahani, *al-Mufradat fi gharib al-qur'an* (Istanbul: Kahraman Yayinlari, 1986), p. 511. Both Harith al-Muhasibi and al-Ghazali refer to this two-fold definition of reason; see al-Muhasibi, *Sharaf al-'aql*, p. 20.

<sup>(17)</sup> Al-Farabi identifies this as one of the six meanings of '*aql*'; see al-Farabi, *Risalah fi'l-'aql*, ed. Maurice Bouyges (Beyrouth, Lebanon: Dar el-Machreq, 1983), pp. 8-9.

however, always takes place within a larger context of ontological significance and epistemic competency.<sup>(18)</sup>

The most fundamental function of reason/intellect is to act as a mirror to reflect the intrinsic meaning and order of things. In performing this task, the intellect has a special relationship with the Divine because it emanates from the Divine Nature. What the intellect discovers as order, necessity and intelligibility in the universe is a reflection of God's own Nature and Will. Mulla Sadra provides a vivid description of this aspect of the intellect:

“The intellect, since there is no veil between it and the the First Truth [God], can witness by itself the essence of the Truth [God] ... there is no veiling between the two ... [God] can certainly manifest itself to the intellect and the manifestation here takes place through the lucid [unveiling] of [God's] essence. There is no aspect or quality added to the Divine and another being added to [the intellect]. The essence of the intellect is like a polished mirror on which the form of the Truth shines. On the mirror itself, there is no existential entity except the reflected form, and the reflected form is nothing but the form related to the Truth. Therefore in the essence of the intellect there is nothing other than the form of the Truth and its theophany. There are no two things here: the existence of the intellect and the manifestation of the Truth upon it because one being cannot have to existences. By the same token, two [distinct] forms cannot emanate from God in one single manner. Because of this, the sages (*'urafa'*) have said that God does not manifest [Himself] twice in the same form. Thus it is known that the existence of the intellect is nothing but a manifestation of God the Exalted through His Form on the intellect; and the form of God's essence is itself His own Essence, not something added to Him.”<sup>(19)</sup>

### The Vocabulary of Thinking in the Qur'an

The Qur'an uses a number of terms that are closely related to reason/intellect and thinking. *Tafakkur*, “thinking”, *qalb*, “heart”, *fu'ad*, “inner heart”, and *lubb*, literally “seed” meaning “essential heart”, are among these terms and each corresponds to a different aspect of the act of perceiving, thinking and reflecting. There are also other terms which fall within the same semantic field of *'aql*: *'ilm*, “knowledge”; *fahm*, “understanding”; *fiqh*, “perceiving/

---

<sup>(18)</sup> The later philosophical tradition has developed an elaborate epistemology and anthropology of reason which includes *'aql hayulani* or *'aql bi'l-quwwah*, the material or potential intellect, *'aql bi'l-fi'l*, the actualized intellect, *'aql mustafad*, the acquired intellect, and finally *'aql fa'al*, the active intellect. Since I cannot discuss these later interpretations here, I will only refer to the foundational texts by the philosophers. For al-Kindi's discussion and classification of *'aql*, which is the first among the philosophers, see his *Risalah fi'l-'aql* ('On the Intellect'), ed. Jean Jolivet in *L'Intellect selon Kindi* (Leiden, Holland: E. J. Brill, 1971). Al-Farabi fully develops al-Kindi's initial exploration in his various works; see especially *Risalah fi'l-'aql*. Ibn Sina discusses *'aql* and its types and functions in his various works including the *Shifa'* and *Najat* but also *al-Mabda' wa'l-ma'ad*. For an extensive survey of their views against the Greek background, see Davidson, Herbert A., *AlFarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>(19)</sup> Mulla Sadra, *Risālat al-ḥashr*, ed. with Persian translation by M. Khwājāwī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mawlawī, 1998), pp. 85-6.

understanding”; *idrak*, “grasping”; *shu’ur*, “consciousness”; *burhan*, “demonstration”; *hujjah*, “evidence”; *bayyinah*, “clear evidence”; *sultan*, “overwhelming evidence”, *furqan*, “discernment”; *tadabbur*, “contemplation”; *nutq*, “talking/thinking”; *hukm*, “judgment”; *hikmah*, “wisdom”; and *dhikr*, “remembrance/invocation”. The Qur’anic usage of these terms, whose full exposition requires a separate study, establishes a context of integrated thinking in which our encounter with reality unveils different aspects of the all-inclusive reality of existence. More importantly, it leads to a mode of thinking that combines empirical observation, rational analysis, moral judgment and spiritual refinement.

This rich vocabulary points to the wholeness of perceiving and thinking. In contrast to categorical distinctions between sensate perception and conceptual analysis, our natural or ‘first-order’ encounter with things takes place as a unitary experience. In perceiving things, our sense organs and reason work together. The sharp distinctions between sensate qualities, which correspond to the physical-material world, and intellectual notions, which correspond to the world of the mind, are reflections of the Cartesian bifurcation between *res extensa* and *res cogitans* and hardly give us an accurate description of the actual act of perceiving and understanding. These categories belong to the ‘second-order’ reflection upon reality whereby we make distinctions between subject and object, the knower and the known, the perceiver and the perceived, mental and material, etc. Our first-order encounter with the world takes place in a different context.

The wholeness of our epistemic experience of things stems from the wholeness of existence. Knowing as encounter means that we stand before our object of knowledge. This puts us in a special relationship with the reality of things. This meaning of knowing through reason is reflected in one of the root meanings of the word *‘aql*, which is to tie, to link, to relate. Reason ties us to the truth and thus opens up a new horizon beyond the ordinary chain of causes. In a horizontal way, the human reason moves between and across facts and concepts and links them to one another. In a vertical way, it links what is below to what is higher. The Qur’an insists on the convergence of the two axes of causality: horizontal, which regulates the world of physical causes, and vertical, which introduces the ‘Divine command’ (*amr*) into the natural realm. There is no contradiction between the two but they follow different rules. The day and night follow each other as part of the natural order in which we live and there is no breaking of this rule. But also “when God wants something to happen, He says to it “be” and it is” (Yasin 36:82). Each realm of existence requires a different type of thinking.

The elaborate vocabulary of sensing, reasoning and thinking which the Qur’an employs is necessitated by the nature of reality itself. A multilayered and multidimensional reality cannot be perceived by a single cognitive method. It requires a larger toolset of conceptual abilities. At this point, the Qur’an speaks of *‘alam al-ghayb*, “the world of the invisible” and *‘alam al-shahadah*, “the world of the visible”. The invisible world refers to that realm of existence known to God alone. God has given intimations of this world but no comprehensive knowledge of it has been made available. While not accessible to the human experience, the invisible world guides our encounter with the world of visible existence and thus functions as a signpost for our conceptual analyses and moral judgments. In a metaphysical and moral sense, it regulates the affairs of the visible world in which we live. What is striking about the Qur’anic notion of the ‘visible world’ is that a proper perception of

it is based on an experience of ‘witnessing’ (*mushahadah*), which is different from looking and seeing. Witnessing means standing before that which presents itself. It entails looking and seeing but also attending to. It is more like the experience of looking at a landscape and having a *gestalt* perception of it. In contemplating a landscape, we move between parts and whole and each time discover a new relationship.

In this sense, our encounter with the reality of things is a rational and conceptual process but takes place within a larger context of intelligibility and significance that goes beyond purely logical and discursive thinking. Concepts are not created in vacuum. Rather, they correspond to different aspects of reality and emerge in our encounter with reality, which the Qur’an describes as “bearing witness to the truth”. Thus we ‘see’ the light, ‘touch’ the wood, ‘smell’ the rose, ‘taste’ the cherry, ‘perceive’ the dimension, ‘think of’ the infinitude, ‘have consciousness of’ the nearness of the water, ‘discern’ between a thing and its shadow, ‘understand’ a command, ‘respond’ to a call, ‘submit’ to truth, ‘accept’ the evidence, ‘contemplate’ the meaning of life, and so on. Each of these epistemic acts says something about our mental and conceptual abilities with which we understand the world. But more importantly, they correspond to something outside us and expand the horizon of our subjectivity.

### **Reason, Heart and the Human Conscience**

This is comparable to the unitary experience of reality like a moving landscape rather than a particular frame taken out of it for dissection. The Qur’an identifies the heart (*al-qalb*) as the proper locus of the unitary experience of reality. This is where perceptual experience, conceptual thinking and moral judgment blend together. Given the sentimentalization of the ‘heart’ since the Cartesian turn in Western philosophy, it should be noted that the Qur’an assigns a clearly epistemic and intellectual function to the heart. The verses that mention the heart refer to our deep conscience by which we see the reality as a whole. It combines rational thinking and moral judgment. The heart, when clean and properly guided, presides over other epistemic faculties and enlightens them about the truth. Heart and reason function as a conduit for gaining insight into the reality of things and how we should relate ourselves to it. It is in this context that the Arabic linguists have identified ‘*aql* and *qalb* as being synonymous.<sup>(20)</sup> The goal of thinking through ‘*aql* and *qalb* is to disclose and inhabit the intelligible order from which particular beings in the universe derive their meaning. Muslim thinkers have seen no contradiction between reason and heart, rational thinking and contemplation, logic and transcendence. One of the major figures of the Kalam tradition, Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi begins his famous book *al-Muqabasat* with a prayer to God to grant him “through His Grace and Generosity the spirit of the heart through the light of the intellect (*ruh al-qalb bi-nur al-‘aql*)”.<sup>(21)</sup>

This is not surprising if we understand how our empirical and conceptual engagement with things works. Possessing sense organs is no guarantee for perceiving things properly because the senses are subsumed under a higher epistemic principle. After all, it is our reason that makes sense of what our sense organs perceive as a raw experience. We may have an eye with which to see but may see things in a distorted manner because of, say, a nervous

---

<sup>(20)</sup> Ibn al-Manzur, *Lisan al-‘Arab*, entries on ‘*aql* and *qalb* (Beirut: no date) Vol. I. p. 687 and Vol. XI, pp. 458-9.

<sup>(21)</sup> Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi, *al-Muqabasat*, ed. H. Sandubo (Tunisia: Dar al-Ma’arif, 1991), p. 7.

breakdown.<sup>(22)</sup> We may have two ears but may fail to hear because we may deliberately chose not to hear certain things. We may have a sharp mind but may not arrive at the right conclusion in, say, a legal dispute because our desire to win the case may take over our judgment. Our sensate faculties thus function within a larger context of conceptual, emotional and moral conditions. The process of arriving at the truth of something entails a unitary experience and involves sensate, cognitive, psychological and moral principles and considerations. Al-Ghazali, following the tradition before him and basing his analysis on the Hadith, describes sense organs as “the soldiers of the heart” and says that “the heart is like the king and the soldiers are like its servants and aids”.<sup>(23)</sup> Even the physically sound functioning of the sense organs depends on the soundness and cleanliness of the heart.

The human person is endowed with reason and thus can have access to the reality of things. But his reason and judgment can be clouded by his ego and carnal desires. He may thus lose his ability for discernment and can delude himself into thinking that he knows and forgets the stubborn and commanding nature of the ego. Against this, the Qur’an warns:

“Have you seen the one who takes as his god his own desire? Then would you be a guardian over him? Or do you think that most of them hear or reason? They are only like cattle; nay, they are even farther astray from the Path.” (al-Furqan 25: 43-44).

Animals serve the purpose for which they have been created. But those who have been created to worship God take their own ego as their master and worship themselves even though they have been given clear signs. This is where their ‘hearing’ and ‘reasoning’ comes to no avail.<sup>(24)</sup> The Qur’an goes further and challenges those who claim to see and hear when in fact their conscience has been blinded:

“And among them are those who listen to you. But can you cause the deaf to hear, although they will not use reason? And among them are those who look at you. But can you guide the blind although they will not [attempt to] see? Indeed, God does not wrong the people at all, but it is the people who are wronging themselves.” (Yunus 10: 42-44).

“And We have certainly created for Hell many of the jinn and mankind. They have hearts with which they do not understand, they have eyes with which they do not see, and they have ears with which they do not hear. Those are like livestock; rather, they are more astray. It is they who are the heedless.” (al-A’raf 7: 179).

This suggests that having sense organs is no guarantee to perceive the truth. Empirical knowledge by itself cannot reveal the truth of things. The heart and the sense organs, which are the “soldiers of the heart”, must all be sound:

---

<sup>(22)</sup> Compare this with what Zarathustra says to the people who show no interest in what he has to say: “Must one first shatter their ears to teach them to hear with their eyes?”, F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, tr. R. J. Hollingdale (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 45.

<sup>(23)</sup> al-Ghazali, *Rawdat al-talibin wa ‘umdat al-salikin*, in *Majmu’ah Rasa’il al-Imam al-Ghazali* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1994), p. 32.

<sup>(24)</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*, p. 1141.



“We made for them hearing and vision and hearts. But their hearing and vision and hearts availed them not from anything [of the punishment] when they were [continually] rejecting God’s signs; and they were enveloped by what they used to ridicule.” (al-Ahqaf 46: 26).

The failure of seeing, hearing, etc., does not stem from a biological imperfection but from the closure of the mind and the heart to the truth. According to Ibn Kathir, this is a result of the fact that one does not “benefit from these organs which God has created as a cause for guidance”.<sup>(25)</sup> In some respects, this is comparable to the vain effort to explain colors to the blind. The ontological disconnect that separates the visually blind from the experience of colors makes the discourse about colors impossible. But a greater illness is the illusion that we think we see things because we have eyes when in fact we do not see.<sup>(26)</sup> The Qur’an insists that ‘seeing’ as witnessing the truth requires a higher principle of intelligibility than bodily hearing and seeing:

“Indeed, you will not make the dead hear, nor will you make the deaf hear the call when they have turned their backs retreating.

Nor can you lead the blind out of their error, you can only make to hear those who believe in Our proofs/signs, and those who have submitted [themselves to God].” (al-Naml 27: 80-81).

Having sound sensate organs is then not enough; they need to be guided by intelligence and wisdom. As Plato says in *Phaedrus* 250, “sight is the most piercing of our bodily senses; though not by that is wisdom seen”. The heart must be uncorrupted and untainted in order to function properly. Quoting the Qur’an and the Prophet of Islam, al-Tirmidhi (d. 910) concludes, in an important work on the heart attributed to him, that the “soundness of sensate organs is possible through the soundness of heart; their corruption comes with the corruption of the heart”.<sup>(27)</sup> Thus *al-sadr* (“the chest”), *al-qalb* (“the heart”), *al-fu’ad* (“the inner heart”), and *al-lubb* (“the innermost intellect”), which al-Tirmidhi analyzes in his work, do not function as separate organs but rather provide a cognitive and spiritual context for our experience of the truth.

The Qur’an insists on the total soundness and integrity of our sensate, psychological and mental faculties in order for us to know, and advises us to “travel on earth”. Travelling or journeying means to look at the entire landscape of existence in order to put things in perspective:

“So have they not traveled through the earth and have hearts by which to reason and ears by which to hear? For indeed, it is not eyes that are blinded, but blinded are the hearts which are within the breasts.” (al-Hajj 22: 46)

---

<sup>(25)</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*, p. 659.

<sup>(26)</sup> Cf. Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, tr. J. G. Gray (New York: Harper Books, 1968), p. 165.

<sup>(27)</sup> Abu ‘Abdallah Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi, *Bayan al-farq bayn al-sadr wa’l-qalb wa’l-fu’ad wa’l-lubb*, (Amman: al-Markaz al-Maliki li’l-Buhuth wa’l-Dirasat al-Islamiyyah, 2009), p. 15. for the English translation of al-Tirmidhi’s work see Nicholas Heer, trans., “A Treatise on the Heart,” in *Three Early Sufi Texts*, trans. Nicholas Heer et al., Revised Edition (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2009).

Once the heart is blinded, all else is skewed and darkened. A similar danger is to act on *zann*, subjective opinion or conjecture, without sound evidence and firm foundation. Reason cannot accept conjecture as truth. Whether we conduct a scientific research or investigate the grounds of religious faith, we need more than conjecture on which to build our truth-claims. The same principle applies to human relations and moral attitude (see al-Hujurat 49: 12). Truth, not conjecture must be the basis of justification for faith:

Say, "Are there of your 'partners' any who guides to the truth?" Say, "God guides to the truth. So is He who guides to the truth more worthy to be followed or he who guides not unless he is guided? Then what is [wrong] with you - how do you judge? And most of them follow nothing but conjecture. Certainly, conjecture can be of no avail against the truth. Surely, God is All-Aware of what they do." (Yunus 10: 35-36; also al-An'am 6:116).

As the presiding principle of sensate and cognitive faculties, the heart gives certainty (*al-yaqin*) and evidence (*al-burhan*) to our beliefs. But this is contingent upon keeping the heart functioning properly. According to the spiritual anthropology of the Qur'an, one must constantly work on his heart, mind and conscience, and guard himself against falsehood. When a person persistently and deliberately mistakes falsehood for truth and bases his judgment on pure conjecture and selfish desires, then he develops a certain habit of mind and loses his ability to distinguish between truth and error. When this happens, which is not rare given the enormous power of desires on reason, his heart becomes "sealed" and loses his conscience. Thus the phrase "God has sealed their hearts" should be understood not in a fatalistic manner whereby God has already ordained certain people to disbelief. This interpretation would go against the thrust of the Qur'anic message. Rather, when one keeps committing the same intellectual and moral mistake and does not repent, he develops a certain habit of misusing his reason, and God leaves those who deliberately persist on wrongdoing. A number of verses describe this closure of the heart/mind/conscienceness as a total loss of direction in both the intellectual and moral senses of the term:

"Indeed, those who disbelieve - it is all the same for them whether you warn them or do not warn them - they will not believe. God has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing, and over their vision is a veil. And for them is a great punishment." (al-Baqara 2:6-7).

"And among them are those who listen to you, but We have placed over their hearts coverings, lest they understand it, and in their ears deafness. And if they should see every sign, they will not believe in it. Even when they come to you arguing with you, those who disbelieve say, "This is not but legends of the former peoples." (al-An'am 6:25).

"The seven heavens and the earth and whatever is in them exalt Him. And there is not a thing except that it exalts [God] by His praise, but you do not understand their [way of] exalting. Indeed, He is ever Forbearing and Forgiving. And when you recite the Quran, We put between you and those who believe not in the Hereafter, an invisible veil. And We have placed over their hearts coverings, lest they understand it, and in their ears deafness. And when you mention your Lord alone in the Qur'an, they turn back in aversion." (al-Isra' 17: 44-46).

“When the hypocrites come to you, [O Muhammad], they say, “We testify that you are the Messenger of God.” And God knows that you are His Messenger, and God testifies that the hypocrites are liars. They have taken their oaths as a cover, so they averted [people] from the way of God. Indeed, it was evil that they were doing. That is because they believed, and then they disbelieved; so their hearts were sealed over, and they do not understand.” (al-Munafiqun 63: 1-3).

By contrast, those whose heart and conscience have been illuminated with the light of faith find peace and repose in the remembrance of God. This ‘finding’ is not something sentimental or imaginative; it touches the core of our existence and links us to God on the one hand, and to the reality of things on the other. It guides our thinking and acting in the world and saturates our lives with meaning. Thus the Qur’an says:

“Those who believe and whose hearts find repose in the remembrance of God, verily, in the remembrance of God do hearts find rest.” (al-Ra’d 13: 28).

“It is He who sent down tranquility into the hearts of the believers that they would increase in faith along with their [present] faith. And to God belong the soldiers of the heavens and the earth, and ever is God Knowing and Wise.” (al-Fath 48:4).

In short, our conscience must be in the right place in order for our reason to function properly.

### **Reason, Existence and the Universe**

The wholesale encounter with reality is a key component of the Quranic vocabulary of thinking and stems from the essential relationship between reason and existence. The word existence (*al-wujud*) is not used in the Qur’an. But the conceptual framework within which the world of creation is presented points to an order of existence in which God’s creative act is disclosed. As the ground of all that exists, existence is a gift of Divine creation and derives its sustenance from God. In this sense, existence is the face of the Divine looking to the world of creation (*‘alam al-khalq*). The created order displays various modalities of existence, which discloses and particularizes itself into specific forms. While these forms or ‘shares of existence’ possess different qualities, they are united by the underlying reality of existence. The Qur’anic phrase *kull*, “everything” and “all”, frequently used in the cosmological verses, refers to this aspect of existence: everything is interrelated to one another by virtue of the fact that they are created by the same God who, as we mentioned, is *al-muhit*, the ‘one who encompasses everything’.

It is in this context that reason finds its proper relationship with existence. Existence is intrinsically intelligible because God creates optimally and what He creates has meaning, purpose and intelligibility built into it.<sup>(28)</sup> The following verse combines the purpose of creation, thinking and praying:

---

<sup>(28)</sup> This premise is also the basis of the argument that this is the best of all possible worlds which God could create. For this version of the “ahsan al-nizam” argument, see my “Mulla Sadra on Theodicy and the Best of All Possible Worlds”, *Oxford Journal of Islamic Studies*, 18:2 (2007), pp. 183-201.

“Do they not contemplate within themselves? God has not created the heavens and the earth and what is between them except in truth and for a specified term. And indeed, many of the people, in [the matter of] the meeting with their Lord, are disbelievers. Have they not traveled through the earth and observed how was the end of those before them? They were greater than them in power, and they plowed the earth and built it up more than they have built it up, and their messengers came to them with clear evidences. And God would not ever have wronged them, but they were wronging themselves.” (al-Rum 30: 8-9).

God creates with wisdom (*hikmah*), purpose (*ghayah*) and Providence (*'inayah*). As the ultimate source of all existence and intelligibility, God bestows these qualities on His creation and saturates the order of creation with meaning and purpose. The celebrated saying that “the first thing God has created is intellect (*al-'aql*)” should be understood in this context. The ‘intellect’ here refers to the universal principles of truth, order and intelligibility which God has built into the nature of things. The intellect is the first thing God has created because God creates things according to a certain order and principle. Thus “the intellect is the closest thing to the Divine”.<sup>(29)</sup> In contrast to modern subjectivism, meaning is not simply a property of the mind. Just as knowledge cannot be reduced to the internal workings of the mind, as is the case with Descartes, meaning cannot be written off, *a la* Galileo, as a ‘secondary quality’ superimposed by the mind upon things. Since meaning is not created but articulated and appropriated by the mind, its essence lies outside my mental constructions of it.

The moral import of this premise is clear: having a meaning and purpose in a non-subjective manner entails a tremendous sense of responsibility. Admitting that we, like the universe, have been created for a purpose means accepting a moral responsibility beyond ourselves. The Qur’an addresses the human person directly to make this point:

“Do you then think that We have created you without a purpose and that you will not be returned to Us? The True Sovereign is too exalted above that.” (Al-Mu’minun 23:115)

“Does man think that he will be left wandering [at his own whim]?” (al-Qiyama 75:36)

As far as the universe is concerned, God creates things and the laws by which they exist. These laws, called *sunnat Allah*, the “wants of God”, sustain the principles of order, harmony and continuity in the universe. It is the function of the human reason to discover these universal principles and intrinsic qualities. By applying itself to these principles, the intellect participates in the intelligible order of existence. Reason is able to discover these intrinsic modes of intelligibility because they are the rational/intelligible principles built into the nature of reality. We can rationally and scientifically analyze the physical universe because it lends itself to such investigation in the first place. The Qur’an finds no contradiction between studying the universe as a natural phenomenon and seeing it as the supreme miracle of God.

The entire universe is an *ayah*, a “sign” for man from God and points to something beyond itself. The Qur’an uses the same word, *ayah*, to refer to its verses as well as “God’s signs” (*ayat Allah*) in the universe, which can be compared to what the Latins have called *vestigia*

---

<sup>(29)</sup> Muhammad ‘Ali al-Tahanawi, *Kashshaf istilahat al-funun* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah), Vol. 3, *Kashshaf*, III, p. 307.

*Dei*. The multiple meanings of *ayah* confirm the profound connections between God's verses in the scripture and His signs in the world of creation: both come from God; both are sacred; both are to be treated with utmost care; both require commitment. God's signs in the two senses are directly related to reason and rationality because they are addressed to the human reason so that man can understand the reality of things (theoretical reason) and pursue virtue and happiness (practical reason). Such a basic and 'material' fact as counting years and keeping time is indeed a "sign" for those who ponder over the order and regularity of the universe:

"It is He who made the sun a shining light and the moon a light [for you] and determined for it phases - that you may know the number of years and account [of time]. God has not created this except in truth. He details the signs (*ayat*) for a people who know. Indeed, in the alternation of the night and the day and [in] what God has created in the heavens and the earth are signs for a people who fear God." (Yunus 10: 5-6).

God presents these signs to humans so that they can use their reason and derive the logical conclusion from them, which is to believe in God. Every sign in the Qur'an and the universe invites a response from the side of the human being. As Izutsu points out, humans can read these signs properly and "confirm" (*tasdiq*) their truth. Or, they fail to use their reason, succumb to their desires and thus "reject" (*takdhib*) their truth. While the first response leads to sincere faith with certainty, the second lands us in disbelief (*kufr*) and denial.<sup>(30)</sup> Misreading God's "clear signs" disconnects us from the reality, and can cause our salvation: "And they will say: "Had we but listened or used our intelligence, we would not have been among the dwellers of the blazing Fire!" (al-Mulk 67:10). Only those who can really use their reason can understand the true meaning of "signs" and act accordingly: "We have made clear to you the signs if you shall use your reason", the Qur'an says (Al-i Imran 3: 118).

Those who use their reason can begin to decipher the non-linguistic language of the universe and understand how it submits to God. This deeper wisdom helps us see the difference between the one who is blind and the one who sees. The Qur'an is forceful in asserting that denying God and taking partners unto Him goes against the nature of things and violates the principle of reason:

"And unto God Alone falls in prostration whoever is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly, and so do their shadows in the mornings and in the afternoons. Say: "Who is the Lord of the heavens and the earth?" Say: "(It is) God." Say: "Have you then taken (for worship) protectors other than Him, such as have no power either for benefit or for harm to themselves?" Say: "Is the blind equal to the one who sees? Or darkness equal to light? Or do they assign to God partners who created the like of His creation, so that the creation (which they made and His creation) seemed alike to them." Say: "God is the Creator of all things, He is the One, the Irresistible." (al-Ra'd 13: 15-16)"

---

<sup>(30)</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an: The Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung* (Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964), pp. 136-7.

Once this is clarified, observation, logical analysis, contemplation and praying join together:

“And to God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and God is over all things competent. Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding. Who remember God while standing or sitting or [lying] on their sides and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying], “Our Lord, You did not create this in vain; exalted are You [above such a thing]; then protect us from the punishment of the Fire. Our Lord, indeed whoever You admit to the Fire – You have disgraced him, and for the wrongdoers there are no helpers. Our Lord, indeed we have heard a caller calling to faith, [saying], ‘Believe in your Lord,’ and we have believed. Our Lord, so forgive us our sins and remove from us our misdeeds and cause us to die with the righteous. Our Lord, and grant us what You promised us through Your messengers and do not disgrace us on the Day of Resurrection. Indeed, You do not fail in [Your] promise.” (Al-i Imran 3: 189-194).

According to the Qur’an, the creation of the universe by God is so reasonable and self-evident that reason, unhindered by irrational causes, immediately recognizes it. This grasping of the truth through intuition (*hads*) underlies much of our empirical and conceptual knowledge. Those who recognize the truth when they see it do in fact use their reason in the most proper way. The Qur’an uses the phrase *ulu’l-albab*, “those who have deep understanding of things” to distinguish them from those who are merely interested in being smart. *al-Bab*, plural of *lubb*, meaning the essence and core of something, refers to a deeper perception of the reality of things which we understand through our reason. According to Ibn Kathir, *ulu’l-albab* refers to those “complete and perspicacious intellects which perceive the reality of things in their apparent reality”.<sup>(31)</sup> Qurtubi describes them as those who “use their reason in contemplating proofs”.<sup>(32)</sup> Once reason is put to proper use, it obtains new degrees of understanding, and the categorical distinctions between reasoning, contemplating and praying evaporate. This is when one begins to obtain certainty (*al-yaqin*), which leaves no doubt about the truth of something standing before us. At this point, the Qur’an puts so much emphasis on the self-evident and clear nature of the truth that it forbids forcing people into converting to Islam. Instead, they should be able to see the truth by themselves:

“There is no compulsion in religion. Verily, the Right Path has become distinct from the wrong path. Whoever disbelieves in Taghut and believes in God, then he has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that will never break. And God is All-Hearer, All-Knower.” (al-Baqarah 2: 256).

The ‘language of the universe’ is revealed to human reason in the form of strict orders, laws, principles, patterns but also powerful symbols, parables and metaphors. The Qur’an sees no contradiction between strict rules of logic, which come from nothing but God’s own Nature, and the symbolism of creation. The Qur’an invites us to discover the perfect order God has created in the universe. The order and regularity that come with this is a proof for the

---

<sup>(31)</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-qur’an al-‘azim* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma’rifah, 2006), p. 334.

<sup>(32)</sup> Abu Abdallah al-Qurtubi, *al-Jami’ li-ahkam al-qur’an* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2004), Vol I, p. 780.

existence of an intelligent Creator. But we are also expected to grasp the symbolic language of the universe and how it praises God at every moment.

“The seven heavens and the earth and whatever is in them exalt Him. And there is not a thing except that it exalts Him by His praise, but you do not understand (*tafaqhuna*) their [way of] exalting. Indeed, He is ever Forbearing and Forgiving.” (al-Isra’ 17:44).<sup>(33)</sup>

A reductionist and rationalist approach, which dwarfs our cognitive capacities and atrophies our imaginative powers, prevents us from understanding the non-discursive language of the universe. The world of creation has a constant conversation with its Creator because it is a ‘muslim’ (Al-i Imran 3:83), i.e., that which surrenders to God. The humans share this quality with nature with one fundamental difference: they have free will (*iradah*) and must chose faith over disbelief, truth over falsehood, and virtue over vice.<sup>(34)</sup> A person who has perfected his sense of discernment can intuit and grasp the universe praising God. This intuitive and ‘imaginative’ thinking is not outside the ken of reason because reason, as I have been arguing, can accommodate non-formal articulations of the truth and understand the non-discursive insights we gain in our encounter with reality.

### **Rationality and Morality**

The same intuitive thinking is at work in our moral choices. Since moral principles are self-evident in most cases, we know how we need to act in such situations. But is it enough to have a self-evident argument to be able to act virtuously? Given the driving force of human emotions, even the correct use of reason alone cannot be sufficient to always make the right moral choices. The reason is that we have to combine reason and will, the two distinguishing features of being human, in order to act on what we believe. In contrast to Descartes who called the human person a “machine who thinks”, we are also beings who will. Here ‘will’ does not simply designate choosing one option or the other. It refers to our ability to make a choice from among available possibilities. But in an axiological sense, it means choosing truth over falsehood and good over evil. Reason and rationality in the broad sense discussed above guide our choices and form the content of our moral behavior. Rationality and morality thus go hand in hand because we are rational animals *and* moral beings at the same time.

---

<sup>(33)</sup> This and similar verses underlie the commonly held view in the Islamic tradition that the entire universe is alive and that “everything has soul”. See Ibn Kathir, Tafsir, p. 932. Mulla Sadra holds that “all animal, plant and inanimate natures have knowledge and consciousness by themselves, through the necessities of their essences, and their particular effects on account of their partaking of existence because existence is identical with light and manifestation. Existence is therefore united with the qualities of the perfection of existence in knowledge, power, volition, life, and the like.” *Ajwibat al-masa’il al-kashaniyyah* in *Majmu’a-yi rasa’il-i falsaf-i-yi Sadr al-Muta’allihin*, ed. Hamid Naji Isfahani (Tehran: Intisharat-i Hikmat, AH 1375), p. 137. For more on the ontological vitalism of Islamic cosmology, see my *Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy*, pp. 229-32.

<sup>(34)</sup> Quoting a popular saying, Tahanawi describes it as follows: “God has mounted reason in the angels without carnal desire, put desires in the animals without reason, and in the children of Adam both of them. Thus whoever has his reason triumph over his carnal desires, he is better than the angels, and whoever has his carnal desires triumph over his reason, he is lower than the animals”. Tahanawi, *Kashshaf*, Vol. 3, p. 314.

In the Qur'an, this point is registered in the relationship between using reason and having a moral and spiritual awareness of God. The word *taqwa*, usually translated as consciousness and fear of God, literally means to protect and guard oneself against danger. In the tradition, it refers to "protecting the soul from what afflicts it".<sup>(35)</sup> As explained in the Hadith, *taqwa* means having the majestic presence of God in one's heart by which to protect oneself against everything false, evil and ugly. In this sense, the conceptual meanings of *'aql* and *taqwa* converge: they both refer to our conscious effort to protect ourselves against the inhuman and immoral consequences of evil-doing, injustice and oppression. Thus "the intelligent person is the one who has consciousness (*taqwa*) of his Lord and who reckons with his soul".<sup>(36)</sup>

This principle underlies the rational basis of choosing goodness over evil and virtue over vice. Reason has no problem with accepting 'consciousness of God' (*taqwa*) as a moral and spiritual principle because it guides our moral choices. It is only by combining intelligibility, meaning and will that we fulfill our humanity as 'rational animals'. Moral choices make sense not because simply they are our free choices but because they let us participate in the intelligible order of existence and thus enable us to go beyond ourselves and reach out to a larger reality. According to the Islamic ethical tradition, upholding justice makes sense because justice (*'adl*) means "putting things in their proper place". Likewise, opposing injustice is reasonable because injustice (*zulm*) means "putting things out of their place", i.e., destroying the order which gives meaning to things. An act is rational when it conforms to the reality of something and pays due attention to its proper place. It then makes perfect sense to protect oneself against the destructive forces of selfishness and evil-doing; acting otherwise contradicts the basis of our humanity. Summing up these points, Ibn Miskawayh says: "... since justice consists indeed giving to the right person what ought to be given in the right way, it would be inconceivable that men should not owe God, exalted is He, who granted us all these immense goods, an obligation which they should fulfill".<sup>(37)</sup>

We can then conclude that it is rational to be moral. By the same token, immorality is irrational because it goes against our self-interest and violates the order of things, which, in turn, causes us harm. The Qur'anic treatment of moral choices and how they are made within the larger context of existence establishes rationality as a key component of moral behavior. But the reverse is also true: rationality, carried to its full capacity, results in moral behavior and extends to other human beings, the universe and eventually God. According to the Qur'an, human beings have been granted reason to discern between right and wrong on the one hand, and good and evil on the other. In terms of both true knowledge and moral behavior, we use reason to make the right choices. The famous controversy among Muslim theologians over whether we know things to be true and good because they are intrinsically so or because God has created them in that way is irrelevant here. The key point is that correct thinking and moral behavior complement each other and thus reject any dichotomy between reason, rationality, belief and morality. Thus Ibn Hazm says that "knowledge has a decisive role in the implementation of virtues ... knowledge has a share in each and every

---

<sup>(35)</sup> Isfahani, *al-Mufradat*, p. 833

<sup>(36)</sup> Tahanawi, *Kashshaf*, Vol. 3, p. 314.

<sup>(37)</sup> Ibn Miskawayh, *The Refinement of Character (Tahdhib al-akhlaq)*, tr. Constantine K. Zurayk (Beirut: The American University of Beirut, 1968), p. 106.



virtue and ignorance in each and every vice”.<sup>(38)</sup> In a similar vein, Ibn Miskawayh identifies “the intelligent man” as one who seeks “virtue in his rational soul, examine the imperfections of this soul in particular, and strives to remedy them to the extent of his capacity and effort”.<sup>(39)</sup>

### **Rationality as Coherence**

The move from reason and rationality to moral behavior and back is a recurrent theme in the Qur’an and forms the basis of the Islamic ethical tradition. Reason, when properly cultivated, leads to moral action; moral behavior, in turn, nurtures reason. The Qur’an considers this simple syllogism to be self-evident because accepting something as right and then not acting accordingly is a contradiction. So is hypocrisy: “Do you order other people to be righteous and forget yourselves while you recite the Scripture? Will you, then, not reason?” (al-Baqara 2: 44). The Qur’an condemns hypocrisy as much as disbelief and in some cases more so because hypocrisy, besides being a failure of the human will, breaks the logical connection between reason and morality and thus lands us in incoherence. “O you who have believe, why do you say what you do not do? It is most hateful in the sight of God that you say that which you do not do.” (al-Saf 61: 2-3).

The same principle of coherence applies to belief in God. The cosmological verses in the Qur’an, which give vivid descriptions of how God has created the universe and the human being, make a strong case for rationality as coherence because all of them without exception speak to the human reason to make the logical connection between a universe so miraculously ordered and well-functioning and the belief in the Creator who created it. Those who take partners unto God, while believing in His existence, contradict themselves. Believing in God and not heeding His guidance presents a clear case of incoherence.

The following verses, while emphasizing God’s infinite mercy in creating and caring for the humankind, challenge the internal inconsistency of taking partners unto God (*shirk*), which is the greatest sin, and declares it to be utter irrationality. Those who think, ponder and use their reason have no difficulty in recognizing God as He deserves to be recognized.

“And who other than Him created the heavens and the earth and sent down for you water from the sky, whereby We cause to grow lush orchards; for it is not up to you to cause their threes to grow! Is there, then, a god besides God? Yet these are the people who ascribe partners to Him.

And who other than Him made the earth a firm abode [for you], and set rivers traversing through it, and put firm mountains therein and sealed off one sea from the other? Is there, then, a god besides God? Indeed, most of them do not know.

And who other than Him responds to the distressed one when he calls Him and He relieves him of the distress and Who has made you [mankind] His vicegerents on earth? Is there, then, a god besides God? – little do you reflect!

---

<sup>(38)</sup> Ibn Hazm, *al-Ahklaq wa’l-siyar fi mudawat al-nufus*, ed. Tahir Ahmad Makki (Jeddah: Dar al-Manarah, 2007), p. 124.

<sup>(39)</sup> Ibn Miskawayh, *The Refinement of Character*, p. 44. Ibn Miskawayh goes on to say that “the proper food of the rational soul is knowledge, the acquisition of intelligibles, the practice of veracity in one’s opinions, the acceptance of truth no matter where or with whom it may be, and the shunning of falsehood and lying whatever it may be or whence it may come”.

And Who other than Him guides you in the darkness of the land and the sea? And who sends forth winds heralding His mercy? Is there, then, a god besides God? Far exalted be He above what they associate with Him!

And who other than Him brings forth His creation and then re-creates it? And who gives you sustenance from the heaven and the earth? Is there, then, a god besides God? Say [O Muhammad!]: Bring your proof if you are right [in associating others with God].” al-Naml 27: 60-64

These verses reveal a strongly argumentative approach and underlie the Qur’an’s insistence on coherence as a basis for a proper discourse about the relationship between man and God on the one hand, God and the universe on the other. Rationality as coherence means that we draw the correct conclusions from the correct premises. Considering the continuity of our ontological and moral presuppositions, this suggests that our empirical observations about the universe lead to their logical conclusion in a theistic context, i.e., accepting God as God and acting accordingly. The Qur’an makes profuse of this procedural notion of rationality and applies it to cosmological, theological and legal issues. In its numerous confrontations with the Meccan pagans, the Qur’an challenges them to think for themselves and see if their misguided thinking about God makes any sense. A rationally coherent notion of God and the universe can be obtained through correct thinking if we can use our reason cogently to read the signs in the “visible world”.

### **Conclusion**

As I have argued so far, rationality as intelligibility moves us beyond the internal workings of a single, disengaged mind and places us within a larger context of ontological significance. The metaphysics of creation establishes the Qur’anic and indeed the Abrahamic notion of substantive rationality derived from the intrinsic intelligibility of the realm of existence. Knowledge as the disclosure of the inherent order and structure of things rejects instrumentalist and subjectivist rationality and instead sets up a context of intelligibility in which our reason and thinking function. The ontological ground of reason is secured by its participation in the intelligible order of existence.

As a book of revelation and guidance, the Qur’an treats human reason and thinking in this larger context of the created order of existence. While having full confidence in uncorrupted reason, it warns against ontological reductionism, epistemological hubris and moral egotism. Reason is a God-given gift with which we access the reality of things. But it is unreasonable to claim that reason alone can give us meaning and freedom. One also needs spiritual guidance through which reason is to be illuminated. The heart as our deep conscience guarantees that procedural rationality, which we employ in our daily dealings, does not trump other types of reasoning. Reason nourished by faith gains a deeper insight into the reality of things because it can set its own limits and finds its proper place in the “circle of existence” (*da’irat al-wujud*). Faith articulated and communicated by reason can bring certainty (*al-yaqin*), which the Qur’an deems essential for our mental and spiritual integrity. (al-An’am 6: 75; al-Takathur 102: 5-7). This is indeed the *hujjat al-balighah*!