

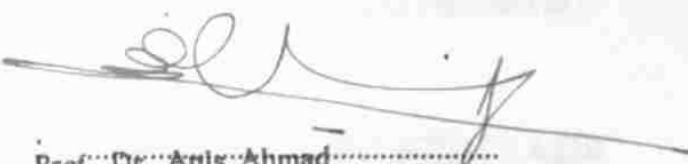


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INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY, MALAYSIA.

SOME PERSPECTIVES OF THE WESTERN AND QUR'ANIC  
CONCEPTIONS OF THE INTELLECT (AL-'AQL).

A THESIS IN ISLAMIC THOUGHT AND PHILOSOPHY

BY

ZAMBRY ABD. KADIR

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إن شر الدواب عند الله  
• الصم البكم الذين لا يعقلون

Verily the vilest of all  
creatures in the Sight of  
God are those deaf, those  
dumbs, one who do not  
use their intellect.

**Al-Anfal : 22**

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents who have brought me up from the slums of poverty and illiteracy to the world of knowledge.

This is also dedicated to my children, Husna, Huda and, Shifa in the hope that through their everyday lives will have meaning and will breath the spirituality of al-aql and strive for the sake of Allah.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I would also like to thank the members of the post-graduate studies of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage : Prof. Dr. Anis Ahmad, Prof. Abd. Rahman I. Doi, Prof. Dr. Abdul Majeed Muhammad Mackeen, Dr. Abdul Rahman Awang and Dr. Eric Winkell, each for their distinctive qualities of scholarship. I wish especially to thank Dr. Eric for reading my thesis and giving concrete suggestions.

To Miss Farikah and Miss Khaliza I am grateful for typing the manuscript. Last, but not least, I wish to express my gratefulness to my wife , Saripah Zulkifli, who had to put up with all kinds of problems through out my study.

I. I. U.  
Malaysia.

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## PREFACE

### Introduction.

Man has been regarded as having cognitive element which is related to his intellect, body and spirit. As a living organism, he is endowed with intelligence, consciousness, and instincts, to distinguish him from other animal species. The Qur'anic references to intellect (al- aql) are so numerous and recurring, behove us to inquire into its nature and significance in a systematic fashion.

In the dominant technocentric civilization of the present, the intellect assumes a position of preeminence which is unprecedented in man's history. It has also been seen as a chief tool for emancipating man from religious tutelage. From such a perspective, religion or revelation is seen as a mere historical accident to be overtaken by the progress of human reason alone. Islam, however, does not perceive the functions of revelation and reason as mutually exclusive , nor does Islam perceive the term al- 'aql as nothing but a form, , an ideal constitution which experience may more or less embody, and that religion is considered as a mass of sentiments and irrational ideas.

## Basic Assumptions

The basic assumption of the study is that the intellectual dimension in Islam consists of a unified vision of man within which al-‘aql and wahy (Revelation) are not separated. It integrates two kinds of knowledge: al-Ma‘rifah al-qāimah ‘ala al-Wahy (knowledge based on Revelation) and al-Ma‘rifah al-Muktasabah (acquired knowledge). The integration of the two kinds of knowledge must then lead man to his ultimate destiny of justice (‘adl) and felicity (falāḥ), and forms a true characteristic of man. By this integration, man will be able to recognize his various faculties and senses, both spiritual and physical. He will recognize too, the significance of his soul and inner being - rūḥ (spirit), nafs (soul), qalb (heart) and ‘aql (intellect).

Al-‘aql as commonly understood, is multi-dimensional. But the Muslim's ‘aql is a spiritual consciousness; inherently obedient to the commandment of its Creator and fully aware that his life is to be a sincere servant (‘abd) of God and His trustee (khalīfah) on earth. To achieve this state of being, man must utilize his ‘aql in order to think, to ponder, and to contemplate the creations of God around him. He must also be able to distinguish the right and the wrong, enjoin good (bodily and spiritually) and forbid evil, and make an attestation of īmān (faith), a reminder to himself.

## **The Scope of the Study**

The scope of this study is limited only to the Qur'ānic material. The scholarly discussions among the mufassirūn (commentators) will become the main focus of the subject concerned. The discussion will also bring forward some documented classical sources of the Qur'ānic commentators of different backgrounds. In the course of documenting the sources, wherever necessary, some critical assessments could be made in order to highlight some pertinent points that require further clarification. Whenever necessary the scope of the discussions may be extended to analyzing selected modern commentators in substantiating certain points which are not clear in the early exegesis.

## **Plan of the Study**

The plan of this study is four-fold: Firstly, an attempt shall be made to highlight the concept of reason and intellect as contained in the Bible and, it proceeds to describe the general development of the Western conception of reason. The reason is to help clarify and appreciate the supremacy of reason in the western intellectual traditions, as this later may clearly help to distinguish it from the Islamic conception of al-'aql.

Secondly, the writer shall review some of the recent studies both by Muslims and non-Muslims writers regarding the concept of al-‘aql. There are numerous writings on the subject. But, scholars of different fields of study have analyzed the relation between reason and revelation differently. Some have highlighted the conflict between reason and revelation from historiographical aspect, while others have looked into theological debates which led to the rise of different schools, and not a few have analyzed from metaphysical points of view.

Thirdly, the writer shall try to present the interpretations and explanations of the concept of al-‘aql by different early commentators . Their interpretations will be discussed under the specific chapter. This is to show how the term ‘aql has been stated repeatedly in the understanding of the Signs of God. Moreover the term al-‘aql is complemented by a variety of Qur’ānic expressions which are in many ways synonymous to it.

Fourthly, the present writer shall elucidate the place of al-‘aql in the perfectibility of man. This means that the study will show conceptually the place of al-‘aql in the frame of human life internally and externally. The study will show that the term al-‘aql should not be understood negatively, it rather helps man to know God comprehensively.

In the conclusion, we hope to show how al-‘aql has been understood differently in Islam as compared to the Western usage. We hope also to correct some misunderstanding that al-‘aql is only a means of reasoning, or only a human cognitive function without being related to other human bodies. Finally, it is hoped that this initial study would indicate that man's value lies in the proper utilization of ‘aql as a God-given instrument of cognition and intuition.

### **Method of the Study**

The method of the study is primarily of conceptual analysis. The main concern is to distinguish between the Qur'ānic framework of al-‘aql and that of outside the Qur'ān. In other words, the study will entirely depend on the library research, and thus, it will involve a proper scrutiny of the texts referred to.

Some problems are anticipated throughout the study. Since the main task of the study is to explore classical sources of the mufassirūn, some difficulties in understanding them could be expected.

The study would be an easy task if it only presents the documented texts pertaining to al-‘aql without giving a critical assessment. However, due to lack of references to support certain

claims made for a later analysis of the proposed topic the task is quite challenging.

The topic might suggest an inclination to theological and philosophical debate. Even some of the early mufassirūn were caught into the frame of such debates. Thus, it is completely impossible to ignore some theological and philosophical discussion throughout the study.

Another anticipated problem is that the topic could not be treated in isolation. This, in view of the fact that the subject of al-‘aql has its interrelatedness with other faculties of human being. Scholars have thus discussed the subject of al-‘aql without segregating it from other connotative meanings, such that as rūh, qalb and, even al-‘ilm.

## **Rationale**

The quest for sublimation of al-‘aql is gradually taking place in the present contemporary thoughts. There has been a group of people urging for exercising of al-‘aql under the spirit of dynamism, progressiveness, and rationalism. Thus, this study shall disclose some modern and contemporary thoughts and trends, with regard to the role and the position of al-‘aql.

It has been felt that the concept of al-<sup>ʿ</sup>aq̄l as stated in the Qur'ān is not properly appreciated. Classical exegesis (tafsīr) of such concept has not been explored widely. There have been various perspectives with regard to the position and the role of al-<sup>ʿ</sup>aq̄l enunciated by the Qur'ānic exegesists (mufassirūn). This study, later, is assumed to bring to light some of the main perspectives of the mufassirūn with regard to al-<sup>ʿ</sup>aq̄l.

Some misconceptions could prevail as people continuously and freely use al-<sup>ʿ</sup>aq̄l to maintain their unauthoritative and unfounded arguments. This phenomenon could affect the true nature of al-<sup>ʿ</sup>aq̄l as propounded in Islam. It is hoped that the study would offer an objective understanding of al-<sup>ʿ</sup>aq̄l. This would enable Muslim to use al-<sup>ʿ</sup>aq̄l in order to attain the truth.

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE WESTERN CONCEPTION OF REASON.

### **The Meaning of Reason and Intellect in the Western Perspective.**

One of the basic questions in Western traditions which continues to baffle in contemporary thinkers of the West is the human mind and its relation to the senses<sup>1</sup>. According to Adler, the question is posed whether to regard the human mind as a single cognitive power, or should it be divided into two quite distinct cognitive powers - sense and everything to which the senses give rise, on the one hand; and intellect, able to understand, judge, and reason, on the other hand. This question presents us with irreconcilable alternatives. This has led to a mistaken view and often complicates the understanding of the cognitive instrument of human mind, without giving any weight to intellectuality<sup>2</sup>.

Hence it is necessary to clarify the meaning of both reason and intellect as understood in Western literature, and later this would help to remove some ambiguities with regard to the meaning and nature of both terms.

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<sup>1</sup> Adler, Mortimer, J., Ten Philosophical Mistakes, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1985), p. 32

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 37 - 42.



The term reason, (Latin, ratio) is defined as "the act of reckoning, calculation, explanation and the act of showing a sufficient reason for one's conduct and justification"<sup>3</sup>. Ratiocinatio means the process or act of reasoning, calculation, ratiocination and theorizing<sup>4</sup>. In Greek the nearest equivalent to reason is logos which also has a narrower meaning of verbum (word). Reason as it relates to the term logos is the process of thinking as the organizational principle of the universe; the ability to give an account (logos) of what one knows; and statement of a distinguishing characteristic of a thing. Aristotelian usage of logos refers to reason, rationality, particularly in an ethical context<sup>5</sup>.

The use of reason, as viewed by Meagher, must reflect "an individual's possession of a capacity to employ his thinking and volitional powers here and now in the direction and control of his behaviour in such a way that his actions can be accounted truly human and morally imputable"<sup>6</sup>. The word "reason" also includes the human capacity for seeing, forming, and investigating cognitive relations<sup>7</sup>. In the most generalized

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<sup>3</sup> Glare, P.G.W. (Ed.), Oxford Latin Dictionary, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1983), pp. 1575-1577

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Peters, F.E., Greek Philosophical Terms, (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p. 111

<sup>6</sup> Meagher, P.K., "Reason, Use of" in New Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. xii, (Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America, 1967), p. 118

<sup>7</sup> The Encyclopedia of Religion, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), Vol. II, p. 223

sense, reason is defined as the relational element in intelligence, as distinct from the elements of content, sensation or emotion<sup>8</sup>.

Another approach in defining reason is through the distinction of man and animal. Man is often defined as the "rational animal" and thus there has been an attempt to distinguish "human reason" and the "reason of animal". It is argued that animals have "reason" as well as "instinct"<sup>9</sup>. Adler however, argues that animals have no mind and intelligence but are completely determined by innate, performed patterns of behaviour that we call instincts. They cannot learn from experience or modify their behaviour in consequence of such learning<sup>10</sup>.

From a Christian (Catholic) theological point of view, reason is related to revelation in two ways: as the subject of revelation (inasmuch as revelation is addressed to reason) and as an instrument of revelation (inasmuch as revelation is grasped by reason). God in revelation makes use of concepts that are already familiar to man in order to yield to his mind concepts (e.g. the Triune Being) and facts (e.g., the Incarnation) that reason alone would never be able to attain. Although human reason would never be able to attain and fathom them, nevertheless, human reason can gradually reach a better

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<sup>8</sup> The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1918); Vol. X, p. 593

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 593

<sup>10</sup> Adler, Ten Philosophical Mistakes, pp. 31-32

understanding of them<sup>11</sup>. This may proceed either from a truth of faith to another truth of faith or from a truth of faith to a truth of reason<sup>12</sup>.

In the field of science, reason is taken to mean the principle of consistency in the universe. The term "universe" is so called here because of just this element of unity<sup>13</sup>. Since this is an understanding of the term "reason" in science, then it is necessary to know the term "reasoning". Reasoning is the process of deriving propositions that are logically consistent with other propositions -- inductive or deductive as the case may be. And, as applied to Nature, this becomes the process of discovering the threads of consistency that characterize relationship in the universe, where reason holds good. What science attempts to do is to find mathematical expression for these relationships, even where such relationships seem to defy mathematical expression.<sup>14</sup>

Another problem that needs clarification is the relationship between faith and reason. One position that has been forwarded is that there is no distinction between faith and reason:

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11 New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. XII, p. 121

12 Ibid., p. 121

13 Rothschild, Richard C., The Emerging Religion of Science, (New York: Preager Publishers, 1989), p. 29.

14 Ibid., p. 29.

- i. Faith absorbs, dominates, and eliminates the need for reason, as in fideism or traditionalism;
- ii. Reason can totally encompass matters of faith, as in rationalism, scientism, modernism;
- iii. the distinction between faith and reason is entirely due to the limitations of abstract thinking itself and by no means expresses the real state of affairs, as in naturalism and supernaturalism<sup>15</sup>.

Another position advocates that a real distinction may be posited:

- i. faith and reason are opposed as contraries, as two modes of knowing, each of which plays an independent role in all spheres of human thought and activity;
- ii. faith and reason are opposed as the perfect to the perfectible (or vice versa): faith (or reason) provides man with firm, adequate knowledge whereas reason (or faith) attains only a vague approximation;
- iii. faith and reason, though distinct, are interrelated in a highly complex way that each believer and each new generation of believers must rethink, reclarify, and reunify<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. V, p. 807

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 807

The attraction to reason in the later period of Western intellectual tradition had contributed to the rise of what is called "rationalism". It is a theory or system that stresses reason's independence from the senses in philosophy or from supernatural revelation in religion. In the philosophical perspective, rationalism stresses the power of a priori reason to grasp substantive truths about the world and tends to single out and magnify human reason while minimizing other human powers, such as sense, imagination, and free will<sup>17</sup>.

Religious rationalism holds that reason is supremely competent in matters of faith and morals and hence the theory of man, of his relation with God, and of his destiny can be had from human intelligence, and thereby excludes revelation and evidence of any authoritative witness<sup>18</sup>, while in the theological sphere, rationalism as asserted by A.W. Benn is the hostile criticism of theological dogma which is "a mental habit of using reason for the destruction of religious belief". This view is supported further by J.B. Barry who views that the term rationalism is limited to the field of theology, "because it was in that field that the self-assertion of reason was most violently and pertinaciously opposed"<sup>19</sup>.

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17 The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. VII - VIII, p. 69; Encyclopedia of Religions and Ethics, Vol. X, p. 580

18 New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. XII, p. 91

19 E.R.E., Vol. X, p. 580

The study of human mind has led to the interesting analysis of reason on the one hand, and intellect on the other. These two terminologies are dealt separately under epistemology and psychology respectively. Intellect in the psychological context is seen as the cognitive function of the mind, including reasoning, conceiving, judging, and relating. Its function involves the acquisition, development and applications of ideas, hypotheses, and theories to the solution of problems<sup>20</sup>.

In its Latinized form, intellectus stands for the action of recognizing or discerning (with the senses). It is a faculty of comprehension and understanding<sup>21</sup>. Perhaps the nearest Greek equivalent is nous which means intelligence, intellect and mind. Xenophanes talks about some one who accomplishes his ends by the power of his mind (nous) alone. Its operation is described as the essential property of the gods shared by only a few men. This universe, and its revolution, is reflected in the motion of the heavens, and is a moral paradigm for man<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Goldenson, Robert M., (Ed.), Longman Dictionary of Psychology and Psychiatry, (New York: Longman, 1984), pp. 383-384. Further elucidation of the subject see, James, William, The Principles of Psychology, (New York: Dover Publication, 1980), 2 Vols.

<sup>21</sup> Glare, Oxford Latin Dictionary, p. 935

<sup>22</sup> Peter, Greek Philosophical Terms, pp. 132-133

The intellect, says Donceal, is an immaterial or spiritual cognitive faculty. It is a faculty by means of which man performs mental or conscious operations, and a cognitive faculty is concerned with the mental operation of knowing. Immaterial or spiritual signifies something not intrinsically dependent on matter, not requiring matter as an auxiliary cause for its existence or for its operation<sup>23</sup>.

### **The Place of Reason in the Bible**

Besides the theological and philosophical thought of Christianity, it is pertinent to bring forth what the Bible says about reason. Reason is not one of the major themes of the Bible, as the Bible expresses mostly the ideas of grace, justice, and judgement; truth and fidelity; truth and goodness; goodness and tenderness; sin and what is encompassed in sin; themes of damnation (satanic powers and the accursed places) and love.<sup>24</sup>

It is convenient to begin with what the Bible speaks about faith and its relationship with reason. In the medieval writings the relationship between faith and reason was based on the acceptance of faith first. One is required to believe before one understands. This is stated in the Bible : "... If ye shall not believe , surely ye shall not understand". ( Is. 7 : 9 ).

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<sup>23</sup> Donceal, J.F., "Intellect", in New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. VII, p. 554

<sup>24</sup> Guillet, Jacques, Themes of the Bible (Indiana: Fides Publishers, Inc., 1964), pp. 96-118; pp. 137-147.

By the word understanding, Augustine viewed as rational insight into the content of Revelation, human reason groping its way towards the full lights of the beatific vision.<sup>25</sup>

In order to make someone believe in God, it is necessary to make a distinction between God and the world, for God is all-supreme. This similarly involves words and thoughts which would assist one to see the possibility of such distinction: "How are they to believe him of whom they have not heard? and how are they to hear, if no one preaches?... Faith then depends on hearing and hearing on the word of Christ". (Rom. 10 : 14, 17 ).

From the above verses, the distinction, according to Sokolowski, can only be stated by voice; "This is a voice of scripture, particularly that of the New Testament; there is a voice of the Church; and behind and in both of these there is the voice of Christ himself"<sup>26</sup>.

The call to believe always finds rejection from people. They disregard the salvation which could bring them to love and avoiding sin. But the "relational" element in them, that is, the reasoning faculties, always lead them astray from the message of the Christ, as Paul said "And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not " (Act. 28:24).

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25 Gilson, Reason and Revelation, p. 19.

26 Sokolowski, The God of Faith and Reason, pp. 24-25