

ASPECTS OF CERTAINTY IN THE QUR’ĀN

Mahdi Abbaszadeh*

Abstract

The problem of certainty is one of the most fundamental problems of epistemology, to the extent that there is no epistemological school of thought, ranging from eastern (including Islamic ones) and western schools, which, affirmatively or negatively, do not discuss on the definition of certainty and its possibility and conditions.

The ultimate extent of certainty in the Qur’ān is the human's hearty tranquility and quiescence after attaining true Knowledge (the knowledge which corresponds to reality). It means that firstly a true knowledge must be realized for human, but this is not deficient enough by itself, rather it needs hearty tranquility and quiescence. Hence, in the Qur’ān, the ultimate extent of certainty is the sum of both epistemological and psychological certainty. From the Qur’anic perspective, such certainty is not acquired through humanistic schools; because they are restricted to human’s epistemological defective faculties, and hence there is no choice except appealing to revealed Knowledge.

Keywords: Qur’ān, Knowledge, Certainty, Conjecture, Ignorance, Reason, Heart, Argument, Intuition, Inspiration, Revelation.

1. Introduction

The problem of certainty is one of the most fundamental problems in epistemology, so far as there is no epistemological school, ranging from eastern schools (including Islamic ones) and western schools, which does not discuss on certainty and its possibility and conditions affirmatively or negatively.

Islamic epistemology, including the Qur’anic epistemology, is a certainist school.

The difference between the Qur’anic view and many other epistemological schools (especially some of the western schools) is in this fact that the Qur’ān does not consider uncertain knowledge as a true knowledge.

Sometimes, a view point is considered as a certain one in other schools that from the Qur’anic perspective it is conjecture, doubt or even ignorance.*

Therefore the superiority of the Qur’ān over the other schools is in its maximum certainist-oriented perspective.

*Assoc. Prof. at “Islamic Research Institute for culture and thought”, Tehran, Iran mehr_1777@yahoo.com
Accepted and presented to the 2nd Symposium in Ankara on *Rethinking the Qur’ān*, May10-11, 2014 ISSN

As it will be noted, the Qur’ān asks its audiences to be always committed to certainty (for instance, see these Qur’anic verses: 1:4, 118; 5:50; 30:60; 45:20; 26:24; 27:22, 14) and not to follow conjecture and doubt -as these are against certainty- and naturally ignorance -as it is against knowing and knowledge.

2. The Meaning of Certainty and Its Types

At a glance, certainty has two types: epistemological certainty and psychological certainty.

By epistemological certainty I mean what logically and philosophically considered as certain, without referring to any specific school.

In Islamic thought, Epistemological certainty is the belief that a knowledge or a proposition is true, it means, it truly indicates to the reality (including the mental or rational reality and external or objective reality) and it is corresponded to a reality and also it could not be imaginable that the knowledge or proposition is not corresponded to reality (for instance, see: Sohrawardi, 1388, p. 83).

It is necessary to note some points about the abovementioned definition:

1. The first part of the definition, that is “epistemological certainty is the belief that a knowledge or a proposition is true”, is raised to expel conjecture and doubt¹ from the definition, because if human does not have categorical belief or credence to his/her knowledge, in fact, he is not in the state of certainty but he is in the state of conjecture or doubt. Thus epistemological certainty is against conjecture and doubt.

2. Certain knowledge surely must be true, that is it must be corresponded with the reality. This is the very epistemic realism.²

If a knowledge is not corresponded to the reality, it will not be true knowledge, and thus no certainty will be achieved.

¹ The "conjecture" is that a knowledge or proposition corresponding to the reality, with the possibility of imagination of the opposite, that is non-correspondence of it to the reality. The Qur’ān often rejects the conjecture and has a negative view to it (for instance, see these Quranic verses: 3:154; 53:23, 28; 6:116; 28:39; 41:22; 10:66; 49:12). The Qur’ān in a few cases glorifies the conjecture and has not negative view to it, but in these cases does not regard it in a common sense (that is philosophical sense) but in a sense which is near to the certainty (for the instances, see this Quranic verse: 2:46). It must be mentioned that with considering the mere “belief”, the “doubt” is previously put away from our definition, because the doubt is hesitancy in the fact that whether a knowledge or a proposition is corresponded to the reality or not. Thus the doubt is against the belief. The Qur’ān often rejects the doubt and has a negative view to it (for the instance, see these Quranic verses: 14: 9, 10; 27:66; 2:2; 3:9). The Qur’ān in a few cases, regards the doubt as neutral or at least has not negative view to it (for instance, see the Quranic verse: 10:94)

² The epistemic realism is one of the “theories of truth” in epistemology which according to it, the human knowledge, with the retention of formal and material conditions, is true if it corresponds to the reality. Epistemic realism in turn, has some types.

It should be noted that the reality is not merely equivalent to the external world but it is different for various propositions:

For example, the reality for mental or rational propositions is the very mind or reason and for the external propositions it is external world or object. Therefore, the reality is more general than the mind or reason and external world, and for each proposition it is considered its correspondence with the specific reality of that proposition.³

3. The second part of the definition, that is “it could not be imaginable that the knowledge or proposition is not corresponded to reality”, is raised to expel both “simple ignorance” and “compound ignorance” from the definition. Because if we imagine that the knowledge or proposition is not corresponded to the reality, firstly that knowledge or sapience is the lack of knowledge or lack of sapience and it is simple ignorance, and secondly this lack of knowledge or ignorance is also unknown for us and this is the compound ignorance. Therefore epistemological certainty is against ignorance (simple and compound).

4. Epistemological certainty in turn has two types: universal and particular ones.

Universal epistemological certainty is defined as: A) a knowledge or a proposition which is corresponded to the reality, B) together with the impossibility of imagining that knowledge or proposition is not corresponded to the reality.

But the particular epistemological certainty will be realized when the decay of the two abovementioned be also impossible in future. This certainty is more credible than the universal certainty and in Islamic thought the epistemological certainty is of this type as such.

Ibn Sina named this type of certainty as permanent certainty against the temporary certainty which does not have the stable attribute (See: Avicenna, 1404, p. 78).

5. At a glance, the phrase “a knowledge or a proposition” shows that certainty could be merely achieved when an predication or a judgment took place, it means that a predicate have been predicated on a subject (or have been deprived from it). Therefore, certainty is merely present for the “propositional knowledge” or “knowledge that”, as the majority of the Islamic philosophers and western epistemologists hold it.

Two types of certainty could be considered as epistemological certainty: rational and intuitive ones.⁴

³ It should be noted that mind or reason is in itself one stage of the stages of reality (or in Islamic philosophers Words, “Nafs-Ul-Amr”(fact itself). The mind or reason in comparative with objective reality is subjective, but in itself is a completely objective thing, similar to other objective things, for it is an existent or entity in the human. As the objective beings have a series of judgments, the mind or reason has a series of judgments too. So, although the mind or reason is not external, but is objective and real.

⁴ Although Islamic thinkers often affirm sense perception (and imaginative perception), and regard them as important and applied stages of human knowledge, some of them such as Peripatetic seek for the certainty -in its exact meaning- in the rational perception, and some of Mystics consider it in Intuitive Perception, and the others like Illuminists in the both rational and intuitive perception. Among them, Sohrawardi regards sense perception (and imaginative perception) as

Rational certainty is the result of rational argumentation and specially proof, and intuitive certainty is the outcome of human direct experience from objective reality without the mediation of subjective forms.⁵

Intuitive certainty in turn is in three types: certainty derived from sensual intuition, certainty derived from rational intuition and certainty derived from hearty intuition.

Sensual intuition is the direct sensual perception of the external objects (sensible things); rational intuition is direct perception of the rational concepts; and hearty intuition is direct perception of the world truths, without mediation of mental forms, through intuitive apprehension (Al-Mukashafah) especially in the form of inspiration or eventually revelation.

But psychological certainty means the human’s hearty tranquility and quiescence related to his/her absolute knowledge and mainly a sort of conviction which logically and philosophically is not considered as a true certainty.

2.1 Rational Certainty

The Qur’ān approved rational knowledge (and naturally the certainty derived from it) as an important level of certainty (for instance, see these Qur’anic verses: 2:44, 76; 3:65; 6: 32; 7:169; 10:16, 100; 11:51; 12:109; 22:46; 8:22) and fundamentally considers the truth as result of proof which is the peak of human rational activity (for instance, see these Qur’anic verses: 2:111; 21:24; 27:64; 23:117; 28:75; 4:174).

Here is cleared that, against the views of fideism school, the Qur’ān does not invite to a merely simple belief or blind faith that is an unreasonable and unjustified faith. It considers rational reasoning and proof necessary for achieving certainty.

In Peripatetic logic, proof is a sort of analogy and analogy is a sort of argumentation.

Argument is consisted of exploring unknown propositions through the known propositions and consequently is a sort of mental action.

Argumentation has three types: analogy, induction and allegory.

Intuitive and presential knowledge. In any way, according to them, true and certain knowledge must be consisted of generality (inclusion) and necessity, but sense perception and (and imaginative perception) don’t have such properties (for instance, see: Javadi Amoli, 1379, p.256-260). Plato regards the perception as true knowledge that at first must be on what there is (and not on what always is becoming, like sensible things) and second be infallible (on the opposition to sense perception which is fallible) and thus he does not regard sense perception as true knowledge (See: Plato, 1997, p.169-170).

⁵ It should be mentioned that according to Islamic thinkers the self-consciousness, that is human knowledge to subjective reality (consisting of human knowledge to the self, faculties and situations and modes of the self, and existence of his/her body) and human knowledge to his/her mental forms and judgments (known by itself), is a direct perception and without mediation of the mental forms, and thus is of kinds of presential knowledge, however my discuss in this paper is on human knowledge to objective things (known by accident).

Analogy is the most important and strongest type of argumentation. Analogy is an argumentation composed of two or more propositions (premises) which if they were true then naturally the result will be necessary. In another word, analogy will lead to a true knowledge if it is true in terms of matter and form. In analogy, human achieves the particular result from a general premise.

Five types of Analogy are: proof, debate, rhetoric, sophistry and Poetry. Proof is the most important and strongest type of analogy. Proof is an analogy which is composed of self-evident premises.

A proposition is self-evident when only with imagining the subject and its predicate, the verification of the affirmation of the predicate over the subject is provided and there is no need for contemplation, examination and argumentation. The self-evident premises of the proof are in six types: apriori premises, apriori data, sensible premises, data by guess, empirical premises, data by transmission.

It should be noted that proof in the Qur’ān has wider meaning than the pre-mentioned Peripatetic logic and it seems that it covers all absolute authentic rational argument, although in these Qur’anic verses implicates the meaning wholly other than rational argument:

1. For instance, the phrase of “proof of his Lord” in this Qur’anic verse: “were it not that he [Yusuf] had seen the of his Lord” (12:24). Here, the proof of his Lord is something other than rational proof and it seems that is some kind of hearty intuition (it will be presented in the next part of this paper) that is the direct observation (See: Shahrzoori, 1372, p. 392-393), Because the Qur’ān used the verb “to see” which is a kind of observation while if the intention was rational proof the verbs like “to listen” was sufficient.

2. The phrase “two proofs” in this Qur’anic verse: “(Oh Moses!) Enter your hand into the opening of your bosom, it will come forth white without evil, and draw your hand to yourself to ward off fear; so these two shall be two proofs from your Lord to Firon and his chiefs” (28:32). Proof in this verse is not rational proof and apparently it means clear and illustrative sign.

2.2 Intuitive Certainty

About the intuitive certainty it seems that the Qur’ān approved sensual and rational perception (for sensual perception, see these Qur’anic verses: 16:78; 23:78; 32:9; 17:36; 67:23; and for rational perception, see these Qur’anic verses: 2:44, 76; 3:65; 6: 32; 7:169; 10:16, 100; 11:51; 12:109; 22:46; 8:22) but did not mentioned sensual intuition (that is perception of the external objects directly and without the mediation of the mental forms) and rational intuition (that is perception of the rational concepts directly and without the mediation of the mental forms). Meanwhile the Qur’ān introduces an epistemic instrument named “Heart” (for instance, see these Qur’anic verses: 17:36; 16:24; 16:78; 47:24; 50:37) and not only mentioned hearty

intuition (means direct perception of the world truths without the mediation of the mental forms through intuitive apprehension, specially in the form of inspiration or finally revelation) but also placed it above rational certainty.

Intuitive certainty in the Qur’ān is based on inspiration and specially revelation (in wakefulness and dream) with the divine help (for instance, see these Qur’anic verses: 4:163; 6:75; 7:172, 173; 17:39; 12:3, 4; 53:10; 37:102; and many other verses about inspiration or revelation) although in the Qur’ān possibility of achieving the place of intuitive certainty is dependent to act according to the Qur’anic values.

There are three main differences between inspiration and revelation:

1. Inspiration belongs to messengers, saints of God, mystics and even ordinary religious people (pious) but revelation only belongs to messengers.

In these Qur’anic verses: “Then He inspired it [the human soul] to understand what is right and wrong for it” (91:8) or “And your Lord inspired to the bee...” (16:68), such inspiration or revelation is inspiration or revelation in its universal meaning and can only be some sort of instinct and divine innate disposition; or the revelation in this Qur’anic verse: “and He revealed in every heaven its affair” (41:12), such inspiration apparently means “to stabilize” and to “set up”. Thus, the meaning of inspiration or revelation in this paper is its particular meaning which the first case (inspiration) is given to messengers, saints and good people and the second case (revelation) is given merely to the messengers.

2. Receiving inspiration is direct and without the mediation of the revelation angel but receiving revelation can be both directly without the mediation of the mediation angle as well as with the mediation of the revelation angel.

In the Qur’ān, revelations to all messengers are the instances for the revelation with the mediation of the angel but for example when God spoke to Moses in the sacred valley of Tuwa (see these Qur’anic verses: 20:9-24) is one of the instances for revelation without the mediation of the angle.

3. Inspiration is a kind of receiving comprehension that has the individual and personal ultimate goal but revelation is a kind of receiving comprehension that has the public and social ultimate goal.

It is needed to be explained that western thinkers consider inspiration and revelation as two kinds of religious experience.

In the words of some Christian theologians, inspiration is merely an individual religious experience but revelation is a universal religious experience. This revelation is “classic” or “primordial” revelation which is only for messengers.

Basically, inspiration belongs to the person itself and is totally personal and private, and does not necessarily influence on the society (although the one who receive it may undertake the social responsibility) but revelation is always universal and public, that is, in revelation human gains an experience that has public benefits and must lead to the guidance of the society toward the transcendent path. (See: Macquarrie, 1977, p. 8)

2.3 Psychological Certainty

The Qur’ān emphasis on the psychological certainty (that is the human's hearty tranquility and quiescence for his knowledge), in line with the epistemological certainty.

The Qur’anic word for this kind of certainty is “hearty to be at ease (or at rest)”. The Qur’anic consideration for this type of certainty can be seen in the request of Ibrahim from God for (corporeal) resurrection (See: the Qur’anic verse: 2:260) as well as the other Qur’anic verses (for instance, see the Qur’anic verse: 13:28).

As it mentioned, psychological certainty is mainly a sort of conviction and it is not considered as a certainty logically and philosophically, because in such certainty human mentally believes in his knowledge (whether it would be a sensual an rational knowledge or even would be intuitive, and whether it would be true, means being corresponded to the reality or it would be false, means not being corresponded to the reality. Indeed, in such certainty human firstly believes a knowledge and regards it as true and then achieves hearty tranquility and quiescence.

Therefore, psychological certainty is different from epistemological one. The important matter in psychological certainty is merely human's hearty tranquility and quiescence and not necessarily truth and falsehood of a knowledge. But epistemological certainty is merely the outcome of the truth, that is the correspondence to reality together with the impossibility of imagining the non- correspondence to reality.

3. The Ultimate Extent of Certainty in the Qur’ān

It can be deduced from the Qur’anic verses that the Qur’ān emphasized on both epistemological and psychological certainty, because the ultimate extent of certainty in the Qur’ān is the human's hearty tranquility and quiescence after reaching to the true knowledge.

It means that there are three requirements for reaching ultimate extent of certainty:

1. Firstly, the knowledge (including rational or intuitive) must realize for human;
2. In the next step, this knowledge must be true, that is it must be corresponded to the reality and also must be impossible to imagine non-correspondence of it to the reality (epistemological certainty);

3. Finally, hearty tranquility and quiescence must realize for human (psychological certainty). Because sometimes it would be possible that a true knowledge (epistemological certainty) realize for human but the hearty tranquility and quiescence does not realize yet.

Therefore, the Qur’anic certainty is the result of true knowledge in addition to hearty tranquility and quiescence. Thus, the Qur’anic certainty is necessarily the sum of both epistemological and psychological certainty.

Certainty in the Qur’ān has three levels: “Ilm ul-Yaqin” (certain by knowing) (102:5); “Ayn ul-Yaqin” (certainty by sight) (102:7); and “Haqq ul-Yaqin” (truth of certainty) (56:95).

It seems that, Ilm ul-Yaqin is comparable with the rational epistemological certainty; Ayn ul-Yaqin is comparable with the intuitive epistemological certainty (due to the inspiration and specially revelation); Haqq ul-Yaqin is comparable with the ultimate extent of certainty in the Qur’ān, that is the sum of both epistemological and psychological certainty.

3.1 The Analysis of the Qur’anic Certainty

1. I have no new contemplation on the rational certainty from the Qur’anic perspective, because there are many contradictories and affirmative discussions by the western philosophers in the history of thought over the reliability and credibility of rational argumentation especially for the problem of proof, and there is no need to repeat them.

2. The Qur’ān considers rational certainty as an entry and level for certainty which is very necessary and useful, but it must be passed over to the intuitive certainty because the certainty derived from direct and objective intuition is superior than the rational certainty.

3. Islamic thinkers -influenced by the Qur’ān- named hearty intuition as “al-mushahadat ul-haqqah” (true intuition), that is an intuition which is necessarily true not the intuition in general. They put it in a place higher than the rational perception and even proof, therefore it is considered as presenter of the ultimate epistemological certainty. Hearty intuition is direct and is a kind of presential knowledge (for instance, see: Sohrawardi, 1375, p. 18). Argumentation and reasoning is dependent on time and temporal while intuition is timeless and in fact is ultra-time.

4. It may be objected that rational argumentation and proof is true and certain for everyone and therefore it is credible but human's hearty intuition could not be assumed credible, true and certain for the others.

Primarily it must be noted that according to the Islamic thinkers, perceptions resulted from revelation are always credible but perceptions resulted from inspiration may be true or false; in another word it could be divine, angelic or satanic.

Some of the Islamic thinkers hold that understanding the differences between divine and angelic perceptions from one side and satanic perception from the other side, is dependent to the existential capacity and level of the preceptor. A person who had enough growth in terms of existential level can easily distinguish the differences between these two types of perceptions with the help of some signs; every perception that leads to good and would not meet change and mutation rapidly is divine or angelic and otherwise it is satanic.

Usually the perceptions that belong to worldly affairs like fortune telling or divination are not credible, but the perception belong to the otherworldly affairs are divine and angelic like having conscience of what is in other minds or mastery over human's minds (See: Mulla sadra, no date, p. 536)

Answering to abovementioned objection we can add that it is clear that hearty intuition could not be assumed true and certain without precise evaluation and judgment, as the Islamic thinkers do not consider all the intuitive perceptions of the claimers as the true one but rather sometimes they talk about the satanic infusions in some intuitive experiences of some people. Therefore the true intuition is merely valid.

5. It may be objected that rational argumentations and proofs are generalizable and transferable, that is it can be conceived by everyone, while hearty intuition is not generalizable and transferrable and at last it can be conceived and useful for the person possessing that.

For the answer we can say: we must note that generalizability and transferability of the hearty intuition is not a insoluble problem, because from the Islamic thinkers perspective anyone can receive inspirational perceptions if he/she act according to the Qur’anic values and divine willing; although revelatory perceptions is merely for the messengers.

6. we can deduct from the Qur’anic verses that the ultimate extent of certainty is not achievable through humanistic schools, because these schools are influenced by the humanistic limits and human’s epistemological defective faculties and therefore for taking advantages of such certainty there is no way except appealing to the revealed source and divine book: “And follow what is revealed to you” (see: 10:109; and also see these Qur’anic verses: 7:203; 18:27; 43:43; 11:12; 33:2; 3:187; 19:12; 23:49; 62:2)

4. Conclusion

Based on cited notes, it seems, from the Qur’anic viewpoints, the ultimate extent of certainty is the human's hearty tranquility and quiescence after attaining true Knowledge (the knowledge which corresponds to reality). It means that firstly a true knowledge must be realized for human, but this is not deficient enough by itself, rather it needs hearty tranquility and quiescence. Hence, in the Qur’ān, the ultimate extent of certainty is the sum of both epistemological and psychological certainty. From the Qur’anic perspective, such certainty is

not acquired through humanistic schools; and hence there is no choice except appealing to revealed Knowledge.

Resources

1. Ibn Sina, Abu-Ali Hussain Ibn Abdellah; *Al-shifa- Al_mantiq: Al-Burhan*; Research by Sa'id Zayed and ...; Ayatollah Mar'ashi Library; Qom; First ed., 1404.
2. Javadi Amoli, Abdollah; *Thematic Interpretation of the Holy Qur'ān: Epistemology in the Qur'ān*; Edited by Hamid Parsania; Markaz Nashr Asra; Qom; Second ed., 1379.
3. Macquarrie, John, *Principles of Christian Theology*, Charles Scribners Sons, New York, Second ed., 1977.
4. Mulla Sadra, Sadr ul-Din Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim Qawam Shirazi; *Al-Ta'liqat ala Sharh Hikmat ul-Ishraq*; Bidar Publication; Qom; Stone print; no date.
5. Plato, *Theaetetus: Complete Works*, Edited with Introduction and Notes by John A. Cooper, Hackett Publishing Company, Indiana Polis/ Cambridge, First published, 1997.
6. Shahrzoori, Shams-al-ddin, *Sharh-e- Hikmat ul-Ishraq*, introduction and revision: Hossein Ziaee Torbati, Moassesse Motale'at va Tahqiqat Farhangi, Tehran, First ed., 1372.
7. Sohrevardi (Shaikh ul-Ishraq), Shahab al-Ddin Yahya Ibn Habash Ibn Amirak; *Al-Talwihat al-Llawhiyyah wa al-Arshiyyah*; revision and introduction: Najafqoli Habibi; Mo'assesse Pajuheshi Hekmat wa Falsafah Iran, Tehran, First ed., 1388.
8. -----; *Hikmat ul-Ishraq*; second vol., revision and introduction: Henry Corbin, Moassesse Motale'at va Tahqiqat Farhangi, Tehran, Second ed., 1375.
9. *The Holy Qur'ān*.