

Religious Extremism

Jama'ah Islamiyyah, al-Qaeda and ISIS

Dr. Ali Akbar Ziaee

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Introduction

Values of Moderation in Intellectual validity

Moderation is term with a wide spectrum of different meaning in our Islamic history. Every Islamic school of thought has its definition and sometime we can find a kind of contradiction in all these different commentaries which you cannot refer them to an abstract common concept. The avoidance of extremes as definition of moderation could increase the ambiguity, because you can ask again about the extreme to find out the meaning of moderation. It means that we are in «vicious circularity» for defining this simple term. So I want to conclude that the definition of moderation cannot help us to understand which political movement or ideological thought are in moderate position and the others are in extreme. Now it is a time to transfer to beyond the terminology and ask: how can we recognize that something is not exceeding the borders of moderation? In other word: what is the best scale to evaluate the position of thoughts and operations? Many Muslim theologians and Fuqaha consider Quran and Sunnah the best scale for determining the validity of thoughts and actions, and they refer to several Hadiths from prophet Mohammad (AS) such as: "O people, I am leaving among you that which if you hold fast to you will not stray: the Book of Allah and my Sunnah." The Hadith is *Sahih* and Muslim Nishabouri recorded this hadith in the chapter *Fada'il al-Sahabah*. There is no Muslim to doubt about the validity of this hadith, but we know that all schools of thought political Islamic movements in our century believe in this hadith. The other question is: how is it possible with one

Quran and one prophet Muslims are different in ideology and politics and all schools pretend and claim to be a moderate Islam?

According to the idea of "*Naql vs Aql*" the function of reason with regard to Qur'an and Sunnah is to understand and accept them. Reason has no role in religion except understanding the orders of Allah. For supporting this position, they refer to religious texts that make it obligatory for Muslims to follow Qur'an and Sunnah. Also, they suggest such texts warn Muslims against offering any opinions or suggestions that may oppose Qur'anic and Sunnah positions. Allah says, (Surah Al-Hujurat, 49: 1) O you who believe! Make not (a decision) in advance before Allah and His Messenger, and fear Allah. Verily, Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. He says, (Surah Al-A'raf, 7: 3): Follow what has been sent down to you from your Lord, and follow not any *Auliya* besides Him. Little do you remember! Also, Allah says, (Surah Al-Imran, 3: 31) Say: "If you love Allah then follow me, Allah will love you and forgive you your sins." There are other Qur'anic Ayahs that order Muslims to follow the revelation sent down from Allah (may He be Exalted) and warn against following one's personal desires and all that is dictated by reason deviating from the right path. The followers of "*Naql vs Aql*" assert that it is not permissible for a person to be fooled by his reason whatever comprehensive understanding and thought he might have; that he takes his reason as a fundamental and the transmitted texts of the Qur'an and the Sunnah as a branch, accepting what is in agreement with reason and rejecting or distorting all that is in disagreement with it. They conclude that this philosophy of *Aql vs Naql* implies an accusation of the Divine *Shari'ah* and undermines the fundamentals and pillars of the *Shari'ah*. The intellectual debates between Mu'tazili and A'ashari in fourth century of Hijrah was about the validity of *Aql* in *shari'ah*. It means that Quran ask us to know about

Allah as an Islamic obligation or *wajib*, or our Intellect and *Aql* ask us to find out the creator and its attributes? This statement that "we need to prophets interfering between people and Allah" is an intellectual and philosophical argument or is our Islamic duty and *wajib* according to Quran and Sunnah? Mu'tazili supports the idea of "*Aql vs Naql*" and gives the priority to *Aql* instead of *Naql* and narrations of Prophet. The movement of Mu'tazilite led to scientific extremism. Extreme fans of science and philosophy denied many metaphysical facts mentioned in the Quran and Sunnah such as the pressure in grave and bodily resurrection. If Ahl Hadith by paying more attention to narrations and interpretations of the Quran took away from the interests of reason and philosophy, the fans of intellect with their indulgence and excesses in the use of reason stood away from revelation and denied many of the truths of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Now we are in the midst of two ways, one way is tradition and another is reason, but it is also a third way to be examined. The third way is reason enlighten by tradition. We in pure philosophy and mathematics are faced with scientific theories that violations are impossible. Pure mathematics is a follower of pure reason and intellect alone without tradition or hadith can discover mathematical laws.

Many philosophical propositions are not the same as mathematics because several hidden theories which are not proven yet support philosophical propositions and this means that philosophy can be affected by fallacies or rhetorical premises, although they show a reasonable arrangement in the philosophical texts.

In the philosophy of science, observations are said to be "theory-laden" when they are affected by the theoretical presuppositions held by the investigator. So pure sciences and many philosophical theories are affected by unproven and unverified hidden premises which could influence on our beliefs and worldview of the creator and

his messenger. Now we approved that third way can be exist from combination of reason and revelation to lead us to right pass, but how can we find some witnesses from Quran and Sunnah to prove it?

Qur'an makes use of two types of languages, the language of reasoning or rational argument and the language of heart, feeling or intuitive reasoning. Each of these languages has a specific function in Quran. Now we should examine whether or not the Quran acknowledges the "authority" of reason or Quran asks us to be a pure followers as the fans of first group claim. This means whether or not we should respect the judgments of reason and act according to them if they happen to be correct and rightly deduced by it. Moreover, if one acts according to the dictates of reason and occasionally falls into error, will God excuse him for it, or whether He will punish him on account of that error? And, if one fails to act according to the ruling of reason, does he deserve punishment?

More than sixty verses can be found in Quran that emphasis on reasoning. Allah says:

إِنَّ شَرَّ الدَّوَابِّ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الضَّالُّمُ الَّذِينَ لَا يَتَّقُونَ

Surely the worst of beasts in God's sight are those that are deaf and dumb and do not reason. (8:22)

Of course, it is obvious that the Qur'an does not mean the physically deaf and dumb, but those who do not want to listen to truth, or those who, when they hear, do not wish to admit it with their tongues. According to this verse of Quran, the people those who do not make use of their intellect and their faculty of thought, such are not fit to be called human beings. The Qur'an includes them among the beasts. There are many other verses in the Qur'an which can be said to accept the authority of reason. In other words, the Qur'an makes statements which cannot be accepted without accepting the authority of reason. For instance, an opponent is asked to forward rational argument in favour of his position:

قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ إِن كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

Say: Bring your proof if you are truthful. (2:111)

This can only be inferred to mean the Qur'an's verification of the authority of reason. The other argument that supports the view that the Qur'an approves of the ultimate authority of reason, is that it defines various problems in terms of cause-and-effect relationship. The cause-and-effect relationship, or the law of causation, is the foundation of rational thinking. This law is honored by the Qur'an and is also employed by it. The Qur'an urges Muslims to study the conditions and circumstances of societies of the past and to take lesson from their history. It is evident that if the destinies of races and nations were random, or dependent upon accidents, or were prescribed from above, the advice to study and draw a lesson would not have any sense. By laying emphasis on it, the Qur'an intends to remind us that a uniform system of laws governs the destinies of all the nations of the world. Another argument which proves that the Qur'an believes in the ultimate authority of reason, is that the Qur'an always explains the rationale behind its commands, laws and precepts. The scholars of *usul al-din* (the principles of the Faith) maintain that the harms and benefits caused by human deeds are among the reasons behind laws and commands. If the authority of reasoning is approved by Quran, now what is the best way to prevent the philosophers and thinkers from errors in reasoning? The human mind can, in many cases, fall into error. However, this danger is not limited to the intellect alone, but can equally befall the senses, and feelings as well. Just for the sense of vision, scores of visual errors and optical illusions have been pointed out. In the case of reason, too, there are times when people frame an argument and rationale and draw an inference on its basis, but later on they realize that the basis of their conclusion was erroneous. Here the question arises, whether the faculty of reason should be suspended on

account of its occasional failures, or whether we should employ other means for discovering the errors of the intellect and seek to avoid such errors. In answering this question, the Sophists said that reason should not be relied upon, and that, basically, argumentation and reasoning is an absurd practice.

Other philosophers have given a fitting reply to the Sophists, and said that though the senses can also err like reason, but no one has ever recommended their suspension. Since it was not possible to discard reason, the philosophers resolved to find ways of making reason secure from error. During their efforts in this regard, they discovered that all arguments consist of two parts, namely, matter and form. Like a building which has various ingredients in its construction, like, lime, cement, steel, etc. (matter), to acquire a specific structure (form). In order to attain the permanence and perfection of its construction, it is essential to procure proper material as well as to draw a perfect and faultless plan. For the correctness and accuracy of an argument, too, it is essential that its content and form be both free of error and defect. For judging the validity of the form of any argument, the Aristotelian or formal logic came into existence. The function of formal logic is to determine the accuracy or inaccuracy of the form of an argument, and help the mind to avoid errors in the process of reasoning.

But the major problem that remains is that solely formal logic is inadequate for this purpose, because it cannot alone guarantee the validity of an argument. It can give assurance about one aspect alone. To obtain the perfection of the material aspect, the use of material logic is also essential, that is, we need certain criteria for controlling the quality of the rational material.

Thinkers like Bacon and Descartes strove hard to evolve some kind of material logic similar to the formal logic of Aristotle, which was devised for formal reasoning. They

did obtain certain criteria in this regard, though they are not as universal as those of Aristotelian logic, but are, to a limited extent, helpful in preventing the mind from committing errors in reasoning.

Some may be surprised to know that the Qur'an has presented such principles for the prevention of any lapses in the process of reasoning, which surpass in merit and precedence the efforts of philosophers like Descartes and others. Among various sources of error mentioned by the Qur'an, one is that of taking conjecture and hypothesis for certainty and conviction. If a person were to adhere to the principle of putting conviction only in certainties and of not confusing between conjectures and certainties, he would not fall into error. The Qur'an lays great emphasis on this problem, and has clearly stated in one place that one of the biggest errors of the human mind is pursuit of conjectures and hypotheses. In another verse, which is addressed to the Prophet (S), the Qur'an says:

وَأِنْ تُطِيعْ أَكْثَرُ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَضِلُّوكَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَإِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَخْرُصُونَ

"If thou obeyest the most part of those on earth, they will lead thee astray from the path of God: they follow only surmise, merely conjecturing." (6:116)

In another verse, the Qur'an says: وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ

"And pursue not that thou has no knowledge of ... (17:36)

This is the word of caution to mankind extended by the Qur'an, for the first time in the history of human ideas, warning mankind against this kind of error.

The second source of error in the reasoning process, which is particularly relevant in social issues, is imitation. Most people are such that they accept whatever beliefs that are current in their society. They adopt certain beliefs merely for the reason that they were followed by their preceding generation. The Qur'an bids people to carefully scrutinize all ideas and judge them by

the criteria of reason --neither to follow blindly the conventional beliefs and traditions of their ancestors, nor to reject them totally without any rational justification.

It reminds us that there are many false doctrines that were introduced in the past, but were accepted by the people, and there are also certain truths that were presented in the distant past, but people resisted them on account of their ignorance. In accepting any ideas or principles, men are advised to make use of their intellects and rational faculties, and not to indulge in blind imitation. Very often, the Qur'an puts imitation of ancestors in direct opposition to reason and intellect:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَا أَلْفَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا أَوَلَوْ كَانَ آبَاؤُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ شَيْئًا وَهُمْ يَفْتَحُونَ

"And when it is said to them: 'Follow what God has sent down', they say, 'No; but we will follow such things as we found our fathers doing.' What? Even if their fathers had no understanding of anything, and if they were not guided?" (2:170)

The Qur'an constantly reiterates the view that the idea of antiquity of an idea is neither the evidence of its falsity, nor is it a testimony of its truthfulness. Antiquity affects material objects; but the eternal truths of existence never become old and outmoded. Truths like:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ

"God changes not what is in a people, until they change what is in themselves ..." (13:11)

are true for ever and ever. The Qur'an asks us to face issues with the weapon of reason and intellect. One should neither forsake a belief for fear of becoming the target of others' ridicule and banter, nor should he accept a belief just because it is upheld by some important and well-known persons. We should ourselves study and investigate the roots of all matters and draw our own conclusions.

A Third effective source of error pointed out by the Qur'an is: Selfish motives tarnish virtue and merit,

A cascade of curtains gallops from the heart towards vision. Unless one maintains objectivity and neutrality in every matter, he is unlikely to think correctly. Reason can function properly only in an atmosphere that is free of selfish desires and motives. A well-known anecdote of al-Allamah al-Hilli, can illustrate this point.

A problem of fiqh was put before al-Allamah al-Hilli: If an animal falls inside a well, and the carcass cannot be removed; what should be done with the well? Incidentally, during the same days, an animal happened to fall into the well in his own house, and it became inevitable for him to deduce an injunction to solve his own problem, too.

There were two possible ways to solve the issue: Firstly, the well should be totally closed, not to be used again; secondly, a fixed quantity of water should be emptied from the well and the rest water of well would be clean and usable. The 'Allamah realized that he could not give a completely impartial verdict about the problem without interference from his own personal interest. Accordingly, he ordered his own well be closed. Then, with an easy mind, free of the pressure of selfish motives, he turned to deducing the details of verdict in the second case.

The Qur'an contains a large number of warnings regarding the evil of submission to personal desires. The following is just one instance of it:

إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَمَا تَهْوَى الْأَنْفُسُ

"They follow nothing except conjecture and what the self-desires" (53.23)

Dr. Ali Akbar Ziaee
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