

**Revelation and Rationality.  
Intellectual Defense of Islam.**

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**School of Mission and Theology  
Stavanger, February, 2010**

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# 1. Introduction

The following is a textual and systematic analysis of a selection of Islamic literature. Some of the literature in question is primarily devoted to *da'wah*, the propagation of Islam, and consequently aimed at the reader's conversion. Other authors take a more philosophical approach, yet remain faithful to the fundamental teachings of Islam. Assuming that the issue can be treated meaningfully within the frameworks of academic enquiry, the aim of this study is to come closer to a phenomenological understanding of Islam, as far as the selected literature makes it available.

As a starting point we will ask: Are there identifiable philosophical patterns to be discovered in this literature? Specifically, what are the premises of arguments relating to the existence and nature of God? Assuming we will come to a better understanding of the method behind these arguments in light of classic Islamic thought, how is divine revelation conceived to relate conceptually to human rationality?

In order to come closer to a phenomenological understanding of Islam, we need to identify its epistemological foundations. By epistemological foundation, we simply mean that which a religious truth claim rests upon in order to be true. Identifying a religious truth claim phenomenologically neither reduces it as such, nor makes it subject to normative theological judgment. However, questions do arise upon reading the material. Islamic *da'wah* claims not only to tell the truth about God. It seeks to prove God's existence and the divine origin of revelation. An approach which takes the complexity of the material seriously must involve critical examination as to whether or not transcendence can be proven.

The sources that have been selected here are primarily *da'wah* literature as it is presented to an English-speaking, mainly Western audience. This type of literature must be viewed against the backdrop of increased contact between communities, both religious and secular. The call to embrace Islam is a consequence of its claim of universality and is not a modern invention. The word 'defense' suggests, however, that a particular effort is made as to

making Islam intellectually acceptable when approaching at a Western reader. Abdul Wadod Shalabi<sup>1</sup> has expressed this concern in his book *Islam. Religion of life*:

‘This book is written about Islam from within. It seeks to show something of the true nature of faith, thereby challenging the accepted stereotypes which so badly compromise the present dialogue of civilizations. By explaining the significance of the formal practices and doctrines of the Islamic religion it endeavours to build a bridge over what must be the deepest yet most irrational gulf ever to have cleaved apart two cultures.’<sup>2</sup>

The aim of this study does not include dealing with the aspects of Islam that are of special interest to the sociology of religion. Our topic does relate to practical issues, such as for example an ongoing debate over the integration of Islamic theology in Western universities. What happens when philosophical expositions of Islamic doctrine meets a Western intellectual tradition? While our approach here must not be considered an attempt at a comparative study, it is nevertheless assumed that it is possible and worthwhile to treat this relationship on a philosophical level.

We begin our analysis by presenting efforts at proving the existence of God. The focus of chapter 3 will be how certainty about God’s existence is thought to be reached through empirical observation or rational processes. In chapter 4 we ask: According to Islamic *da’wah*, what is the nature of God? Here we will concentrate on efforts to prove *tawhid*, the principle of divine unity. In chapter 5 we turn to literature which may help us understand the methodology behind these arguments. It is here that an Islamic view on the relationship between revelation and rationality will be examined in greater detail. The final chapter will provide a reflection on how we may respond to the arguments with the tools available in the area of religious studies, especially the phenomenology of religion. It will also explore whether it would be appropriate to approach Islamic thought, as it is presented here, within a broader academic perspective. But first, there is more to be said on how we may best approach our material.

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<sup>1</sup> With a scholarly background from both the al-Azhar University in Cairo and the University of Cambridge, Shalabi is the author of several books covering different aspects of Islam.

<sup>2</sup> Shalabi 2006:4

## 2. Material and method.

### 2.1 Introduction.

The primary tools for this study are provided by the chosen texts themselves, in terms of their self-presentation as texts speaking to man's ability to reason. In order to come to a deeper understanding of the epistemology of the selected *da'wah* literature, I have included academic resources written from within an Islamic perspective. I will also approach the topic with analytical tools provided within the field of religious studies and philosophy of science as practised within the Western academic paradigm.

### 2.2 Brief presentation of selected literature.

#### 2.2.1 *Islamic da'wah literature*

I have been aiming toward a qualitative selection to show a representative and varied picture of *da'wah* literature with a focus on the rational aspects of Islam. Some books are regarded as 'classics', others more recently published. Some books are originally publications from theological faculties in Riyadh and Cairo, others are linked to doctorates from Western universities. As this is a type of literature with certain audiences in mind, I have taken into account and considered what is actually being handed out or distributed in relation to *da'wah* efforts in Islamic centres in the Middle East and Western countries<sup>3</sup>. At first here I will very briefly present the central authors, although the collection of sources used will be wider. There are popular authors of *da'wa* literature, whom I have not chosen as a primary source, as the content leans more often toward polemics than toward the fundamental teachings of Islam.<sup>4</sup>. The literature I have chosen can be categorized in two according to agenda and

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<sup>3</sup> For example the Al-Azhar Mosque in Cairo and Islamic Cultural Centre Norway.

<sup>4</sup> I have not selected for example Ahmed Deedat, whose statements enjoy a certain popularity, but also controversy. His arguments often take the form of polemics, where foundations of other religious beliefs are being attacked, but in a way that representatives of those beliefs would not recognize. I have included some polemic material, in terms of arguments against posed central Christian doctrine (for example Bilal Philips), but I have avoided the most extreme literature. This would surely add an interesting complexity, but, as in the case

academic level, yet somewhat overlapping in content. The first type is literature aimed towards the reader's conversion. In this category belong authors such as Abdul Wadod Shalabi: *Islam. Religion of life (2006)*<sup>5</sup>. Shalabi received his theological training at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo and holds a doctorate from the University of Cambridge. He is believed to stand firmly on one leg in each 'camp', or as put in the preface, holds 'an acute understanding of the crisis of the modern world [which] has placed him in a unique position to distill and introduce Islam to multitudes raised in the West'<sup>6</sup> Musavi Lari's *God and His Attributes. Lessons on Islamic Doctrine (2000)* is a thorough presentation of the basics of Islamic theology in which, he 'convincingly refutes the materialist point of view while presenting sound reasoning for the monotheistic world view'<sup>7</sup>. Musavi Lari was born in Iran, where he also completed his studies. He has since travelled and done scholarly work across the world. Other books include Abul Ala Mawdudi's classic *Islams fundament*<sup>8</sup>, Hammudah Abdulati's *Introduksjon til Islam*<sup>9</sup>, more populist literature such as Zaghlul El-Naggar: *Scientific Facts Revealed in the Glorious Qur'an*' (2006)<sup>10</sup> and Bilal Philips: *The true message of Jesus Christ. (1989)*<sup>11</sup>. The latter can be described as being popular form, but conveying academic aspirations. I believe it is also worth including two recordings of lectures held by popular speakers, the first being westerner Abdur Raheem Green with his philosophical lecture: 'Does God exist?', the other being Indian born Zakir Naik, who argues on the same topic, but uses natural science as support for his views.

The second type of books, we may classify as systematic academic literature. These works are more elaborate in their argumentation, they consider classic Islamic thought more systematically, and bring the discussion to a methodological level. I have mainly included two major works by Malay scholar Osman Bakar: *The history and Philosophy of Islamic*

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of Deedat perhaps helpful only to a purely literary analysis. The aim here is to identify what Islam presents itself to be and base my further reflections on that. Major aspects of Deedat's arguments are well covered by other authors, some of which are also clearly inspired by his authorship.

<sup>5</sup> Edited by A.H Murad. Shourouk Int Bookshop, Cairo.

<sup>6</sup> From back cover.

<sup>7</sup> From back cover.

<sup>8</sup> First published in Urdu in 1937. English versions are often titled *Towards understanding Islam*. Several online editions are available. For reference purposes I have used the Norwegian version here. Quotations are my own translations.

<sup>9</sup> Translation: *Introduction to Islam*. Published by Islamic Cultural Centre Norway. An English version exists under the name of *Islam in Focus (1998)*.

<sup>10</sup> There are two editions. One written by El-Nagar, with subtitle *Selected examples from the area of Earth Sciences (2006)*, the other edited by Nabil Haroun (2006) and contains a transcription of a television interview

<sup>11</sup> St. David's college, University of Wales is listed, but probably as a place where Philips got his academic degree, not the publisher. The foreword is dated 1989, but from references made the edition must be from later than 1994.

*Science*(1999) and *Classification of knowledge in Islam. A Study in Islamic Philosophies of Science*(1998). As background material I have also included Iranian philosopher and Islamic scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr: *Science and Civilization in Islam*.(1987). Nasr has also written the foreword in Bakar's book from 1998.

### 2.2.2 Theoretical sources:

The major bulk of first-hand research for this project has been conducted on the Islamic literature. I have sought to analyze the arguments found in it, and through that establish the premises of the argumentation. I have approached the systematic Islamic literature with the aim of analyzing the arguments and to understand the methodology behind them. General references to the fields of philosophy and theology will be made underway. This study is not meant to be comparative in the sense that defined Islamic and Western traditions are put up next to one another, or equally considered. Some epistemological concerns do arise, however, and I have attempted to meet them with tools provided by our field of study. Helpful introductory literature has been: Brian Davies: *An introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (2004), Antonio B. da Silva: *Hva er religionsfenomenologi?* (1996)<sup>12</sup>, Peter Connolly (ed.): *Approaches to the Study of Religion* (1999), and Alan F. Chalmers: *What is this thing called Science?* (1999)

## 2.3. Analyzing Islamic material in an academic context.

### 2.3.1. Choosing an angle: God

I ventured into this literature hoping to eventually grasp the essence of the arguments. But how does one choose an approach to make sure one does not miss out on that which is most significant? I have wanted to touch upon issues such as reason and revelation, philosophy and theology and how they play out in Islamic discourse. One will for example quickly note

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<sup>12</sup> Transl.: *What is (the) phenomenology of religion?* Major elements of the discussion here are also found in da Silva's doctoral thesis: *The phenomenology of Religion as a Philosophical Problem*, Uppsala 1982.

the claim that it is possible, and preferred, to have factual knowledge of religious issues. By factual knowledge based on verifiable facts, and not knowledge as personal conviction. Epistemological concerns are believed to account, in an equal manner, for the whole hierarchy of knowledge. At the top of this hierarchy thrones divine knowledge, the source of all other truths.

As a starting point in the process of dealing with the chosen *da'wah* literature, I have analyzed how the writers respond to their own questions, also known from the field of philosophy, such as 'does God exist?', 'what is the nature of God?', and 'how can we *know* anything about God?'

### *2.3.2. Choosing a lens: Approaches to the study of religion.*

As a starting point I have wanted to let the material to speak for itself. What I have looked for specifically are identifiable patterns of reasoning and identifiable philosophical axioms, both the ones made explicit and those remaining implicit. Some emerge quite clearly from reading through the books even briefly. Have I set out to find *the* methodology of *da'wah*? Not quite. But I believe it to be of value to reflect on the way arguments are being presented, either as directly spelled out or more subtle. This requires a qualitative research of these arguments, using specific examples which I have found to be representative.

When attempting to discuss Islamic theological literature meaningfully in an academic context, one is faced with concerns on a number of levels: First of all, as a researcher of a type of literature aiming for the reader's conversion, one finds oneself belonging in the target group. One needs to find a way to remain an 'outsider' as if the content did not have implications for eternity (a practical judgement), while recognizing the intended level of seriousness. Secondly, one needs to assert whether the views portrayed can be attributed to a representative community of scholars at the present, or belonging in 'alternative' camps, or simply the occasional 'apologetic' experiment. Thirdly, there is the task of handling a wide variety of academic levels. It can be useful to ask whether a book is 'academic' in the sense that it can be used as a viable source of information, or whether the author is biased in his

approach. Meanwhile, literature which does not consider conflicting views at all can also provide interesting information about its method.

The books present themselves as clearly religious, antithetical to atheism and secularism. A definition of religion might be redundant, but one made by Connolly describes well the starting point for the Islamic discourse in question, as well as this research of it: '[M]y definition of the term 'religion' is: *any beliefs which involve the acceptance of a sacred, trans-empirical realm and any behavior designed to affect a person's relationship with that realm*'<sup>13</sup> Connolly also points out that 'information never occurs in a vacuum. Accurate, objective accounts of religious phenomena and religious traditions simply do not exist in their own right.' Here, Islamic scholars are bound to disagree. But as committed to the study of religion, we need to, at our best, pursue what Ninian Smart called 'methodological agnosticism'<sup>14</sup>, which, in Connolly's words, entail 'neither a commitment to the truth or accuracy of one or more religious views[...]nor a conviction of their falsity or inaccuracy.'<sup>15</sup> Connolly further believes an open mind to be the primary requisite towards 'phenomenological *epoché*, the imaginative entering into the world of others'<sup>16</sup>. If one is to make a qualitative judgement at all one must at least identify the premises of these judgements.

The chosen method is, as mentioned, textual and systematic analysis. I have no intention here of discovering the 'essence'<sup>17</sup> of Islam as it *is*. Nor make judgements on its truth or falsity. In terms of purely describing the doctrinal and philosophical dimensions<sup>18</sup> of Islam, the sources speak well for themselves. In other words, a phenomenological approach of simply 'bracketing' arguments based solely on their self-understanding, is not going to get us much further than the sources themselves. I will therefore, toward the end, raise some epistemological concerns which may, after all, help bring us closer to an understanding of the foundations of Islam.

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<sup>13</sup> Connolly 1999:6-7

<sup>14</sup> Connolly 1999:2.

<sup>15</sup> Connolly 1999:2

<sup>16</sup> Connolly 1999:2-3.

<sup>17</sup> Discussed in da Silva/Ore 1996:68 as the counterpart to descriptive phenomenology.

<sup>18</sup> Connolly 1999:x. (Smart) and Connolly:233-235. (Whaling)

### 2.3.3. Use of terminology.

What is ‘knowledge’? What is ‘reason’? Abdel-Wahab Elmessiri, an Egyptian professor of English literature mentions in one article named *Recapturing the Islamic Paradigm*<sup>19</sup>, that one cannot simply translate concepts such as ‘*aql*’ and ‘*fiqh*’ into English. Apart from the obvious problems of direct translation from one language to another, words have different origin, development and play different roles in today’s discourse. Arguments may prove foreign to the reader for this very reason. However, I do believe it is far from necessary to reduce the discussion purely to the level of linguistics. The writers and publishers have aimed these books at a Western, non-Arabic-speaking audience. Accordingly, my analysis is based on the assumption that it is possible to say something about issues related to reason and rationality in Islam on a phenomenological level, using an English academic terminology.

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<sup>19</sup> Elmessiri 2003: Common translations: ‘*aql* – knowledge or doctrine. *fiqh* - jurisprudence.

### 3. The existence of God.

#### 3.1. Introduction.

Hammudah Abdualti states in his introduction: ‘Knowledge of God and the belief in him comprises the very foundation of Islam. It is such an essential topic it requires a thorough and clear presentation. For the sake of clarity, however, we will make use of some simple evidence’<sup>20</sup>. The defence of fundamental Islamic doctrine is set against the background of secularism, materialism and ‘Islamophobia’<sup>21</sup>, and to authors of Islamic *da’wah* this is a serious task. Abdulati states further: ‘The purpose of life is to worship God’<sup>22</sup> According to Shalabi, ‘Religion is indeed the only meaningful activity of man’<sup>23</sup>, it is always urgent. Thus, the message of Islam would appear to be of eternal importance for the individual reader, if he indeed be one of the unbelievers, or in modern terms; an atheist or sceptic. It is assumed that rejection of Islam is, in essence, based on a distorted image of it.<sup>24</sup> The intellectual defence of Islam is therefore aimed at presenting fundamental articles of faith, not only convincingly, but in a way that is understandable to the reader.

Taking on the assumption that the question is worth asking, and that it can be answered in a meaningful way, what is it, according to Islamic *da’wah* that makes the existence of God so evident? The arguments vary greatly in terms of complexity throughout the discourse. It is, however, possible to identify patterns of thought. I have chosen to present these according to two classic categories; firstly: conclusions which can be arrived at through reasoning alone, and secondly; conclusions drawn from assertive experience. The first category I have labelled ‘ontological’, and the second I have labelled ‘cosmological’. This is not to say that the authors have consciously adhered to them as such. Both categories belong in a Western philosophical tradition. However, as a fruitful starting point for further discussion I consider it is fair to use them. It is also fair to suggest that in this particular context of defensive

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<sup>20</sup> Abdulati:11.”Kjennskap til Gud og troen på Ham utgjør selve Islams grunnlag.”

<sup>21</sup> See for example article by s.Rashad: ‘*The urgency of Da’wah in the West. Countering Islamophobia*’. (2007) [http://www.readingislam.com/servlet/Satellite?c=Article\\_C&cid=1165994164172&pagename=Zone-English-Discover\\_Islam%2FDIELayout](http://www.readingislam.com/servlet/Satellite?c=Article_C&cid=1165994164172&pagename=Zone-English-Discover_Islam%2FDIELayout). Retrieved 10.02.10.

<sup>22</sup> Abdulati:26

<sup>23</sup> Shalabi 2006:5

<sup>24</sup> Abdulati:5.

discourse we are mainly dealing with what can be referred to as ‘natural theology’. As a definition we can think of natural theology as the attempt to show that belief in God’s existence can be supported by reason or argument which ought to be accepted to anyone<sup>25</sup>. It says, in other words that one need not presuppose God’s existence in order to defend it. An important feature in this literature is the assumption that the question can be approached from an objective point of view. One of the authors, Dr. Bilal Philips, presents his method in the introduction: ‘The only way that we may find the truth about anything is to approach it systematically and logically.’<sup>26</sup>, and God is not exempt from such investigation.

### 3.2. Ontological arguments

An ontological argument uses the method of a priori proof, which uses intuition and reason alone<sup>27</sup> and is not based on sensual experience. As suggested above, the following examples are not all to be understood as fully developed philosophical arguments. The aim here is not to discuss whether they are all fit to be called ‘ontological’. The aim is to describe the general method, which is to identify what can be known, naturally, of the transcendent object (God is even defined as the ‘ideal object of worship’<sup>28</sup>) and from there draw the conclusion that he must exist. Let us turn to two major types of arguments that are not supported by experimental knowledge. The first one is related to the human soul, the second to Islam’s claim of universality.

#### 3.2.1. *The religious nature of man.*

The first Islamic article of faith, the *Kalimah*, says: ‘*la ilaha illa’Llah*’, there is no deity save God.<sup>29</sup> The Arabic word *Ilah*, ‘someone who is the object of worship’<sup>30</sup>, means a being

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<sup>25</sup> Davies 2004:41. (Davies also lists alternative definitions, for example ‘the attempt to ground beliefs about God on purely rational reflection’ p.41.)

<sup>26</sup> Philips:3

<sup>27</sup> Oppy, Graham. "Ontological Arguments". in Edward N. Zalta. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. ISSN 1095-5054. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ontological-arguments>. Retrieved Nov.1,2009.

<sup>28</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:101

<sup>29</sup> Shalabi 2006:7.

<sup>30</sup> Mawdudi 1990:64. ‘*en som er gjenstand for tilbedelse*’.

whose greatness and power is worthy of worship. Anything which has a power greater than man can fathom or conceive, is also called *Ilah*.<sup>31</sup> The word entails unlimited power, and carries the meaning of something veiled in mystery. *Ilah* has parallels in other languages, such as the English ‘God’. Mawdudi believes the need to worship and to have a deity, to be anchored in human nature. There is something in the human soul which forces it to act in such a way. What, then, according to Islamic *da’wah* is this *something*?

To Green, the question is not really ‘is there a god?’, because ‘there are millions of gods’<sup>32</sup>. All cultures have concepts of a transcendent being, he says. But then he refers not only the gods of other religions or even idols or things, but ideas and concepts, such as communism. There are many gods, he says, but ‘are they really capable of giving people what they want and what they need?’<sup>33</sup> Green concludes that there is only one God who can help and this must be the God of Islam. Shalabi wants to show that Islam is ‘no opiate’<sup>34</sup>. Modern living and status symbols are ‘tasteless and without meaning’<sup>35</sup>. The reason, he says, is ‘understood intuitively by many’<sup>36</sup>, but few know how to respond. ‘We have lost contact with the mystery which lies within ourselves; we have forgotten what we are.’<sup>37</sup> He further quotes scientist Julian Huxley, who is to have said: ‘The blank space in the modern heart is a God shaped blank.’<sup>38</sup> Life without the transcendent, says Shalabi, ‘is not only desultory and without meaning, it is miserable, as the Qur’an tells us’<sup>39</sup>.

According to Musavi Lari, it is ‘[t]he depths of man’s being [which] impel him to seek God.’<sup>40</sup> Musavi Lari holds knowledge of God’s existence -at the most fundamental level - to be a natural and innate perception. This natural and innate perception can nevertheless be forgotten upon entering ‘the sphere of science and philosophy’<sup>41</sup> with its various proofs and deductions. The Quran is to have called it man’s *fitra*, his ‘natural disposition.’<sup>42</sup> which is ‘to love God, beauty, and all humanity, and to feel revulsion towards selfishness, ugliness and

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<sup>31</sup> Mawdudi 1990:65.

<sup>32</sup> Transcribed from ca 0:16:27.

<sup>33</sup> Green: *Does God exist?* Transcribed from ca 0:16:48-55.

<sup>34</sup> Shalabi 2006:80.

<sup>35</sup> Shalabi 2006:79.

<sup>36</sup> Shalabi 2006:79.

<sup>37</sup> Shalabi 2006:79.

<sup>38</sup> Shalabi 2006:79.

<sup>39</sup> Shalabi 2006:79.

<sup>40</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:19.

<sup>41</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:19.

<sup>42</sup> Shalabi 2006: 14. No reference is made to particular verses in the Qur’an.

evil.<sup>43</sup> Man's moral qualities and sense of aesthetics, although with limitations, imply that there is something greater, which is not limited. *There is no god, but Allah* is thus 'an affirmation of complete transcendence; the most perfect articulation of what lies forever beyond the reach of language'<sup>44</sup>. *The God* is none other than the one God that other religions have different concepts of. Contrary to currents in Western studies on the history of religion<sup>45</sup>, Musavi Lari's account does not begin with primal religion culminating in monotheism. It begins with a belief in one God. Nowhere in his book is there a specific reference to any historical research made, in fact, it seems that the whole field of history of religion is met with a great deal of scepticism. Musavi Lari views monotheism as 'without doubt one of the principal sources of human culture and knowledge'.<sup>46</sup> That which mankind has sought and worshipped throughout history is none other than *the god, Al'lah*. Shalabi uses even more inclusive language: '[T]he founders of the great religions of mankind shared in a common vision, an experience of that absolute state of beyond-being which in the English language call God'.<sup>47</sup> Nasr appears to be on the same note when he claims that to embrace Islam should, even for a Westerner, be understood as a reversion, a 'restoration of a primordial and fundamental unity'<sup>48</sup>, and not a conversion to something foreign.

Musavi Lari also criticizes the sociological theories which conclude, 'unsupported by any evidence'<sup>49</sup>, that God is a human fabrication. He asks rhetorically<sup>50</sup> 'Is the belief in religion of thousands of scholars and thinkers the product of fear [...]? Can their inclination to religion, the result of scholarly studies, of logic and rational proof, be attributed to their ignorance and lack of awareness of the natural causes of phenomena? What would be the answer of an intelligent person?'<sup>51</sup> Musavi Lari further holds that man's natural inclination to be religious has only recently been called into question by what he calls 'materialists'<sup>52</sup>. With his arguments he seeks to show that the views of materialists cannot be effectively sustained. However, there is another point in the questioning of God's existence that he does not

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<sup>43</sup> Shalabi 2006:14.

<sup>44</sup> Shalabi 2006:11

<sup>45</sup> See for example David Gellner's summary of the history of anthropology in Connolly 1999:10.

<sup>46</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:81.

<sup>47</sup> Shalabi 2006:6

<sup>48</sup> Nasr 1987:22.

<sup>49</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:15.

<sup>50</sup> In response to Bertrand Russell.: "*In m opinion, religion is above all founded on fear: fear of the unknown, fear of death, fear of defeat, fear of the mysterious and hidden. In addition, as already remarked, a sentiment comes into being enabling everyone to imagine that he has a supporter in all problems and struggles*' (From Russel: *Why I Am Not A Christian*, p-37. Quoted in Musavi Lari:15.

<sup>51</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:18.

<sup>52</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:81.

address. Even if we were to understand the history of religion exactly as Musavi Lari describes it, the *fitra* argument does not take into account the possibility that the majority of ‘intelligent people’ may have gotten it wrong. Even if we were to conclude that man is essentially religious, or that the hole in the modern heart is a God shaped hole, where is the proof that it is not just a hole? As Davies points out that ‘[i]f only a proper understanding of God is to lead one to conclude that God exists<sup>53</sup>, it should be questioned whether we can simply define something into existence. The problem of an intentional argument is essentially as follows: To define this ‘something’ that would be properly addressed ‘God’ as God, does not mean that it actually exists. It is a valid argument if the premise is already given. But writers here claim that God’s existence can be objectively proven. An atheist who does not feel that his depths impel him to seek God will only draw from the argument that someone believes he should. There is no direct link drawn from man’s *fitra* to the actual existence of the ‘proper object of worship.’<sup>54</sup> Instead the reader is left to ponder the various accounts of the history of religion. Mawdudi’s definition of *Ilah* as ‘anything which has a power greater than man can conceive (or fathom),’ comes close to the starting point of Anselm’s ontological argument<sup>55</sup>, but it does not develop any further than that. We may grant Islamists the notion that non-religious people are outnumbered by those who do believe in the existence of a deity. What is interesting here, then, is how indications of a majority in agreement is so boldly presented as not only indication, but proof. This brings us to the next point, the concept of ‘common sense’.

### 3.2.2 *The ‘common sense’ argument.*

In addition to calling arguments ‘reasonable’ or ‘rational’ some authors claim them to be the truth simply because they are ‘common sense’. What do they mean by this? The term ‘common sense’ signifies something beyond having simply run out of persuasive arguments. Green defines common sense as that which is obvious to everyone except the insane and ‘perhaps philosophers’<sup>56</sup> He believes scepticism against Islam to be rooted not so much in

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<sup>53</sup> Davies 2004:98

<sup>54</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:101. See also 3.2 (introductory paragraph.)

<sup>55</sup> Anselm (1033-1109) defines God as ‘*something than which nothing greater can be conceived*’, and from there derives that ‘*for sure that than which nothing greater can be conceived cannot exist only in the intellect. For if it is only in the intellect it can be thought to be in reality as well, which is greater.*’ or ‘*For if it is only in the intellect, what is greater can be thought to be in reality as well.* (Davies’ own translations in Davies:99)

<sup>56</sup> Green: *Does God exist?* Transcribed from 0:21:22

disagreement as in misunderstandings. Most people who criticise Islamic laws, for instance, do so not on the basis of the fundamentals of Islam, but their unfortunate impression of what it teaches. And the reason for that is, as he puts it: ‘The fundamentals of what Islam teaches are so firmly rooted in reason and common sense that it is really virtually impossible to produce any type of effective argument against it.’<sup>57</sup> He then goes on to describe what these fundamentals are, beginning with the ‘obvious’ existence of God.

It is often brought up as a point that Islam has no clergy as distinguished from the ordinary followers. It is a faith without intermediaries<sup>58</sup>. There is no secretive transmission of knowledge. ‘Common sense’ is not necessarily that which is evident to everyone, but rather that which is evident to *anyone*. Abdulati believes in presenting clear and simple proofs, although it could ‘seem boring or oversimplified for someone who already knows something about the topic’<sup>59</sup>. He does not wish to address doubters, who, in his opinion, complicate Islam’s understanding of God. The simplicity may cause the more ‘enlightened people’<sup>60</sup> to think more thoroughly through the message. If this turns out to be the results, the simplicity will have turned out to be a ‘desired and creative simplicity’<sup>61</sup>, which in itself is one of the special features of Islam.

The ‘common sense’ argument is meant to be effective as ‘proof’ in that it is *not* a feature of the individual, although he may possess it. Rather it seems to represent an ideal, rooted in an agreement of the majority. The concept of ‘common sense’ must also be understood in relation to Islam’s claim of universality. On the one hand, Islam entails a detailed set of rules for living<sup>62</sup>. Yet, in paragraphs where the fundamental beliefs about God are portrayed, so is also a relatively positive view on cultural variation.<sup>63</sup> Cultures are corrupted in their worship and their ways. However, humanity is believed to have had intuitive knowledge of God since creation, not only as individuals but collectively as well. Consequently, there are traces of monotheism to be found in every society.

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<sup>57</sup> Green: *Does God exist?* Transcribed from 0:26:30

<sup>58</sup> Shalabi 2006:12.

<sup>59</sup> Abdulati:11. ‘virke kjedelig eller overforeklet for en som allerede vet noe om emnet.’

<sup>60</sup> Abdulati:11. ‘opplyste mennesker’.

<sup>61</sup> Abdulati:12. ‘ønskelig og kreativ enkelhet’.

<sup>62</sup> The major part of Abdulati’s book is for example devoted to the practical aspects of Islam. Pages 69-243.

<sup>63</sup> In pages 5-68 Abdulati maintains a much more philosophical style, including ideas of brotherhood, equality etc.

Again, we may object and say that ‘common sense’ appears to only signify a collective understanding of what God *ought* to be. ‘Common sense’ may be understood as a purely rational, innate human feature, or as collective memory in some form of the original state of monotheism. In either case, it appears that the human being is simply made to understand that there is a God that they must worship. There is no ‘special sacramental function’<sup>64</sup>, no elaborate theological doctrines, one more unlikely than the other, such as is claimed to be the case with for example the different sects of Christianity<sup>65</sup>. What sets Islam apart from all other religions is its simplicity. ‘God’ is a concept anyone can relate to, that is anyone except the insane ‘and perhaps philosophers’<sup>66</sup>. In other words, when using the common sense argument, such as Green does, he leaves his listener without much chance. A type of proof which goes: ‘it is only common sense to believe in God’ is very difficult to argue with.

### 3.3. Cosmological arguments

#### 3.3.1. *The kalam argument*

The *kalam* argument is found in any theistic thinking, but originated in an Islamic context.<sup>67</sup> In short, it holds that the universe had a beginning and only God could have brought this about. The fact that anything exists at all proves that there has to be a First Cause. Often, the arguments simply draw attention to the existence of the universe. Abdulati asks ‘[c]an we find an explanation to this enormous universe?’<sup>68</sup> And further, that ‘[w]e recognize [...] that nothing can come into being by itself’<sup>69</sup>. Something must have caused the existence of the universe, and this is what we worship as God. ‘The one who makes something must be different from and greater than what he makes.’<sup>70</sup> In more philosophical terms, the existence of creation necessitates the existence of a Creator.

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<sup>64</sup> Shalabi 2006:25.

<sup>65</sup> Shalabi 2006:45.

<sup>66</sup> Green: Does God exist? Transcribed from 0:21:22.

<sup>67</sup> Davies 2004:49.

<sup>68</sup> Abdulati:12 ‘*Kan vi finne en forklaring på det enorme universet?*’

<sup>69</sup> Abdulati:12 ‘*Vi erkjenner [...] at ingenting kan oppstå av seg selv.*’

<sup>70</sup> Abdulati:13. ‘*Den som lager noe må være forskjellig fra of større enn de than lager.*’

Musavi Lari brings the topic to an in-depth discussion in a chapter he calls ‘*The Need of the World for One Without Need*’<sup>71</sup>. He begins with the principle of causality as a universal law and ‘foundation for all efforts of man’<sup>72</sup>, including the acquisition of knowledge. ‘Any supposable phenomenon’, he says, ‘was submerged in the darkness of non-being before it assumed the form of being.’<sup>73</sup> When they ‘hastened toward the point of being’<sup>74</sup>, this was the result of a cause that impelled them in that direction. The relationship between cause and effect is the relationship between two existing things, in the sense that the existence of one of them is dependent on the existence of the other. Therefore, that which brought the existing thing into being must have been an external thing. The existence of matter, for instance, must have had a beginning. Its impulse must have been eternal, and it must also be transcendent. Musavi Lari concludes that ‘no phenomenon becomes manifest in the world until a certain power is bestowed on it by one whose essence is free from need and is itself the very source from which being gushes forth’<sup>75</sup>. From there he rejects the deistic notion that the First Cause can withdraw from the world once it has been brought into existence. ‘[A]ll phenomena – all contingent beings – derive at all times and in every instant from an infinite essence that bestows being – i.e. the Necessary Being, the Unique and Almighty Creator – the power and sustenance that permit them to come into being and remain in being’<sup>76</sup>. In other words, the physical world does not have an independent existence of its own. Everything which exists is directly linked to God in such a way that if cut off from God it ceases to exist. The belief in God as the continuous, and independent, cause for everything in existence is a significant feature of Islam, and has implications on the view on natural science. We will touch upon this point towards the end of chapter 6.

Musavi Lari continues to dwell on the topic of ‘First Cause’ in a way here that is interesting, but somewhat unique among the writers. More often, the simplest kalam arguments take a step further to include *design*. The complex order of creation testifies of a Creator, an external factor that has *meant* something about everything else. Abdulati concludes that ‘[t]here must be a Great Force in the world, and in nature there must be a Great Artist. The true believers recognize this force of all forces and artist of all artists. The same believers and

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<sup>71</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:65.

<sup>72</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:65.

<sup>73</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:66.

<sup>74</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:66.

<sup>75</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:67.

<sup>76</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:67.

enlightened people recognize this Artist and call him Allah or God.’<sup>77</sup> Musavi Lari argues that the precise system of the cosmos ‘bears witness to the existence of a source characterized by knowledge and power’<sup>78</sup>. The world as it exists, as a ‘compendium of finely calculated causes and reasons’<sup>79</sup> indicates that there is a plan behind it, and not mere chance: ‘The confused and incomprehensible brush strokes of a painting cannot be taken as the indication of a skilled artist, but precise strokes and designs with meaningful content are indeed evidence for the existence of a talented painter’.<sup>80</sup>

On a similar note, Nabil Haroun believes God’s existence should be evident to any observer of nature: ‘[W]hat [does] a reasonable and honest reading of the physical world tells us about God[?] Read through the "book of nature" at any level, from the smallest subatomic particles to the single living cells, to the complex biological systems [...] the universe at large: from our planet earth, to the solar and the galactic systems!’<sup>81</sup> Mawdudi sees the stars and heavenly bodies as ‘countless manifestations of God’s divine power’<sup>82</sup> The universe is ‘in itself a testimony of the fact that its Planner, Creator and Ruler is an omnipotent Being with unlimited power[...], against Whom nothing in the universe dears to disobey.’<sup>83</sup> Zakir Naik makes use of the famous ‘watch argument’ as first proposed by William Paley<sup>84</sup>: A stone on the road is just there and is rarely accounted for, but someone who stumbles upon a complex clockwork understands that it could not just have happened. If an atheist is asked ‘Who will be the first person who will be able to tell you the mechanism of this machinery?’<sup>85</sup> even the atheist will answer ‘the manufacturer’<sup>86</sup>, says Naik. The observer of the stars, celestial beings believed to be the most perfect in creation, must see that universe is even more complex than a clock. To Naik, the mere existence of a complex universe counts as not only a suggestion, but proof of God’s existence.

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<sup>77</sup> Abdulati:13.

<sup>78</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:17.

<sup>79</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:16.

<sup>80</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:17.

<sup>81</sup> Nabil Haroun 2009.

<sup>82</sup> Mawdudi:18. *’utallige manifestasjoner av Guds guddommelige makt’*.

<sup>83</sup> Mawdudi:18. *’i seg selv et vitne for det faktum at dets Planlegger, Skaper og Styrrer er et allmektig Vesen med ubegrenset makt[...], som ingenting i universet våger å vise ulydighet.’*

<sup>84</sup> Davies 2004:75.

<sup>85</sup> Zakir Naik: Does God exist? Transcribed from 0:59.

<sup>86</sup> Zakir Naik: Does God exist? Transcribed from 1:28. Some may say the creator, the producer, or the inventor

### 3.3.2. *The scientific miracles in the Qur'an.*

In the literature there is a particular type of argument meant to prove that the Qur'an has supernatural origin; the argument of the scientific miracles of the Qur'an. The modern version of it stems from research done by French scholar Maurice Bucaille, who, in the process of examining the relationship between the Qur'an and natural science, is to have made discoveries beyond what he could have expected<sup>87</sup>. El-Naggar points to what he calls the 'cosmic verses'<sup>88</sup> in the Qur'an. These verses are not as plain as the others, but their meaning will continue to develop, as human knowledge grows forever.<sup>89</sup> Naturally, the Qur'an is above human knowledge and also 'ceaselessly inimitable'.<sup>90</sup> The quest to understand the hidden glory of the Qur'an, then, involves closely exploring these cosmic verses. 'Their meanings beautifully unfold with the gradual unfolding of human knowledge, generation after generation. Such scientific knowledge was limited at the time of revelation, but because of the cumulative nature of scientific knowledge, it grows with time.'<sup>91</sup> It is, he says, essential to employ all available scientific knowledge in every field of study referred to in the Qur'an, in order to reach a correct understanding of the cosmic verses. This involves re-interpreting certain Qur'anic verses in the context of their scientific connotation. The aim here, however, is not science. It is to leave the reader without a shred of doubt that God in fact does exist, however only *the* God. In El-Naggar's words; 'The scientific inimitability of the Glorious Qur'an is [...] a challenge through which we can prove to humanity that this Noble Book [was] revealed by the Creator of the universe fourteen hundred years ago to a prophet who could neither read nor write.'<sup>92</sup> As one interviewer of El-Naggar puts it, 'No reasonable person can listen to this discussion and not believe in the revelations of the Qur'an.'<sup>93</sup>

Zaikir Naik's method is similar to El-Naggar's. Naik also claims to avoid use of what he calls theories and propositions, only 'scientific facts' are given status as knowledge. 'Who

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<sup>87</sup> Maurice Bucaille: 'L'homme D'ou Vient-il? Les Responses de la Science et des Ecritures Eaintes.' First edition (1981) 'What is the Origin of Man? The Answers of Science and the Holy Scriptures'. First English edition 1982. Also available as: 'The Bible, the Qur'an and Science. The Holy Scriptures Examined in the Light of Modern Knowledge'. New York, 2003.

<sup>88</sup> El-Naggar 2006:4.

<sup>89</sup> El-Naggar(1) 2006:8

<sup>90</sup> El-Naggar(1) 2006:8. Related to the doctrine of inimitability, found in the Qur'an itself. Sura 112.

<sup>91</sup> El-Naggar(1) 2006:9.

<sup>92</sup> El-Naggar(1) 2006:19.

<sup>93</sup> El-Naggar(1) 2006:68.

else could have known this?’ Naik asks rhetorically. It is believed that all knowledge is guided by the Divine. Any misguidance must be from Satan or due to human ignorance. Natural science has now, with certainty, confirmed a set of facts. Correlation of facts and lack of contradictory statements equals proof. Phillips reasons along the same path about the Qur’an. It is ‘free from inexplicable contradictions’<sup>94</sup>, and thus fulfils the criteria of being ‘the divine word of God’<sup>95</sup>.

The object of scientific interpretation of revelation is to prove that the source of revelation is divine. We may ask then: does the argument of the scientific inimitability of the Qur’an not already presuppose the existence of anything ‘divine’ at all? What does this have to do with proving God’s existence? El-Naggar and Zaik’s argument is this: The fact that such a ‘miraculous’ book exists is enough proof to conclude that there must also be a God who exists. The argument is linked to the doctrine of the pre-existence of the Qur’an. Scripture is believed to be mirrored in the whole of creation. Since there is such an evident match between these, the source of information about both must be one and the same. There must be ‘someone’ behind the Qur’an and it must be that same ‘someone’ who is responsible for the earth’s existence. Truth can ultimately only have one source and that source must by definition be God. The argument is also related to the traditional doctrine of inimitability, which generally says that the style in which the Qur’an is written is beyond what any human being can produce. Since no human being can produce anything like the Qur’an, let alone any of the cosmic verses, they must come from the next logical level, namely the metaphysical realm. It is also related to the design argument described above. It is with a book as it is with a clock. Even an atheist will have to agree that a book does not ‘just happen’, or evolve naturally. Something so perfect and orderly can not have been made by humans. It must be from the metaphysical realm. The more ‘miraculous’ the Qur’anic passage the better the indication of divine origin. And the more scientific the argument sounds, the more plausible it is considered. If the Qur’an is proven to have divine origin, then consequently it must be free from contradictions. Since the cosmic verses are from God, the other verses relating to worship, ethics and the afterlife must be from God also.

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<sup>94</sup> Phillips:6

<sup>95</sup> Phillips:6.

Naik and El-Naggar's conclusions have been criticised both by scientists and religious scholars<sup>96</sup>. But here that is not the point. The point is first, their strong belief in scientific progress, or perhaps more precisely, the status scientific progress is believed to have among their audience. Second, it is the conviction that modern scientific discoveries can not only be proved compatible with the Qur'an, but are already mentioned in it. The precedence of the Qur'an, in referring to a specific aspect of science, becomes a material proof of its scientific inimitability. A popular example is the Big Bang theory, which remains a theory all the while experimental science cannot promote it to the level of certainty<sup>97</sup>. Or, as Naik puts it: 'no scientist could be a direct witness at the time of creation.'<sup>98</sup> Yet, as the reference made to the Big Bang in the Qur'an attributes precedence to the Qur'an, it establishes enough support to rise the Big Bang theory to the level of certainty. As we have seen, each of the premises of the argument of the scientific inimitability of the Qur'an can be derived from the Qur'an itself. In other words, the whole argument amounts to circular reasoning. Scripture may be used as hermeneutical key if the aim is to understand the Qur'an as a text, or Islam as a belief system. But presented as 'objective'<sup>99</sup> proof, it may still fail to convince the 'reasonable person'<sup>100</sup>.

### 3.4. Conclusive remarks.

'Does God exist?' may be posed as a philosophical question as a starting point, but it is not treated as such throughout the discourse. One will find few, if any, fully developed philosophical arguments. Notably, arguments are not presented as ideas to be discussed, they are simply 'proofs'. Belief in God's existence is only 'reasonable', 'rational', 'logical' or 'common sense'. We have seen that arguments aimed at proving God's existence reflect a relatively positive view on the promises of modern science. Musavi Lari nevertheless refutes the materialists who say everything in existence can be studied empirically. Science illuminates a limited realm, not the whole of creation. He says 'belief in the reality of the

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<sup>96</sup> See for example article by Siauddin Sardar published in New Statesman.

<http://www.newstatesman.com/books/2008/08/quran-muslim-scientific> Retrieved last 16.02.10.

<sup>97</sup> El-Naggar(1) 2006:27.

<sup>98</sup> Zakir Naik: 'Does God exist?'

<sup>99</sup> Phillips:3. '[A]n objective point of view must be maintained throughout the course of our research.'

<sup>100</sup> See footnote 93: 'No reasonable person can listen to this discussion and not believe in the revelations of the Qur'an'. El-Naggar (1) 2006:68.

unseen involves more than God<sup>101</sup>, but as science is becoming more advanced, belief in God acquires a more scientific nature and a new kind of logic through the advancement of science. How does he relate his view on science to evidence of God's existence? Science highlights the principle of cause and effect as underlying all phenomena. And someone who believes in this 'cannot possibly ignore the role of the most fundamental factor that is at work over and above all causes.'<sup>102</sup> Science is known to bear the potential to carry out good and evil, but it does not have the potential to lead man completely astray from God. On the contrary it is believed that the more one reveals the mysteries of nature, the closer one comes to the mysteries of God.

From the perspective of the Christian philosophical tradition, Thomas Aquinas, as a proponent of natural theology, notes that God's existence can be known without reliance on faith and scripture. He also notes that His existence is not self-evident and does require argumentation<sup>103</sup>. Islamic theologians seem to go further in considering God's existence to be self evident. As Green puts it: 'The fundamentals of what Islam teaches are so firmly rooted in reason and common sense is that it is virtually impossible to produce any effective argument against it'<sup>104</sup> Meanwhile, a defensive type of arguments is what this is about. And the fundamental ally called upon, is the reader or listeners own ability to reason. With this, one seeks to prove that it is not necessary to adhere to something blindly. The aim is to convince the reader 'beyond the shadow of doubt'<sup>105</sup> that there is indeed a God. One does not operate with a special category of faith, or belief 'in spite of'. Not only does there happen to be a God, it could be nothing but the case. It seems that the very possibility that God should be non-existent is difficult to grasp. Any criticism against the arguments laid out is logically understood as a sort of atheism. To ignore the issue, or treat it merely on a philosophical basis seems unthinkable. Consequently, agnosticism does not make sense. Islam is, as the word suggests<sup>106</sup>, an attitude to the question of God's existence more than it is a conclusion.

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<sup>101</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:37. (Title of Lesson four)

<sup>102</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:84.

<sup>103</sup> See for example: <http://www.aquinasonline.com/Topics/existgod.html> or Davies (2004)

<sup>104</sup> Green: does God exist? Transcribed from 0:26:40.

<sup>105</sup> Mawdudi 1990:26. 'hinsides skyggen av tvil'.

<sup>106</sup> Derived from the root 'slm, which translates into, among others; peace, purity, submission and obedience. (Abdulati:18)

## 4. The nature of God.

### 4.1. Introduction

When people believe that God exists, says Abdulati, they must learn his attributes and names<sup>107</sup>. Generally, he says, perfection and absolute goodness belongs to God and he has no flaws or wants. Specifically, one should know and believe the following: God is only One. He has no collaborator or son, He is neither begets nor is begotten. He is worshipped by all in eternity, He has no beginning or end, and no one is His equal.<sup>108</sup> The *Kalimah; la ilaha illa Allah*, ‘there is no deity save God’<sup>109</sup> is believed to be, in the words of Shalabi, ‘an affirmation of complete transcendence; the most perfect articulation of what lies forever beyond the reach of language.’<sup>110</sup> It is pure monotheism. It declares the unity of the metaphysical ‘by implication more than by statement’<sup>111</sup> It implies that there is ‘no object worthy of worship save God, no conditioner of meaning apart from Him.’<sup>112</sup> The idea of unity is ‘the heart of the Muslim revelation’<sup>113</sup> it is the highest form of expression of the divine. It makes all the clouds of ignorance disappear, says Mawdudi, and enlightens history with the light of reality.<sup>114</sup> According to Musavi Lari, it was the unity of God which was always the primary reality revealed to the prophets. In the wake of Islam it led to a definitive way to worship God, with its precise rules and manifestations of a complete religion. Proper worship of the one God was the very purpose of the revelation of God’s unity. ‘In fact, the basic preaching of all the Prophets was a call to monotheism, not a proof of the existence of God.’<sup>115</sup>

The focus of this chapter will be arguments meant to prove *tawhid*, that there is only one God, and the fundamental unity of God. I will refer to two major paths of reasoning which

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<sup>107</sup> Abdulati:15.

<sup>108</sup> Abdulati:15. ‘*Gud er bare Èn. Han har ingen medarbeider eller sønn, Han verken føder eller er født. Han tilbes av alle i evighet og har ingen begynnelse eller slutt, og ingen er hans Like*’. Abdulati makes a reference to the Qur’an, sura112.

<sup>109</sup> Shalabi 2006:11.

<sup>110</sup> Shalabi 2006:11.

<sup>111</sup> Shalabi 2006:11.

<sup>112</sup> Shalabi 2006:11.

<sup>113</sup> Nasr 1987:22.

<sup>114</sup> Mawdudi 1990:70.

<sup>115</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:25

typically follow the arguments on God's existence. The first of path of reasoning relates the principle of divine unity to cosmology and the 'First Cause' argument. Further, a unity of creation is believed to reflect the unity of the Creator. The second path of reasoning attempts to show the connection between divine unity and Islam's claim of universal relevance. It relates to the *fitra* and 'common sense' arguments in that it sees humanity as essentially being one race and one society. At the end of chapter four I will examine how *tawhid* is considered a prerequisite, admitted or not, for knowledge about God.

## 4.2. The principle of divine unity.

### 4.2.1. *The First Cause must be One.*

The argument relates to the *kalam* argument, in that the existence of anything at all must have a First Cause.<sup>116</sup> The existence of everything could only have one starting point, says Mawdudi. The First Cause can not be plural. He asks 'Who can create and keep this majestic universe?'<sup>117</sup> He answers, Only He who is Lord of all<sup>118</sup>. He must have unlimited power, He must be beyond any flaw or weakness and no one can intervene in what He does. 'Only such a Being can be the Creator, Supervisor and Steward of the universe.'<sup>119</sup> To Abulati it is a matter of coherence: 'Nothing can work in an orderly manner without some sort of providence. This order must also have a plan, a Will and a Unified Spirit'<sup>120</sup>. Shalabi also notes that the world can not be the product of mere chance. 'The universe has a Cause and this Cause is One.'<sup>121</sup> The more one contemplates the subject, says Mawdudi, the clearer it becomes that all divine powers and attributes must be attributed to one and the same Being alone. Polytheism must be considered a form of ignorance; it cannot stand the scrutiny of reason. Moreover, it is a practical impossibility, for by denying this primary truth one bereaves the whole universe of its meaning and significance.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> See 3.3.1. The *kalam* argument.

<sup>117</sup> Mawdudi 1990:70. 'hvem kan skape og holde oppsyn med dette majestetiske univers?'

<sup>118</sup> Mawdudi 1990:70.

<sup>119</sup> Mawdudi 1990:70. 'Bare et slikt Vesen kan være Skaperen, Overvåkeren og Styreren av universet'.

<sup>120</sup> Abdulati:13. 'en Styrende Vilje', 'en Enestående Ånd'.

<sup>121</sup> Shalabi 2006:16

<sup>122</sup> Mawdudi 1990:71. 'for ved å fornekte denne primære sannhet berøver man alt i universet dets mening og betydning.'

Musavi Lari claims, along with Shalabi and Mawdudi, that the cause of everything else in existence *can* only be One. He refers to the First Cause also in terms of ‘the primary cause’ to show that it is not linked to a specific time. It is the primary cause ‘by virtue of possessing perfect and unlimited being; [...]and it contains no trace of mutability or change.’<sup>123</sup> It seems important for Musavi Lari to show that God does not have ‘modes’ or is divided in any way, either in ‘persons’ or in terms of the different attributes. Also, he claims that since the First Cause stands in no need of a cause, it follows that no cause can intervene in it. God’s unity is thus linked with God’s sovereignty, which can not, by definition, be ‘intervened’ with without compromising the principle of *tawhid*.

#### 4.2.2. *The unity of God reflected in the unity of nature.*

Abdulati notes: ‘The world’s great wonders and miracles are like open books where we can read about God.’<sup>124</sup> To Hameed the ‘perfect harmony existing among the Sun, the Moon, the planets, and the stars, declares the oneness of the Creator as well as the uniformity of the laws that govern them’<sup>125</sup>. Indeed, he says, ‘all evidence in the universal order and nature unanimously proclaim the oneness of God. And believers are admonished to observe, study, and ponder over the phenomena of nature to be convinced of this stupendous fact’<sup>126</sup> How is it reasonable to draw such a conclusion just from observing the universe?

According to Musavi Lari, the principle of divine unity is ‘at the center of the Muslim’s curiosity regarding nature’<sup>127</sup>. The Qur’an encourages the human being to read its signs, *ayat*, which point toward the unity of God<sup>128</sup>. ‘From the earliest beginnings of Near Eastern thought, the cosmos is regarded as a unified entity which embraces the whole of being;’<sup>129</sup> To Nasr, cosmic unity is a clear proof of divine unity<sup>130</sup>. If there were many deities, a lack of cooperation would necessarily occur, and the world would dissolve<sup>131</sup>. The world has not dissolved, on the contrary it obeys the laws of nature. From ‘the one divine principle from

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<sup>123</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:71.

<sup>124</sup> Abdulati:17. ‘*Verdens store undere og imponerende mirakler er lik åpne bøker der vi kan lese om Gud*’.

<sup>125</sup> S.Hameed (2009)

<sup>126</sup> S. Hameed (2009)

<sup>127</sup> S.P.Manzoor 2005.

<sup>128</sup> See for example sura 2:211. *Ayat* is translated into ‘proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc’

<sup>129</sup> Nasr 1987:viii. (Giorgio de Santillana: from preface).

<sup>130</sup> Nasr 1987:

<sup>131</sup> Mawdudi 1990:71.

which all being is derived, in whose overwhelming Presence all reality is dissolved[...] all conscious existence becomes a Surrender – Islam’.<sup>132</sup> All other powers are in reality subject to the omnipotent and omniscient lawgiver, the one God. In accordance with *tawhid*, Nasr sees the universe as an undividable whole. Everything in existence is believed to point towards the unity of God. Nature itself is then to be interpreted in light of the principle of divine unity. In other words, the basis for *tawhid* is not grounded in anything, except in itself. However, to for example Bakar it is not regarded as problematic: ‘this idea acts as one of the principal guides to that inquiry, while at the same time being confirmed by it.’<sup>133</sup> Also Nasr adds that cosmic unity is a clear proof of divine unity once ‘the objective reality of cosmic unity’<sup>134</sup> has been accepted. Premises used to define God are used as proof of his nature. We will return to this toward at end of this chapter. But first, let us look at another, similar argument which also derives its premise from *tawhid*.

#### 4.3. One humanity and One God. The universality of Islam.

From reading the sources, they seem to convey the notion that the unity of the Creator has its parallel in the unity of creation, and this includes humans in a special way: ‘There is only one God who created one race of human beings’<sup>135</sup>. The principle of universality is typically opposed to Judaism<sup>136</sup>, a ‘tribal religion’<sup>137</sup>. What is believed to make Islam unique compared to other religions is that it does not have a connection with any distinct person, or land or people.<sup>138</sup> Allah is not the god of Muslims only, or the Arabs, he is *the* God. This also means that in reality, there are no other gods. Shahul Hameed notes in an article on the universality of Islam, that it ‘should be evident to any thinking person that the very concept of universality, by definition, precludes any chance for “differences or divisions among the powers” that control the universe. If there were more gods than one, there could be

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<sup>132</sup> Nasr 1987:viii (Giorgio de santillana: from preface).

<sup>133</sup> Bakar 1998:46.

<sup>134</sup> Nasr 1987:

<sup>135</sup> Philips:85.

<sup>136</sup> Christianity on the other hand typically faces criticism because, as it is believed, false religious concepts such as polytheism or belief in a trinity would undermine the very foundations of universality.

<sup>137</sup> Green: Does God exist?

<sup>138</sup> Mawdudi 1990:11. ‘

differences — in fact, wars — among the gods<sup>139</sup> Belief in tribal gods is an expression of polytheism, he says, and thus the nature of the gods excludes them from being trusted.

Hameed concludes that One God, one humanity, and one religion for mankind is the foundation of Islam.<sup>140</sup> ‘The Muslim believes in the unity of mankind when it comes to the source of creation, the origin of life and its final fate. The common origin of mankind is Adam and Eve, all humans belong with and have a part in this origin. As for the final fate, the Muslim has not the least of doubt that it is to God, the Creator that all humans will return to.’<sup>141</sup> Hameed further explains this ‘philosophical universalism’<sup>142</sup>. It claims that there are facts that are true for all people, at all times. In logic, he says, a proposition is said to have universality if it can be proved to be valid in all possible contexts without creating a contradiction. So, truth is considered to be universal if it is valid in all times and places. Such truth is known as ‘absolute truth’ or ‘eternal truth’<sup>143</sup>. The principle of ‘one humanity’ implies the existence of a unified morality governing society. [A] universal religion should be a complete religion, so that it does not leave the moral principles that should govern the affairs of humans to the whims and prejudices of any particular person or group. Islam is a complete way of life.<sup>144</sup>

Abdulati also relates the unity of mankind to the unity of God and the unity of religion, and because the Muslim believes in all of these ‘he will believe in all God’s messengers and revelation without discrimination.’<sup>145</sup> The principle of universality means that every human being is subject to the same truth about God and all humans are all eventually responsible before Him. Differences in race, colour, caste, wealth and power disappear. Abdulati calls the fraternity of all humans a ‘fundamental element in the value system of Islam’<sup>146</sup>. It is also related to liberty and equality. According to Shalabi, it was Muslims who first got rid of race and caste systems.’ And never has there been any consciousness of race in Islam, for the Qur’an teaches that all are one family’.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> S. Hameed 2009.

<sup>140</sup> S. Hameed 2009.

<sup>141</sup> Abdulati:49.

<sup>142</sup> S.Hameed 2009.

<sup>143</sup> S.Hameed 2009.

<sup>144</sup> S.Hameed 2009.

<sup>145</sup> Abdulati:49.

<sup>146</sup> Abdualti:49 ‘*et fundamental element i islams verdisystem*’.

<sup>147</sup> Shalabi 2006:24-25.

The logic of the argument of the universality of Islam can easily be followed. However, the writers here seem to reason along the same path as with the arguments related to the scientific miracles of the Qur'an. Certain knowledge is believed to be self-evident while it in fact can also be derived from specific religious scripture. The unity of humanity must be regarded as a presupposition on the same level as the unity of God. The principle of equality of all humans before God is a concept which can be derived from tawhid, which is exactly what the argument seeks to prove. As with the phrase 'modern scientific discoveries', the authors seems to suppose that the concept of 'one humanity' does not require additional verification. The paradigm appears to be that categories such as 'race' or 'caste' do not *really* exist. The idea is popular, but it can surely be traced to particular religious and philosophical currents. What is most interesting here, then, is perhaps the way it is simply drawn upon as proof in the context of the West. The main support for the *premise* of the argument, namely the oneness of humanity, seems to be that a number of people have simply discovered and accepted this. It is becoming a type of 'common sense' also in the West. The unity and equality of humanity should be so evident to most, that it would, to quote Green again, be 'virtually impossible to come up with a reasonable argument against it'<sup>148</sup>.

#### 4.4. The definition of God.

Assuming there is a God, what is he like? Islamic authors of *da'wah* literature would say: God is not *like* anything. He is unlike everything else. It is, however, believed to be possible to know something about his nature. One way in which man is believed to know something about God is through contemplating the words that describe God's attributes, such as Him being Omnipotent, Omniscient, Just and Merciful, among others.<sup>149</sup> Yet, any reflections beyond mentioning God's names seem to revolve around the first, most basic principle: God is One. '[T]he blazingly simple truth of the Unity of God'<sup>150</sup> says Shalabi, is the principle of *tawhid*, the principle of Divine Unity. Then, what about God's names and characteristics? It seems that the Qur'an is trusted to provide a sufficient answer once its status as revelation

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<sup>148</sup> Green: *Does God exist?* Transcribed from 0:26:50.

<sup>149</sup> Other names and characteristics: Compassionate, Guardian, True Councillor, Righteous, Lord of Lords, the Creator, Careful, First and the Last, All-knowing, Wise, Hearing, Awake, Witness, Illuminating and Powerful. (Qur'an 57:1-6; 59:22-24) Loving, the Provider, Generous, Rich, Independent, Forgiving, Mild, Patient, Understanding, Unique, Protector, Judge and Peace (Qur'an 3:31;11:6;35:15;65:2-3) Musavi Lari 2000:XXXX

<sup>150</sup> Shalabi 2006:45.

has been accepted. It is worth noting the absence of questions regarding God's 'moral' attributes, as is often the case in Western philosophy of religion<sup>151</sup>. The style is generally not 'apologetic' in the sense that one tries to solve contradictions<sup>152</sup> such as for example his Omnipotence and the problem of evil<sup>153</sup>. It is interesting to note that Islamic *da'wah* authors do not seem at all concerned with explaining or proving that 'God is good'. What they do seek to prove is that God is One, and that it is Islam which represents true monotheism.

The belief in God's existence and God's oneness are inseparable. In other words, what they do is argue for the case that there is no other god, but this Allah, and that this is the One who chose Muhammad as messenger. Of all the things God is, he is essentially One. Musavi Lari seeks to prove God's existence on the basis of man's *fitra*. Meanwhile, what Mawdudi calls 'the age of ignorance'<sup>154</sup> still stands all the while man continues to worship lesser deities in addition to the highest deity. Even the notion of the One God contains some traces from the age of ignorance. 'Some imagine that he has a body, like humans.'<sup>155</sup> Mawdudi is here referring to the Christian doctrines of Trinity and the nature of Christ. He says the one God can only be transcendent. Creation and creator can not mix. The sin of *shirk*, to associate God with other things, has been called the negation of Tawheed.<sup>156</sup> Also, to Green, the real problem is not that Christians do not believe in God, but that they actually attribute to the Creator some powers or 'things' that in fact belongs to creation. He asks: 'What is it to say that someone is God and man at the same time? It is a contradiction. It is not a paradox, he says, it is 'an impossibility by definition'<sup>157</sup>. Christians are saying: 'you are going to go to hell for ever if you do not believe in something that is impossible.'<sup>158</sup> So I have to believe something impossible without proof<sup>159</sup> Christians say 'God can do anything'<sup>160</sup>. Yes, says Green, but not if it contradicts his nature. It does not make sense.

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<sup>151</sup> Davies 2004:226-230 'The morality of God' and chapter 10. God and evil 208-235.

<sup>152</sup> That is if any contradictions are identified at all. Abdulati explains how it is only reasonable to conclude that human beings are born without sin. It is 'incredibly' unlikely that God would not be merciful and forgive Adam for the sin he committed strictly on behalf of himself as an individual. 'Based on this rational foundation as well as the authority of the Qur'an, the Muslim believes that Adam understood what he had done and asked God for forgiveness, as any other sensible person would have done.'(p.28) In the same manner the Christian doctrine of the crucifixion is 'irreconcilable with Divine mercy and justice as well as human logic and dignity.' (p.29)

<sup>153</sup> Davies2004:209.

<sup>154</sup> Mawdudi 1990:69. '*uvitenhetens tid*'.

<sup>155</sup> Mawdudi 1990:69. '*Noen mennesker tenker seg at han har et legeme slik som mennesker*'.

<sup>156</sup> P. Manzoor 2005.

<sup>157</sup> Green: Does God exist? Transcribed from 1:04:03.

<sup>158</sup> Green: Does God exist? Transcribed from.1:07:02.

<sup>159</sup> Green: Does God exist? Transcribed from 1:07:32.

<sup>160</sup> Green: Does God exist? Transcribed from 1:04:12.

In light of *tawhid*, Greens argument is reasonable enough: God can not be both God and man and still be God. God can only be one, if he is three, then he is simply not God. Green does not believe it is necessary to prove that the divinity of Jesus and consequently the doctrine of Trinity are false. When something is impossible by definition, the burden of proof lies with those who claim the impossible. As already mentioned, the literature analysed here there is a particular focus on the simplicity of Islam's doctrine. Emphasizes is also its consistency. Also with reference to the Christian tradition, Philips devotes a major bulk of his polemic argument to show that the Bible *could not* be a word from God. His simple criterion is this: if the Bible is the word of God we could expect it to be consistent. The One who has all knowledge simply can not contradict himself. The Cause of and origin of truth must ultimately be in unity.

Is *tawhid* recognized as revealed doctrine or reasonable prerequisite to proper belief in God? It is both. Revelation, both in terms of Scripture and of signs in nature, is understood to be full of references to God's unity and oneness. Meanwhile, the principle of *tawhid* is recognized as a prerequisite to accepting the Qur'an as revelation. We must identify *tawhid* as an overarching epistemological paradigm in Islam. For Islamic thought, the realisation of the existence of the One transcendent God is above all other knowledge, and the more one contemplates it, the deeper the conviction that this is the point of reference for of all knowledge. Revelation is thus not only knowledge about the divine, it is knowledge about anything. In any field of science, including the humanistic sciences, one will find that it all points toward the truth in *la ilaha illa'Llah*<sup>161</sup>. All truth is believed to have the same coherent, unified source. Any ad hoc claims which would draw the human mind away from contemplating God's existence and unity are not only a sin, they are reasonably impossible.

We have seen that arguments proving the principle of divine unity clearly amount to circular reasoning. We have also seen that it is not regarded as a problem. How can circular reasoning not be seen as problematic in the search for objective truth? The arguments seem to fall back on the one premise which is not questioned; the principle of divine unity. Then we have to ask: How is an argument believed to persuade the reader if it hardly touches upon its premise, which is exactly the place where disagreement is found? The last question has been

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<sup>161</sup> Shalabi 2006:7. 'There is not deity save God'.

perhaps the single most puzzling feature of this encounter. It is to be hoped that a more systematic study of the concept of that which is called 'divine knowledge' will bring us closer to an understanding. How does knowledge about God in terms of rational thinking relate conceptually to knowledge from God in terms of revelation? This leads us to the next chapter.

## 5. The acquisition of divine knowledge

(The conceptual framework according to Bakar.)

### 5.1. Introduction.

Until now we have investigated arguments presented in favor of God's existence and unity. They show us that the human being is believed to relate to knowledge about God both by rational thought and by observation. The existence of God may be accepted merely based on an affirmation of the existence of the universe. In other instances a proper description of the concept 'God' is believed to be enough to conclude that he exists. While authors appeal to the reader's own ability to reason, their arguments are closely bound to Islamic revelation. Thus, their arguments often amount to circular reasoning, leaving the premises untouched. This does not, however, seem to disturb those who present them. It is not only presumed that God can be known objectively, it is also believed that his existence and unity can be defended objectively. My concern in this chapter is not to make judgements of the validity of particular arguments. In order to understand them better we need first to approach them on an epistemological level, by looking more closely at the methodology behind them: *How* is the (process of) revelation, in terms of truth from God, believed to relate to the human mind as objective knowledge?

One author, Malay scholar Osman Bakar, provides not only arguments, but a comprehensive methodology to accompany them. In this chapter, I will present relevant aspects of this methodology, which he claims to derive from classic Islamic thought.

### 5.2. An Islamic methodology.

Bakar's devotion for Islam and his agenda to make Islam intellectually acceptable places him in a category similar to the other writers. As a methodological starting point, upholds a commitment to the revelation in the Qur'an. He says the Muslim mind which accepts an

Islamic view of the cosmos has, prior to that, already accepted Revelation as the highest source of knowledge<sup>162</sup>. What makes him unique in relation to the other writers is their genuine effort to provide a conceptual framework which guides the reader a step further beyond the mere ‘proofs’. Bakar derives several of his conclusions from works of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a well known authority in Islamic scholarship. As philosophers concerned with religion and the spiritual dimension especially, they do occasionally reveal a favor toward mysticism. What makes their contribution of interest here is their combined commitment to Islamic revelation and true scholarship.

Bakar sees the need for an epistemological paradigm that can provide a more coherent view of the world continuously revealed by modern science<sup>163</sup>. The usual Muslim response to modern science has been to seek to demonstrate that Islamic civilization preceded the modern West in the application of the Scientific Method<sup>164</sup> and exerted influence upon it. In Bakar’s view the ‘so-called Scientific Method’ should by no means be accepted as the sole path to knowledge. Its present epistemological foundation is after all in itself a conscious rebellion against, and rejection of the idea of, revelation. The result has on the one hand become a theoretical anarchism of philosophical contradictions. On the other hand, the widespread use of experimentation has lead to an empiricism which regards sensual experience as the source of all knowledge. Modern science is therefore in a current state of confusion as well as a spiritual reductionism which impoverishes the natural order. Contrary to the modern scientific method, Islam is guarded against any such ‘philosophical deviations’<sup>165</sup>. Bakar uses the term ‘science’<sup>166</sup> ‘in a comprehensive sense of an organized body of knowledge that constitutes a discipline with its distinctive goals, basic premises and objects and methods of inquiry’<sup>167</sup>. Islamic science embraces a wider meaning than does the modern discipline of the same name. In accordance with an Islamic view on the hierarchy of the sciences, it includes the supreme knowledge of *tawhid* as a metaphysical science - the most universal science since it deals with the ‘Supreme Reality’<sup>168</sup> which contains all things. It is only through a revival of traditional Islamic sciences that a consciousness of this

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<sup>162</sup> Bakar 1999:21

<sup>163</sup> Bakar 1999:16.

<sup>164</sup> Bakar 1999:14

<sup>165</sup> Bakar 1999:5.

<sup>166</sup> *‘ilm*

<sup>167</sup> Bakar 1998:5.

<sup>168</sup> Bakar 1999:73.

‘richness of reality’<sup>169</sup> can be brought about. Faithfulness to *tawhid* spares one of the ‘unfortunate and intellectually precarious situation’<sup>170</sup> of having different modes of knowledge compete one another and having to affirm one over the other. This is not so say that Islamic science consists of one single methodology. Rather, it consists of different methods in accordance with the nature of the subject in question and modes of understanding that subject<sup>171</sup>. In other words an Islamic methodology amounts to *a coherent and unified view of a multiplicity of methodologies*. The various sciences must be regarded as bodies of evidence to the principle of divine unity. All possible paths to knowledge belong within one and the same epistemological scheme ‘from ratiocination and interpretation of sacred Scriptures to observation and experimentation’<sup>172</sup>. Each available path has its legitimate role to play as long as it points toward *tawhid*.

How, according to Bakar, is this revival of Islamic science is to take place? Islamic science must be viewed as an independent scientific and intellectual tradition, but one that issues forth from ‘the Quranic view of reality and of man’s place in that reality’<sup>173</sup>. As asserted by Ibn Sina, true science, says Bakar ‘is that science which seeks the knowledge of the essences of things in relation to their Divine Origin’<sup>174</sup>. In the Islamic tradition different approaches have been made. According to Al-Farabi’s (870-950) classification, one group of scholars are those who claim divine revelation as superior even to the knowledge gained by the best of human intellects<sup>175</sup>. Another group defends their theology by showing that scientific knowledge is in harmony with the religious texts<sup>176</sup>. Bakar does not approve of pure rationalism, in which God is treated merely as an abstract philosophical concept. Neither does he approve of literalism, where any kind of rationalism of faith is prohibited. In order to reach true knowledge about God, he must be approached as the Reality Who is the fountainhead and basis of revealed religion<sup>177</sup>. To speak of a true Islamic methodology is to

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<sup>169</sup> Bakar 1999:20,76.

<sup>170</sup> Bakar 1999:5.

<sup>171</sup> Bakar 1999:15

<sup>172</sup> Bakar 1999:15

<sup>173</sup> Bakar 1999:17.

<sup>174</sup> Bakar 1999:23.

<sup>175</sup> The *mutakallimun*, ‘the theologians’ A group among the classic scholars of Islam. See also the description by al-Ghazzali of the *mutakallimun* as those who claim themselves as men of independent thinking and intellectual speculation. See Bakar 1998:182.

<sup>176</sup> Bakar 1998:146.

<sup>177</sup> Bakar 1999:82.

speak of all possible ways or methods by means of which man can gain knowledge of this Reality.<sup>178</sup>

### 5.3. How revelation relates to the human soul.

Because it is omniscient God who reveals and the human being who gains knowledge, the question of methodology is ‘conceptually inseparable from the ultimate purpose of human cognition’<sup>179</sup>. In order to know what God has revealed it is essential to also know the truth about man’s intellectual creativity. How, according to Bakar, is the principle of *tawhid* and the hierarchy of knowledge relative to the human being? An Islamic methodology of knowledge deals precisely with the essential relationship between the hierarchy of man’s faculties of knowing and the hierarchy of the Universe, and with the principles governing that relationship. Now, let us turn specifically to how revelation relates to the human intellect as knowledge.

#### 5.3.1. *The hierarchy of beings and the corresponding faculties of knowing*

How is knowledge of the divine possible? A central thesis to Islam is that it is in God’s nature to create and to reveal. God desires to be known. His creation is also his revelation, otherwise it would be impossible for him to be known. The human is the central being in creation, ‘by virtue of the supernatural character of his intellect and its cognitive powers, and by virtue of being a universe in miniature’<sup>180</sup>. Man has been equipped with all that is necessary for him to know what he needs to know. According to Bakar, there is a lot of literature in Islamic intellectual history that deals with the methodology of knowledge. The different schools, such as the Peripatetic, the Illuminationist, the Transcendent theosophy, as well as those of gnosis (mainly identified with the Sufis) have touched upon methodology, from different perspectives. But, says Bakar, ‘all of them are categorical and united in their

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<sup>178</sup> Bakar 1999:19

<sup>179</sup> Bakar 1999:17

<sup>180</sup> Bakar 1999:26.

view of asserting the hierarchic nature of both man's faculties of knowledge and the Universe.<sup>181</sup> To speak of methodology is, therefore, to speak of man as the subject that knows. This concept of a hierarchy of Reality is accepted as an axiomatic truth, 'thanks to the teaching of revelation'<sup>182</sup>. Each level of Reality has a corresponding mode of knowledge in man. Man is seen as the subjective pole of knowledge and consists of all the faculties and 'the hierarchy of the faculties and powers of knowing within the human knowing subject'<sup>183</sup>. These faculties and powers constitute multiple levels of consciousness, but within a hierarchical and unified totality. The objective pole of knowledge is the world of beings that are knowable and known. Its ontological principle is the Divine Intellect or Pure Being<sup>184</sup>.

The relationship between the objective and subjective poles of knowledge involves an idea of a one-to-one correspondence between the two poles, where 'every level of cosmic existence has its corresponding existence in man'<sup>185</sup>. The acquisition of knowledge is thus a process of intellectual and spiritual realization of the subjective experience of Reality<sup>186</sup>. In other words, knowledge is made possible through the actualisation of possibilities latent within the intellect<sup>187</sup>. But, Bakar adds, the actualization is possible only if the intellect, as the subjective revelation in man were to submit itself to the Qur'an, the objective revelation. How, more specifically, does this process of actualization of knowledge take place? The next paragraph provides a more in-depth description of the relationship between the objective and subjective poles of knowledge. It will also serve as an example of how Bakar uses classic Islamic philosophy in support of his methodology.

### 5.3.2 Al-Farabi's(870-950) *psychology and the Active intellect.*

According to al-Farabi the human being gains knowledge either through sensation, the imaginative faculty or the rational faculty, corresponding to the body, soul and spirit<sup>188</sup>. The rational faculty ranks highest in the hierarchy of the subjective pole of knowledge, 'for it

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<sup>181</sup> Bakar 1999:20.

<sup>182</sup> Bakar 1998:44.

<sup>183</sup> Bakar 1998:44.

<sup>184</sup> Bakar 1999:23.

<sup>185</sup> Bakar 1999:23.

<sup>186</sup> Bakar 1998:45.

<sup>187</sup> Bakar 1999:27.

<sup>188</sup> In Islamic terminology: *jism*, *nafs* and *'aql*. *'Aql* refers to the human intellect which is man's highest faculty of knowledge.

rules or orders all the others'<sup>189</sup>. The function of the rational faculty, as the subjective revelation, is to receive the *forms* of intellectual objects, which Bakar calls 'intelligibles', in some instances intelligible forms<sup>190</sup>. The hierarchy of these intelligibles are as follows: Intelligibles are immaterial forms, free from matter and material attachments. There are two kinds of intelligibles 'imprinted on the rational soul'.<sup>191</sup> Of the first kind are forms that at some point were matter, but became abstracted from it. They were potential intelligibles, but are now actual intelligibles. The second kind of intelligibles are not, and never were, in matter. These refer to the First Cause and a whole hierarchy of intelligences situated below it. Of this second kind of intelligibles, the Active intellect is placed lowest in rank. Bakar further explains the role of the Active intellect: The human being possesses intelligence in a latent form, a potential intelligence. The potential intelligence becomes actual intelligence through several stages. The first stage Bakar calls habitual intelligence, and occurs when the first intelligible forms are present in the soul. The second state is called the actual intellect, which is reached after full actualization has taken place in the mind. The third state is a complete realisation of the actual intellect, and is called acquired intelligence. The final stage of the actualisation of potential intelligence is the Active intellect, 'this supra-individual intellect which transcends this highest level of human intellect, and which renders this whole process of intellectual actualization possible'<sup>192</sup>. It is the illumination of the Active intellect<sup>193</sup> which enables the various faculties and powers of knowing to be fully functional and receptive to revelation. The potential intellect becomes actual intellect, understood as knowledge, according to the intelligible forms, or aspects of Reality it has received.

Al-Farabi identified the Active intellect with the holy spirit (*Ruh al-Quds*), or Gabriel, the archangel of Divine revelation. He also called it 'a separate form of man'<sup>194</sup> or true man.

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<sup>189</sup> Bakar 1998:49.

<sup>190</sup> Bakar 1998:56

<sup>191</sup> Bakar 1998:55.

<sup>192</sup> Bakar 1999:27.

<sup>193</sup> An analogy of the relationship between the Active intellect and the human intellect is described as that of the sun to the eye in darkness: "*The eye is only potential sight as long as it is in darkness. It is the sun, insofar as it gives the eye illumination, which makes the eye actual sight and visible things actually visible. Further, the sunlight enables the eye to see not only objects but also the light itself as well as the source of that light. In a similar manner, 'light' from the active intellect makes the potential intellect an actual intellect and the potential intelligibles actual intelligibles. The potential intellect is then able to perceive that 'light' as well as the active intellect.*" (from Bakar 1998: 56.)

<sup>194</sup> Bakar 1998:56.

Bakar himself refers to something he calls ‘the Divine Intellect or *the Logos*<sup>195</sup>, in which the Reality of the Holy Qur’an resides’<sup>196</sup>. The Divine Intellect is also the source of the spiritual substance of the human intellect. Bakar, with al-Farabi, presupposes a match between God’s revelation and the human intellect, or the human intellect as it *can be*. The key to real knowledge is neither independent rational thinking, nor unguided sense perception<sup>197</sup>. Islamic epistemology affirms that the ultimate key to true knowledge is *supra-rational perceptions*. Yet, it is clear that all human thought can not be attributed to illumination of the Active intellect or its spiritual substance stemming from the Divine Intellect. How is the human mind to reach certainty about which thoughts must be attributed to human error, and which can be attributed to divine guidance, if indeed such a thing exists? How does an Islamic methodology resolve the issue of doubt?

### 5.3.3. *The place of doubt: Al-Ghazzali’s (1058-1111) epistemological crisis and its solution.*

Bakar’s account of al-Ghazzali’s<sup>198</sup> philosophical system is based on his autobiographical work *Deliverance from Error*, or *al-Munqidh*<sup>199</sup>. *Al-Munqidh* was partly written as the result of a methodological crisis that al-Ghazzali found himself in, both due to personal afflictions and the intellectual environment at the time<sup>200</sup>. Most interesting here is not to understand the true nature of al-Ghazzali’s crisis or the various interpretations of it, but Bakar’s explanation of it. Bakar is primarily concerned with the philosophical meaning and significance of this Ghazzalian doubt. It was al-Ghazzali’s natural intellectual disposition to grasp the real meaning of things<sup>201</sup>. He wanted certain and infallible knowledge, defined by Bakar as ‘that knowledge which is completely free from any error or doubt, and with which the heart finds complete satisfaction.’<sup>202</sup> Ghazzali’s own definition is ‘that in which the thing known is made so manifest that no doubt clings to it, nor is it accompanied by the possibility of error and deception, nor can the mind even suppose such a possibility’<sup>203</sup>. Al-Ghazzali approved the

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<sup>195</sup> Bakar 1999:24. Logos is known from Greek philosophy and Christianity as divine revelation.

<sup>196</sup> Bakar 1998:24.

<sup>197</sup> Abstractions of universal forms can also account for the presence of images of sensible things in the imaginative faculty, but its place in the hierarchy of potential knowledge is less clear. See Bakar 1999:62.

<sup>198</sup> Al-Ghazzali’ is used by several Western scholars. Here I will use the transcription of Bakar.

<sup>199</sup> *al-Munqidh min al-dalal*,

<sup>200</sup> For a thorough description of the currents in Islamic philosophy at the time of al-Ghazzali, see Bakar 1998:155-171.

<sup>201</sup> Bakar 1999:42.

<sup>202</sup> Bakar 1999:47-48.

<sup>203</sup> Bakar 1999:41. Translation by McCarthy

aim of *kalam*,<sup>204</sup> as it is rooted in the Qur'an, but he was critical of certain aspects. The methods of *kalam* could not satisfy his thirst for 'knowledge of the reality of things.' He thus began to question *taqlid*, the 'uncritically inherited religious belief'<sup>205</sup> as a manner of acquiring ideas. But, says Bakar, this must not be understood as if al-Ghazzali ever advocated complete abandonment of it. It must be seen in the context of his quest for the highest level of certainty. He was dissatisfied with *taqlid* because it could not quench his intellectual thirst<sup>206</sup>. Ghazzali admits *taqlid* to be acceptable, even necessary, for 'the simple believers whose minds are free of the kind of intellectual curiosity one finds on philosophers and scientists, and who are therefore content to accept things based on the authority of the experts.'<sup>207</sup>

In his quest for this true and infallible knowledge, al-Ghazzali had relied on sense-based data and rational data, which belong in the category of primary truths<sup>208</sup>. At one point when his reliance on sense-data had been shattered, he sought refuge in the certainty of rational data. Even these were refuted, yet not in the same way reason itself had refuted the claims of the senses. According to Bakar, Al-Ghazzali's reason was reminded of the possibility of another judge superior to itself. If this judge of reason were to reveal itself it would disprove the lies of reason, just as reason had given lie to the judgment of the senses<sup>209</sup>. In the event that it does not reveal itself, Bakar notes that 'the mere fact of the non-appearance of this other judge does not prove the impossibility of its existence'. Bakar is not talking about the existence of God, but the possibility of another kind of perception beyond reason. It was through this discovery that al-Ghazzali ended up refuting the rationalists, who claimed that knowledge of God ought to be acquired through rational thinking removed from revelation. He said, 'whoever thinks that the unveiling of truth depends on precisely formulated proofs has indeed straightened the broad mercy of God'<sup>210</sup>. Bakar suggests further that the end of his doubt was of a spiritual nature. He 'sought the light of certainty and that knowledge which

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<sup>204</sup> Al-Ghazzali saw *kalam* as coming out of 'a need to formulate a systematic defense of the tenets of that religion against attacks from various sources such as from the followers of other religions'. Bakar 1998:146.

<sup>205</sup> Bakar 1999:43.

<sup>206</sup> Bakar 1999:45.

<sup>207</sup> Bakar 1999:43.

<sup>208</sup> Such as ten is more than three, one and the same thing cannot be simultaneously affirmed and denied.XXXX

<sup>209</sup> Bakar 1999:48-49. From *Al-Munqid*, transl. McCarthy.

<sup>210</sup> Bakar 1999:48. From *Al-Munqid*, transl. McCarthy.

guarantees salvation'<sup>211</sup>, and he found that light in Sufism It was the light that God cast into his breast that resolved his epistemological crisis.

Bakar calls al-Ghazzali's doubt, which lasted only two months, a disease of skepticism and a mysterious malady of the soul<sup>212</sup>. His epistemological crisis was 'none other than the inner tussle or tensions' between his soul's rational faculty and the supra rational faculty, the intuitive faculty. His doubt was not of a spiritual nature, but a methodological one. 'His problem was one of finding the rightful place for each of the human faculties of knowing within the total scheme of knowledge, and, in particular, of establishing the right relationship between reason and intuition, as this latter term is traditionally understood.'<sup>213</sup>

Scholars have cited *al-Munqid* suggesting that Al-Ghazzali anticipated Descartes (1596-1650) and his method of doubt. Was a method of doubt central in al-Ghazzali's epistemology? No, says Bakar. His doubt does not reflect a skeptical attitude as that of modern western philosophy. There is nothing to be found in this that is comparable to Descartes' assertion that it is necessary once in one's life to doubt of all things, so far as it is possible<sup>214</sup>. Bakar concludes that 'if man is able to doubt it is because certitude exists'<sup>215</sup>. Thus, the true nature of al-Ghazzali's crisis was not of truth itself, but of conflicting modes of knowing and accepting truth. He did not fall into the above mentioned philosophical temptation of the agnostics and the relativists<sup>216</sup>. His quest was to find the light of certainty, not an exercise in religious subjectivism or an act of disillusionment with objective reality. Al-Ghazzali was drawn to the highest objective reality that is<sup>217</sup>. He had doubts about the reliability of his rational faculty in the face of certain assertive manifestations of the intuitive faculty. Yet, it was never cut off from revelation and faith. 'Philosophical certainty is of no value if it is not accompanied by submission to the truth and by the transformation of one's being in conformity with that truth'<sup>218</sup>.

Al-Ghazzali's doubt must, in Bakar's view be placed in the context of his environment and 'the whole set of opportunities which Islam ever places at the disposal of man in his quest

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<sup>211</sup> Bakar 1999:47.

<sup>212</sup> Bakar 1999:41.

<sup>213</sup> Bakar 1999:51.

<sup>214</sup> Bakar 1999:51.

<sup>215</sup> Bakar 1999:57.

<sup>216</sup> Bakar 1999:52.

<sup>217</sup> Bakar 1999:59.

<sup>218</sup> Bakar 1999:56.

for certainty.<sup>219</sup> The problem of diversity at the time did not lead to ‘the kind of relativism that is rampant in modern times’<sup>220</sup>. On the contrary it led to the search for the inner reality of human nature, that is man’s primordial nature, man’s *fitra*, which on the earthly plane becomes the receptacle for the multiplicity of religious forms and expression. Bakar returns to the principle of the hierarchy of the faculties of the human soul: Al-Ghazzali’s doubt was in reality none other than an ‘inner tussle or tension between [the soul’s] rational faculty and another faculty which mounts an appeal to the former...’<sup>221</sup> His doubt was generated not from ‘below’ but suggested from ‘above’. It was removed ‘not through the power of reason, but from ‘above’ as a result of the light of divine grace, which restores to each faculty of knowledge its rightful position and its validity and trustworthiness at its own level.’<sup>222</sup>

#### 5.4. The principle of divine unity and its methodological consequences

##### 5.4.1. *Religious consciousness the quest for objectivity.*

Bakar’s methodology of knowledge relates to the science of revelation, Islamic gnosis, rather than the science of fiqh, or jurisprudence. Although an integral religious tradition encompassing all aspects of life, he views Islam as essentially a religion of knowledge, as the central means to salvation of the soul<sup>223</sup>. The different intellectual schools in Islam have touched upon the science of revelation from different perspectives, but are categorical and united, he says, in their view in asserting the hierarchic nature of both man’s faculties of knowledge and the Universe<sup>224</sup>. An Islamic methodology is one which does not separate religious belief from scientific knowledge. The scientific spirit of the Islamic world is fundamentally rooted in religious consciousness. It makes the quest for objective knowledge different from that in the West, both religiously and historically speaking. Bakar further explains that which he calls the ‘conceptual relationship between scientific objectivity and

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<sup>219</sup> Bakar 1999:XXXXXXXXXXx

<sup>220</sup> Bakar 1999:43.

<sup>221</sup> Bakar 1999:50.

<sup>222</sup> Bakar 1999:54.

<sup>223</sup> Bakar 1999:1.

<sup>224</sup> Bakar 1999:21.

religious consciousness'<sup>225</sup>. First, what does he mean by 'religious consciousness'? Religious consciousness is essentially the consciousness of *tawhid*. The principle of Divine unity lies at the core of Islamic, or as Bakar would put it, the Muslim world view. The scientific spirit is not opposed to the consciousness of *tawhid*, but in an integral part of it. The consciousness of *tawhid* involves an acceptance of 'the objective reality of cosmic unity'<sup>226</sup>. It means on one hand that nature is made up of many levels of reality. On the other hand it means that there is a unity of nature in that it 'must manifest the oneness of its metaphysical source and origin religiously called God.'<sup>227</sup>

As we have seen in analyzing the arguments, the unity of nature is in itself regarded as a proof of Divine unity. Bakar himself notes the circular reasoning in this: 'The Muslim conviction that whatever truths or knowledge they were to discover about nature could not be opposed to the teachings of their sacred Book comes from that book itself.'<sup>228</sup> He does not however conclude that this kind of reasoning makes a claim scientifically problematic. Any methodology, he claims, is determined by the particular world view accepted a priori by the scientific collectivity in question.<sup>229</sup> According to Bakar, then, modern science is no more objective than Islamic science. Objectivity is an essential element also of the Muslim scientific spirit. Muslim scholars, beginning in the ninth century CE, were already in the possession of a scientific attitude and a scientific frame of mind, which they had inherited from the religious sciences. Among their 'most outstanding' features were a 'passion for truth and objectivity', a 'general respect for fully corroborated empirical evidence' and 'a mind skilled in the classification of things'<sup>230</sup>. The sense of objectivity, understood as referring to the qualities of impartiality, disinterestedness and justice[...] is inseparable from the religious consciousness of *tawhid*'<sup>231</sup>. Man is capable of objectivity because, in principle, he has been endowed with these qualities. In fact, man desires and needs objectivity because, as created in the image of God, he wishes to emulate these qualities, which are in fact not just human, but also divine.

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<sup>225</sup> Bakar 1999:10.

<sup>226</sup> Bakar 1999:2.

<sup>227</sup> Bakar 1999:2

<sup>228</sup> Bakar 1999:8

<sup>229</sup> Bakar 1999:20.

<sup>230</sup> Bakar 1999:2.

<sup>231</sup> Bakar 1999:9

A second principle of objectivity is the principle of public or collective verification<sup>232</sup>. The Islamic point of view differs from modern world in this matter. Something does not become objective simply because it is verifiable by many, says Bakar. Islamic intellectual tradition speaks of objectivity on the higher planes of human consciousness. There are many levels of objective truth. Corresponding to each level of truth there is a particular form of verification or proof involving the particular faculty of knowing through which that objective truth is recognized.<sup>233</sup> Further, '[o]bjectivity is also possible in the domain of non-empirical knowledge, such as in religious and spiritual knowledge or in philosophical and metaphysical knowledge'<sup>234</sup>. This is precisely, he says, because all men possess the higher faculties of knowledge. Objectivity in its highest sense belongs to the intellectual order. It is here, that man is able to intellectually distinguish between the Absolute and the relative, or discern what is God and what is other than God<sup>235</sup>.

Objective scholarship in the Islamic sense is, in other words, of religious significance. In modern scholarship it is confined to the empirical or experimental domain, while in Islam objectivity speaks to the 'higher planes of the human consciousness'<sup>236</sup> as well. In Bakar's view 'modern scholarship has yet to show that by discarding religion from its worldview, it can attain a higher standard of impartiality, universality, and justice than had been demonstrated in religiously based scholarship, especially traditional Islamic scholarship.'<sup>237</sup> In the Islamic world, the use of reason was never cut off from faith in divine revelation. Generally, they affirmed the idea of superiority to divine revelation over human reason. Thus, the use of logic did not lead to a secular rationalism which 'rebels against God and religion'<sup>238</sup>. Logic, Bakar claims, was never understood as being opposed to religious faith. Rather, a form of logic was developed within the framework of the religious consciousness of the transcendent. Logic is thus related to wisdom<sup>239</sup>. In their use of logic they were concerned with clarity and consistency, aware that logic can lead to both truth and error. But used correctly by an intellect that is not corrupted by 'the lower passions', logic itself may

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<sup>232</sup> Bakar 1999:8:

<sup>233</sup> Bakar 1999:10.

<sup>234</sup> Bakar 1999:10-11.

<sup>235</sup> Bakar 1999:11.

<sup>236</sup> Bakar 1999:10

<sup>237</sup> Bakar 1999:9

<sup>238</sup> Bakar 1999:5

<sup>239</sup> *Hikmah*.

lead to the truth. In this way, Muslim scholars were able to combine the spirit of experimentation with a ‘strong religious awareness of the Transcendent.’<sup>240</sup>

#### 5.4.2. *The creative mind.*

What is, in Bakar’s view, the true nature of human creativity? We can define creativity as the origin of ideas, concepts and theories. Modern science, he says, resolves the question mostly on the level of physics and chemistry in the human brain or consciousness. The divine origin of man’s creative ideas is denied and the question of creativity is reduced to the concept of the human genius. And as a consequence, modern science wrestles with problems on a horizontal level, where no proper solution can be found. Bakar seems to have noted that this has already led scientists, especially physicists to look for new and meaningful explanations. In some instances they involve acceptance of Scripture. According to Bakar, Muslims maintain that the ‘uncreated reality of the Holy Qur’an resides in the Divine Intellect. The individual human intellect, the universe and the Quran all have one and the same metaphysical basis, ‘the Twin source of Revelation and Intellectual intuition’<sup>241</sup>. Bakar calls for a stronger integration of *tafsir*, Quranic exegesis or interpretation, into science. The operative aspect of *tafsir* is the rational faculty, or reason. Its power is analysis and ratiocination<sup>242</sup>. Its tool is logic. Bakar points out, again, that logic does not depend on the validity or the premises, but rather the correctness of its syllogistic reasoning. The role of revelation, he says is to provide the premises of rational or logical arguments. As opposed to a western type of rationalism, the domain of *tafsir* does not extend beyond the external meanings of the Qur’an. A Western rationalism is false not because it seeks to express reality in rational mode, as far as this is possible, but because it seeks to embrace the whole of reality in the realm of reason<sup>243</sup>. ‘In *tafsir*, the rational faculty is placed at the disposal of faith or revelation in the sense that it is called upon to present and expound the content of Revelation in a rational manner to the best degree possible, whereas in modern thought it has been used to rebel against truth claims which lie outside its cognitive competence’<sup>244</sup>.

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<sup>240</sup> Bakar 1999:4

<sup>241</sup> From footnotes: ‘The Unicity of Nature, which is the goal as well as the basis of the Islamic sciences, is derived from the application of the principle of al-Tawhid (Unity) contained in the first Shahada, *La ilaha illa’ Allah, to the domain of Nature.*’ Bakar 1999:18.

<sup>242</sup> Bakar 1999:32.

<sup>243</sup> Bakar 1999:32.

<sup>244</sup> Bakar 1999:32.

As a consequence of this view, a central concern of Islam is with the protection and correct functioning of the human intelligence. Every rational thought, whether intuitive or subject to conscious reasoning is either in direct accordance with revelation or in direct opposition to it. Divine knowledge has an existence independently of the human mind. At the same time, being already imprinted on the rational faculty, it is an integral part of it. The correct use of the rational faculty, says Bakar, does not lead to the kind of rationalism found in the Western world. As is also claimed by Nasr, man's intellectual quest cannot be reduced to a defined method, but always involves an intuition, 'a jump of a creative nature'<sup>245</sup>. It is only through being receptive to ideas of higher levels of reality that true solutions can be found. This means, practically, that one may seek God's help in prayer in order to solve scientific and philosophical problems. However, as we have already seen reception of these higher ideas is possible only if the mind is illuminated by the Active Intellect. The human intellect must have already been illuminated by the light of faith, and touched by the grace issuing forth from revelation. It is upon submission to revelation at all levels that the intellect is enabled to actualize the potential knowledge 'to the extent grace from revelation makes it possible'<sup>246</sup>.

#### *5.4.3 Conclusive remarks.*

As with the authors whose arguments we have previously examined, the principle of Divine unity appears to be the ultimate definition of God. It seems that the reader is expected to accept this premise even prior to acceptance of the Quran as the word of God and Muhammad as the seal of Prophets. Once this premise has been accepted, and naturally so, one simply cannot but believe that the rest is truth. Al-Farabi emphasized the positive aspects of reason as 'a ladder which leads one to the verities of revelation'. The overview of his psychology serves to explain the distinction between intellect and reason.

Al-Farabi's definition of intellect is 'that by which a man understands'<sup>247</sup>. To Bakar, the outcome of intellectual activity, in the form of knowledge is considered superior to the

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<sup>245</sup> Reference made to Nasr "Reflections of methodology..." p.8. in Bakar: 1999:28.

<sup>246</sup> Bakar 1999:31.

<sup>247</sup> Partly practical and partly theoretical. Practically partly related to skills, partly reflective, and has to do with the things humans can alter by deliberation and skill. The theoretical aspect has to do with that which cannot be

process. Reason is not opposed to the intellect or to revelation if it is correctly used. Reason, in fact, should serve both the intellect and revelation. The dichotomy is thus not between the empirical and the rational, but the sense-based and the religious consciousness, which judges and governs it. Truth, then, is not relative, it is considered Absolute in its origin, and all other truths relate to it in a hierarchy of Reality. Moreover, knowledge of this reality is not acquired in a 'democratic' way, but according to a hierarchy of knowledge, of which the ultimate is divine knowledge. Knowledge is acquired through processes in the human soul, of which the rational faculty is placed hierarchically above the other. Yet, as we have seen, rationality in the Islamic sense is understood in terms of acquisition of knowledge from a source external to the human mind. To assert whether the knowledge acquired in fact truth and not merely inherited knowledge, which holds the possibility of both truth and error, is fundamentally linked to whatever level of certainty can be expected in the enquiry for truth about the topic in question. Knowledge about God is, by necessity, subject to a certain level of certainty affirmed in a traditional Islamic way of hierarchically ordering the universe, which is, in turn, believed to have its origin in divine revelation.

It seems that no epistemological crisis would be able to alter the view on the Reality that Bakar describes. This is because this Reality is not external to the human intellect, the human intellect is rather an integral part of the Reality. Only God would be in a position to alter the reality of things. But he could not do so, unless he ceased to be God. In his analysis of Ghazzali's doubt, Bakar understands it as a tension between his rational faculty and his ability of supra-rational perception rather than a true epistemological crisis. By defining al-Ghazzali's doubt as a methodological and not spiritual, he succeeds in reinforcing an Islamic worldview in stead of challenging its premises. Bakar's system of knowledge does leave room for the unknown, but in defined areas only. According to *tawhid* all thought, unless corrupted, leads to right belief. What Bakar does in his methodology is provide a comprehensive structural relationship between the objective reality of beings, the human mind and the Quranic revelation. God himself is surely incomprehensible for the human intellect, but to Bakar, there is nothing about his being that could imply an alteration of the hierarchy of beings, and consequently the system of knowledge about him.

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changed and still be what it is, as for example altering three so that it becomes even, while still remaining three. (Bakar 1998:54-55.)

## 6. Towards an understanding of the epistemological foundations of Islam.

### 6.1 Introduction.

This has so far been a systematic study of Islamic *da'wah* literature in its efforts to prove God's existence and unity. The analysis has involved immediate, first hand reflection. The aim has been at first to identify types of arguments and the premises of the arguments. Next, we have seen the presentation of an Islamic methodology according to one scholar which claims to derive his methodology from traditional philosophy while maintaining the authority of the Qur'an as divine revelation. In the process, questions have come up that need to be met with further reflection. Provided that the epistemology reflected in the arguments as well as Bakar's methodology is representative and intended, there seems to be little or no room for questioning circular argumentation. On the same token belief in God is presented as reasonable and rational. Authors show certain ambivalence in relation to modern knowledge. In the arguments meant to make the existence and unity of God reasonable and plausible, modern knowledge is called upon as support<sup>248</sup>. Bakar follows the other authors in that Islam is reasonable, but is more apt at recognizing a different type of reason than 'the kind of rationalism and logicism one finds in the modern West',<sup>249</sup>

In the first part I will ask what may be the most approach to Islam as a religious phenomenon. I will do so by discussing insights from the study of religion, especially philosophy of religion, including phenomenology. I will ask questions of epistemology, such as what can be known as opposed to belief only, and how things can be known. From there I intend to reflect on Islam as knowledge, on concepts such as 'objectivity', and 'science', and how 'knowledge' is believed to be an appropriate term in relation to God. Toward the end, while keeping in mind the specific arguments, I will reflect on how such arguments might be received in the context of a western intellectual tradition. Islam's encounter with a modern western world view potentially raises major issues that can not be resolved here. I will merely try to map out some of the most striking potential issues on a conceptual level.

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<sup>248</sup> See especially 3.3.2.: *The scientific miracles in the Qur'an* and 4.2.2.: *The unity of God reflected in the unity of nature*.

<sup>249</sup> Bakar 1999:4.

There are also methodological concerns: From the beginning it has been essential to bear in mind the possible distinction between that which the author claims to do, and what he actually does. As also noted by Da Silva and Ore, a good analysis will have to involve interpretation of intent, as well as a reasonable interpretation of the analysis which follows<sup>250</sup> The literature has been demanding in this respect. At times the immediate reasonable response has been puzzlement. Apparent gaps between expressed intent and the way the argument is carried out, has made it necessary, and also worthwhile, to reflect beyond mere ‘arrestments’. The aim throughout the research has been to keep the analysis on a somewhat grounded level. Although, immediately questions arise as to exactly what the analysis is grounded in: Taking the literature seriously in terms of its own methodology, what does ‘a reasonable interpretation’ of it amount to? A scholarly approach to Islamic arguments has to make use of the very set of tools which have been sought emulated in some respects and undermined in others. However, while adding to the complexity, it should not render them useless. The objective of this last chapter is not to choose one particular approach and maintain it as more valid than others, rather to reflect on the complexity of approaches.

## 6.2. Islam as religion.

### *6.2.1 Philosophical approaches to arguments.*

As a starting point we have defined ‘religion’ as a world view claiming to have its origin in divine truths or divine revelation<sup>251</sup>. Rob Fisher describes the paradoxical relationship between faith and reason of the Christian West. On the one hand there is a commitment to faith as opposed to reason, on the other hand the use of philosophy in its defense, apologetics and expositions. Church Father Tertullian pointed to the essential incompatibility of philosophy and religion<sup>252</sup>. Even if they are not unrelated they must be kept apart, because one will eventually destroy the other. The link between them, however, focuses on rationality. A philosophical approach to religion, Fisher argues, is a rational process. Reason has a fundamental part to play in a religious tradition’s reflection on its experiences and

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<sup>250</sup> Da silva/Ore 1996:3

<sup>251</sup> See 2. *Material and method.*

<sup>252</sup> Connolly 1999:110. (Fisher)

beliefs. A religious tradition must also be able to use reason in producing logical arguments and making justifiable claims.<sup>253</sup> A philosophical approach may focus especially on the intellectual dimension of religion<sup>254</sup>. A systematic study of the intellectual dimension is in practice identical with phenomenology of religion or comparative research on religion<sup>255</sup>. It is primarily concerned with describing and understanding the beliefs and practices held by members of a religious tradition. A philosophical approach may for example deal with problems of coherence and consistency involved in holding a concept of 'God'. It should be concerned with the grounds supporting religious belief, and the justification of religious claims to say anything of meaning about persons, the world and God.<sup>256</sup> In this case the major challenge has been to logically interpret an already conceptualized Islamic belief system. Given that the material has been mostly aiming at making the reader accept a truth claim, another question comes up: the question of truth and falsity.

### 6.2.2 *Questions concerning truth and falsity.*

Can a study of Islam include asking questions of truth and falsity? As noted by da Silva and Ore, it can be useful to operate with a distinction between a genuine religious experience, deviation<sup>257</sup> and what is what is reasonably acceptable in the world of religions as well as the science of religion<sup>258</sup>. It is essential to understand religious phenomena in a way that adherents can recognize. Yet, seeking to verify religious claims is an important task of the various disciplines of religious science. Phenomenology of religion is, at base, a methodological approach, in which questions of truth and falsity is not the issue. The phenomenological approach to religion arose, on the one hand, out of a need for an alternative to an empirical-positivistic epistemology which cannot say anything on the possible ontological or metaphysical reference, i.e. the divine<sup>259</sup> It rejects methodological

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<sup>253</sup> Connolly 1999:110.

<sup>254</sup> The term 'dimension' indicates that reason and rationality form only one aspect of the phenomenon of 'religion'. Other dimensions such as psychological and material do exist, but are not taken into account here. It does not suggest that one dimension is superior or inferior, but rather that a philosophical approach is the more appropriate tool.

<sup>255</sup> In order to attain the proper analytical tools for a closer analysis of phenomenology of religion, da Silva and Ore sees the need for discussing its methodological basis, its philosophical roots. This will involve a philosophical discussion about what religion *is*.

<sup>256</sup> Connolly 1999:106.

<sup>257</sup> Da Silva/Ore 1996:7 'villfarelser'.

<sup>258</sup> Da Silva/Ore 1996:7

<sup>259</sup> Da Silva/Ore 1996:2.

atheism, while such leads to an ontological reduction of religious phenomena<sup>260</sup>. It seeks on the other hand to avoid making normative theological judgments based on the theology of a particular context, for example within a given branch of Christian theology. An empirical positivistic view on knowledge does not necessarily lead to an atheistic methodology. The consequence is rather, a methodology of agnosticism neither affirming nor denying transcendent beings and events.<sup>261</sup>

Rudolph Otto introduced the concept of ‘the holy’<sup>262</sup> in order to regard transcendence as an object of scientific study. Religion came to be understood as ‘expression of holiness’<sup>263</sup>. Frank Whaling, while presenting theological approaches to religion<sup>264</sup>, goes further in advocating an approach which ‘takes the notion of transcendence seriously’ and which involves the search for an overarching theology of religion.<sup>265</sup> He understands the theologies of particular religions as contributions to a global theology of religions<sup>266</sup>. With this approach Whaling attempts to lift the study of religion out of the humanities and incorporate theology into a broader field of religious studies. It is interesting to note here a parallel to the type of arguments we have labeled ontological, where Islamic scholars in they make great efforts to describe *fitra*, the natural religiosity of the human being. Scholars in the field of religious studies, Whaling included, do not conclude that transcendent reality, ‘the holy’ or ‘God’ exists in its own right. In contrast, that is exactly what Islamic *da’wah* s does. It seeks to draw a logical link between a universal recognition of God on an intentional level and Islam as the ultimate expression of this. It is in this context that the *fitra* arguments appear as less developed ontological arguments. It does not consider the possibility of a ‘mere’ intentional existence. The actual existence of God is not made evident as opposed to his existence on an intentional level, but simply as a logical extension of it. We will return to this point later in the chapter.

It was insights from the field of anthropology which introduced the recognition of religious belief as built on axioms. As noted by David Gellner it is sometimes impossible, when confronted with certain religious beliefs, to say that it makes no difference whether they are

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<sup>260</sup> Da Silva/Ore 1996:2.

<sup>261</sup> Connolly 1999:xii-xiii. (Foreword by NinianSmart)

<sup>262</sup> Connolly 1999:81.(Erricker)

<sup>263</sup> Connolly 1999:79. (Erricker)

<sup>264</sup> Connolly 1999:226-274. Chapter 7. (Whaling)

<sup>265</sup> Connolly 1999:253 (Whaling)

<sup>266</sup> Connolly 1999:264 (Whaling)

true or false. ‘One cannot simply ‘bracket’ them.’<sup>267</sup> If, for example, what is believed to take place really does so in a way that the researcher can relate to then the belief is ‘straightforward’<sup>268</sup>. If not, the researcher is compelled to ask ‘why they do not see that their beliefs might be false’<sup>269</sup>. Evans-Pritchard noted, in a study among the Azande, that within their own way of thinking, their presuppositions ‘appeared entirely reasonable’<sup>270</sup>. In the wake of this discovery, scholars continued to discuss how far all thoughts systems share this unfalsifiable quality, and whether supposedly ‘rational’ scientific worldviews are any different. Throughout the research of arguments found in Islamic discourse, the aim has been to identify their premises. While avoiding a normative theological approach, we *can* point to the fact that possibility of error is hardly expressed, if at all. A type of argument which goes, ‘I could be wrong here, but here are my reasons for believing such and such’ is not expressed. We cannot actually conclude that the authors ‘do not see’ the possibility of error in the matter of God’s existence and nature, but we can conclude that it is not considered a necessary step in a persuasive argument.

The conclusions in the wake of Evan-Pritchard’s study have tended toward relativism, where religions, like science, are understood as systems of thought to the point of which to explain, control and predict the natural world<sup>271</sup>. As much as these conclusions attempt to understand religions on their own terms, they have also become controversial, as they logically relate to the idea that ‘primitive’ religion is an inferior form of science. Viewing religious belief in terms of stages of societal evolution is an approach abandoned by most researchers today. It is still a popular notion, resulting for example in the idea that the Muslim world is presently living in the Middle Ages, or have not yet reached enlightenment<sup>272</sup>. Meanwhile, we are historically correct in saying that the phases leading up to the modern view on knowledge have not occurred in the same way in Islam. The Muslim world has maintained a more unified epistemology. Critical reasoning is welcomed in theory, but it has not lead to epistemological crises comparable to those in the West. For example, a parallel to Kant’s

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<sup>267</sup> Connolly 1999:28.(Gellner) Related to an anthropological study made by Evans-Pritchard of religious thought in the Azande tribe. Published 1937.

<sup>268</sup> Connolly 1999:28. (Gellner)

<sup>269</sup> Connolly 1999:28. (Gellner)

<sup>270</sup> Conolly 1999:29 (Gellner)

<sup>271</sup> Connolly 1999:29. (Gellner) For example Robin Horton: *African traditional thought and western science*.1967.

<sup>272</sup> A similar tendency in academia is to explore the role of Islamic philosophy in the greater History of philosophy. As expressed by de Santilliana: ‘Islamic culture is too often presented as the indispensable link between Antiquity and our Middle Ages’. In his view ‘a way of turning a great civilization into a service department of Western history.’ Giorgio de Santilliana: from preface to Nasr first edition. Nasr 1987: vii

‘das Ding an sich’, - the world as it appears through use of reason as opposed to the world as it is - is simply not expressed in Islamic literature. Instead model of knowledge prevails in which there is potential accuracy in the relationship between Reality as it is and the way it is understood by the human being. The Islamic belief in a hierarchy of Reality places the ontological reality of God within one and the same epistemological scheme.

When approaching Islam as *religion* we do so with the tools made available by the field of religious studies. They are useful in terms of bringing us closer to an understanding of religious claims by precise definitions, regardless of what the claims are based on. We are not, however, to make judgments as to whether the conclusions of the arguments are true or false. Before we conclude our research, however, let us approach Islam as that which claims to be, namely *knowledge*.

### 6.3. Islam as knowledge.

#### 6.3.1 Revelation as source of knowledge.

When studying the arguments labelled ‘ontological’, we saw that human religiosity, *fitra*, is thought to relate directly to a Reality independent of it. According to Bakar’s methodology there is a direct link between the human intellect and divine revelation. Shalabi’s description of this relationship is that the human being constitutes ‘the potential point of transition between God, who is beyond comprehension, in that He is pure Unity and is only knowable to Himself, and the created world’<sup>273</sup> On the one hand it means that human knowledge is limited and that God is beyond human understanding. On the other hand Islamic theology stresses that it is possible, or even required to know. Divine revelation is precisely this: a recognition of ‘man’s essential inability to deal with his world’<sup>274</sup> and essentially the source of all knowledge.

Islam is not unique in claiming religious beliefs to be factual. It is also far from the only religion to invest in philosophical reasoning. What the literature has shown is a widespread

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<sup>273</sup> Shalabi 2006:6. (Reflects a gnostic worldview, but not one in which the worldly equals evil. All creation is in a sense ‘good’, because it reflects the Creator.)

<sup>274</sup> Shalabi 2006:13.

use of scientific terms in support of divinely revealed knowledge. Bakar's agenda is not merely the defence of Islam. He esteems revealed religion as directly relevant for scientific pursuit. Islamic philosophy holds that all truth has one and the same unified source. It relates to the human intellect through the Active intellect.<sup>275</sup> Thus to distinguish between knowledge which can be attained by reason, and knowledge which can only be acquired by revelation, it is not a concern. Islam does not share conceptual distinction between general and special revelation similar to that in Western thought. Islamic theologians may recognize a qualitative difference between that of which every human being should be naturally aware and the deeper awareness acquired through faith and worship. A clear distinction is not found in their argumentation, and it is not central. Islam is considered intellectually available to any reasonable person<sup>276</sup> once it has been presented to them. While there are multiple ways in which God has made his will known, the words of the Qur'an is withheld as the normative center, by which everything else is interpreted. Yet, there is no potential paradox inherent in what one should know about God 'naturally' and what is made known in Scripture. As a consequence of this unified epistemology, authors of da'wah seek not to reconcile religion and reason, but hold them up as fundamental allies from the very beginning.

Two rather distinct ways of acquiring knowledge do appear from the material. First, these are knowledge which can be acquired through scientific study and second, knowledge based on that which is called 'common sense'. Each relate to man's ability to understand the world around him and of God in a reasonable way, and they are both expected to anticipate the clarity of the words of the Qur'an. 'Common sense' is generally used in support of the above mentioned *fitra*-argument. It refers to a quality of all human being as the subjective pole of knowledge, with all of its faculties. Knowledge of God's existence is self-evident or 'natural (*fitriyah*) to the intellect'<sup>277</sup> because each human being has already been equipped with potential knowledge by the Creator himself. The word 'science' appears in variety of approaches, but it is always used to support truth claims.

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<sup>275</sup> See 5.3.1. The hierarchy of beings and the corresponding faculties of knowing.

<sup>276</sup> Example: 'No reasonable person can listen to this discussion and not believe in the revelations of the Qur'an.' El-Naggar 2006:68

<sup>277</sup> Al-Farabi, transl. in Bakar 1998:58.

### 6.3.2 *The Western scientific model of knowledge:*

The possibilities, and limitations, of science are closely connected with its epistemological and anthropological starting point. Plato's simple condition of what can be considered 'knowledge' is true belief joined with good arguments<sup>278</sup>. It involves actual truthfulness as well as the knower being conscious of its truthfulness. Knowledge can also be understood in relational terms<sup>279</sup>. It entails the existence of a subject of knowledge, which is the human being, and the existence of an object of knowledge which can be experienced or understood. How does one acquire knowledge of an objective reality? Throughout the history of philosophy in the West, two main types of well-debated theories of knowledge give completely different answers, namely empiricism and rationalism.

Knowledge can also be understood as perception. Empiricism means that knowledge should be acquired through experience<sup>280</sup>, or more specifically, a 'systematic enquiry of reality in order to acquire knowledge as verified experience.'<sup>281</sup> The latter definition underlines the methodology behind the acquisition of knowledge. Scientific knowledge as tried and tested experience ought to be universal, objective and constant<sup>282</sup>. An important principle in objective enquiry is that premises should not rest on a desired conclusion. It is a fundamental principle in scientific enquiry that evidence that is used to construct a theory, or hypothesis, cannot be used again as evidence of that theory<sup>283</sup>. If so, it ends in what we have called circular argumentation, where premises are not challenged, rather reinforced. Within what Chalmers calls 'a widely held commonsensical view of science'<sup>284</sup> the problem would seem possible to avoid. Given that an objective reality exists prior to and independent of our research, we can define science as 'knowledge derived from the facts of experience'<sup>285</sup>. Yet, it still leaves open the question of which statements are borne out of observation and which not.<sup>286</sup> If judgments about the truth of observation statements depend on what is already known or assumed, then the observable facts are as fallible as the presuppositions underlying

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<sup>278</sup> Da Silva/Ore 1996:10 '*sann tro forenet med gode grunner*'... Alternatively: true judgement with an account.

<sup>279</sup> Da Silva/Ore 1996:10.

<sup>280</sup> Experience understood in a strict sense as systematically derived from ideas implanted in the mind by way of sense perception.

<sup>281</sup> Da Silva/Ore 1996:9. '*en systematisk undersøkelse av virkeligheten for å få kunnskap som prøvd erfaring*'..

<sup>282</sup> Da Silva/Ore 1996:12.

<sup>283</sup> Chalmers 1999:184.

<sup>284</sup> Chalmers 1999:1.

<sup>285</sup> Chalmers 1999:2.

<sup>286</sup> Chalmers 1999:14.

them. To Chalmers this suggests that even ‘the observable basis for science is not as straightforward and secure as is widely and traditionally supposed.’<sup>287</sup> Bakar appears to be the only one among the Islamic authors with a clear understanding of the problems with circular reasoning. Yet, he concludes that the scientific models of the West are not more useful than others when it comes to reaching objective truth. Any scientific community, he says, is axiomatic in their research and thus modern science cannot be trusted any more than other worldviews<sup>288</sup>. On the contrary the existence of several scientific methods which have made objectivity a democratic enterprise lead to a fragmented world view. Bakar believes a shift is necessary and already on the way.

Rationalism, as a way to knowledge, is defined as a priori reasoning, independent of observation and thus the counter-part of empiricism. The view on man’s rationality as means to acquire true and certain knowledge has in western intellectual history shifted between orthodoxy, where knowledge is understood in relational terms, to a methodology of objective enquiry and critical reasoning. The demand for objectivity, related to the methodological agnosticism of phenomenology of religion, is the type of ‘organized skepticism’<sup>289</sup> in which the researcher is obligated to question established routines, authorities, theories and results of prior research<sup>290</sup>.

### 6.3.3 *Islamic perspectives on rationality.*

The western intellectual tradition defines ‘rational thought’ as that which can be known by inference in terms of unaided reason. By contrast, revelation is understood as God’s communication of truths which unaided human reason cannot grasp for itself<sup>291</sup>. From an Islamic point of view, the very notion that anything in the human being should be unaided or removed from the ‘aid’ of God is unthinkable. In the *da’wah* literature used for this study we find a somewhat ambivalent attitude toward the human intellect. An Islamic model of knowledge opposes, and contrasts, ‘theoretical anarchism’<sup>292</sup>. Meanwhile, there is a belief in

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<sup>287</sup> Chalmers 1999:18.

<sup>288</sup> Bakar 1999:20.

<sup>289</sup> From Robert K. Merton 1973 in Da Silva/Ore 1996:2.

<sup>290</sup> Da Silva/Ore 1999: 2.

<sup>291</sup> Human reason either as a ‘preamble’ to faith (f.ex Aquinas) or not related at all (dialectic theology?).

<sup>292</sup> Bakar 1999:16.

common sense. The arguments we have labelled ‘cosmological’ link revelation directly to empirical observation in two different ways. First in that the universe bears witness of the existence of a Creator, secondly in that the unity of nature reflects the unity of the Creator.

In Bakar’s methodology facts are not ‘derived’ from anywhere simply by using the proper scientific method. All knowledge has its origin in a comprehensive, unified revelation. The Qur’an, the observable signs in nature and man’s rationality are believed to have ultimately one and the same source, in Farabian terms: the Active intellect<sup>293</sup>. Bakar brings to the table a coherent methodology explaining how rationality is believed to mirror, and not, unlike a western rationality, challenge revelation. In Bakar’s methodology the primary ‘function’ of man’s rationality is not in potential opposition to that which is observed. Rather, if functioning properly, it has the potential to ‘actualize’ knowledge from the divine. In other words, revelation from God is not confined to the senses, or even to experience in a wider sense. More than that, it is directly linked with the human being’s ultimate use of his or her rational mind. Every human being is thought to be equipped with a rational soul, holding the potential of acquiring knowledge through illumination by the Active intellect<sup>294</sup>. The discovery throughout this research has been that according to Islam it is not a matter of revelation *or* rationality. The Active intellect, serves as a model for intellectual perfection. Because the rational mind is created by God it is also created with potential knowledge of God. It is upon acceptance of the Qur’an, which is the objective revelation, that the subjective revelation, namely man’s intelligence, becomes an actuality. The rational mind is therefore neither ‘free’ nor detached from religious belief.

#### *6.3.4 A phenomenological approach to science?*

The task of epistemology is to discover how knowledge differs from belief and opinion. In order to distinguish philosophically between the concepts of knowledge and belief, he asks: ‘Are the beliefs we hold capable of being true or false?’<sup>295</sup> Or is this precisely what makes them beliefs and not knowledge? A simple answer to the question is that knowledge can be scientifically proven, whereas religious belief can only be scientifically recorded. A

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<sup>293</sup> See 5.3.2. Al-Farabi’s psychology and the Active intellect.

<sup>294</sup> See 5.3.2. Al-Farabi’s psychology and the Active intellect.

<sup>295</sup> Connolly 1999:121.

consequence of empirical-positivistic view on science has been that statements which claim to say something about reality must be empirically verifiable. Religious and metaphysical ‘knowledge’ such as ‘God exists’ are not verifiable, nor falsifiable, and therefore meaningless per definition. But must science disregard ‘God’ as object of study? As previously mentioned, an affirmation of ‘the holy’ was introduced to solve this in question in the study of religion<sup>296</sup>. Da Silva and Ore trace the roots of phenomenology of religion to general philosophy. Phenomenology attempts to find answers to questions such as ‘how is knowledge possible at all?’ and ‘how is objectivity possible at all?’<sup>297</sup> Can we trust sense perceptions to be factual?<sup>298</sup> While all sciences seek knowledge in different forms, phenomenology must investigate the foundations for all knowledge and thus be the epistemological foundation for all sciences. According to da Silva and Ore, Husserl believes phenomenology should be the basis of all science<sup>299</sup>. Husserl uses the term ‘phenomenology’ to describe something which ‘reveals’ itself to our consciousness when we think of something, perceives, experiences or imagines something, ‘independently of the question of whether it exists as such in a natural reality’<sup>300</sup>. The intentional quality of human consciousness is that it is always directed toward something other than itself. The intended object may not, however, have a logical relation to something real. Sometimes it exists merely as an intended object<sup>301</sup>. The moment a claim is made concerning the factual existence of whatever is described one has left the area of phenomenology. With the *fitra* argument, Islamic *da’wah* authors follow also Husserl’s phenomenology as far as to the intentional existence of God. Yet, it is exactly on the matter of existence that they separate. Arguments are clearly presented as ‘proofs’ of actual being. They are meant to leave the reader ‘without a shred of doubt’, that God does, in fact exist, and that he is One. A phenomenological approach to science is still unable to reconcile a western scientific model with Islamic attempts at scientifically proving God’s existence.

Conclusively, let us return to the question asked in the beginning of this chapter: Can a study of Islam involve questions of truth and falsity? Islam viewed as religion is a unified view of

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<sup>296</sup> See 6.2.2.: *Questions of truth and falsity*.

<sup>297</sup> Da Silva/Ore 1996:20, from da Silva 1982:31 in reference to Ströker 1972:252.

<sup>298</sup> Chalmers notes: The extent to which perceptions are influenced by the background and expectations of the observer, so that what appears to be an observable fact for one need not be for another. (Chalmers 1999:17)

<sup>299</sup> Husserl’s view on phenomenology as a strict science has been criticized by analytical philosophy, because of this lack of truth criteria Stegmüller (1969): ‘phenomenology lacks “just the feature to make it science – intersubjective testability’ in Da Silva/Ore 1996:21.

<sup>300</sup> Runes (1974) in da Silva/Ore 1996:19.

<sup>301</sup> Da Silva/Ore 1996:20.

knowledge, based on a set of axioms. As religion, a ‘closed system’<sup>302</sup>, we are obliged to look at it from an outsider’s perspective. Islam is best understood phenomenologically, through ‘bracketing’. If viewed as science, it must be questioned. A scientific claim is an invitation to challenge it, even if it ‘proved’ impossible to disprove it. As ‘science’, or objective truth, we have to approach it with the tools available to ‘anyone’. When it is claimed that an intelligent person cannot fail to see that a certain argument leads to the truth<sup>303</sup>, we are all invited as insiders. If someone does fail to see that the argument is true, or can hold water scientifically, it is because their minds have not been illuminated with divine revelation and remain in the dark<sup>304</sup>. Although this is logically very possible, it is not easily verified or falsified and we have therefore left the area of science. Chalmers articulates the undesirability of making ad hoc claims. Science as an open system aims for simplicity, but as noted by Chalmers, by the time evidence is used to construct a theory it cannot be used again as evidence of that theory<sup>305</sup>. Once a circular argument has been detected, it is necessary to reevaluate its epistemological foundations. Islam escapes the critical questioning which is so crucial to science. As a closed system, it remains, in scientific terms, an ad hoc hypothesis.

#### 6.4. Getting the message across.

*Da’wa* literature holds that the message of Islam is simple, reasonable and highly important. But does the message communicate with the reader? Conclusions such as ‘God exists’ and ‘God is One’ are believed to be impossible to get around. Yet, the validity of the arguments stumble upon a set of obstacles when communicating to a Western intellectual tradition. Towards the end we will briefly deal with three of them.

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<sup>302</sup> Connolly 1999:29. (Gellner) Horton’s division into closed (religious) and open (scientific) systems had controversial elements, in that religions of preliterate societies are an inferior form of science. The use of these terms here do not entail such a view. See 6.4.1.

<sup>303</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:16. Musavi Lari asks rhetorically: ‘What would be the answer of an intelligent person?’ See also footnote 227.

<sup>304</sup> Found in Mawududi’s description of the *kafir*, the unbelievers. Pages:14-15.

<sup>305</sup> Chalmers 1999:184. See also 6.3.2.

#### *6.4.1 The three archetypes of knowledge versus a unified view of knowledge.*

In the Western world three archetypes of knowledge have evolved, the humanities, theology and nature. Whaling explains how each has played a role as the dominant model. To the ancient Greeks, 'religion' in its different forms found its place the humanities. At the time of Aquinas, theology became 'the queen of sciences'<sup>306</sup>, ruling over philosophical thought. In the wake of the modern era, the theological world view was replaced with a natural world view, in which experimental science gradually became the basis for all certain knowledge. By contrast, the Muslim world has largely been able to maintain a view in which the Qur'an remains the utmost expression of truth while all other sources of knowledge confirm this knowledge in a unified epistemology.

In our literature, arguments aspiring to be academic appear to be drawn from an unwarranted mix of disciplines. As an example, we have seen efforts to prove God's existence with the help of geology and its relation to the miraculous nature of a literary text<sup>307</sup>. Other authors draw support from seemingly random references to scholars from another time, unrecognized in academic circles or unnoticed by the general public<sup>308</sup>. The result is confusion. The western reader is left unable to follow the logical steps of an argument and to recognize it as reasoning on the level it claims to be. The literature appeals to man's own ability to reason. Yet, this is exactly where it fails to persuade. As noted throughout the study, Islamic authors do not operate with a distinction between religious belief and science. God's existence and unity is expected to fall under the category of knowledge. Whereas the Western reader is expecting the notion of God falling into the category of 'religion' he is introduced to an unfamiliar category of scientific knowledge. Islam presents God's existence as the most fundamental knowledge of all. In the mind of the Western reader, 'God' is the very last thing that can be labelled scientific.

A lack of friction between religious thought and scientific enquiry has implications on the Islamic understanding of causality. Whereas a scientific world view is preoccupied with examining the possible relationships between matters and events, an Islamic world view makes the existence of all that happens, in every possible mode, directly dependent on the

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<sup>306</sup> Connolly 1999:231. (Whaling) Quoting Bourne (1965)

<sup>307</sup> See Naik and El-Naggar's arguments on the scientific miracles of the Qur'an in 3.3.2.

<sup>308</sup> Bilal Philips reference to liberal Biblical scholars only, for example R.T. France: *The Myth of The God Incarnate*. And J.K. Elliot: "Checking the Bible's roots. Philips:5.

will and act of God. Bakar believes strongly in Islamic science. The ‘modern scientific worldview’ is in his view an unsuitable method to acquiring knowledge because it does not take into account the relationship between God and the things of the world. This is also recognized by Musavi Lari. No experiment can be set up to determine whether a non-material being exists or not, ‘because only what can be negated by means of experiment can be proven by means of experiment’<sup>309</sup> Hameed explains how the empirical positivistic approach ‘led to the belief that human beings are constituted in such a way that the knowledge of reality is always unavailable to them’<sup>310</sup>. Reality behind appearances was placed beyond the scope of human understanding and therefore be abandoned. Consequentially, to speak of ‘proof’ with regard to a transcendent being became irrelevant. Some authors who recognize the problems of conveying the proper message, sees that there is more to this than just a communicative aspect. Nasr is not afraid to point at the ‘blind emulation of Western models blended often in ad hoc fashion with what has survived of the madrasah system.’ In his view this is currently causing confusion and chaos in education curricula. Islamic scholars who adapt western models lose the unified perspective. Their arguments fall apart not because of the competition that these western models represent, but because they are blended in. It is against this background that Bakar calls for a revival of the Islamic scientific pursuit, and strengthen especially the area of education<sup>311</sup>. Elmessiri would like to see that ‘rather than imposing Western analytical categories on the Islamic worldview, the bearers of the new discourse try to discover its fundamental categories’<sup>312</sup> As he puts it: ‘The bearers of the new discourse neither reject nor accept the West uncritically.’<sup>313</sup>

As mentioned previously, the Western view of Islam has been shaped by theories of societal evolution. Once the leading in both anthropology and history of religion, they are now considered barely respectable academic circles. They are nevertheless alive and well in popular culture<sup>314</sup> and have resulted in for example a notion that the Muslim world is living in the Middle Ages and has not reached Enlightenment and corresponding scientific progress and humanistic values<sup>315</sup> Further, the notion that any difficulties these societies might face

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<sup>309</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:30.

<sup>310</sup> Hameed 2009.

<sup>311</sup> Bakar 1999: appendix.

<sup>312</sup> Elmessiri:2003.

<sup>313</sup> Elmessiri 2003.

<sup>314</sup> Connolly 1999:11. (Gellner)

<sup>315</sup> A similar tendency in academia is to explore the role of Islamic philosophy in the greater History of philosophy. As expressed by de Santilliana: ‘Islamic culture is too often presented as the indispensable link

stem from remaining in a dark, theological world view, now nearly completely left behind by the Western world. Without upholding the presupposition of societal evolution, we can conclude that historically, the Islamic world has escaped processes or crises similar to those of the West. Following Whaling, we may say that it is the Western world that has always lacked, as it seems, a unified view of knowledge. Facing a global context, the third mode of knowledge currently ruling in the West is always going to be subject to replacement with a new<sup>316</sup>.

### 6.3.2. *An optimistic view on the human being and the reception of truth.*

As we saw in the beginning, authors of *da'wah* literature utter frustration of the misplaced image given of Islam in the West. Misconceptions, not disagreement, are believed to be the main problem. After establishing this, an analysis may follow of what is believed to really be the crisis of the Western world, such as unbelief<sup>317</sup> conflicting ideologies of materialism and communism<sup>318</sup>, and reductionist views on science<sup>319</sup>. The Islamic world has been able to maintain a unified world view and it enjoys a status as the ruling theological tradition. The optimism on behalf of Islam is rooted in its anthropology, described in detail in chapter 5. Combined with a strong belief in Islam's universality, the result is belief in 'enlightenment'<sup>320</sup> as the missing piece in the desired development. As Shalabi puts it, '[a]midst the ruins of a thousand faiths and secular ideologies, Islam, religion of life, lives on.'<sup>321</sup>

Although perhaps more thoroughly shaken and more frequently thrown overboard, the West also has its foundations. A positive view on humanity's 'natural disposition' is not one of them, and such claims will in themselves be liable to invoke at least some sort of scepticism. Doubt is not considered a moral virtue in the Islamic world. In the West, doubt is considered

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between Antiquity and our Middle Ages'. In his view 'a way of turning a great civilization into a service department of Western history.' Giorgio de Santillana: from preface to Nasr first edition. Nasr 1987: vii

<sup>316</sup> To whaling this includes incorporating 'an overarching theology of religion' into a broader field of study, including religious studies. Connolly 1999: 253(Whaling)

<sup>317</sup> Mawdudi 1990:14-17. '*Vantroens natur*'.

<sup>318</sup> Musavi Lari 2000:81-100. '*Lesson Eight: Pseudo-Scientific demagoguery*'.

<sup>319</sup> Bakar 1999:28.

<sup>320</sup> 'enlightenment' in the meaning of the word. Not to be seen in relation to the period of Enlightenment in Western intellectual history.

<sup>321</sup> Shalabi 2006:80

not only a moral virtue, it is also considered reasonable. The Christian tradition of West knows a tradition of apologetics, which is the attempt to present of religious belief in such a way that it meets counter arguments based on doubt. According to Islamic *da'wah*, faith and reason are not opposed. Consequentially, Islam does not need 'defense' or 'apologies'. A clear presentation of the foundations of Islam is believed to be sufficient. When facing a Western audience, however, it meets the demand for a process of reasoning which appears exactly what it claims to be, namely objective. In Islamic methodology 'objectivity' seems to refer to realization of potential knowledge in terms of intuition and perception. A modern western understanding of objectivity emphasizes empirical verification and detachment. A persuasive argument is one which takes objections into account and meets the counter-arguments in a proper way. When self-critique is completely missing, it is difficult to accept results of scientific studies as 'objective'. To the 'insider', using Connolly's term again<sup>322</sup>, *tawheed* makes all the necessary sense, while the 'outsider' remains in the outside, not any more worried about his own ability to think rationally.

### 6.3.3 A disinterested approach to 'God'.

Finally, and perhaps most strikingly, Islamic *da'wah* meets with a habit of treating the issue of transcendence as 'phenomenon'. Historically, 'natural theology', has played a part also in Western philosophy. Aquinas held that certain things about God are demonstrable by reason: such as he exists, he is one, and he is good.<sup>323</sup> To accept these conclusions does not entail or necessitate religious faith. *Belief* in God is thus not an article of faith, but a prerequisite to faith. One is self-evident, the other is not. This is an essential distinction in Christian theology, but a foreign concept in Islam. In Islam, There is no need for 'additional' revelations. *Belief* in the existence of the One God is ceaselessly linked to the worship of him. In phenomenology, the actual relationship between the object of research and the metaphysical or transcendent dimension of reality<sup>324</sup> is irrelevant. Once such a claim has been made, one has left the phenomenological approach, and with that the area of scientific study. Meanwhile, the more modern idea of 'the holy' has made it possible to identify 'God' as an object of study. We have previously seen parallels between the field of religious studies

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<sup>322</sup> Connolly 1999:2.

<sup>323</sup> *Sacred Doctrine*. <http://www.aquinasonline.com/Topics/natheol.html> Retrieved 19.11.09.

<sup>324</sup> Da Silva/Ore 1996:34.

and Islamic arguments in approaching 'God' on an intentional level. Where they separate just at the point where the actual 'Being'<sup>325</sup> of the transcendent is in question. 'God' remains, in phenomenological terms, *noema*<sup>326</sup>.

A phenomenological approach to religion is to serve as an alternative to reductionism and judgment. Yet, any approach which does not consider truth or falsity will in a sense 'reduce' what the Islamic scholars are trying to achieve. *Da'wah* literature does not ask the reader to understand or analyze. It expects the reader to take a stand. Yet, even in a situation where all misconceptions were overcome, the arguments meet with a western habit of continually questioning truth claims, philosophical as well as religious. The possibility of an absolute truth in existence is not excluded. Anyone claiming to have grasped it completely, however, meets with an environment where one is satisfied with identifying axioms and agreeing to disagree. In its scientific quest, the West seems content with holding up a preference for objectivity before truth. Even in the cases where questions concerning 'God' is considered with great care and serious analyses it is still detached from the question of ontology. Relativism as such may not be the conclusion, but it has become an essential skill to be able to pretend that it does not matter whether God exists or not.

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<sup>325</sup> Heidegger writes 'Being' with a capital B when referring to it in purely ontological terms. Da Silva 1982:56

<sup>326</sup>Noema: intended object. Da Silva/Ore 1996:in reference to Husserl 1950:181.

## 7. Summary and conclusion

In the beginning we set out to come closer to a phenomenological understanding of Islam, its epistemological foundations in particular. From what we are able to conclude as a result of this study of Islamic *da'wah* literature, we can say the following:

Islamic *da'wah* holds that God, by definition, is fundamentally different from creation. He is transcendent and can not be comprehended by the human being. There are nevertheless a lot of ways available with which the human being can come to certain knowledge of God's existence; through recognizing the religious nature of man, through observing nature, and through the study of Scripture.

When it comes to the Islamic understanding of the nature of God, one principle is at the center, and that is *tawhid*, the principle of divine unity. *Tawhid* signifies more than the unity of God only. An important doctrine is that the unity of God is reflected in the unity of nature. It is through revelation in a unified sense that God's existence and nature becomes evident. Revelation in a unified sense means the words of the Qur'an, the universe reflecting God's unity and the religious nature of the human being. The principle of *tawhid* is thus the underlying principle in Islamic epistemology. It is used to prove divine unity as well as the existence of God. We have seen arguments showing that a proper definition of God, that he is one, is believed to be enough to conclude that he exists. It is difficult to find arguments which take into account that the premises could be subject to questioning. The desired conclusion of the argument may be drawn upon as its main support. Any counter-argument is met with the claim that counter-arguments are impossible. Within the epistemological scheme of Islam, perhaps they are.

Osman Bakar explains the epistemological scheme of Islam in terms of a unified system of methodologies, in which he incorporates the belief in the Qur'an as divine revelation. Bakar further links the principle of *tawhid* to objectivity. He criticizes the Western view on objectivity which encourages critical reasoning and doubt, and rejects what he calls theoretical anarchism as a means to acquire knowledge. In his view, it is precisely because objective truth exists that doubt is possible.

While *tawhid* is at the centre of Islamic epistemology, the question of revelation also relates to the principle of the hierarchy of beings. Bakar understands revelation in relational terms. Using models developed by philosophers of the earliest centuries of Islam, he seeks to show that there is a direct correspondence between objective Reality, which is hierarchical in nature, and the knowing subject, which is the hierarchy of the faculties of the human soul. According to these models, each level of Reality has a corresponding mode of knowledge in the human being. There is an objective pole of knowledge, its ontological principle being the Divine intellect, or the *Logos*, and a corresponding pole of subjective knowledge, which is the human soul.

It is not the transcendent God himself who is the revealed. In accordance with *tawhid*, the Qur'an, nature and the rational faculty of the human intellect are thought to all have the same metaphysical basis, or source. While truth can ultimately have only one source, the conclusion of the argument is that this metaphysical basis must be God. The arguments presented in chapters 3 and 4 suggest that knowledge of God's existence and unity can be acquired through observation as well as rational thought. In the model presented by Bakar, revelation is understood in terms of supra-rational perception. Potential knowledge becomes actual knowledge upon illumination by the Active intellect. It is *in* the rational faculty of the human soul, which is of a spiritual substance, that the acquisition of divine knowledge takes place.

The Islamic understanding of rationality is thus fundamentally different from a Western understanding of rationality. Within the epistemological scheme of Islam the rational mind is neither free nor fundamentally detached from religion. Rather, it is directly related to divine knowledge. Consequently, it does not make sense to rationalize oneself out of religious belief. In the literature this comes to an expression through a general absence of critical reasoning. Epistemological doubt is explained away with the help of a comprehensive world view which does not, and cannot, separate between the rationality of the human being and divine revelation.

The aim of Islamic *da'wah* literature, in the sense that it appeals to the intellect, is to make the reader accept Islam as knowledge. Meanwhile, Islam maintains that God is, undoubtedly

and by definition, transcendent. From the perspective of a western model of knowledge, proofs regarding transcendence are indirect proofs, and serve at best as indications. God is not known unless it is God who is actually revealed. The Islamic objection that God cannot directly reveal himself without ceasing to be transcendent is logically valid, but rests on an axiom which disqualifies it from a Western understanding of scientific knowledge.

It is through the placement of scientific knowledge and knowledge about God within one and the same epistemological scheme of *tawhid* that efforts to scientifically prove God's existence and nature are made possible. However, by not touching upon the premises of their arguments, Islamic authors remain inside *tawhid* throughout the entire discourse, whereas the critical reader remains on the outside.

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