

MINARET OF FREEDOM INSTITUTE STATEMENT OF METHODOLOGY

The basic premise behind our methodology is to take seriously the theme expressed in our book *Signs in the Heavens* that the Islamic epistemology is predicated on the belief that absolute certainty belongs only to Allah, and that the best that humans can do is to seek a convergence of the three sources of knowledge Allah has granted to us: reason, experience, and transmission from reliable sources. Within that epistemological framework, we are committed to the most **rigorous** academic research. Every hypothesis, every idea, every argument, and every conclusion shall be subjected to the most thorough questioning to seek its weakness with the intention of reformulating our analyses until they can withstand any rational scrutiny or empirical test.

The work we are involved in is social science. There is a tendency to think of social science as a “soft science.” While there are some good reasons for this, there is no reason for *our* social scientific studies and analysis to lack rigor.

It is always wise to define one’s terms. We should be careful to that in our work, and also in the terminology used to plan and discuss our work. Here is a useful lexicon:

A **model** is a theoretical construction that serves to represent something by specifying its functional elements and the relationships among them. It may have predictive value, or it may serve (for example in the discussion of chaotic systems) to illustrate how systems work without actually giving one the ability to make specific predictions in particular cases.

A **theory** is not a conjecture but a detailed **model** of how observed facts relate to one another based on falsifiable premises. The relationship between theory and the phenomena of interest may be established, and ideally should be established by both analysis and synthesis. **Analysis** will begin with a study of the phenomena and attempt to extract the theoretical elements while **synthesis** begins with the theoretical elements and attempts to construct a model that can explain or predict the behavior of the phenomena.

There are some things we shall take as a given. We shall not question the text of the Qur’an. While the Qur’an itself invites individuals to ascertain for themselves its authenticity by investigating its inimitability, we, as an institution, take the received Arabic text as our starting point. Muslims, by definition (the second part of the shahadah, *Muhammad ar-rasûl Allah*) have already been convinced that the Qur’an has been reliably transmitted from its divine source. (Non-Muslims working for this organization shall for the purposes of their work for this organization accept this premise as a hypothetical.) However **this does not mean that we take any given interpretation of the text as a given**. On the contrary, all interpretations may be questioned and reconsidered.

The hadith shall not be taken as a given neither in text, interpretation, nor authenticity. The hadith shall not be treated as revelation, which they are not, but as historical reports (which is what the word hadith means), subject to the same test as any other historical record, only more so, because of their bearing on the sunnah which is a source of Islamic law.

The hadith are useful as an aid to understanding the Qur'an insofar as, to the extent that they may be deemed authentic, they provide an insight into the sunnah of the Prophet (as). The significance of the sunnah, however, is not as a supplement to the Qur'an, still less as a means of abrogation of the Qur'an (*astaghfirullah!*) but as an **example** of how the principles of Qur'anic Islam were implemented by the Prophet in his time and place. These examples provide an illustration of the principles that, properly understood, may allow us to formulate equally correct answers appropriate to our time and place and the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Precisely because practice of the Prophet is set forward in the Qur'an as an example to us, it is imperative that we understand the meaning of the word **example**. Consider the following illustration: A math textbook explains how to do addition. At the end of the chapter the following example is given: "6+6=12." On the final exam, a student is asked to add nine and seven. If he gives the answer "12" he shall fail, and it will not avail him to complain that "the example in the textbook" gave an answer of twelve. Similarly, we shall fail in our duty of properly understanding the sunnah if we engage in such mindless *taqlid*.

In the same way we shall take **reason** as a given, without denying the possibility that any chain of reasoning may be erroneous either because it is based on false premises, contains a logical fallacy, or may simply not apply to the point under consideration. Also, we shall give due weight to the significance of **experience** without denying that observations can be mistaken, perceptions may be false, and that the lake we see in the desert with our own eyes could in the end prove to be a mirage. However, **when carefully interpreted revelation, sound reasoning, and repeated experience all point to the same conclusion, we shall declare ourselves to be as certain as it is possible for humans beings to be, and still, to avoid arrogance, add *Allahu a`lam*.**

We are an Islamic libertarian think tank. It is the academic rigor I insist upon that makes us a think tank. It is our acceptance of the text of the Qur'an that makes us Islamic. It is the fact that we understand that neither our religious convictions nor our academic rigor justifies the imposition of our ideas on those who disagree that makes us libertarian.

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