



## The Relationship between Reason and Revelation from the Perspective of an Extraordinary Salafi Abū al-Wafā' Ibn 'Aqīl \*

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**Abstract:** The relationship between reason and revelation has been on the agenda of Islamic scholars for a long time and it has been discussed as an essential argument with regard to developing the source of religious epistemology. The Salafist approach represents the most traditionalist fundamental religious idea of Islam, they subordinate the reason to the revelation and hence they consider the revelation and religious narrations as a pure and the only source. Ibn 'Aqīl was a member of the Salafi/Hanbali scholars and he had some counter-view/discourses against intellectual tradition that he belonged to. He attached great importance to reason and this is the most notable discourse in his doctrine. Also, this is an indication of his traditionalist approach and meanwhile, he tends towards rationalism. The main argument of Ibn 'Aqīl regarding the relationship between reason and revelation is the compatibility of reason and revelation. Reason confirms revelation and revelation agrees with reason. So, there is no contradiction or conflict between reason and revelation. Thusly, a correct understanding of revelation is only possible by using the mind/by putting the mind into action correctly.

**Keywords:** Ibn 'Aqīl, reason, revelation, reasoning, knowledge.

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## Introduction

Reason and revelation are two main sources of knowledge. The balance between these two sources have been disturbed due to strict traditionalist, that restricted reason and strict rationalist that restricted the knowledge of revelation. However, reason and revelation are not alternative to one another, rather than this, they are promoter/supporting phenomena for one another. Because revelation is a dominant source over the human being deeds/actions as well as it is a motivated source that leads human being to do ontological inquiries about the external world and search for the meaningfulness.

Relationship between mind and reason is the first and a main issue in the agenda that always keep the mind of the Islamic scholar, especially philosopher and theologian busy. The Kalam (islamic theology) has attached a great importance to the reason when setting its methodology and this is the key feature that distinguishes kalam from other related studies. The reason has a function in evaluating, processing, and verification the knowledge just as it is performing the same function to get the knowledge. So, the reason has the same approach to revelation as well. The Muslim theologians (mutakallimūn) consider the reason as an effective instrument in understanding and interpreting revelation.

In Salafī's paradigm reason is considered as a way for understanding activities as well as using of reason/rational method in religious interpretation is considered as bid'a (innovation) and void, in opposition to Muslim theologians. Although Abū al-Wafā' Ibn 'Aqīl, who lived in the fifth century Hijri and was a Hanbalī-Salafī that member of Ashab al-Hadith, he questioned the possibility of a third approach among these two-opposite points of views. The main reason behind his differentiation from the Salafī predecessor, is the lecture of kalam that he attended for a while within the scope of multiple/ versatile teaching activities which were given by Mu'tazili scholars.

## The Epistemic Value of Reason

Ibn 'Aqīl<sup>1</sup> attached importance to the concept of the reasoning (naẓar) and independent reasoning (ijtihād), and these were his main and the most important objections to the Salafī tradition that he was a member of.<sup>2</sup> As a matter of fact, the first these two concepts, which are completely against the codes of Salafī tradition, indicates domination of personal opinion/evaluation and interpretation on the subject/provision and the second one indicates that one obliged to use the mind in the process.<sup>3</sup>

To Ibn 'Aqīl, the reasoning (naẓar), which is the way of inferential knowledge, means to contemplate/think deeply about the condition and the evidence of something, in order to attest to those things. It is also means distinguishing and knowing the right from wrong as well as proof something and doubt about, and this can be possible only with searching through rational method. On the flipside, Ibn 'Aqīl pointed out that acquired knowledge by personal effort includes suspicion and hence he stated that every aspect/viewpoint and research does not lead to the correct result, and there might be a false viewpoint/aspect, due to this fact, he indicated that the knowledge which have been obtained through the viewpoint and inferential method might have suspicion. Consequently, the accurate viewpoint could only be obtained by using a right method, if not it might cause inaccuracy.

Ibn 'Aqīl described the processes of the reasoning (naẓar) in two ways; as a goal and as a tool, he characterized the naẓar as a tool, since the result that could be taken through the naẓar is out

<sup>1</sup> For detailed information on Ibn 'Aqīl's life and thought system, see George Makdisi, *Ibn 'Aqīl et la Résurgence de l'Islam Traditionaliste au XIe Siècle (Ve Siècle de l'Hégire)* (Damas: Institut Français de Damas, 1963); Makdisi, *Ibn 'Aqīl: Religion and Culture in Classical Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburg University Press, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Abū al-Faraj Ibn Rajab, *Dhail 'alā Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, I-V, ed. 'Abdurrahmān b. Sulaymān al-'Uthaymīn (Riyad: Maktaba al-Ubaykān, 2005), I, 348.

<sup>3</sup> Abū al-Wafā' Ibn 'Aqīl, *al-Waḍīḥ fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, ed. George Makdisi (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2010), I, 7-8 and 25.

of its control and at the same time as a goal/aim, since the intended is only could be obtained through the aim itself. For instance, knowing God and His Messenger is the main aim of the reasoning. To accessing the knowledge is the first thing which is expected from the obligant (mukallaf) and this is a religious obligation (fardh) on him. Ibn 'Aqīl mentioned about the notion of demonstration (burhān) within framework of the reasoning (nazar). He defined the notion of evidence as a tool that could provide accessibility to the needed/ necessary information/ knowledge, similarly to his definition of notion of the reasoning.<sup>4</sup>

Ibn 'Aqīl believes that it is an obligation to use the deduction and the view which are the dominant method of theologian principal, it is also obligatory for every individual who has responsibility/obligant. He indicated the way that Abraham went through to discover the existence of God via his rational effort<sup>5</sup> and considered it as a reference, in this regard, Ibn 'Aqīl emphasized on the reasoning (nazar), deduction and induction as the functions of mind/ reason.<sup>6</sup>

To Ibn 'Aqīl having approach of the reasoning and jurisprudence mean to be against/ avoid the imitation (taqlid) and paying attention to avoid from imitation, which is another point that differentiated him from companions of hadith. Also, he thought that it is obligation to be subjected of evidence, not the ideas/arguments of Ahmad b. Hanbal.<sup>7</sup>

To Ibn 'Aqīl, reason, prophet and Quran are the dominant of divine grace that God bestowed on human being. Ibn 'Aqīl gave priority to the reason as a precondition, since, reason has an important role in deciding and evidencing the reality/trueness of the prophet and the text that has been brought by him. Ibn 'Aqīl touched on the factor that the reason was given to human being

<sup>4</sup> Ibn 'Aqīl, *al-Waḍīḥ fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, I, 22; IV/I, 236-237.

<sup>5</sup> Sūrah al-An'ām, 6/76.

<sup>6</sup> Ibn 'Aqīl, *Kitāb al-Funūn*, ed. George Makdisi (Beirut: Institut de Letters Orientales, 1970-1), II, 717.

<sup>7</sup> Ibn Rajab, *Dhail 'alā Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, I, 348.

as a grace, in order to explain the importance that he attached to functional mind/reason. In this regard, the reason should be used in obeying to his endower (Allah), his orders and prohibitions, to show the needed gratitude to his generosity and to be fair and kind to other people. Because the mind/reason which is not concerned with obeying to God and being fair with people is not different from a blind eye and a deaf ear in terms of function.<sup>8</sup>

Ibn 'Aqīl pointed out to that the reason should be forethoughtfulness.<sup>9</sup> As God says” Say, “Have you considered? If it is from God and you reject it—who is further astray than he who is cutoff and alienated?”<sup>10</sup> “If he is a liar, his lying will rebound upon him; but if he is truthful, then some of what he promises you will befall you”<sup>11</sup> these verses are criticism to those who do not take precaution and reason involves in/a part of this action. These verses that call for taking precaution and appeal to reason to take this action, since this action cannot be taken by anything else, but only by reason.<sup>12</sup> We can say that this means reason is coincide with revelation and confirm revelation in regard to the way of Ibn 'Aqīl's consideration the issue that God appeals to human mind/ reason.

### **The Scope of Authority/Jurisdiction of Reason and Revelation**

Rational knowledge and revelational knowledge are complimentary for each other. However, this does not always make for them possible to expresses interchangeably. The mutakallimūn considered this as a problem and determined the authority of both rational knowledge and revelational knowledge under three categories, in their works.<sup>13</sup> The things/issues can

<sup>8</sup> Ibn 'Aqīl, *Kitāb al-Funūn*, II, s. 652; Makdisi, *Ibn 'Aqīl: Religion and Culture in Classical Islam*, 92.

<sup>9</sup> According to Abū al-Hussain al-Basrī, reason has made it necessary to be cautious. Ibn 'Aqīl, *Kitāb al-Funūn*, II, 600.

<sup>10</sup> Sūrah al-Fuṣṣilat, 41/52.

<sup>11</sup> Sūrah al-Mu'min, 40/28.

<sup>12</sup> Ibn 'Aqīl, *Kitāb al-Funūn*, II, 648-649.

<sup>13</sup> Bāqillānī, *at-Taqrīb wa al-Irshād aṣ-Ṣaghīr*, akt. Binyamin Abrahamov, *İslam Kelâmı: Gelenekçilik ve Akılcılık*, Tr. trans. Emine Buket Sağlam (İstanbul: İnsan

only be known by reason, the things/issues can only be known by revelation and the things/the issues can only be known by both reason and revelation, also, Ibn 'Aqīl's work/approach includes descriptions about these categories. Principally, we should underline that he did not develop a different approach and explanation about the subject. However, it is important to know that he agreed with discourses of mutakallimūn.

Ibn 'Aqīl incontrovertibly gave the priority to the reason in the category where the limit of authority of reason and revelation are separated. According to this, the reason has a main function in the context/ framework of confirming the messenger and his messages and priorly, proving the existence and tawhid (God's oneness). When he made this definition, he started with categorization of the things that could be known by reason without appealing to revelation, and these issues are respectively proving of God's existence, God as the creator of the world, God's oneness, the obligatory attributes of God, the tracts, and proving the necessity of sending a messenger and he considered the reason as a sole authority, in order to prove these issues.<sup>14</sup>

Ibn 'Aqīl argued the issue with emphasizing on monotheism (tawhīd) and prophecy that can only be known by reason, without elaborating his view about the creation of the universe. Minerals and plants are the signs of God's existence in this context. Also, they indicted the existence, mastery and wisdom of the craftsmen.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the reason does not need revelational knowledge to make deduction about the existence of a creator and the traces of his wisdom through his creation, on the contrary, the reason must be convinced to prove the reality of revela-

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Yayınları, 2010), 123-124; al-Juwaynī, *Kitabū'l-İrşād: İnanç Esasları Kılavuzu*, Tr. trans. A. Bülent Baloğlu, Mehmet İlhan, Sabri Yılmaz and Faruk Sancar (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 2012), 291-292; Abū Ya'lā al-Farrā', *Mukhtaşar al-Mu'tamad fī Uşūl ad-Dīn*, ed. Vedit Zeydān Haddād (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1974), 24-25; Abū al-Hussain al-Basrī, *Kitāb al-Mu'tamad fī Uşūl al-Fiqh*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥamidullāh (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1964-5), II, 886-888.

<sup>14</sup> Ibn 'Aqīl, *al-Waḍiḥ fī Uşūl al-Fiqh*, I, 33-34.

<sup>15</sup> Ibn 'Aqīl, *Kitāb al-Funūn*, II, 665.

tional knowledge. According to Ibn 'Aqīl, the revelation based on God's speech and message and this is the indication of the argument. There is a consensus (ijma) that the messenger of God as a recipient and transmitter of the revelation did not make any mistake in transferring the messages. However, he thought that it would be truer approach to know about God first and then know about the accuracy of God's speech and message, since it is secondary (fer)<sup>16</sup> to prove the existence of God. Therefore, he stated that it is impossible to know Allah/God without knowing his attributes/names and his messenger. Thusly, he put the knowledge about knowing Allah and his messenger in the category of the rational knowledge that could be obtained through reason, rather than through revelational knowledge, he also emphasized on obligation of knowing the messenger/prophet through reason/rational knowledge and he also indicated that the argument on the contrary of this, namely, the argument of those who said that knowing Allah/God is only possible through revelation is unreasonable/ irrational.<sup>17</sup> As a matter of fact, he thought that imitation is permissible in terms of religious rituals; such as prayer and ritual of prayer, but he disapproved the imitation in the field of monotheism/tawhīd and prophecy.<sup>18</sup> His point of view gave clue that he was an extraordinary/ out of common Salafists.

On the other hand, Ibn 'Aqīl stressed that it is not an obligation to have knowledge about the reality of the informant/the messenger and he pointed out that we have no other reference except reason, in order to answer the question, how one could be sure from the reality of the prophet/messenger. According to him, it is impossible for someone to say that I received a message about the existence of God and His messenger, hence they should be considered as truth. Because such matters; God's oneness and the existence of the prophet/messenger need evidences that could be proved through comprehension, independently from

<sup>16</sup> Ibn 'Aqīl, *al-Waḍīḥ fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, II, 98.

<sup>17</sup> Ibn 'Aqīl, *al-Waḍīḥ fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, II, 33.

<sup>18</sup> Ibn 'Aqīl, *al-Waḍīḥ fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, IV/II, 507.

the message and the messenger. Such a message can be attractive to us, but what we need is the real evidence rather than the words/ the messages of the messenger. The precision of these issues is only possible with reason. If the informant got the knowledge about the Tawhid/God's oneness and prophecy through the view, Ibn 'Aqīl stated that this indicates the truth of our words, if the informant got these information/knowledge through another informant, in this case, one needs to prove the correctness/truthiness of all knowledge/information one by one, as a result, he concluded that this is impossible.<sup>19</sup>

As it can be seen, Ibn 'Aqīl has revealed/suggested that rational theorem is unrivaled in terms of epistemic value in the subjects that related to Tawhid/God's oneness and prophethood. As a matter of fact, it is impossible to prove/confirm frequent messages. The accuracy of the received message can only be confirmed by reason. In another word, the reason has the sole competency in this regard.

Actually, he brought the issue to the agenda and it is becoming highly crucial, while considering him as a member of Salafi/Hanbeli tradition that acting deliberately and cautiously about giving authority to the reason. Ibn 'Aqīl emphasized on the idea of misusing the reason or not using the reason/mind leads to sin, on the contrary of the approach that considering using the reason as a bidat/innovation which is lead to sin. Also, he stated that what Allah will be more pleased, if we use the reason truthfully and continued:

The person who grasp/comprehends the importance of the reason, which is God's gift to his servants, will use his means available and his power to the extent of his abilities and sedulity in order to show his gratitude to his God. But as far as I can see, most people debar the reason from the place that the reason deserved. They lament through the poetry and prose for their youth/past years.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Ibn 'Aqīl, *al-Waḍīḥ fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, I, 33-34.

<sup>20</sup> Ibn 'Aqīl, *Kitāb al-Funūn*, II, 691-692.

Based on the question of whether the reason alone is sufficient to comprehend the tawhid and nubuwwat, Ibn 'Aqīl inferred that this will not change the fact that the reason is not capable to comprehend other matters. So/at this point revelation gets involved in the issue. According to Ibn 'Aqīl there are some categories that reason is not capable to identify and they can only be known by revelation, these types of knowledge/ categories included the issues which are related to the judgement of such as acts; husun-qubuh (the concept of good and evil), harām-halāl (permissible/lawful-sinful/unlawful) obedience and rebellion, obligatory and meshbūh/abominable, etc. He pointed out that there is a third category, which can be known by both reason and revelation, in this regard, he prioritized the knowledge related to tawhid (God's oneness) and prophethood and he stated that these two concepts need to be supported by revelation, even in the cases that they can be comprehended by reason. Additionally, it is impossible to get some knowledges via reason only. For instance, making comparison between judgments, the vision of God (ru'yatullāh), the preciseness of the good action which are based on the solitary hadīth (khabar al-wāhid), and great sinners (murtakib al-kabīra) are among these knowledges.<sup>21</sup>

### Conclusion

Although Ibn 'Aqīl is a member of the Hanbali tradition, which has an introverted, extremely strict in terms of sectarian nomism, he emphasized that there is an absolute agreement between reason and revelation, in consequences of they are favor of the same sources, thusly, the conflict or contradiction would not be possible between them (reason and revelation), also he underlined that with using mind/reason correctly (precise view), it is possible to understand the revelation truly and he attached importance to the reasoning and use of reason as a muslim theologian (mutakallim). However, He deemed the comprehensive

<sup>21</sup> Ibn 'Aqīl, *al-Waḍīḥ fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, I, 33-34.

and interpretative activities of the reason as an obligation, and he always considered the revelational knowledge as a restrictive factor in his method/ for his approach.

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