

A Philosophical Perspective on the Uniqueness of the Quran



William Shakespeare, who was an English poet and playwright, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language, is often used as an example of unique literature. The argument posed is that if Shakespeare expressed his poetry and prose in a unique manner – and he is a human being – then surely no matter how unique the Quran is, it must also be from a human being.

However there are some problems with the above argument. It does not take into account the nature of the Quran's uniqueness and it doesn't understand the uniqueness of literary geniuses such as Shakespeare. Although Shakespeare composed poetry and prose that received an unparalleled aesthetic reception, the literary form he expressed his works in was not unique. In many instances Shakespeare used the common Iambic Pentameter (The Iambic pentameter is a meter in poetry. It refers to a line consisting of five iambic feet. The word "pentameter" simply means that there are five feet in the line.) However in the case of the Quran, its language is in an entirely unknown and unmatched literary form. The structural features of the Quranic discourse render it unique and not the subjective appreciation of its literary and linguistic makeup.

With this in mind there are two approaches that can show that there are greater reasons to believe that the Quran is from the divine and a miraculous text. The first approach is rational deduction and the second is the philosophy of Miracles.

Rational Deduction

Rational deduction is the thinking process where logical conclusions are drawn from a universally accepted statement or provable premises. This process is also called rational inference or logical deduction.

In the context of the Quran's uniqueness the universally accepted statement supported by eastern and western scholarship is:

"The Quran was not successfully imitated by the Arabs at the time of revelation"

From this statement the following logical conclusions can be drawn:

1. The Quran could not have come from an Arab as the Arabs, at the time of revelation, were linguists par excellence and they failed to challenge the Quran. They had even admitted that the Quran could have not come from a human being.
2. The Quran could not have come from a Non-Arab as the language in the Quran is Arabic, and the knowledge of the Arabic language is a pre-requisite to successfully challenge the Quran.
3. The Quran could not have come from the Prophet Muhammad due to the following reasons:
 - a. The Prophet Muhammad was an Arab himself and all the Arabs failed to challenge the Quran.
 - b. The Arabs linguists at the time of revelation never accused the Prophet of being the author of the Quran.
 - c. The Prophet Muhammad experienced many trials and tribulations during the course of his Prophetic mission. For example his children died, his beloved wife Khadija passed away, he was boycotted, his close companions were tortured and killed, yet the Quran's literary character remains that of the divine voice and character. Nothing in the Quran expresses the turmoil and emotions of the Prophet Muhammad. It is almost a psychological and physiological impossibility to go through what the Prophet went through and yet none of the emotions are expressed in the literary character of the Quran.
 - d. The Quran is a known literary masterpiece yet its verses were at many times revealed for specific circumstances and events that occurred. However, without revision or deletion they are literary masterpieces. All literary masterpieces have undergone revision and deletion to ensure literary perfection, however the Quran was revealed instantaneously.
 - e. The hadith or narrations of the Prophet Muhammad are in a totally different style than that of the Quran. How can any human being express themselves orally over a 23 year period (which was the period of Quranic revelation) in two distinct styles? This is a psychological and physiological impossibility according to modern research.
 - f. All types of human expression can be imitated if the blueprint of that expression exists. For example artwork can be imitated even though some art is thought to be extraordinary or amazingly unique. But in the case of the Quran we have the blueprint – the Quran itself – yet no one has been able to imitate its unique literary form.
4. The Quran could not have come from another being such as a Jinn or Spirit because the basis of their existence is the Quran and revelation itself. Their existence is based upon revelation and not empirical evidence. Therefore if

someone claims that the source of the Quran to be another being then they would have to prove its existence and in this case proving revelation. In the case of using the Quran as the revelation to establish Jinns' existence then that would mean the whole rational deduction exercise would not be required in the first place, as the Quran would already have been established as a divine text, because to believe in Jinns' existence would mean belief in the Quran in the first place.

5. The Quran can only have come from the Divine as it is the only logical explanation as all other explanations have been discarded because they do not explain the uniqueness of the Quran in a comprehensive and coherent manner.

Philosophy of Miracles

The word miracle is derived from the Latin word 'miraculum' meaning "something wonderful". A miracle is commonly defined as a violation of a natural law (lex naturalis); however this is an incoherent definition. This incoherence is due our understanding of natural laws, as the Philosopher Bilynskyj observes "...so long as natural laws are conceived of as universal inductive generalizations, the notion of violation of a natural law is incoherent."

Natural laws are inductive generalizations of patterns we observe in the universe. If the definition of a miracle is a violation of a natural law, in other words a violation of the patterns we observe in the universe, then an obvious conceptual problem occurs. The problem is: why can't we take this perceived violation of the pattern as part of the pattern? Therefore the more coherent description of a miracle is not a 'violation' but an 'impossibility'. The Philosopher William Lane Craig rejects the definition of a miracle as a "violation of a natural law" and replaces it with the coherent definition of "events which lie outside the productive capacity of nature". What this means is that miracles are acts of impossibilities concerning causal or logical connections.

The Miraculous Quran

What makes the Quran a miracle, is that it lies outside the productive capacity of the nature of the Arabic language. The productive capacity of nature, concerning the Arabic language, is that any grammatically sound expression of the Arabic language will always fall within the known Arabic literary forms of Prose and Poetry.

The Quran is a miracle as its literary form cannot be explained via the productive capacity of the Arabic language, because all the possible combinations of Arabic words, letters and grammatical rules have been exhausted and yet the Quran's literary form has not been imitated. The Arabs who were known to have been Arab linguists par excellence failed to

successfully challenge the Quran. Forster Fitzgerald Arbuthnot who was a notable British Orientalist and translator states:

"and that though several attempts have been made to produce a work equal to it as far as elegant writing is concerned, none has as yet succeeded."^[1]

The implication of this is that there is no link between the Quran and the Arabic language; however this seems impossible because the Quran is made up of the Arabic language! On the other hand, all the combinations of Arabic words and letters have been used to try and imitate the Quran. Therefore, it can only be concluded that a supernatural explanation is the only coherent explanation for this impossible Arabic literary form – the Quran.

When we look at the productive nature of the Arabic language to find an answer for the unique literary form of the Quran, we find no link between it and the divine text, thus making it an impossibility requiring supernatural explanation. So it logically follows that if the Quran is a literary event that lies outside the productive capacity of the Arabic language, then, by definition, it is a miracle.

Footnotes:

^[1] F. F. Arbuthnot. 1885. The Construction of the Bible and the Koran. London, p 5