



Research Paper

Experience in the Field of Cognition: A Comparative Analysis of the Approaches of the Holy Quran and Logical Positivism

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Abstract

There are numerous methods for acquiring knowledge, such as sense and experience, reason and intuition, conscience and revelation, which mankind has benefited from throughout history. In the 20th century, logical positivists limited knowledge to the monopoly of sense and experience and, like Descartes, sought the unity and integration of sciences. In contrast, the Holy Quran, by utilizing all available methods, has tried to enhance human consciousness in a comprehensive and all-round way. The Quran not only uses sense and experience to understand the natural world, but also uses them to reach supernatural truths. This research, using a descriptive-analytical method, comparatively examines the role and position of experience in the epistemology of the Holy Quran and logical positivism. The findings show that the monopoly of knowledge in the experimental method, although very effective in understanding natural and scientific issues, causes limitations in understanding metaphysical and ethical issues and paves the way for the closure of these areas. In contrast, the Quran, with a comprehensive and integrated approach, uses experience alongside other epistemological methods and uses it in all sciences, both natural and supernatural. Accordingly, the empirical method cannot be considered as the only method of knowledge, but rather, along with other methods, it has a complementary and determining role.

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

The question of how human beings attain knowledge has been central to philosophical inquiry across civilizations. Within modern Western philosophy, logical positivism sought to redefine the limits of knowledge by confining all meaningful propositions to the domain of sensory verification. This doctrine, grounded in empiricism and the verification principle, rejected metaphysical, theological, and ethical claims as cognitively meaningless. Such a reductionist epistemology, while influential in the development of the scientific method and analytic philosophy, has been widely critiqued for its inability to account for forms of knowledge beyond empirical observation.

In contrast, the Qur'anic epistemological system affirms empirical experience as an essential but not exclusive avenue of knowing. The Qur'an repeatedly calls upon humanity to observe natural phenomena—such as the heavens, the earth, and the alternation of night and day—as signs that lead not only to scientific understanding but also to metaphysical awareness, moral responsibility, and spiritual insight. In this framework, experience, reason, heart, and revelation operate together in a unified system, providing a multi-layered approach to knowledge.

The present study aims to provide a systematic comparative analysis of these two epistemological models. The principal research question is: What is the role and scope of empirical experience in the Qur'anic worldview, and how does it compare with the positivist conception of experience as the sole criterion of meaningful knowledge? Subsidiary questions explore the limitations of experiential exclusivism, the Qur'anic integration of

empirical and non-empirical methods, and the implications of both systems for broader metaphysical and ethical inquiry.

2. Methods

The study adopts a descriptive-analytical and comparative methodology. Primary data include Qur'anic verses that address empirical observation, reflection, and the signs of creation; classical commentaries and philosophical works within the Islamic tradition; and key writings of logical positivist thinkers such as Ayer, Carnap, Schlick, and Hempel. Secondary sources include modern epistemological studies, works on philosophy of science, and recent scholarship on Qur'anic epistemology. Through careful textual analysis, the research identifies conceptual patterns relating to the epistemic function of experience in both systems. The comparative dimension allows for a structured examination of parallels and contrasts: while both the Qur'an and positivism acknowledge the epistemic value of experience, their underlying philosophical assumptions, ontological commitments, and ultimate goals differ fundamentally. The research design thus enables a nuanced understanding of how each framework evaluates empirical data and integrates (or rejects) other forms of knowledge.

3. Results

The findings demonstrate that logical positivism, by restricting meaningful knowledge to empirically verifiable propositions, effectively eliminates the possibility of metaphysical, theological, and ethical discourse within its epistemic framework. This results in a considerable narrowing of the human cognitive horizon. While this model contributed significantly to the development of scientific rigor, it fails to provide a comprehensive understanding of human experience,



particularly in matters that transcend physical observation. In contrast, the Qur'anic worldview positions empirical experience as a stepping stone toward deeper intellectual and spiritual cognition. The Qur'an invites human beings to reflect on the natural world not merely for scientific discovery, but to cultivate awareness of divine wisdom, moral order, and existential meaning. This approach transforms sensory data into a vehicle for intellectual contemplation and metaphysical insight.

Moreover, the Qur'an does not isolate experience from other epistemic faculties. Instead, it integrates empirical observation with rational inference, intuitive knowledge, and revelation. This multi-dimensional structure allows the Qur'anic epistemology to address both material and immaterial realities. The study also reveals that the Qur'an's epistemic inclusivity prevents the reductionism inherent in positivist thought, offering a balanced model that recognizes the strengths of empirical method while acknowledging its limitations. The comparison further highlights that positivism treats experience as an end in itself, whereas the Qur'an treats it as a means toward self-discovery, ethical refinement, and recognition of a transcendent order. This fundamental difference in purpose leads to different interpretations

of the scope and limits of human knowledge.

4. Conclusion

The research concludes that empirical experience, though indispensable for the advancement of scientific knowledge, cannot serve as the sole or ultimate criterion for human understanding. Logical positivism's attempt to reduce all meaningful knowledge to sensory verification creates substantial blind spots, particularly in metaphysical, ethical, and spiritual domains. Such a restricted model fails to respond to the full spectrum of human cognitive needs. On the other hand, the Qur'anic epistemology articulates a more comprehensive and integrated vision. It affirms the value of experience while embedding it within a broader epistemic network that includes reason, intuition, and revelation. By doing so, it preserves the strengths of empirical inquiry without falling into reductionism. Thus, the Qur'anic model offers a richer and more balanced framework for understanding reality—one capable of addressing both the physical world and transcendent dimensions of human existence. Experience, within this framework, is not diminished but elevated, functioning as a complementary and transformative epistemic method that leads to holistic knowledge.