

A Philosophical Perspective on The Uniqueness of the Qur'an

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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 Qur'an 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 Qur'an'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 Qur'an, its language is in an entirely unknown and unmatched literary form. The structural features of the Qur'anic discourse primarily render it unique, although the variety and assortment of the subjective appreciation of its literary and linguistic makeup adequately supplement that.

With this in mind there are two approaches that can show that there are greater reasons to believe that the Qur'an 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 Qur'an's uniqueness the universally accepted statement supported by eastern and western scholarship is:

"The Qur'an was not successfully imitated by the Arabs at the time of revelation."

From this statement the following logical conclusions can be drawn:

1. The Qur'an 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 Qur'an. They had even admitted that the Qur'an could have not come from a human being.
2. The Qur'an could not have come from a Non-Arab as the language in the Qur'an is Arabic, and the knowledge of the Arabic language is a prerequisite to successfully challenge the Qur'an.
3. The Qur'an 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 Qur'an.
 - b. The Arabs linguists at the time of revelation never accused the Prophet of being the author of the Qur'an.
 - c. The Prophet Muhammad experienced many trials during the course of his Prophetic mission. For instance, his children died, his beloved wife Khadija passed away, he and his entire tribe were boycotted, his close companions were tortured and some killed, yet all through this the Qur'an's literary character never loses touch with that of a divine voice and revelation. Various places in the Qur'an express the turmoil and emotion of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions, but miraculously, the Holy Text maintains customary literary candor even when describing the torments and consoling the affectees. In a nutshell, it appears to be almost a psychological and physiological improbability to endure what the Prophet and his companions went through and yet these and other emotions are expressed in the usual literary character of the Qur'an.
 - d. The Qur'an 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 Qur'an was revealed instantaneously.
 - e. The hadith or narrations of the Prophet Muhammad are in a totally different style than that of the Qur'an. How can any human being express themselves orally over a 23 year period (which was the period of Qur'anic 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 Qur'an we have the blueprint – the Qur'an itself – yet no one has been able to imitate its unique literary form.

4. The Qur'an could not have come from another being such as a Jinn or Spirit because the basis of their existence is the Qur'an and revelation itself. Their existence is based upon revelation and not empirical evidence. Therefore if someone claims that the source of the Qur'an to be another being then they would have to prove its existence and in this case proving revelation. In the case of using the Qur'an 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 Qur'an would already have been established as a divine text, because to believe in Jinns existence would mean belief in the Qur'an in the first place.

5. The Qur'an 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 Qur'an 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 generalisations the notion of violation of a nature 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 Qur'an

What makes the Qur'an 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 Qur'an 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 Qur'an's literary form has not been imitated. The Arabs who were known to have been Arab linguists par excellence failed to successfully challenge the Qur'an. 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 Qur'an and the Arabic language; however this seems impossible because the Qur'an 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 Qur'an. Therefore, it can only be concluded that a supernatural explanation is the only coherent explanation for this impossible Arabic literary form – the Qur'an.

Even when we look at the rich and productive nature of the pre as well as post Qur'anic Arabic language and compare it with the Divine Text, we are unable to find any parallel in terms of the lexicological superiority and the unique literary form which is found in the Qur'an alone. It, therefore, logically follows that the revelation and, more importantly for our thesis, the literary structure of the Qur'an is a one-off event, that no human or other being can emulate. This factor of 'divine production' of the Qur'an is a 'self sustaining' miracle in its own.

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