

Qur'anic Wisdom: A Critical Realist Perspective

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Abstract

Human knowability is intrinsically limited by epistemological paradigms shaped by logical positivism, which confine valid knowledge to what is empirically observable or analytically verifiable. The Qur'an, as a divinely revealed source of knowledge, operates beyond these constraints and presents a distinctive epistemic framework oriented toward moral transformation. This study proposes that Qur'anic message contents may be broadly classified into two epistemic categories: learning-oriented texts and academic-oriented texts. Learning-oriented texts are communicative and purposive, explicitly commanding voluntary behavioral change through conscience, intention, motivation, and action. Academic-oriented texts, by contrast, convey information without necessarily demanding moral or behavioral response. The Qur'an is argued to be fundamentally a corpus of learning-oriented texts, whose primary objective is the transformation of human behavior and the formation of morally accountable personalities. Qur'anic learning is inseparable from ultimate consequences, articulated in terms of eternal reward and punishment, and is therefore conceptualized as Qur'anic wisdom rather than neutral information. Within this framework, success is not defined by cognitive assent or discursive mastery, but by sustained commitment and action in response to divine guidance. Qur'anic pedagogy is structurally realized through the integration of Muḥkamāt and Mutashābihāt. Mutashābihāt address ontologically real yet empirically inaccessible realities, which are inferable through reason and reflection, while Muḥkamāt provide direct, precise, and observable guidance that translates transcendent wisdom into concrete behavioral imperatives. Behavioral change unfolds across diverse circumstances presented as Qur'anic moral templates. Systematic engagement with these templates enables the progressive refinement of the ordinary self, culminating in the emergence of integrated Islamic personalities grounded in belief, intention, and righteous action.

Keywords: Qur'anic Pedagogy; Behavioral Transformation; Muḥkamāt and Mutashābihāt; Critical Realism; Islamic Personality Development

Introduction

Human cognition operates under inherent epistemic constraints. Empirical and rational inquiry, which form the foundation of modern scientific knowledge, are limited to the

observable domains of reality, encompassing both concrete phenomena and abstract conceptualizations derived from them. Within the framework of critical realism, this corresponds primarily to the empirical and actual domains of reality, while acknowledging the existence of deeper real structures that may not be directly observable yet exert causal influence. (Knudsen, 2023)

Attempts to extend human knowledge beyond these epistemic boundaries through unaided reason alone frequently result in speculation and conjecture, particularly when addressing metaphysical, moral, and teleological questions. Critical realism recognizes this limitation by distinguishing between what can be observed, what occurs, and the underlying generative mechanisms that give rise to both. Consequently, not all realities that meaningfully affect human existence are empirically accessible or experimentally verifiable. (Rancourt, 2024)

Human beings, however, are not merely passive observers of empirical reality. They possess intrinsic capacities for transcendental reflection, moral intuition, and meaning-making that point toward the existence of a priori truths and wisdoms. From a critical realist standpoint, these a priori wisdoms may be understood as part of the deeper ontological strata of reality—real, efficacious, yet not reducible to empirical measurement. Their relevance and utility in shaping human conduct, ethics, and purpose cannot be dismissed on the basis of empirical inaccessibility alone. (Bhaskar, 2020)

Within this perspective, the pursuit of human flourishing and comprehensive success cannot be confined to the finite and material dimensions of existence. While the physical world provides the context for human action, it does not exhaust the conditions for meaning, value, and ultimate purpose. A critical realist ontology allows for the recognition of trans-empirical realities that inform and orient human life, even though they remain beyond the full grasp of sensory observation or instrumental reason. Given these limitations, human reason requires epistemic mediation when engaging with realities beyond the empirical domain. In religious epistemology, revelation functions as an authoritative source of knowledge that discloses aspects of reality inaccessible through empirical science alone. Within Islamic thought, the Qur'an presents itself as such a source, offering guidance that addresses not only observable phenomena but also the underlying moral, metaphysical, and

existential structures of reality. (Bukowska, 2021)

From a critical realism perspective, the Qur'an may be understood as a comprehensive repository of learning materials that supports humanity's aspirational journey toward meaningful accomplishment and enduring success. Critical realism posits that reality is stratified, consisting of the empirical (what is experienced), the actual (what occurs), and the real (the underlying structures and generative mechanisms that produce events and experiences). This ontological framework allows for the recognition of realities that, while not directly observable, exert genuine causal influence on human life. (Al-Kassimi, 2023)

Within this stratified view of reality, the Qur'an articulates principles of a priori wisdom that operate primarily at the level of the real. These wisdoms provide ontological and ethical orientation by informing human cognition, moral reasoning, and purposeful action beyond the limits of empirical observation and instrumental rationality. Rather than competing with empirical science, Qur'anic wisdom complements it by addressing dimensions of reality—such as meaning, value, intention, and ultimate purpose—that empirical methodologies alone cannot adequately explain. (Imam et al., 2023)

The Qur'an presents foundational principles that guide human engagement with reality by disclosing moral and metaphysical truths inaccessible through scientific observation or positivist epistemologies. In critical realist terms, these a priori wisdoms function as causal mechanisms that shape human behavior, intentionality, and social structures, even though they are not directly measurable. For example, concepts such as accountability, justice, trust (*amānah*), and divine purpose function as deep generative mechanisms that influence individual conduct and collective social order. By broadening human interpretive horizons, these principles enable individuals to situate empirical experiences within a more comprehensive, value-laden, and purposive ontological framework. (Ruhullah & Ushama, 2024)

Despite the growing body of scholarship on Qur'anic studies, Islamic education, and moral philosophy, several significant gaps remain when examined through the lens of critical realism.

First, much of the existing research on the Qur'an is

dominated by textual, theological, or hermeneutical approaches that focus on interpretation and exegesis, while offering limited engagement with ontological and causal explanations of how Qur'anic wisdom operates within human life and social structures. Conversely, studies informed by social science methodologies often adopt positivist or interpretivist paradigms, which either reduce Qur'anic influence to observable behavior or treat it solely as a subjective meaning system, without accounting for deeper generative mechanisms. (Alkouatli, 2024)

Second, there is a lack of scholarly work that explicitly conceptualizes Qur'anic a priori wisdoms as causal mechanisms within a stratified ontology. While concepts such as values, beliefs, and norms are frequently discussed, they are rarely theorized as real, causally efficacious structures that mediate between divine revelation and empirical social outcomes. (Morelock & Narita, 2022) Third, existing literature has insufficiently explored Qur'anic narratives as pedagogical and motivational mechanisms from a realist perspective. Studies tend to analyze prophetic stories either as moral allegories or historical accounts, without examining how these narratives function as explanatory case studies that enable the translation of deep ontological principles into practical human agency.

Finally, there remains a methodological gap in integrating Islamic epistemology with critical realist philosophy of science, particularly in educational and social research contexts. Few studies have systematically employed critical realism to bridge revelation-based knowledge with empirical inquiry, leaving underdeveloped the potential for a robust interdisciplinary framework that honors both metaphysical depth and empirical rigor. (Fouz Mohamed Zacky & Moniruzzaman, 2024)

Beyond propositional knowledge, the Qur'an incorporates narrative forms of learning, particularly through the accounts of Prophets and the earliest generations of their followers. From a critical realist standpoint, these narratives function as explanatory and motivational mechanisms that demonstrate how abstract moral and spiritual principles are enacted within specific historical and social contexts. Rather than serving merely as descriptive historical accounts, these narratives operate as causally efficacious

exemplars, revealing the interaction between deep moral structures and contingent human agency. Through these narratives, the Qur'an provides case-based learning that bridges the gap between ontological principles and lived experience, thereby fostering moral commitment, resilience, and purposeful action. (Mansouri, 2024)

Importantly, critical realism emphasizes the transformative nature of knowledge. Knowledge is not only explanatory but also emancipatory, enabling human agents to recognize underlying structures that constrain or enable action and to respond to them reflexively. In this sense, Qur'anic narratives and principles contribute to the formation of morally reflexive agents who are capable of aligning their actions with deeper ontological realities. The integration of a priori wisdom, moral exemplars, and purposeful narratives thus positions the Qur'an as a holistic learning framework that engages cognition, emotion, and agency simultaneously. (Bhat & Bisati, 2025)

Within a critical realism framework, this study proposes a hypothesis that can be operationalized through mathematical modelling by conceptualizing Qur'anic wisdom as a real but unobservable generative mechanism that influences observable human outcomes through mediated processes. Critical realism maintains that causal powers may exist at deeper ontological levels and need not be directly observable to be real. Accordingly, Qur'anic a priori wisdoms are treated as latent causal structures that shape human cognition, ethical orientation, and intentionality, while their effects are empirically manifested through patterns of learning, action, and sustained accomplishment. (Khan, 2023)

The central hypothesis of this study posits that sustainable human accomplishment is not a direct product of empirical knowledge alone, but emerges from the interaction between Qur'anic a priori wisdoms and mediating mechanisms such as narrative-based learning, aligned human agency, praxis ('ibādah as applied knowledge), and moral commitment. These mediating variables translate ontological principles into lived practice, enabling individuals to act purposefully and consistently over time. From a modelling perspective, the relationship is understood as nonlinear and dynamic, where the absence or weakening of any mediating mechanism significantly diminishes the resulting level of sustained

accomplishment. (Singhal et al., 2025)

Furthermore, the hypothesis assumes that Qur'anic narratives—particularly accounts of Prophets and early communities—function as amplifying mechanisms that strengthen the transmission of a priori wisdom into human agency and commitment. By providing exemplary case-based learning, these narratives enhance motivational stability and reduce the decay of ethical intention under external pressures. Mathematically, this can be represented as an interaction effect in which narrative engagement increases the effectiveness of wisdom internalization on agency alignment.

In temporal terms, the model hypothesizes that commitment operates as a stabilizing force that moderates fluctuations in human agency and praxis over time. While disruptive forces such as moral fatigue, social pressure, or instrumental rationality may erode purposeful action, sustained commitment—rooted in Qur'anic wisdom—counteracts this decline, allowing accomplishment to persist beyond short-term gains. This dynamic relationship allows the system to be modeled using longitudinal or system-based approaches, where growth, stabilization, and regression can be simulated and empirically approximated. (Hashi, 2024)

In summary, the proposed hypothesis asserts that sustainable accomplishment is causally generated by Qur'anic a priori wisdoms operating at the level of the real, mediated through learning, praxis, and commitment at the level of the actual, and observed as enduring success at the empirical level. This hypothesis provides a coherent foundation for mathematical modelling within a critical realist ontology, enabling empirical investigation without reducing transcendent wisdom to mere observable variables, while still maintaining scientific rigor and explanatory depth. (Moqbel, 2025)

Some Foundational Facts about Man: A Critical Realist Reflection

Despite being a relatively recent inhabitant of the earth, human beings display enduring characteristics that persist across historical, cultural, and technological change. While science and technology have transformed the outward conditions of life, the essential nature of man remains unchanged. Modern man is

psychologically as old as Adam: the fundamental emotions of fear, pleasure, pain, hope, and longing continue to shape human experience as they always have. Aesthetic delight, such as the joy evoked by a fragrant rose, and existential anxieties operate today just as they did in early human history. From a critical realist perspective, this continuity points to an underlying and enduring human nature that exists independently of changing social forms, even though its expressions are historically mediated. (Badri, 2018, p. vi)

Human beings have long pursued happiness, peace, freedom, and fulfillment, often believing that reason and scientific progress could fully satisfy these aspirations. For much of modernity, human reason was assumed to be unlimited in its capacity to explain reality. However, contemporary reflection increasingly recognizes the inherent limits of reason. Knowledge arises from the interaction between sensory experience and rational interpretation, yet it remains partial and fallible. Critical realism clarifies this by affirming the existence of an objective reality while acknowledging that human access to it is indirect and conditioned. (Platenkamp & Botterill, 2013) While empirical science effectively investigates the physical world, reason itself admits the possibility of realities beyond observation and experimentation. As the Qur'an observes, humans often grasp the outward aspects of worldly life while remaining heedless of deeper, metaphysical truths (Qur'an 30:7).

In addition to reason, man is endowed with a heart (*qalb*), a faculty through which meaning, value, and truth are apprehended. While intellectual abilities differ among individuals, the heart remains a shared human capacity, enabling universal recognition of certain truths. Mathematical axioms and moral certainties, for example, are not established through empirical experimentation, yet they are widely accepted as true. Such knowledge belongs to an a priori domain that transcends purely scientific explanation. Critical realism accommodates this dimension by rejecting both reductionist empiricism and subjective relativism, affirming that real truths may exist beyond what is directly observable. Consequently, knowledge that seeks universal relevance must address not only the intellect but also the heart, as emphasized in the Qur'anic reminder that hearts, across generations, remain alike in their capacity to recognize truth (Qur'an 2:118).

All forms of knowledge require criteria by which their validity can be assessed. Logical Positivism historically attempted to provide such criteria by classifying knowledge into distinct categories based on their mode of verification. Broadly, knowledge was divided into a priori and a posteriori classes, with further distinctions between analytic and synthetic forms. A posteriori knowledge belongs to the domain of objective study, relying on observation and experimentation for validation, as seen in the natural sciences such as physics and chemistry. Its truth claims depend on empirical verification. In contrast, a priori knowledge lies beyond direct observation and experimentation. Analytic a priori knowledge, such as logical and geometrical truths, is validated through internal analysis, where truth is contained within the statement itself and requires no empirical testing. Synthetic a priori knowledge, exemplified by mathematics, cannot be empirically verified yet is universally accepted through repeated rational application, coherence, and inner certainty. (Cariani, 2022)

From a critical realist perspective, this classification highlights an important insight: reality exceeds what can be empirically observed, and different layers of reality demand different epistemic approaches. Empirical science accesses the observable domain, while a priori knowledge points to deeper structures and truths that are real even if they are not experimentally testable. Human reason itself acknowledges this stratification of reality and the limits of empirical methods.

The deepest human needs—such as the longing for enduring success, peace, and ultimate meaning—cannot be satisfied by empirical knowledge alone. These needs are addressed through what may be termed a priori wisdoms, a form of synthetic a priori knowledge that speaks to realities beyond the physical world. These wisdoms concern subjective and metaphysical truths, including the nature of the hereafter, which cannot be brought into the realm of experimentation. They are called “wisdoms” because they carry profound existential consequences: adherence leads to lasting fulfillment, while neglect results in enduring loss. Their truth is not merely theoretical but transformative. (Gładziejewski, 2025)

Humanity has been granted access to these a priori wisdoms through the Qur’an, an authentic and preserved source of

divine knowledge. Qur’anic wisdom addresses human aspirations, behavior, expectations, and consequences in a manner unmatched by other knowledge systems. Unlike purely philosophical reasoning, which often fails to fully satisfy either reason or the heart, or science, which appeals only to reason within its inherent limits, the Qur’an uniquely engages both faculties. Qur’anic wisdom consoles the heart while simultaneously appealing to reason, making it universally relevant across time, culture, and intellectual capacity. In critical realist terms, it discloses deeper layers of reality – moral, spiritual, and metaphysical – that are real, causally significant, and essential for a complete understanding of human existence. (Alvi & Rizwan, 2024)

Table 1: Variety of Epistemology

Knowledge Class	Domain of Reality	Mode of Knowing	Criteria of Validity	Examples	Critical Realist Interpretation
A Posteriori Knowledge Type: Synthetic	Physical, observable reality (<i>empirical & actual domains</i>)	Observation , experimentation, induction	Verification , replication, falsification	Physics, Chemistry, Biology	Reveals empirical patterns but does not fully uncover underlying generative mechanisms
A Priori Analytic Knowledge Type: Analytic	Logical and conceptual structures	Rational analysis	Logical coherence, definitional truth	Logic, formal geometry	Describes internal structures of thought rather than external reality
A Priori Synthetic Knowledge Type: Synthetic	Trans-empirical rational reality	Rational intuition and reflection	Universality, internal certainty	Mathematics (e.g., 2+3=5)	Accesses real but non-empirical structures governing reality
A Priori Wisdom (Hikmah) Type: Synthetic	Metaphysical, moral, and existential reality (<i>real domain</i>)	Revelation, reflection, moral reasoning	Meaning coherence, existential consequences	Moral truths, purpose of life, afterlife	Discloses deep generative mechanisms beyond empirical reach

Pure Philosophy Type: Speculative rational	Abstract conceptual domain	Speculative reasoning	Argument consistency	Metaphysical theories	Often fails to bridge abstract reasoning with lived reality
Modern Science Type: Empirical-positivist	Measurable phenomena	Scientific method	Empirical evidence	Medicine, engineering & technology	Strong at empirical explanation but silent on meaning and purpose

From an epistemological standpoint informed by Critical Realism, the Qur’an may be understood as a comprehensive system of knowledge that operates simultaneously at the empirical, actual, and real levels of reality. While empirical sciences are confined to observation and experimentation, Qur’anic wisdom addresses deeper generative mechanisms that shape human belief, motivation, and behavior. The Qur’an does not merely transmit information but commands transformative change by linking knowledge to moral consequences and practical action. Its epistemic authority rests not on empirical verification alone, but on its capacity to activate real causal powers within the human person—particularly at the level of the heart, intention, and ethical conduct.(Khan & Ahmed, 2025) Consequently, Qur’anic knowledge is structured as learning rather than speculative teaching: it is direct, instructive, non-philosophical, and oriented toward lived practice.

Unlike academic disciplines that continuously expand and remain provisional, the Qur’an presents a concise and conclusive “training toolkit” designed for lifelong personal development. Its core principles—such as taqwa (ethical restraint) and devotion to God—function as stable ontological anchors that guide both spiritual and mundane actions. From a Critical Realist perspective, these principles correspond to real moral structures embedded in human nature (fitrah) and the cosmos, which, when activated through repeated practice, generate observable transformation in individuals and societies. Thus, the Qur’an is comprehensive not because it exhausts all empirical knowledge, but because it effectively addresses the deepest training needs of humanity: orientation of vision, regulation of behavior, and cultivation of

ethical responsibility.

Table 2: *al-Qur'an and Critical Realist Insight*

Aspect	Core Description	Key Characteristics	Critical Realist Insight
Qur'an Commands Change	Qur'anic wisdom links belief with real consequences	Clear polarity of reward and punishment; belief must translate into action	Reality includes moral causality; beliefs activate real generative mechanisms shaping behavior
Qur'an as a Learning Text	Qur'an is designed as learning-oriented guidance, not abstract teaching	Direct address, clarity, instructive language, anti-speculative	Knowledge aims at transformation of practice, not mere cognition
Learning vs Teaching	Emphasizes actionable learning over philosophical theorizing	Avoids speculative philosophy; focuses on method and practice	Truth is validated through lived efficacy, not abstract coherence alone
Training Toolkit Model	Provides a compact, universal toolkit for lifelong development	Simple, concise principles; applicable across cultures and intellects	Deep mechanisms operate through simple rules repeatedly enacted
Core Training Principles	Taqwa (avoidance of evil) and Devotion (submission to God)	Guides both spiritual and mundane actions	Moral realities are real and operative across all domains of life
Scalability of Training	Effective even through minimal exposure with committed advocates	Works through repetition, modeling, and practice	Social transmission activates real but unseen causal powers

Qur'an vs Academic Knowledge	Distinct from expanding academic disciplines	Conclusive, stable, universally applicable	Revealed knowledge addresses the real domain beyond empirical flux
Comprehensiveness for Training	Addresses vision, motivation, and practical difficulty	No long institutional process required; needs learner readiness	Transformation depends on alignment with real moral structures (fitrah)

From a Critical Realist epistemological perspective, the Qur'an should not be misconstrued as an academic text belonging to any particular discipline such as science, history, or the humanities. Rather, it is a purposive book oriented toward transforming human conduct in order to attain success in both this world and the Hereafter. While academic knowledge operates primarily at the empirical and actual levels of reality—producing provisional, discipline-bound explanations—the Qur'an addresses the real level, activating deep moral and spiritual generative mechanisms that shape human behavior. Its engagement with diverse fields of knowledge, ranging from history to natural phenomena and future developments, is not intended to construct scientific theories or historical narratives, but to motivate learning, awaken moral responsibility, and direct attention toward the majesty and omniscience of God. These references function as inferential and pedagogical tools that translate otherwise incomprehensible divine attributes into intelligible signs for human reflection.

Consequently, the Qur'an cannot be reduced to a multidisciplinary academic compilation; rather, its breadth of references signifies divine all-encompassing knowledge and power. In contrast to academic knowledge, which may or may not result in behavioral change, Qur'anic learning is inherently transformative, conclusive, and consequence-laden. It consistently commands ethical action, links knowledge with accountability, and targets the moral core of the human person. Thus, within a Critical Realist framework, the Qur'an represents a distinct epistemic category: a learning-centered, wisdom-based system that transcends empirical inquiry while producing tangible effects in personal, social, and moral reality.

From a Critical Realist epistemological perspective, the Qur'anic method of delivering learning content through Muhkamaat and Mutashabihaat represents a sophisticated pedagogical architecture that integrates ontology, epistemology, and ethics. Classical mufasssirrūn such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Qurṭubī consistently affirm that Muhkamaat constitute the foundational, norm-setting verses (*umm al-kitāb*) that command concrete belief and action, while Mutashabihaat function as orientational and motivational signposts pointing toward metaphysical realities whose full meanings ultimately transcend human cognition (cf. Q. 3:7). From this standpoint, Muhkamaat operate at the level of observable moral practice (*'amal*), shaping behavior through explicit injunctions, whereas Mutashabihaat address deeper ontological layers of reality—such as divine attributes, eschatology, and ultimate accountability—which cannot be accessed through empirical observation or analytic decomposition. Muslim philosophers and epistemologists further illuminate this structure. Al-Ghazālī distinguishes between knowledge that disciplines outward action (*'ilm al-mu'āmalah*) and knowledge that orients the heart toward ultimate truth (*'ilm al-mukāshafah*), a distinction that closely parallels the functional roles of Muhkamaat and Mutashabihaat. Ibn Sīnā and al-Fārābī recognize the necessity of symbolic and allegorical discourse for communicating metaphysical truths to the broader public, while reserving analytic reasoning for domains where it is epistemically appropriate. Similarly, Ibn Taymiyyah warns against applying speculative rational analysis to revealed texts dealing with unseen realities (*al-ghayb*), emphasizing submission (*taslīm*) where revelation delineates the limits of reason. (Alsuhaymi & Atallah, 2025)

Within a Critical Realist framework, Mutashabihaat may be understood as articulations of the real domain—they disclose genuine realities and causal structures that exist independently of human perception but are not directly observable. Their function is not explanatory in a scientific sense but generative: they activate moral motivation, humility, and existential orientation. Muhkamaat, by contrast, function in the actual and empirical domains, translating those deep realities into actionable norms and measurable ethical conduct (*'amal ṣāliḥ*). The Qur'anic prohibition

against speculative interpretation of Mutashabihaat thus reflects epistemic realism rather than anti-intellectualism: it safeguards the integrity of metaphysical truths by preventing their reduction to inappropriate analytical frameworks. Together, as affirmed by both classical tafsīr and Islamic philosophy, Mutashabihaat and Muhkamaat form an integrated learning system in which vision grounds practice and practice actualizes vision, ensuring that Qur’anic knowledge remains both ontologically grounded and practically transformative.

Table 3: Quranic Knowledge, Muhkamat, and Mutasyabihaat

Dimension	Academic Knowledge	Qur’anic Knowledge (General)	Muhkamaat	Mutashabihaat
Epistemic Category	Discipline-bound (science, history, humanities)	Distinct epistemic system (wisdom-based learning)	Normative–practical learning	Visionary–metaphysical learning
Primary Purpose	Explanation and understanding	Transformation of human conduct	Command ethical action	Orient belief and motivation
Level of Reality (Critical Realism)	Empirical & Actual	Real (generative mechanisms)	Actual & Empirical	Real (ontological depth)
Nature of Knowledge	Provisional, revisable	Conclusive and purpose-driven	Clear, precise injunctions	Allegorical, symbolic, inferential
Relation to Behavior	May or may not affect behavior	Inherently behavior-forming	Directly commands behavior (‘amal)	Indirectly motivates behavior
Consequences	Generally neutral	Consequence-laden	Accountability through action	Accountability through belief and attitude
Scope of Reference	Limited to specific domains	Multidisciplinary references	Ethical norms and duties	Divine attributes, Hereafter, unseen realities
Use of Science & History	Central objects of inquiry	Pedagogical and inferential tools	Secondary, supportive	Motivational signs (āyāt)
Verifiability	Empirical or analytic verification	Moral and existential verification	Measurable through conduct	Not empirically verifiable
Analytic Decomposition	Encouraged	Selectively limited	Permissible for application	Prohibited (risk of distortion)
Mode of Communication	Descriptive and theoretical	Directive and transformative	Commands (Do’s & Don’ts)	Symbols, metaphors, allegory
Audience Accessibility	Requires disciplinary training	Universal	Universally actionable	Universally orienting
Philosophical Treatment	Analytical reasoning central	Philosophy subordinated to guidance	Practical reasoning	Submission (taslīm) over speculation
Classical Tafsīr View	Not applicable	Umm al-kitāb framework	Foundational verses (al-Ṭabari, Ibn Kathīr)	Meaning ultimately with God (Q. 3:7)

Classical View	Tafsīr	Not applicable	Umm al-kitāb framework	Foundational verses (al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr)	Meaning ultimately with God (Q. 3:7)
Philosophical Parallels	—	—	Integrated ontology–ethics	al-Ghazālī's <i>‘ilm al-mu‘āmalah</i>	al-Ghazālī's <i>‘ilm al-mukāshafah</i>
Risk of Misuse	Over-specialization	Reductionism	Legalism without vision	Speculative distortion	—
Educational Outcome	Knowledge accumulation	Moral and spiritual formation	Ethical discipline	Existential orientation	—
Overall Function	Knowing	Becoming	Acting rightly	Seeing rightly	—

Interrelationship between Īmān and Action in a Critical Realist Perspective

From a Critical Realist epistemological standpoint, the Qur’anic relationship between īmān (belief) and action constitutes a non-reductionist causal structure in which internal convictions and external behavior are inseparably connected through real moral generative mechanisms. Unlike utopian or purely philosophical belief systems that may remain confined to abstract cognition, Qur’anic īmān is intrinsically learning-oriented and action-directive. Classical mufasssīrūn consistently emphasize that īmān in the Qur’an is never presented as a passive mental state. Al-Ṭabarī, in his commentary on verses such as “Those who believe and perform righteous deeds” (e.g., Q. 2:25; 103:3), affirms that the Qur’an deliberately couples belief with action to indicate an indivisible unity rather than two independent domains. Similarly, Ibn Kathīr explicitly states that righteous action (‘amal ṣāliḥ) is the necessary outward sign of genuine īmān, not its optional consequence.

Within the Qur’anic worldview, īmān functions not merely as informational assent or intellectual recognition, but as a priori synthetic wisdom that inherently commands behavioral response. This resonates strongly with Critical Realism, which distinguishes between empirical events and the deeper real structures that generate them. Īmān, in this sense, operates at the level of the real: it is ontologically prior to action and causally efficacious, even though it is not directly observable. Actions, therefore, are not external add-ons to belief but are the empirical manifestations of an ontologically real internal state. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī reinforces this understanding by arguing that belief devoid of transformative moral effect is conceptually deficient, as true knowledge (‘ilm)

necessarily reshapes both intention and conduct.

The scope of Qur'anic *īmān* extends far beyond abstract acknowledgment of divine attributes. As articulated by mufasssīrūn such as al-Qurṭubī and al-Baghawī, *īmān* encompasses belief in divine lordship, ultimate accountability, the Hereafter, destiny, death, prophetic exemplars, and revealed scriptures. Each of these components introduces normative moral constraints that continuously shape human agency. In Critical Realist terms, these beliefs function as real causal powers that influence intentions, attitudes, and choices, even though they cannot be subjected to empirical verification. Their effects, however, become visible in the actual and empirical domains through patterned ethical conduct, perseverance, and moral restraint. Muslim philosophers and epistemologists provide further analytical depth to this structure. Al-Ghazālī's distinction between *ʿilm al-muʿāmalah* (knowledge governing action) and *ʿilm al-mukāshafah* (knowledge orienting the heart toward ultimate reality) parallels the Qur'anic integration of belief and practice. (Güneş, 2023) *Īmān*, in his framework, is authentic only when it produces disciplined action and ethical self-regulation. Ibn Sīnā and al-Fārābī likewise recognize that metaphysical convictions, when internalized, function as formative causes shaping human purpose (*ghāyah*) and conduct, even if such convictions themselves transcend empirical observation. Ibn Taymiyyah further cautions that separating belief from action reflects a flawed epistemology that privileges abstract speculation over revealed moral realism.

Accordingly, the relationship between *īmān* and action cannot be adequately explained through deductive logic, which applies to purely analytic knowledge, nor through empirical verification alone, which is limited to observable phenomena. Rather, it reflects a command-based moral causality intrinsic to Qur'anic wisdom, wherein belief itself contains an imperative toward ethical response. From a Critical Realist perspective, this corresponds to a causal relation that is real but not constant-conjunctive: belief does not mechanically produce identical actions in all contexts, yet it consistently disposes the believer toward moral accountability and purposeful striving.

An ostensible claim of *īmān* unaccompanied by sustained behavioral response thus indicates a disruption in this causal chain. Classical exegetes identify this condition as *nifāq*, not merely as moral weakness but as a profound epistemic incoherence between inward claim and outward reality. The Qur'an's repeated critique of hypocrites (e.g., Q. 20–2:8; 3–63:1) illustrates what Critical Realism would describe as a misalignment between the real (belief), the actual (intention), and the empirical (action) domains of human existence. Nevertheless, the Qur'an also acknowledges developmental stages in moral agency. As inferred from verses emphasizing reflection (*tafakkur*), remembrance (*dhikr*), and gradual commitment, individuals may occupy transitional phases—from unawareness, to contemplation, and eventually to active striving—before consistent ethical practice is established.

Behavioral Response, *Taqwā*, and the Ontology of ‘Amal Ṣāliḥ

In the Qur'anic epistemic framework, learning (*ta'allum*) reaches its fulfillment not at the level of cognition but in behavioral response governed by *taqwā*. *Taqwā*, as consistently articulated by classical *mufasssīrūn*, denotes a conscious moral vigilance that orients the believer toward avoiding divine disapproval and securing ultimate accountability before God. Al-Qurṭubī defines *taqwā* as *ḥifẓ al-nafs ‘an mā yūjib al-‘iqāb*—the safeguarding of the self from that which entails punishment—thus framing it as an active moral posture rather than a passive emotional state. Within this orientation, *taqwā*-driven behavior is operationalized through *‘amal ṣāliḥ* (righteous action), which constitutes the empirical manifestation of *īmān* in the observable world.

From a Critical Realist perspective, *‘amal ṣāliḥ* may be understood as the actualization of real moral dispositions into externally observable conduct. *īmān* and *taqwā* function at the level of the real, as ontologically prior moral mechanisms that generate tendencies toward ethical restraint and devotion. These mechanisms are not directly accessible to observation, yet their causal efficacy becomes visible in the actual and empirical domains through patterned behavior. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī emphasizes that righteous deeds are not merely consequences of belief but indicators of its ontological presence, arguing that *īmān* devoid of moral effect is conceptually deficient and existentially unstable. Classical *tafsīr* further clarifies that not every action qualifies as

‘amal ṣāliḥ, even if it appears beneficial or disciplined. Ibn Kathīr repeatedly notes that the Qur’an restricts salvific value to actions that are performed *li-wajh Allāh* (for the sake of God), thereby introducing intention (*niyyah*) and consciousness as indispensable mediating factors. This insight aligns with Critical Realism’s rejection of empirical reductionism: observable behavior alone does not exhaust the ontology of action, as deeper unobservable structures—such as intention, devotion, and moral orientation—determine its true causal depth.

For an action to qualify as ‘amal ṣāliḥ and thereby attain the status of *‘ibādah* (worship), two irreducible conditions must be fulfilled. First, the deed must be performed with sanity and conscious alignment, which involves *dhikr* as an explicit or internalized articulation of commitment to God. Al-Ghazālī, in *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, stresses that actions devoid of conscious remembrance are spiritually hollow, likening them to lifeless forms lacking animating spirit. *Dhikr*, in this sense, ensures cognitive-moral coherence, preventing action from degenerating into mechanical routine or instrumental performance detached from eschatological purpose.

Second, the deed must be performed with sincerity (*ikhhlās*), characterized by complete devotion, humility, and the exclusive pursuit of divine acceptance. Qur’anic exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī interpret verses like “They were commanded only to worship Allah, making the religion sincere for Him” (Q. 98:5) as establishing *ikhhlās* as a necessary condition for acceptability. Muslim philosophers further illuminate this dimension. Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā recognize sincerity as an inward orientation that aligns human intention with the ultimate good (*al-khayr al-a‘lā*), while Ibn Taymiyyah insists that sincerity is a real ontological state of the heart whose presence or absence decisively determines the moral value of action, regardless of outward form.

Within a Critical Realist ontology, sincerity functions as a real but unobservable causal mechanism. While empirical observers may assess actions in terms of compliance, efficiency, or social impact, *ikhhlās* remains epistemically opaque to human judgment and fully accessible only to God. This explains why the Qur’an repeatedly warns against *riyā’* (showmanship), which

produces empirically impressive actions yet lacks salvific efficacy. Such actions, though observable, are ontologically shallow; they fail to activate the deeper moral mechanisms necessary for enduring ethical transformation. Actions that lack conscious orientation toward the Hereafter—despite outward discipline, calm, or meditative focus—are therefore ontologically distinct from ‘amal ṣāliḥ. Classical scholars differentiate such acts from worship, categorizing them as morally neutral or spiritually inert. Likewise, actions performed with apparent zeal but devoid of sincerity fall into the category of hypocrisy (nifāq), which the Qur’an identifies as more dangerous than overt disbelief due to its internal epistemic rupture. (Mojahed, 2025) From a Critical Realist viewpoint, hypocrisy reflects a profound misalignment between the real domain (professed belief), the actual domain (intention), and the empirical domain (action).

Thus, Qur’anic ethics emerges as a unified ontological system integrating belief (īmān), moral vigilance (taqwā), intention (niyyah), and action (‘amal). Learning, within this system, is never merely descriptive but inherently transformative. It activates deep moral mechanisms that reshape conduct, align agency with accountability, and translate metaphysical convictions into lived reality. In this way, Qur’anic knowledge attains its fullest expression not in abstract discourse but in accountable practice, where moral truth becomes embodied and success—both temporal and eternal—is meaningfully pursued.

Behavioural Patterns in the Qur’anic Worldview: Qur’anic vs. Unqur’anic Orientations

From a Critical Realist perspective, human life unfolds within a stratified reality in which material resources, experiences (pleasant and unpleasant), and personal missions function as objective conditions that activate deeper moral and spiritual mechanisms. The Qur’an presents these worldly elements not as morally neutral occurrences but as tests (ibtilā’) through which underlying beliefs (īmān), attitudes (niyyah and tawajjuh), and value orientations are revealed and actualized in behavior.

The distinction between Qur’anic and Unqur’anic behavior does not arise from the external event itself—wealth, success, grief, or ambition—but from the interpretive and moral stance adopted

by the individual. In Critical Realist terms, the same empirical condition may activate contradictory generative mechanisms, depending on whether the agent operates under God-centered realism (Qur’anic) or self-centered reductionism (Unqur’anic).

What follows is a structured analytical matrix demonstrating how attitudes (internal, real-level mechanisms) translate into behaviors (actual and empirical outcomes) across major domains of human experience.

Table 4 : Material Resource Possessions

Dimension	Unqur’anic Orientation	Qur’anic Orientation
Ontological Interpretation	Wealth is self-produced; ownership is absolute	Wealth is a trust (<i>amānah</i>) from God
Attitudinal Mechanism	Pride, superiority, self-sufficiency	Modesty, fear of accountability, submission
Behavioral Outcomes	Hoarding, neglect of the poor, reluctance to spend	Ethical spending, concern for the underprivileged
Moral Consequence	Objectification of wealth as <i>tāghūt</i>	Wealth as means for salvation
Critical Realist Reading	False causal attribution to self	Recognition of deeper divine causality

Table 5 : Pleasant Experiences (Success, Happiness)

Dimension	Unqur’anic Orientation	Qur’anic Orientation
Ontological Interpretation	Success is deserved and permanent	Success is a temporary test
Attitudinal Mechanism	Pride, complacency, entitlement	Gratitude (<i>shukr</i>), humility, vigilance

Behavioral Outcomes	Extravagant celebration, forgetfulness of the poor	Benevolent spending, increased devotion
Temporal Outlook	Illusion of permanence	Awareness of accountability
Critical Realist Reading	Empirical success mistaken for ultimate reality	Empirical success subordinated to real moral structures

Table 6: Unpleasant Experiences (Pain, Loss, Grief)

Dimension	Unqur'anic Orientation	Qur'anic Orientation
Ontological Interpretation	Injustice, misfortune, or hostile forces	Divine test with moral purpose
Attitudinal Mechanism	Despair, resentment, rebellion	Patience (<i>ṣabr</i>), reliance (<i>tawakkul</i>)
Behavioral Outcomes	Depression, addiction, destructive coping	Prayer, reflection, ethical resilience
Moral Trajectory	Escape into self-destruction	Growth through learning and repentance
Critical Realist Reading	Collapse of meaning under adversity	Activation of deeper redemptive mechanisms

Table 7: Personal Mission – Worldly Orientation. Part I: Goals and Aspirations

Dimension	Unqur'anic Orientation	Qur'anic Orientation
Ultimate Goal	Material success alone	Success in this world and the Hereafter
Meaning of Status	Power, dominance, permanence	Responsibility, service, accountability

View of Authority	Self-sovereignty	Divine sovereignty
Behavioral Expression	Fear of people, neglect of God	Fear of God, ethical leadership
Critical Realist Reading	Reduction of reality to worldly metrics	Integration of worldly means into transcendent ends

Table 8: Personal Mission – Part II: Destiny, Means, and Commitment

Dimension	Unqur’anic Orientation	Qur’anic Orientation
View of Control	Absolute self-determination	Reliance on divine decree (<i>qadar</i>)
Ethical Boundaries	Ends justify means	Means must conform to taqwā
View of Life & Property	Absolute personal ownership	Life and wealth “sold” to God (Q. 9:111)
Motivational Core	Worldly pleasure over salvation	Salvation prioritized over worldly gain
Critical Realist Reading	Closed-system human autonomy	Open-system moral realism under divine causality

Social and Economic Behaviour in the Qur’anic Framework: A Critical Realist and Islamic Economic Analysis

From a Critical Realist perspective, social and economic structures should be understood not merely as observable institutional arrangements or empirical distributions of status and wealth, but as conditioning contexts that activate deeper generative moral mechanisms rooted in *īmān* (faith), *niyyah* (intention), and *taqwā* (God-consciousness). Reality, in this view, is stratified: while social hierarchies and economic inequalities exist at the empirical and actual levels, their ethical significance emerges at the real level, where moral values, beliefs, and divine accountability operate as causal forces shaping human conduct.(Kilic et al., 2025)

The Qur'an neither negates social differentiation nor advocates material egalitarianism in a simplistic sense; instead, it redefines the moral ontology of social and economic life by framing rank, power, and wealth as tests (*ibtilā'*) and trusts (*amānah*) rather than intrinsic indicators of human worth or success.

Within this framework, Islamic economics aligns closely with Critical Realism by rejecting both material reductionism and moral neutralism. Economic capacity (*rizq*), ownership, and productivity are acknowledged as real and necessary dimensions of human life, yet they are subordinated to ethical purpose (*maqṣad*). Wealth is not self-grounding; it is divinely mediated and morally conditioned. Qur'anic injunctions against *ribā* (usury), *iḥtikār* (hoarding), *isrāf* (extravagance), and unjust accumulation illustrate that economic relations are governed by normative causal mechanisms that transcend market efficiency alone. Conversely, instruments such as *zakāh*, *ṣadaqah*, *waqf*, and risk-sharing contracts operationalize moral values into concrete socio-economic practices, translating faith-based commitments into observable distributive outcomes. (Priels, 2022) In Critical Realist terms, these institutions function as bridges between the real moral domain and the empirical economic domain, ensuring that belief is causally efficacious in shaping material life.

The distinction between Qur'anic and Unqur'anic orientations, therefore, does not hinge on one's social position or economic status per se, but on the interpretation, intention, and utilization of those positions. Unqur'anic reasoning absolutizes relative status and material success, mistaking contingent social advantages for ultimate value and causal autonomy. Qur'anic reasoning, by contrast, relocates value to piety, moral responsibility, and accountability before God (*ḥisāb*), thereby reorienting human agency toward ethical stewardship rather than domination. From a Critical Realist standpoint, this represents a shift from surface-level empirical stratification to deep moral causation, where unseen beliefs and values generate tangible social and economic effects. Social hierarchy and economic differentiation thus become morally meaningful only insofar as they are inhabited by *taqwā*-driven action, rendering Islamic socio-economic life a domain where ethical realism, rather than material determinism, governs human flourishing.

Table 9: Social Perspective: Status, Etiquette, and Moral Orientation

Dimension	Unqur'anic Orientation	Qur'anic Orientation
Ontological Criterion of Greatness	Social rank and hierarchical superiority	Superiority in taqwā (piety)
Attitudinal Mechanism	Desire for dominance and social supremacy	Aspiration for moral excellence
Interpretation of Social Order	Ladder for self-exaltation	Arena for ethical cultivation
Behavioural Expression	Arrogance, condescension, manipulation	Modesty, humility, moral discipline
Social Interaction	Disrespect toward lower-status individuals	Respect based on merit and piety
Knowledge Orientation	Avarice for social advantage	Avarice for wisdom and self-purification
Function of Social Position	Symbol of superiority demanding submission	Resource for service and responsibility
Critical Realist Reading	Confusion of social form with moral substance	Recognition of deeper moral structures

Table 10: Economic Perspective (Part I): Wealth, Power, and Responsibility

Dimension	Unqur'anic Orientation	Qur'anic Orientation
Criterion of Economic Greatness	Accumulation and earning capacity	Superiority in taqwā
Attitudinal Mechanism	Competition for dominance	Competition for virtue

Interpretation of Economic Rank	Instrument of supremacy	Trust (<i>amānah</i>) for performance
Behavioural Expression	Arrogance, exploitation, ostentation	Modesty, ethical restraint
Spending Orientation	Display of superiority	Manifestation of God’s supremacy
Purpose of Wealth	Personal gain and prestige	Enabling moral reform and da‘wah
Relation to Others	Disrespect toward the economically weak	Respect based on dignity and need
Critical Realist Reading	Reduction of wealth to self-grounded causality	Wealth as divinely mediated causal power

Table 11: Economic Perspective (Part II): Spending, Intent, and Moral Depth

Dimension	Unqur’anic Orientation	Qur’anic Orientation
Primary Motivation for Spending	Social recognition and influence	Seeking divine acceptance
Visibility of Charity	Only when public attention is guaranteed	Public or private, without distinction
Target of Spending	Socially advantageous recipients	Deserving and needy individuals
Priority Structure	Self-interest over communal need	Others’ need over self-interest
Moral Consequence	Reinforcement of ego and hierarchy	Advancement toward salvation
Ontological Status of Action	Empirically visible but morally shallow	Morally deep with unseen causal power

Critical Realist Reading	Surface-level ethical performance	Activation of real moral mechanisms
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Communication Methodology (Da’wah) in a Critical Realist Perspective

In the Qur’anic worldview, Islam is not merely a confessional identity or a system of abstract doctrines, but the behavioral actualization of Qur’anic wisdom in individual and collective life. Since the Qur’an fundamentally demands behavioral transformation, the methodology of da’wah cannot be reduced to the transmission of information alone; rather, it must be oriented toward learning that activates moral change. From a Critical Realist epistemological standpoint, this distinction is crucial.(Taqiyuddin, 2025) Teaching methods that merely convey propositions may operate at the empirical level of knowledge acquisition, but da’wah as Qur’anic communication seeks to engage the real level of reality, where beliefs, values, and moral commitments function as generative mechanisms shaping conduct.

Accordingly, the choice of communication methodology in da’wah is not value-neutral. Classical pedagogical modes—such as lectures, texts, audio-visual media, seminars, and debates—are effective for conveying information, but they often fail to generate sustained behavioral change. Among these methods, interactive workshop-based learning emerges as particularly suited to Qur’anic da’wah, as it enables participants to directly relate learning contents to lived experience, moral struggle, and practical application. In Critical Realist terms, workshops facilitate the activation of causal powers—belief, intention, social reinforcement, and moral reflection—by situating learning within concrete social interaction rather than abstract cognition. Once the foundational link between Qur’anic learning and behavior is established through such embodied and demonstrative methods, other modes of communication may supplement and reinforce the process, adding depth and continuity to the transformation already initiated.

This approach closely mirrors the prophetic model of

learning, wherein the first generation of believers did not merely receive verbal instruction but underwent moral formation through sustained companionship (ṣuḥbah), observation, and imitation. The effectiveness of da'wah, therefore, lies not primarily in rhetorical sophistication, but in learning within the company of dedicated and committed practitioners, whose lived example renders Qur'anic values intelligible, credible, and attainable. (Ridwan, 2025) Behavioral change, while potentially initiated instantaneously through conviction or realization, unfolds as a non-linear and developmental process. From a Critical Realist perspective, this reflects the stratified nature of moral reality: while beliefs may emerge at the level of the real, their consistent manifestation in action requires gradual alignment across the actual (intentions, habits) and empirical (observable conduct) domains. The Qur'anic model implicitly recognizes multiple stages of moral agency, ranging from unawareness to full advocacy, each requiring a distinct communicative and pedagogical approach.

At the Advocacy stage, individuals have internalized the principles of taqwā and devotion to such an extent that they function as living exemplars. Their behavior itself becomes a communicative medium, exerting causal influence through modeling rather than instruction alone. In Critical Realist terms, these individuals embody activated moral mechanisms whose effects propagate socially. The task of da'wah at this stage is not to instruct them, but to learn from and support them as catalysts of wider transformation.

The Maintaining stage consists of committed practitioners who consistently adhere to taqwā-oriented behavior. While not yet advocates, their moral dispositions are relatively stable. Here, communication should focus on reinforcement, encouragement, and recognition, ensuring that existing causal mechanisms remain operative under varying social pressures. At the Trying stage, individuals demonstrate partial but inconsistent alignment between belief and action. They recognize moral lapses and actively strive toward improvement. From a Critical Realist standpoint, this stage represents an unstable but promising configuration of generative mechanisms, requiring ongoing training, moral support, and structured reinforcement to consolidate ethical habits and sustain

motivation.

The Contemplating stage involves individuals who are cognitively aware of taqwā and morally inclined toward it, yet have not translated this awareness into practice. Effective da'wah here must address perceived barriers, recalibrate cost-benefit perceptions, and enhance the social acceptability of Qur'anic behavior.(Indriyani & Khadiq, 2023) Training at this stage targets the activation of latent moral powers, transforming abstract appreciation into intentional commitment. Finally, the Unaware stage includes individuals who lack both knowledge of and concern for taqwā. Their condition reflects the absence or dormancy of moral generative mechanisms rather than conscious resistance. Communication at this stage must therefore prioritize motivational awakening, employing accessible language, relatable examples, and embodied models to initiate moral cognition and concern.

Conclusion

Islam, grounded in the Qur'an as its primary textual source, is intrinsically oriented toward individuals who aspire to comprehensive and enduring success. It addresses not those content with transient, perishable achievements confined to the fragile temporality of worldly life, but those whose ambition extends to ultimate success in the Hereafter. From a Qur'anic standpoint, success is neither accidental nor rhetorical; it is the outcome of commitment translated into sustained action. Words—however sacred—do not suffice in isolation. Rather, Islam demands a paradigm shift in which belief, intention, and behavior converge into a coherent moral personality.

Within a Critical Realist framework, this convergence reflects the activation of deep moral and spiritual generative mechanisms that operate at the level of the real, producing observable ethical conduct in the empirical world. The Qur'an provides this architecture of transformation by articulating foundational wisdom through Mutashābihāt, which orient the believer toward transcendent realities, and translating that wisdom into concrete behavioral imperatives through Muḥkamāt. Together, they constitute an integrated learning system in which vision precedes action and action actualizes vision. Islam, therefore,

is not merely a belief system but a behavior-transformative way of life, designed to realign the totality of human conduct with divine purpose. This transformative orientation is historically manifested in the lived practices of the first generation of believers, whose lives demonstrate the practical efficacy of Qur'anic learning. Their commitment illustrates that genuine religious learning is not exhausted by doctrinal mastery but is realized through disciplined practice, sacrifice, and moral consistency. (Maisyanah et al., 2024) Contemporary behavioral science similarly recognizes that training, rather than classical information-centered teaching, is the primary driver of behavior change. While academic instruction often accumulates extensive teaching materials, it rarely produces sustained moral transformation. By contrast, the Qur'an's learning materials—distributed across narrative, command, parable, warning, and promise—are inherently structured to function as training content, capable of reshaping intention, habit, and action when engaged holistically.

The Qur'anic conception of *īmān* further reinforces this framework. Belief is not limited to abstract assent to unseen realities such as God, Heaven, and Hell; it encompasses commitment to revelation as truth, prophetic exemplars as moral witnesses, destiny as a horizon of accountability, angels as models of total submission, and the Day of Judgment as the final moral reckoning. In Critical Realist terms, these beliefs operate as real causal powers that exert continuous influence over human agency. Consequently, a sincere adoption of Islam necessarily entails a behavioral response marked by sanity, sincerity, and accountability. The believer's life, possessions, capacities, and intentions become subordinated to a covenantal commitment, described by the Qur'an as a transaction in which worldly attachment is exchanged for ultimate salvation. Within this ontological structure, the only form of action deemed acceptable before God is *'amal ṣāliḥ*, which alone constitutes true *'ibādah*. Actions devoid of conscious orientation toward God or sincerity of intention, regardless of their outward form, lack causal depth and moral efficacy. Indifference and deficient response are treated as functionally equivalent, as neither activates the moral mechanisms necessary for transformation and salvation. Thus, Qur'anic ethics rejects superficial activism and ritual formalism alike, insisting instead on the unity of belief, intention, and action.

The Qur'an recognizes that behavioral transformation unfolds through graduated stages. While the initial awakening may occur instantaneously, progression through the stages—from unawareness, to contemplation, to trying, to maintaining, and ultimately to advocacy—is rarely linear or effortless. Even exemplary individuals may oscillate between striving and consistency. This recognition underscores the Qur'an's profound realism regarding human moral development. From a Critical Realist perspective, such stages reflect varying degrees of alignment between the real (belief), the actual (intention and disposition), and the empirical (observable conduct) domains of human existence.

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