

REVISITING CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH QURANIC LENS

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ABSTRACT

Despite the widespread emphasis on teaching critical thinking at international universities, there is a growing concern that graduates are inadequately prepared to navigate the complexities of contemporary crises, revealing significant shortcomings in conventional approaches to critical thinking education. Through comparative text analysis, this study examines the concept of critical thinking through a Quranic perspective, highlighting the integration of ethical, moral, and spiritual dimensions into the traditional critical thinking frameworks. The Quranic perspective acknowledges the existence of knowledge beyond the empirical and physically observable world, urging a recognition of the limitations of human intellect. The study presents a more holistic approach to critical thinking drawing on Quranic teachings to enrich contemporary understanding and practice. By exploring the Quran's emphasis on ethical reasoning, reflective and strategic thinking, restraint and self-control as elements of sound critical thinking, the study identifies both convergences and divergences with Western models of critical thinking. The findings of the Quran's unique contributions to critical thinking include the integration of spirituality for autonomous critical thinking, a holistic approach to reasoning, the central role of the heart in thinking, and the importance of character-building for sound judgment. The research aims to foster a more integrated approach to critical thinking presenting a set of Islamic critical insights that encompass not only intellectual but also spiritual and moral capacities, challenging current educational paradigms and advocating for a comprehensive development that prioritizes character-building together with technical skills such as awareness of cognitive biases and heuristics.

INTRODUCTION

The escalating crises in global affairs, as highlighted by the recent United Nations Security Council's meeting, the role of critical thinking grounded in ethics, moral values, and justice becomes increasingly vital than ever before.² This also finds support by the perspectives shared in the International Crisis Group's "10 Conflicts to Watch in 2024," emphasizing

¹ "CEO and Senior Education Consultant - Ednastics, Dubai, UAE," Ednastics, accessed February 5, 2024, <https://ednastics.com/our-people/>.

² United Nations Security Council, "9250th Meeting (AM & PM): With Highest Number of Violent Conflicts Since Second World War, United Nations Must Rethink Efforts to Achieve, Sustain Peace, Speakers Tell Security Council," United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, January 26, 2023, <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15184.doc.htm>.

the need for ethical and just approaches in international relations.³ During the Security Council meeting, Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed underscored the dire state of global peace, noting that 2 billion people “ a quarter of humanity” live in conflict-affected areas, the highest number since the Second World War⁴. The escalating crises in global affairs, as underscored by the International Crisis Group and the United Nations Security Council suggests a fundamental flaw in the current conceptions of critical thinking, particularly when many world leaders who were educated in Western or Western-influenced institutions continue to favor military solutions over diplomatic ones. This trend points to the potential inadequacy of prevailing critical thinking paradigms in addressing contemporary global challenges. As a result, there is an emerging need to re-conceptualize critical thinking, emphasizing ethics, moral values, and justice to better equip those in leadership positions with more holistic critical thinking in navigating the complexities of international relations. Therefore, in addressing Muhammad Mumtaz Ali's provocative assertion that 'we are not critical of critical thinking'⁵, this paper seeks to critically review the flaws in current critical thinking practices and explore ways to develop critical thinkers who are better equipped to make ethical and effective choices in tackling the challenges the world faces.

At a personal level, in an ever-evolving world, marked by information overload, critical thinking has emerged as a fundamental skill for navigating the complexities of modern life. Its significance covers all spheres of life from academic pursuits to personal decisions requiring a more analytical approach than ever before. Within academia, critical thinking is at the center for intellectual growth and research. Students equipped with this skill can analyze information from diverse sources⁶ challenge prevailing assumptions and construct well-reasoned arguments⁷. Critical thinking empowers individuals to make informed decisions about their health, finances, and relationships. It allows people to analyze options, identify potential pitfalls, and ultimately chart a course aligned with our values and goals⁸. In an age of conflicting information and persuasive advertising, it equips people with the tools to sift through the noise and make informed choices. Never has critical thinking been so crucial for a more rigorous academic discourse, international relations, and

³ International Crisis Group, "10 Conflicts to Watch in 2024," International Crisis Group, accessed January 30, 2024, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/10-conflicts-watch-2024>.

⁴ United Nations Security Council, "9250th Meeting (AM & PM): With Highest Number of Violent Conflicts Since Second World War, United Nations Must Rethink Efforts to Achieve, Sustain Peace, Speakers Tell Security Council," United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, January 26, 2023, <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15184.doc.htm>.

⁵ Muhammad Mumtaz Ali, *Islamic Research, Theory, Methodology and Thesis Writing: A Milestone for Sustainable Development* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2022), 270.

⁶ John Dewey, *How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process* (Boston: D.C. Heath & Co Publishers, 1933).

⁷ Peter A. Facione, *Critical Thinking: What It Is and Why It Counts* (California: California Academic Press, 2011)

⁸ Rolf Dobelli, *The Art of Thinking Clearly* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2014).

understanding the intricacies of personal life. Stuart Hanscomb encapsulates the essence of critical thinking as being the art of living well.⁹ This perspective positions critical thinking not just as an academic skill, but as a vital tool for making informed, thoughtful decisions in all aspects of life.

The origins of the term 'critical thinking' are a subject of some debate, with different sources providing varied accounts. While many often credit John Dewey as the originator of critical thinking as a distinct field¹⁰, attributing this to his 1910 work 'How We Think,' other sources, such as Webster's online dictionary¹¹, offer a broader historical context. Webster's suggests that the term was first known to be used as early as 1815, with its first dictionary appearance dating back to 1810. This earlier usage may reflect an evolving understanding of the concept, separate from Dewey's later formalization. Despite these earlier conceptualizations, the formal teaching of critical thinking in higher education in the United States is relatively recent. A turning point was in 1983 when California State University became the first institution in the United States to mandate a critical thinking course as a graduation requirement.¹² This development underscores the relatively recent emphasis on critical thinking in the Western educational settings.

The definitions of critical thinking from various scholars center primarily on the principles of rationality and logic. Stuart Hanscomb defines it as a tool to avoid erroneous conclusions across everyday life thereby enhancing our capacity for reasoning and argument assessment¹³. Similarly, Robert Ennis conceptualizes it as "reasonable, reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do," which underscores its applicability in imparting practical skills¹⁴. Echoing this, John Dewey's perspective of "active, persistent and careful consideration of a belief¹⁵" points out a sense of diligence and responsibility. In another perspective, Hanscomb's breakdown of critical thinking into theoretical knowledge, practical application, and self-reflection adds details in terms of its components and being aware of our thinking process to enhance decision-making and recognize reasoning flaws¹⁶. The field gained further depth with Daniel Kahneman's introduction of intuitive (System 1) versus deliberative (System 2) thought processes in "Thinking, Fast and Slow,"

⁹ Stuart Hanscomb, *Critical Thinking: The Basics*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2023), 6.

¹⁰ Ibid, 5.

¹¹ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "critical thinking," accessed January 30, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/critical%20thinking>.

¹² Jonathan Haber, *Critical Thinking* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020), 32-33.

¹³ Stuart Hanscomb, *Critical Thinking: The Basics*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2023), 12.

¹⁴ Robert Ennis, "Critical Thinking Dispositions: Their Nature and Accessibility," *Informal Logic* 18, no. 2 & 3 (1996): 165-82.

¹⁵ John Dewey, *How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process* (Boston: D.C. Heath & Co Publishers, 1933), 6.

¹⁶ Stuart Hanscomb, *Critical Thinking: The Basics*, 13.

advocating for a balanced approach in critical thinking.¹⁷ Rolf Dobelli's emphasis on identifying and avoiding cognitive errors points to the systematic deviations from logical thinking¹⁸.

Jonathan Haber's listing of critical thinking's components, including structured thinking, language skills, and argumentation, reinforces its foundational aspects¹⁹. Daniel Goleman's introduction of emotional intelligence into the discussion brings a necessary balance between cognitive and emotional faculties, advocating for a more holistic approach²⁰.

While none of the authors discuss the role of ethics in critical thinking, Vincent Ryan Ruggiero's work adds ethical reasoning into the equation highlighting ethical and moral dimensions in the realm of critical thinking²¹. His focus on the need for objective moral standards, especially in the face of prevalent moral relativism, underscores the reductionist nature of a critical thinking model that lacks ethical considerations.²² This observation calls for an integration of character-building, ethical standards, and an acknowledgment of the inherent limitations in human thinking, thereby challenging the scope and depth of critical thinking as traditionally conceived.

Critical thinking education has mainly explored the impact of cognitive biases on our decision-making and reasoning processes, emphasizing the importance of awareness and understanding of these biases to mitigate their effects. In fact, Rolf Dobelli, in his book "The Art of Thinking Clearly," argues that recognizing and identifying the 99 cognitive errors, biases, and illusions he discusses can help individuals avoid these common pitfalls and make more rational choices²³. For example, he discusses framing effects where the same information could lead to different choices based on how the information is presented. Stuart Hanscomb supports the significance of understanding both heuristics and biases as essential tools for enhancing critical thinking skills²⁴. These authors suggest that by familiarizing oneself with these cognitive shortcuts and errors, one can improve their critical thinking abilities, thereby making more informed and less biased decisions. Jonathan Haber takes the discussion a step further in his work, "Critical Thinking," by questioning whether it is indeed possible to nurture truly autonomous critical thinkers by teaching these cognitive biases²⁵. Haber challenges the traditional goal of creating

¹⁷ Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (Penguin Random House UK, 2011), 21.

¹⁸ Rolf Dobelli, *The Art of Thinking Clearly* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2014), xvii.

¹⁹ Jonathan Haber, *Critical Thinking* 93.

²⁰ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, 10th anniversary edition (New Delhi: Bloomsbury, 2005), 22.

²¹ Vincent Ryan Ruggiero, *Thinking Critically About Ethical Issues*, 11th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2024), 2.

²² *Ibid*, 6.

²³ Rolf Dobelli, *The Art of Thinking Clearly*, 25.

²⁴ Stuart Hanscomb *Critical Thinking: The Basics*, 30.

²⁵ Jonathan Haber, *Critical Thinking* 32-33.

independent thinkers, positing that thinking is a social act that does not occur solely within an individual's mind but rather in interaction with others and within the context of historical and social norms²⁶. This perspective suggests that while awareness of cognitive biases and heuristics is crucial, the capacity for critical thinking is also deeply influenced by our interactions with others and the collective knowledge and norms of our societies.

The Western models of critical thinking, as discussed earlier, emphasize logic and rationality, yet often overlook the holistic nature that includes ethical, moral, and spiritual dimensions. This oversight becomes evident when we consider the perspectives of Islamic scholars on the subject. For instance, Jamal Badi and Mustapha Tajdin, in their work 'Creative Thinking: an Islamic Perspective', emphasize the concept of '*Tafakkur*' (thinking) in the Qur'anic view. According to them, *Tafakkur* is not just a cognitive process but a spiritual and ethical engagement which distinguishes humans from other creatures and playing a crucial role in civilization and character building²⁷. Moreover, they outline various barriers to *Tafakkur*, such as ignorance, blind imitation, arrogance, and influence of negative desires, all of which can distort the critical thinking process. This Islamic perspective introduces a unique dimension to critical thinking to overcome internal logical inconsistencies by aligning thinking with ethical, spiritual, moral, legal, and consequential views of life, as opposed to solely materialistic or relativistic perspectives²⁸.

Muhammad Mumtaz Ali, in his book 'Islamic Research Theory, Methodology, and Thesis Writing', introduces critical insights²⁹ that highlight the necessity of incorporating metaphysical knowledge alongside human intellect to bridge its inherent limitations. He contends that critical thinking should be more holistic, incorporating the unseen dimensions of knowledge as mentioned in the Qur'an which are the keys to realms beyond human perception³⁰. This approach not only addresses the limitations of current models but also enriches our understanding and application of critical thinking in both personal and global contexts. Building on this foundation, the study incorporates Mohd. Kamal Hassan's concept of the Islamization of the self, highlighting *Tazkiyah* (purification of the heart), *Taqwa* (God-consciousness), and *Ilm* (knowledge), to introduce "Character-Building Standards" as a crucial framework for enhancing critical thinking. This framework reinterprets Hassan's principles within the domain of critical thinking, focusing on Ethical Purification (Tazkiyah) for elevated emotional intelligence and impartial analysis with Moral Awareness (Taqwa). These elements collectively emphasize a progression towards

²⁶ Ibid, 109.

²⁷ Jamal Badi and Mustapha Tajdin, *Creative Thinking, an Islamic Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2021).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Muhammad Mumtaz Ali, 265

³⁰ Ibid, 260

comprehensive development, advocating for a critical thinking paradigm that extends beyond mere analytical abilities to embrace moral and spiritual maturation.³¹

Here is slightly re-worded list of the character-building standards:

1. **Ethical Purification:** Aligned with *Tazkiyah*, contributes to critical thinking by fostering virtues that enhance emotional intelligence and ethical judgment, facilitating clearer and more unbiased analysis.
2. **Moral Awareness:** Taqwa integrates a moral compass into decision-making, ensuring that choices are not only logical but also ethically sound and aligned with divine principles.
3. **Holistic Knowledge:** Ilm encourages a broad and deep understanding of both religious and worldly matters, promoting well-informed and comprehensive critical analysis.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research methodology was designed to explore the comprehensive framework of critical thinking as presented within the Quran, comparing this with contemporary understandings of critical thinking. To achieve this, the study employed two data sources: a thematic Quran encyclopedia³² developed in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and the Quranic Arabic Corpus³³. The thematic Quran encyclopedia, recognized as the first peer-reviewed scientific compilation focused on Quranic themes, encompasses works from 217 global researchers across 345 themes, with contributions reviewed by an additional 100 scholars. This resource was pivotal for exploring the multifaceted interpretations and representations of critical thinking within the Quran. Additionally, the Quranic Arabic Corpus, known for its detailed linguistic analysis capabilities, provided an invaluable tool for textual analysis of the Quran.

The research began with an extensive review of the thematic Quran encyclopedia to identify diverse conceptualizations of critical thinking in the Quran. This included a rigorous examination of linguistic meanings (*musdalāh*) and scholarly interpretations related to critical thinking within the Quranic context. The goal was to establish a foundational understanding of how critical thinking is conceptualized and discussed within Quranic texts and by Islamic scholars. Following this foundational analysis, the study identified key

³¹ Mohd. Kamal Hassan, "The Ulū Albāb Model", *Intellectual Discourse*, IIUM Press, 2010, pp. 200-202.

³² Tafsir Center for Quranic Studies, "Thematic Tafsir" accessed January 15, 2024, <https://modoe.com>

³³ Quranic Corpus accessed January 20, 2024, <https://corpus.quran.com>.

terms associated with critical thinking by leveraging the thematic insights from the encyclopedia. The Corpus was then used to conduct systematic searches for these identified terms, including their root words and variant forms, to analyze their occurrences, contexts, and thematic significance within the Quran.

Each identified verse was subject to a detailed contextual analysis to understand the application and implications of critical thinking principles as conveyed in the Quran. This analysis was comprehensive, considering both the immediate linguistic context and broader thematic implications within the Quran. An important aspect of the methodology was the comparative analysis conducted between contemporary critical thinking models and the interpretations derived from Quranic texts. This comparison aimed to identify areas of convergence and divergence, illuminating how the Quranic approach extends beyond traditional critical thinking frameworks by incorporating ethical, moral, and spiritual dimensions often absent in the current critical thinking models.

The Role of the Heart in Thinking

In the Quran the heart is used in in three distinct meanings³⁴:

1. Intellect, as mentioned in 'Indeed, in that is a reminder for whoever has a 'mindful' heart³⁵.
2. Opinion, as in 'You think they are united, yet their hearts are divided³⁶.
3. The literal heart in the chest, exemplified by 'but it is the hearts in the chests that grow blind³⁷.

The three conceptualizations of the heart in the Quran, particularly the heart's identification with intellect and opinion offers intriguing implications for modern critical thinking. Firstly, equating the heart with intellect challenges the contemporary dichotomy between emotion (heart) and reason (mind) indicating a more integrated approach to understanding human cognition while in Daniel Kahneman's book³⁸ "Thinking, Fast and Slow" outlines System 1 (intuitive, emotion-driven) and System 2 (deliberate, rational) thinking, arguing for the importance of finding equilibrium between these two distinct systems for effective decision-making. Secondly, the association of the heart with opinion, as illustrated in the Quran, implies that our beliefs and judgments are not solely products of detached rationality but are deeply influenced by our emotional and spiritual state. This intertwining of emotion

³⁴ Tafsir Center for Quranic Studies, "Thematic Tafsir."

³⁵ Quran, Surah Qaf 50:37, translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, accessed January 15, 2024, <https://quran.com>. All translations in this study are derived from this translation.

³⁶ Quran, Surah Al-Hashr 59:14.

³⁷ Quran, Surah Al-Hajj 22:46.

³⁸ Daniel Kahneman, Thinking, Fast and Slow 22.

and cognition in the formation of opinions can enrich modern critical thinking frameworks, advocating for a more holistic approach that considers emotional intelligence and ethical considerations alongside logical analysis. These Quranic interpretations of the heart as both intellect and the seat of opinion invite a reevaluation of critical thinking processes, encouraging a more comprehensive understanding that encompasses emotional depth, moral values, and rational thought.

While modern cognitive science often emphasizes the distinct roles of the brain in logical reasoning and emotions in decision-making, a contrasting view emerges from the Quranic concept of the "heart." This central metaphor, encompassing both the intellectual and emotional faculties, is evident in verses like "Have they no hearts to understand with³⁹?" and "Allah has sealed their hearts and their hearing⁴⁰". While acknowledging the brain's role in information processing, the Quran suggests that true wisdom springs from this deeper core, where emotions illuminate reason and guide moral choices. In contrast to the sharp dichotomies often presented in cognitive science, the Quranic heart offers a holistic perspective, emphasizing the harmonious interplay of rational analysis and emotional resonance. Consider, for example, the verse "Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those with understanding⁴¹". This verse suggests that wisdom extends beyond mere intellectual capacity; it resides in the heart's ability to resonate with the awe-inspiring beauty of the universe. In fact, "Iman Shafi'i together with other scholars posits that the heart is the seat of the intellect and is prepared to reveal the truth in all things⁴²". This reflects the Quranic perspective where the heart is viewed not merely as a physical organ, but as a central locus of understanding and cognition. It challenges modern interpretations that strictly assign cognitive processes to the brain, suggesting a more integrated approach where emotional and rational faculties are interconnected within the heart.

Aql: Beyond Intellect

Linguistically, 'aql' in Arabic has its roots in the verb 'aqala, meaning "to bind" or "to restrain." This connection to 'restraint' becomes evident in its applications, such as using an 'iqal (halter) to control a camel. In the context of human behavior, this connection signifies the intellect's role in restraining individuals from harmful thoughts and actions. The intellect was named so because it comprehends what benefits in terms of goodness,

³⁹ Quran, Surah Al-Hajj 22:46.

⁴⁰ Quran, Surah Al-Baqarah 2:7.

⁴¹ Quran, Surah Ali Imran 3:190.

⁴² The original Arabic text states: "ذهب الشافعي وأكثر المتكلمين إلى أن محل العقل هو القلب، وهو مستعد لأن تنجلي فيه حقيقة". الحق في الأشياء كلها. Tafsir Center for Quranic Studies, "Thematic Tafsir: The Heart," accessed January 15, 2024, <https://modoe.com/show-book-scroll/421>

and it discerns against what harms⁴³. The Qur'an reinforces this meaning, emphasizing 'aql' as a tool for understanding and reasoning, as in the verse: "If only we had listened and reasoned, we would not be among the residents of the Blaze⁴⁴". Though often translated as "intellect," 'aql encompasses a richer spectrum than its English equivalent. While "intellect" focuses on cognitive abilities like reasoning and logic, 'aql extends to encompass wisdom, understanding, discernment, and moral judgement. It represents a deeper form of reasoning, intertwined with ethical and spiritual awareness.

Arabic 'aql, with its focus on restraint and control, transcends the standard English "intellect" by integrating cognitive ability with moral awareness. Its function extends beyond mere deduction and analysis, serving as a guiding principle for thought and action in a holistic manner. While 'aql equips us to grasp advantages and disadvantages in a given situation, its deeper purpose lies in guiding behavior away from harmful impulses and towards virtuous deeds. As the Quran emphasizes, the term Aql is used to mean profound understanding⁴⁵, urging us to navigate life not just with logic, but also with wisdom, ethical judgment, and a commitment to doing the right thing and doing no harm.

Islam emphasizes rational thought in harmony with the natural disposition (*Fitrah*) that Allah has instilled in humans and safeguarding the human intellect with care. It is crucial to recognize that the Islamic critical thinking framework transcends the mere teaching of cognitive biases and techniques. While these elements can aid in avoiding mental shortcuts, true intellectual preservation requires protecting the intellect from influences that impair its clarity⁴⁶. As the verse in Surah Ma'idah⁴⁷ advises against intoxicants and gambling for their corrupting influence; similarly, a comprehensive critical thinking education must include guarding the intellect against those vices and similar factors that cloud judgment, confuse understanding, and diminish moral integrity. Preserving the intellect from what clouds its clarity, confuses its understanding, and corrupts its righteousness is an individual duty, a collective duty, and a governmental duty⁴⁸.

This framework illustrates that the natural disposition and intellect work well together. A critical thinking approach devoid of a character-building framework is prone to making unsound decisions. Therefore, integrating character-building into critical thinking ensures

⁴³ The original Arabic text states: "وأسمى العقل عقلاً؛ لأنه يعقل به ما ينفعه من الخير، و يعقل به عما يضره" Tafsir Center for Quranic Studies, "Thematic Tafsir: The Heart," accessed January 15, 2024, <https://modoee.com/show-book-scroll/421>

⁴⁴ Quran, Surah Al-Mulk 67:110.

⁴⁵ Quran, Surah Al-Ankabut 29:43.

⁴⁶ Tafsir Center for Quranic Studies, "Thematic Tafsir: Aql, intellect," accessed January 15, 2024, <https://modoee.com/show-book-scroll/421>

⁴⁷ Quran, Surah Al-Ma'idah 5:90.

⁴⁸ Tafsir Center for Quranic Studies, "Thematic Tafsir."

decisions are not only logical but also morally and ethically sound, reflecting a comprehensive approach to intellectual preservation and moral integrity.

The Quran's Legacy of Critical Thinking

The Quranic perspective on critical thinking presents a rich and multifaceted approach that significantly enriches contemporary conceptions of critical thinking. The Qur'an encourages not only the analytical and logical dimensions of critical thinking but also emphasizes ethical, spiritual, and reflective thinking. For instance, the Quran urges believers to engage in metacognitive thinking, as evidenced by the verse that invites individuals to carefully consider the Quran itself, highlighting the absence of contradictions as a sign of divine origin, "Do they not then reflect on the Quran? Had it been from anyone other than Allah, they would have certainly found in it many inconsistencies".⁴⁹ Similarly, ethical and moral considerations are embedded in the Quranic call to justice, good conduct, and compassion, providing a moral compass that guides believers in their decisions and actions, "Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion: He instructs you, that ye may receive admonition."⁵⁰ Moreover, the Quran addresses existential, deeper questions, offering insights into the purpose of human life, encouraging thought provoking, contemplative engagement with one's existence, "I did not create jinn and humans except to worship Me"⁵¹. In another verse, pragmatic thinking is advocated through verses that balance spiritual duties with the necessities of worldly life, reflecting a pragmatic approach to daily living, "Once the prayer is over, disperse throughout the land and seek the bounty of Allah. And remember Allah often so you may be successful"⁵². The Quran further invites believers to engage in contemplative meditation on the signs of the universe, fostering a mindset geared towards reflection and introspection, "Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the day and night there are signs for people of reason"⁵³. Lastly, introspective thinking is highlighted, with believers urged to reflect on their actions and prepare for the future, emphasizing self-assessment and personal growth, "O believers! Be mindful of Allah and let every soul look to what 'deeds' it has sent forth for tomorrow. And fear Allah, 'for' certainly Allah is All-Aware of what you do"⁵⁴. These examples from the Quran illustrate how Islamic teachings contribute to a broader and more integrated understanding of critical thinking, encompassing not only the intellectual but also the moral

⁴⁹ Quran, Surah An-Nisa 4:82.

⁵⁰ Quran, Surah An-Nahl 16:90.

⁵¹ Quran, Surah Adh-Dhariyar 51:56.

⁵² Quran, Surah Al-Jumu'ah 62:10.

⁵³ Quran, Surah Ali-Imran 3:190.

⁵⁴ Quran, Surah Al-Hashr 59:18.

and spiritual dimensions, thereby offering a comprehensive framework that enhances current conceptions of critical thinking.

As we explore the various forms of thinking patterns encouraged by the Quran, it becomes evident that among these, strategic thinking stands out as a crucial tool for navigating the complexities of modern life. The emphasis on evaluating the consequences of our decisions before making them is particularly relevant today, where challenges demand not only immediate solutions but also a vision for the future. Transitioning from a broad overview of Quranic encouragement for various forms of thought, it becomes evident that strategic thinking and planning are integrated into the essence of Islamic teachings. The Quran extensively underlines the importance of strategic thinking and planning across various facets of life, advocating for a forward-looking and prepared approach to both worldly affairs and spiritual endeavors. For example, it encourages strategic preparation for defense, as seen in the directive to ready forces and resources to safeguard the community, emphasizing the value of readiness and tactical planning, "Prepare against them what you 'believers' can of 'military' power and cavalry to deter Allah's enemies and your enemies as well as other enemies unknown to you but known to Allah. Whatever you spend in the cause of Allah will be paid to you in full and you will not be wronged⁵⁵." Sound strategic approach to wealth management is also highlighted, cautioning against both extravagance and stinginess encouraging people to adopt a middle path in their spending habits, "They are' those who spend neither wastefully nor stingily, but moderately in between⁵⁶". The importance of collaborative decision-making is underscored through the advocacy for consultation and collective deliberation, demonstrating the Quran's acknowledgment of strategic planning in governance and communal affairs, "who respond to their Lord, establish prayer, conduct their affairs by mutual consultation, and donate from what We have provided for them⁵⁷." Moreover, the Quran advises believers to prioritize their eternal life in the hereafter over the temporary allure of worldly life, urging a strategic focus on spiritual goals and the afterlife, "Nay (behold), ye prefer the life of this world; But the Hereafter is better and more enduring⁵⁸". Through these teachings, the Quran offers a comprehensive framework for strategic thinking, guiding believers to apply foresight and careful planning in all areas of life to achieve both worldly success and spiritual fulfillment.

The Quranic Art of Reasoning

While the term "critical thinking" is a modern invention, the Quran has been replete with insights that resonate with this concept for over 1400 years. It presents a timeless

⁵⁵ Quran, Surah Al-Anfal 8:60.

⁵⁶ Quran, Surah Al-Furqan 25:67.

⁵⁷ Quran, Surah Ash-Shuraa 42:38.

⁵⁸ Quran, Surah Al-A'la 87:16-17.

framework for intellectual and spiritual inquiry that predates the principles underlying contemporary critical thought. The Quran's engagement with deductive and inductive reasoning which is foundational to modern scientific research showcases its alignment with the processes of drawing logical conclusions from specific observations or general premises.

Deductive reasoning in the Quran begins with broad, encompassing statements before narrowing down to specific conclusions. An illustrative example is found in the verses, "Surely in 'the creation of' the heavens and the earth are signs for the believers. And in your own creation, and whatever living beings He dispersed, are signs for people of sure faith⁵⁹." Here, the general premise—that the universe and life with its signs—leads to the specific conclusion that these signs are affirmations of faith for those who reflect, embodying the essence of deductive reasoning. Conversely, inductive reasoning in the Quran involves observing specific instances and drawing broader generalizations from them. For instance, the description of the meeting of two seas without mixing, as detailed in " He merges the two bodies of 'fresh and salt' water; yet between them is a barrier⁶⁰." serves as a specific instance from which a general conclusion about Allah's absolute control over natural phenomena and His creation's inherent order is drawn. This scenario mirrors the inductive approach where specific observations lead to broader generalizations about the divine orchestration of the natural world. This natural occurrence, where freshwater and saltwater meet but do not readily mix due to differences in temperature, salinity, and density, has been observed in various parts of the world. Modern science explains this through the concept of a halocline⁶¹, which is a transition layer between two bodies of water with different salinity levels, and also through the understanding of estuarine dynamics where river water meets sea water. These examples underscore how the Quran employs both deductive and inductive reasoning to foster a deeper contemplation of existence, the universe, and divine wisdom. While its primary aim is to offer spiritual and moral guidance, the Quran also invites its readers to engage in a process of reasoning and reflection, bridging faith and intellect.

Barriers to Sound Judgement

The Quran encompasses a broad spectrum of guidance aimed at fostering sound judgment and critical thinking for humanity. It addresses various aspects that can impair an individual's ability to make reasoned decisions and judgments, emphasizing the importance of verification, the responsible use of speech, and the avoidance of doubt and speculation. For instance, the Quran advises against following that of which one has no knowledge,

⁵⁹ Quran, Surah Al-Jathiyah 45:3-4.

⁶⁰ Quran, Surah Ar-Rahman 55:19-20.

⁶¹ "What Is Halocline?" *National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration*, accessed February 1, 2024, <http://www.noaa.gov/what-is-halocline>.

thereby warning against the dangers of ignorance and unfounded speculation, “O believers, if an evildoer brings you any news, verify it so you do not harm people unknowingly, becoming regretful for what you have done.⁶² This directive serves as a foundation for encouraging a critical approach to information and discouraging the acceptance or dissemination of knowledge without verification.

In addition to promoting verification and cautioning against speculation and fabrication, the Quran also provides guidance on interpersonal behaviors and attitudes conducive to sound critical thinking. Verses encourage humility, and the avoidance of contempt and arrogance, “And do not walk on the earth arrogantly. Surely you can neither crack the earth nor stretch to the height of the mountains⁶³.” Such teachings underscore the importance of an open-mindedness in interactions with others. The Quran also advises against engaging in fruitless arguments promoting instead constructive and respectful discourse, “Do not argue with the People of the Book unless gracefully, except with those of them who act wrongfully⁶⁴.” This guidance not only fosters a culture of respect and humility but also encourages a critical examination of ideas in a manner that is productive rather than divisive.

The Quranic verses offer insights into developing a spiritual foundation that not only nurtures resilience and integrity but also fosters autonomy in critical thinking, free from the distortions of immediate worldly pressures and the influence of biases and fallacies in judgment.

The principles to uphold justice unequivocally, even against one's self-interest or those closest to them, instills a deep sense of moral autonomy and ethical reasoning, “O believers! Stand firm for justice as witnesses for Allah even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or close relatives. Be they rich or poor, Allah is best to ensure their interests. So do not let your desires cause you to deviate ‘from justice’. If you distort the testimony or refuse to give it, then ‘know that’ Allah is certainly All-Aware of what you do⁶⁵.” By emphasizing the importance of adhering to divine principles of fairness and truth over personal biases or societal expectations, this commandment encourages individuals to engage in critical self-reflection and to make decisions based on objective criteria rather than subjective preferences. This autonomy in judgment is crucial for navigating complex moral challenges and for resisting the influence of external pressures that may lead to compromised ethical standards.

⁶² Quran, Surah Al-Hujurat 49:6.

⁶³ Quran, Surah Al-Isra' 17:37.

⁶⁴ Quran, Surah Al-Ankabut 29:46.

⁶⁵ Quran, Surah An-Nisa 4:135.

The encouragement to trust in Allah's plan and protection liberates individuals from the grip of fear and insecurity, which are significant barriers to autonomous decision-making, “Say, “Nothing will ever befall us except what Allah has destined for us. He is our Protector.” So, in Allah let the believers put their trust⁶⁶.” Recognizing that ultimate outcomes are within Allah's wisdom helps to minimize anxiety over worldly uncertainties, thereby enabling a more rational, composed approach to problem-solving and decision-making. This trust fosters an inner strength that equips people to evaluate situations with clarity and to act according to what they genuinely believe is right, rather than being swayed by the immediate pressures of their environment.

Stressing the importance of perseverance and endurance, especially in the face of adversity, cultivates a mindset that values long-term goals and principles over short-term gains or comfort, “O believers! Patiently endure, persevere, stand on guard, and be mindful of Allah, so you may be successful⁶⁷.” This perspective encourages critical thinking by prompting individuals to look beyond the immediate consequences of their actions and to consider their broader implications in the light of their faith and values. Such a stance is instrumental in developing the capacity to think independently, to question prevailing norms, and to resist the temptation to conform to expedient but potentially unethical choices.

In a related verse on building strong spiritual foundation and its impact on building autonomous critical thinkers, the emphasis on patience and forgiveness highlights the power of emotional intelligence and empathy in critical thinking⁶⁸. By valuing forgiveness and understanding, people are encouraged to consider multiple perspectives and to recognize the complexity of human behavior. This understanding can lead to more refined judgments and decisions that are not clouded by anger or resentment but are informed by a compassionate appreciation of the human condition. It also mitigates the risk of being unduly influenced by external forces, including those that might seek to exploit emotional vulnerabilities or societal divisions. These Quranic teachings contribute to the development of individuals who are not only spiritually grounded but also autonomous critical thinkers. This spiritual and intellectual autonomy is essential for making sound decisions that reflect one's deepest convictions, even in the face of external threats or pressures.

Results

The comprehensive analysis of critical thinking through a Quranic lens compared with contemporary models unveils areas of convergence and divergence. These findings show

⁶⁶ Quran, Surah At-Tawbah 9:51

⁶⁷ Quran, Surah Ali Imran 3:200

⁶⁸ Quran, Surah Ash-Shuraa 42:43

the multifaceted nature of critical thinking, enriching our understanding by integrating intellect with ethical, moral, and spiritual dimensions. The "Areas of Convergence" highlight the shared values between the Quranic perspective and contemporary critical thinking models, underscoring the universal importance of ethical reasoning, reflective thinking, analytical logic, inquiry, and the pursuit of knowledge. These shared principles lay a common foundation for critical thinking. In contrast, the "Critical Insights: Areas of Divergence" section outlines the distinctive contributions of the Quranic approach, emphasizing the integration of spirituality, a holistic approach to reasoning, the central role of the heart in thinking, and the importance of character-building for sound judgment. These areas point to a more holistic view of critical thinking that encompasses not just the cognitive and analytical but also the spiritual, emotional, and moral capacities of the individual. Moreover, strategic thinking and the acknowledgment of human cognition's limitations, as well as the emphasis on building strong spiritual foundations for autonomous critical thinkers, are highlighted as essential components for navigating the complexities of modern life with integrity and conviction.

The Quranic encouragement of both deductive and inductive reasoning methods showcases its alignment with contemporary scientific and logical methods, while also emphasizing the spiritual and moral dimensions of knowledge. This demonstrates the Quran's timeless relevance in fostering a critical thinking approach that is both intellectually and spiritually enriching. Together, these findings offer a profound insight into how critical thinking can be re-envisioned to foster individuals who are not only intellectually adept but also spiritually and morally grounded.

Critical Thinking Foundations: Areas of Convergence

These are the shared principles between contemporary and Quranic perspectives on critical thinking, highlighting the universal importance of ethical reasoning, reflective thinking, and analytical logic.

1. **Importance of Ethical Reasoning:** Both contemporary critical thinking models and the Quranic perspective emphasize the significance of ethical reasoning in decision-making processes. The convergence here lies in the acknowledgment that critical thinking is not merely about logical analysis but also involves making judgments that are ethically sound and morally just.
2. **Reflective Thinking and Self-Assessment:** The Quran and modern critical thinking frameworks both advocate for the importance of metacognition or thinking about one's own thinking processes. This includes self-reflection, self-assessment, and a conscious awareness of one's cognitive biases and limitations.

3. **Analytical and Logical Reasoning:** At the core of both approaches is the value placed on analytical and logical reasoning. The ability to analyze information, draw logical inferences, and make reasoned arguments is fundamental to critical thinking as outlined in both Quranic teachings and contemporary models.
4. **Inquiry and Questioning:** Both perspectives encourage a questioning attitude towards knowledge and assumptions. The Quran invites humanity to reflect upon the natural world and human existence as a means of understanding, similar to how modern critical thinking urges questioning of premises and arguments to uncover truth.
5. **Pursuit of Knowledge** The acquisition of knowledge and the pursuit of education are highly valued in both the Quran and contemporary critical thinking discourse.

Islamic Critical Insights: Areas of Divergence

These are the unique contributions of the Quranic approach to critical thinking, emphasizing the integration of spirituality, holistic reasoning, and character-building as essential components that distinguish it from Western models.

1. **Limitation of Human Cognition:** The Quran frequently addresses the limitations of human cognition when it comes to understanding the full scope of existence, including the metaphysical or unseen aspects of the world. Verses such as "They ask you 'O Prophet' about the spirit. Say, "Its nature is known only to my Lord, and you 'O humanity' have been given but little knowledge⁶⁹." underscore the belief that human beings possess only a fraction of all possible knowledge, much of which pertains to realms beyond human perception. In contrast, Modern critical thinking conceptions typically focus on the tangible, empirical world, emphasizing evidence-based reasoning and the analysis of observable phenomena. These models often operate within the assumption that all that is worth knowing or can be known is accessible through sensory experience or scientific investigation, with less emphasis on the intrinsic limitations of human cognition regarding metaphysical realities. This consideration is critical because it highlights a fundamental difference in how critical thinking is conceptualized within the Quranic framework versus contemporary models. The Quranic perspective acknowledges the existence and

⁶⁹ Quran, Surah Al-Isra 17:85.

importance of knowledge beyond the empirical and physically observable world, urging a recognition of the limitations of human intellect.

2. **Character-Building for Sound Judgment:** The Quran explicitly emphasizes the need for character-building, advocating for the removal of barriers to sound judgment through moral and ethical development. This stands in contrast to contemporary critical thinking frameworks that lean towards moral relativism, where ethical standards are seen as subjective and culturally dependent. When considering 'Aql within the character-building aspect of critical thinking education, it emphasizes that true intellectual development is inseparable from moral and ethical growth. Therefore, a lack of restraint can be seen as indicative of a deficiency in critical thinking. The discussion also touches on broader debates about the nature of intelligence and wisdom. While traditional measures of intelligence might focus on cognitive abilities such as memory, problem-solving skills, and logical reasoning, the concept of 'Aql invites a more holistic view. It suggests that true intelligence—encompassing wisdom—requires the ability to control one's impulses and to make decisions that are beneficial in the long term, both for oneself and for society. Thus, from this perspective, being "smart" involves much more than intellectual trait but it also requires the ethical use of one's intellect and the exercise of restraint. The Quranic model of critical thinking advocates for a comprehensive approach that includes character-building, emphasizing the importance of ethical purification (Tazkiyah), moral awareness (Taqwa), and holistic knowledge (Ilm) in making sound judgments. This approach resonates with contemporary critiques, such as those by Haber, who argue that critical thinking is inherently a social act influenced by interaction with others and embedded within specific historical and social norms. This perspective challenges the notion of critical thinking as purely a cognitive skill, highlighting the role of character and context in shaping one's ability to think critically and make ethically sound decisions.

Barriers to Autonomous Critical Thinking: The Quranic teachings illuminate a path to cultivating autonomous critical thinkers through the development of strong spiritual foundation and resilience against worldly pressures and biases. By advocating for justice, trust in divine wisdom, perseverance, and empathy, these teachings foster an environment where individuals develop the capacity for independent thought, guided by objective judgment and ethical integrity. This holistic approach not only equips individuals with the intellectual skills necessary for critical thinking but also instills a deep sense of spiritual and moral responsibility, enabling them to become more autonomous critical thinkers.

3. **Role of the Heart in Thinking:** The Quran attributes a significant role to the heart in the process of thinking and reasoning, challenging the strict dichotomy between emotion (heart) and reason (mind) found in contemporary cognitive theories. The Quran holds a more integrated view of cognition that encompasses emotional intelligence and intuition as part of the critical thinking process.
4. **Integration of Spirituality and Critical Thinking:** The Quran integrates faith and spirituality into the process of critical thinking, seeing them as inseparable from ethical reasoning and moral judgment. This contrasts with contemporary models that often exclude spiritual considerations from the critical thinking process, focusing instead on secular and empirical bases for reasoning.
5. **Holistic Approach to Reasoning:** The Quranic approach to critical thinking is inherently holistic, considering the emotional, spiritual, and moral dimensions alongside the intellectual. In contrast, many Western models emphasize a more compartmentalized approach, often prioritizing logical and analytical reasoning over emotional and spiritual insights.
6. **Strategic Thinking and Purpose of Life:** The ultimate goal of critical thinking in the Quranic view extends beyond intellectual achievement and problem-solving to include spiritual enlightenment, moral integrity, and preparation for the afterlife. Contemporary critical thinking models; however, often focus on more immediate, worldly objectives such as effective decision-making, problem-solving, and the advancement of knowledge without necessarily considering the spiritual or eternal implications.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals a comprehensive approach to critical thinking, drawing from the Quranic perspective to advocate for a paradigm that integrates ethical reasoning, reflective thinking, and analytical logic. It underscores the necessity of transcending traditional educational frameworks to embrace a model that equally values character development and technical skills. The Quranic insights presented emphasize the critical role of character-building in improving sound judgment, addressing the modern challenges of leadership and decision-making. This approach is particularly relevant in a world where people often face the dilemma of conflict versus empathy, highlighting the urgency for critical thinking education that fosters moral objectivity and ethical reasoning.

The divergence from conventional models, marked by a holistic approach to reasoning, the significance of the heart in thought processes, and an awareness of human cognition's limitations, calls for a redefined approach to critical thinking. This approach acknowledges the complex nature of knowledge to include both the seen and unseen, and the constraints of human understanding, thereby advocating for a balanced growth of intellectual, spiritual, and moral capacities. The integration of these Quranic teachings into the educational field paves the way for developing truly autonomous thinkers, prepared to confront life's challenges with ethical clarity, strong spiritual foundations, and intellectual consistency.

Revisiting critical thinking through a Quranic lens offers new insights for a more holistic view of critical thinking. It presents a model that not only equips individuals with the requisite analytical skills but also instills in them the moral and spiritual foundations vital for ethics-based, consistent decision-making. This enriched perspective has the potential to contribute significantly to the global discourse on critical thinking, urging a reevaluation of educational practices to cultivate thinkers who are not just analytically proficient but also morally and spiritually fit equipped for principle-centered decision-making that can navigate today's complex challenges.

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