

Gradational Epistemology in Qur'anic Perspective: A Ṣadrian Hermeneutical Model and Its Epistemological, Anthropological, and Cultural–Civilizational Implications

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ABSTRACT:

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Within Islamic theology and Qur'anic exegesis, the levels of sensory, rational, and heart-based cognition have often been discussed through separate theological, philosophical, or exegetical approaches. As the foundations upon which individual and collective attitudes and decisions are formed, these levels exert a direct influence on political and economic orientations. Nevertheless, Western theories of civilization have largely concentrated on structural and historical factors and have devoted comparatively little attention to the role of levels of cognition in the dynamics of civilization. The absence of a model that explains these levels within a teleological and civilizational framework has created a significant gap in the existing literature. This study seeks to propose a Ṣadrian hermeneutical model that integrates Qur'anic epistemology with the principles of *al-Ḥikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, thereby reinterpreting the progression from sensory cognition to rational understanding and ultimately to heart-based cognition in relation to civilizational development. By a Ṣadrian hermeneutical model, the study refers to an interpretive framework grounded in *al-Ḥikmah al-Muta'aliyah* that explains the understanding of the Qur'anic text in relation to the existential and cognitive levels of the human being. This study presents the model through the lens of its epistemological, anthropological, and cultural-civilizational implications.

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Utilizing a descriptive-analytical methodology with a comparative approach, this research examines selected Qur'anic verses based on Mullā Ṣadrā's doctrines of substantial motion (*al-ḥarakah al-jawhariyyah*), the gradation of Being (*tashkīk al-wujūd*), and the unity of the intellect and the intelligible (*ittiḥād al-ʿāqil wa al-maʿqūl*). Subsequently, a comparative analysis is offered alongside classical exegeses and Western civilizational models. The Qur'anic-Ṣadrian model regards sensory cognition as the indispensable yet inherently limited point of departure; it presents rational cognition as a bridge leading to presential knowledge; and it identifies heart-based cognition as the highest mode of cognition and the means through which individual spiritual refinement is linked to collective civilizational flourishing. By grounding the integration of sciences in existential unity and teleology, this framework provides an alternative to reductionist empiricist, rationalist, and utilitarian approaches, demonstrating that individual perceptual transcendence serves as a primary catalyst for civilizational progress within a Qur'anic horizon.

KEYWORDS: Qur'anic epistemology, Mulla Sadra, *al-Ḥikmah al-Mutaʿaliyah*, Ṣadrian hermeneutics, Presential knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-ḥuḍūrī*), Hierarchy of cognition, Civilizational development.

1. Introduction

The Noble Qur'an, as the Book of Divine Guidance, serves not only as the foundation of Islamic law and ethics but also as a primary source for explaining the levels of human knowledge and the existential journey of the human being toward Absolute Reality. Within this intellectual horizon, the Transcendent Philosophy (*al-Ḥikmah al-Mutaʿaliyah*) of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (Mullā Ṣadrā) (1981, 8: 140), founded upon such principles as substantial motion (*al-ḥarakah al-jawhariyyah*) and the gradation of being (*tashkīk al-wujūd*) (1981, 1: 322), provides a philosophical-mystical system through which the levels of human knowledge and the process of existential perfection may be understood and interpreted in light of the Qur'an and divine revelation.

According to this approach, cognition begins with sensory experience (Q. 16:78),¹ is deepened through rational reflection and logical inference (Q. 2:269),² and ultimately reaches its highest perfection in cardiac presential

1- Allah has brought you forth from the bellies of your mothers while you did not know anything. He made for you hearing, eyesight, and hearts so that you may give thanks (Q. 16:78).

2- He gives wisdom to whomever He wishes, and he who is given wisdom, is certainly given an abundant good. But none takes admonition except those who possess intellect (Q. 2:269).

knowledge (Q. 50:37).³ These verses will be examined in detail in the following sections of this study. Although these stages appear to constitute three distinct levels of cognition, from the perspective of *al-Ḥikmah al-Muta'āliyah* and the Qur'anic conception of the human being they represent continuous and developmental stages that guide the human person from outward understanding to inward spiritual witnessing.

In the present study, this threefold progression is not regarded merely as a descriptive account of the stages of cognition; rather, it is conceived as an explanatory model. This model is grounded in well-defined epistemological foundations, systematically organizes the principal components of human cognition, and specifies the relationship and hierarchical ordering of sense perception, reason, and the heart within a purposive and teleological framework.

The criteria by which this framework qualifies as a model are as follows: (1) the existence of explicit theoretical and anthropological foundations; (2) the definition of the constituent elements and levels of the cognitive process; (3) the explanation of the hierarchical and functional relationships among these levels; and (4) the explanatory capacity of the model to connect epistemic transformation with civilizational implications.

On the basis of these premises, the present article seeks to demonstrate how the Qur'anic–Ṣadrian model of cognition provides a framework for analysing the relationship between human knowledge and civilizational horizons. It further argues that, in light of the Qur'an and the principles of *al-Ḥikmah al-Muta'āliyah*, this developmental trajectory can be understood, interpreted, and applied within the context of civilizational studies. Despite the rich intellectual legacy of Qur'anic studies and Islamic philosophy, a significant gap remains in integrating these epistemic dimensions into a unified framework, one that is simultaneously grounded in the Qur'anic text, rooted in Ṣadrian philosophical principles, and capable of explaining the civilizational implications of this continuum of cognition. The present study aims to bridge this gap by formulating a Qur'anic–philosophical framework that links the sensory–rational–cardiac progression of knowledge to civilizational advancement.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Classical Islamic and Philosophical Sources

The works of Mullā Ṣadrā, particularly *Al-Ḥikmah al-Muta'āliyah fī al-*

3– There is indeed an admonition in that for one who has a heart, or gives ear, being attentive (Q. 50:37).

Asfār al-‘Aqliyyah al-Arba‘ah (1981) and *al-Shawāhid al-Rubūbiyyah* (2004), establish the theoretical foundations of the unity of the intellect and the intelligible (*ittiḥād al-‘āqil wa al-ma‘qūl*), the levels of cognition, and the role of the soul's substantial motion (*al-ḥarakah al-jawhariyyah*) in the perfection of knowledge. Within the exegetical tradition, Tabataba'i (1996, 9: 364) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (1999, 15: 284) interpret the Qur'anic verses concerning hearing (*sam‘*), sight (*baṣar*), and the heart (*fu‘ād*) from philosophical and theological perspectives. In particular, al-Rāzī emphasizes the function of reason and rational demonstration in understanding the Qur'anic verses and the hierarchy of human cognition.

2.2. *Qur'anic–Civilizational Approaches*

A number of contemporary studies have sought to examine the relationship between Qur'anic knowledge and civilizational development (Alviri 2015; Kosari 2018). However, most of these studies remain confined to either the sensory or rational dimensions of cognition and do not systematically incorporate the intuitive–cardiac dimension into their explanatory models.

2.3. *Western Philosophical Frameworks*

The civilizational theories of Spengler (2006) and Huntington (1996) notwithstanding their analytical value, do not ground civilizational development in a metaphysical hierarchy of human cognition or in revealed knowledge. A comparison between these theories and the Qur'anic–Ṣadrian model reveals the absence of a teleological and revelation-centered account of civilizational development in the former.

Compared with existing studies on Qur'anic epistemology and Ṣadrian philosophy, the present research offers several significant contributions. First, it presents the three levels of cognition, sensory, rational, and cardiac, as an integrated hierarchical continuum within the framework of *al-Ḥikmah al-Muta‘aliyah* and Qur'anic hermeneutics, whereas most previous studies have examined only isolated segments of this epistemic sequence. Second, by establishing a direct connection between the hierarchy of cognition and the process of civilization-building, the proposed model demonstrates how individual epistemic growth may culminate in collective flourishing and civilizational advancement, an approach that has received comparatively little attention in the existing literature. Third, the systematic integration of authoritative Qur'anic commentaries with the philosophical writings of Mullā Ṣadrā produces a coherent philosophical–hermeneutical framework

that simultaneously offers a critical assessment of empiricist, rationalist, and purely utilitarian Western approaches, while advancing a teleological and ontological alternative. Finally, the interdisciplinary character of this study does not merely consist in combining different methodologies; rather, it is grounded in the unity of being and the purposiveness of knowledge. As such, it offers the potential to redefine the relationship between individual knowledge and civilizational theorization within contemporary international scholarship in Qur'anic studies and Islamic philosophy.

Through an analysis of its implications, the present study proposes a Qur'anic–Šadrian model that incorporates the complete hierarchy of cognition, sensory, rational, and cardiac, within a unified philosophical–hermeneutical structure as a comprehensive mode of understanding. Within this framework, each level represents a distinct stage in the epistemic development of the human being and, while preserving its own characteristics, remains organically connected to the others within a continuous epistemic progression. The following sections introduce and examine these implications.

3. Epistemological Implications

3.1. Advancing the Methodology of Truth-Discovery: From Limited Empiricism to Reason and Intuition

إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَذِكْرًا لِمَنْ كَانَ لَهُ قَلْبٌ أَوْ أَلْقَى السَّمْعَ وَهُوَ شَهِيدٌ (ق/37)

There is indeed an admonition in that for one who has a heart, or gives ear, being attentive (Q. 50:37).

The term *qalb* (heart) in this verse denotes the center of consciousness and rational cognition rather than the merely physiological organ. The expression *alqā al-sam'* (to lend an attentive ear) signifies conscious and deliberate reception, while *wa huwa shahīd* (while being present) refers to the stage of inward presence and intuitive witnessing (Tabataba'i 1996, 18: 432). These three components, the heart, attentive listening, and existential presence, are presented as interconnected stages within the process of cognition, beginning with sensory perception and culminating in presential knowledge (al-Ṭūsī 2002, 9: 554).

In his discussion of substantial motion, Mullā Šadrā (1981, 8: 140–145) explains that the human soul commences cognition in a state of pure potentiality. Sensory perceptions constitute the primary materials for intellectual abstraction, while rational cognition, in turn, serves as the bridge

leading to intuitive knowledge attained by the heart. From this perspective, the verse articulates the Ṣadrīan epistemological trajectory in the language of revelation: sense perception (*sam*'), rational processing (*qalb*), and ultimately intuitive presence (*shahīd*). This corresponds precisely to what Mullā Ṣadrā describes as the progression through the ascending degrees of perfection.

This Qur'anic model thus rescues the methodology of truth-discovery from reductionism, whether in the form of exclusive empiricism or pure rationalism. In the empiricist tradition of Western philosophy, exemplified by John Locke, human knowledge derives from experience through sensation and reflection (Locke 1999). By contrast, both the Qur'an and Mullā Ṣadrā (1981, 1: 340) consider sensory perception to be merely the point of departure, maintaining that it remains insufficient unless elevated through reason and the heart. Conversely, the rationalist tradition, exemplified by Descartes (2008), regards reason rather than sensory experience as the primary source of certain knowledge. Within the Qur'anic-Ṣadrīan framework, however, reason remains incomplete unless accompanied by the presence and illumination of the heart.

When this verse is examined alongside the positions of both empiricists and rationalists, an important implication emerges for Islamic epistemology: the criterion of certainty and truth in the Qur'an lies in the integration of all three epistemic faculties. This perspective differs fundamentally from classical epistemological models that often treat sensation and reason as competing sources of knowledge. Instead, it proposes an integrated methodology that begins with empirical data, refines it through rational reflection (*tadabbur*), and culminates in intuitive certainty (*yaqīn*) realized at the level of the heart.

3.2. Resolving Epistemological Relativism through the Hierarchical Structure of Knowledge

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَٰئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا (الإسراء/ 36)

Do not follow that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed the hearing, the eyesight, and the heart all of these are accountable (Q. 17:36).

The verb *taqfu* derives from the root *Q-F-W*, meaning to follow in someone's footsteps. In this verse, it denotes the prohibition against following claims that lack certain knowledge. The reference to hearing (*sam*'), sight (*baṣar*), and the heart (*fu'ād*) encompasses the full spectrum of human cognitive faculties, extending from the most sensory dimensions of

perception to its deepest inward capacities (Tabataba'i 1996, 13: 176). Al-Zamakhsharī (1986, 2: 556) emphasizes that the sequence of these three faculties represents the natural progression of knowledge, from sensory perception, to rational understanding, and finally to intuitive, heart-based cognition.

Within Ṣadrian philosophy, the human soul advances through substantial motion from the sensory level, which remains closely tied to matter, to the level of intellectual abstraction involving universal forms, and ultimately to the highest stage of presential cognition (*al-idrāk al-ḥuḍūrī*) realized by the heart (Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī 1981, 8: 275–280). Significantly, this verse explicitly names these three stages while simultaneously emphasizing human accountability for each of them. In *al-Shawāhid al-Rubūbiyyah*, Mullā Ṣadrā (2004, 258) maintains that the distinction between levels of knowledge concerns the varying degrees of proximity to reality, rather than any relativity in the truth itself.

In contemporary philosophy, epistemological relativism maintains that truth is dependent upon individuals' conceptual, cultural, or epistemic frameworks, thereby denying the existence of any absolute criterion of truth. By acknowledging that knowledge unfolds through hierarchical levels, the Qur'anic–Ṣadrian model explains differences in human cognition as implications of differing epistemic capacities and stages of development rather than as evidence of multiple or shifting truths. This perspective establishes a form of Gradational Realism, which rejects absolute relativism while simultaneously recognizing the dynamic and developmental nature of human knowledge.

From the standpoint of Western epistemology, philosophers such as Thomas Kuhn (2012) advance a conception of paradigms that approaches a form of epistemological relativism by challenging a stable correspondence with reality across different conceptual frameworks. By contrast, the Qur'anic and Ṣadrian perspective reconciles the hierarchical nature of cognition with the permanence of truth. Even one whose cognition remains at the sensory level apprehends a genuine aspect of reality, although fuller and more comprehensive dimensions of truth become accessible only at higher stages of cognition. Accordingly, this Qur'anic framework provides the conceptual basis for critiquing epistemological relativism and replacing it with a model of epistemic growth.

3.3. Establishing Presential Knowledge as the Highest Degree of Epistemic Certainty

يَعْلَمُونَ ظَاهِرًا مِّنَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ عَنِ الْآخِرَةِ هُمْ غَفِلُونَ (الروم / 7)

They know just an outward aspect of the life of the world, but they are oblivious of the Hereafter (Q. 30:7).

This verse presents a distinction between outward, sensory knowledge and inward, intuitive knowledge (Tabataba'i 1996, 16: 140). The term *ẓāhir* (outward) denotes the observable and sensible dimension of things, in contrast to *bāḥin* (inward), which refers to the ultimate and ontological reality underlying existence. Al-Rāzī (1999, 25: 72) explains that being “heedless of the Hereafter” signifies not merely a lack of information but, more profoundly, deprivation from the presential apprehension of the unseen reality. Mullā Ṣadrā (1981, 3: 357–360) argues that acquired knowledge (*al-‘ilm al-ḥuṣūlī*) is confined to mental representations and sensory appearances and therefore cannot penetrate the essence of reality. Reality, in its innermost nature, can only be apprehended through presential knowledge (*al-‘ilm al-ḥuḍūrī*). According to him, through substantial motion, the human soul gradually detaches itself from merely external forms of knowledge and, through abstraction and spiritual purification, ascends to the stage at which the knower becomes united with the known, attaining direct and presential cognition. This process is likewise embedded within the Qur’anic model: the transition from the outward realm of the present world (*al-dunyā*) to the inward reality of the Hereafter (*al-ākhirah*) corresponds to the transition from acquired knowledge to presential knowledge. Within this framework, presential knowledge is established as the highest form of epistemic certainty.

In mainstream Western epistemology, particularly within the analytic tradition, certainty is generally understood in terms of the justification of true belief. By contrast, the Qur’anic–Ṣadrian model conceives certainty not as proposition-centered but as ontology-centered. Certainty is realized when the knower and the known become existentially united and conceptual mediation disappears. This perspective offers a profound critique of both naive empiricism, which remains confined to observable appearances, and pure rationalism, which is satisfied with conceptual understanding alone. Husserl’s (1983) phenomenology famously proposed the principle of returning to the things themselves. Nevertheless, Husserl’s project primarily concerns the transcendental analysis of consciousness and intentional experience rather than an existential union between the subject and the object of knowledge. In contrast, Transcendent Philosophy and the Qur’anic

worldview interpret such a “return” as the attainment of complete presence and existential self-effacement (*fanā*) in the known. This distinction carries an important implication for Islamic epistemology: the highest degree of certainty and truth is attained not through the accumulation of information but through the ontological transformation of the knowing subject.

3.4. The Convergence of the Levels of Cognition toward Comprehensive Monotheistic Knowledge

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ مِثْلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكُوتٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ الْمِصْبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍ الزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ
دُرِّيٌّ يُوقَدُ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ لَا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ يَكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِيءُ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ نُورٌ عَلَى
نُورٍ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَ يُضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ (النور/35)

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is a niche wherein is a lamp the lamp is in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star lit from a blessed olive tree, neither eastern nor western, whose oil almost lights up, though fire should not touch it. Light upon light. Allah guides to His Light whomever He wishes. Allah draws parables for mankind, and Allah has knowledge of all things (Q. 24:35).

Through its rich imagery of light, this verse depicts the gradual ascent of knowledge. According to Tabataba'i (1996, 15: 142–147), the believer's heart is interpreted as the *mishkāṭ* (niche), the locus in which the various levels of cognition, sensory, rational, and spiritual, operate synergistically so as to reflect the Divine Light. Al-Rāzī (1999, 23: 225) interprets the expression *nūr 'alā nūr* (light upon light) as denoting the cumulative intensification of guidance and knowledge: beginning with sensory experience, progressing through rational contemplation, and reaching completion in intuitive, heart-based witnessing.

Mullā Ṣadrā (1981, 7: 292–295) identifies light with the very reality of existence, maintaining that the degrees of luminosity correspond to the degrees of being and cognition. The substantial motion of the soul thus constitutes a journey from the light of sensory perception (empirical observation), to the light of intelligible realities (universal concepts and immaterial meanings), and finally to the sacred light (*al-nūr al-qudsī*) of presential intuitive knowledge and existential union with reality. This progression illustrates the convergence and mutual reinforcement of the various levels of cognition, transforming knowledge into a unified and coherent system rather than a fragmented collection of disconnected modes of knowing.

Such a model establishes a unitive epistemological framework within

Islamic thought, in which sensory perception, rational reflection, and spiritual intuition are not competing sources of knowledge but complementary stages within a single epistemic continuum. Consequently, it dismantles false dichotomies such as faith versus reason or experience versus revelation. Within this perspective, the senses gather information, reason comprehends its meaning, and the heart attains direct witnessing; yet all three ultimately contribute to the realization of one and the same truth. This continuity preserves epistemic certainty from fragmentation and reductionism.

In the Cartesian tradition, the search for certain knowledge begins with methodical doubt and accords epistemic priority to reason (Descartes 2008). Conversely, within classical empiricism, reason operates upon experiential data rather than serving as an independent source of knowledge (Locke 1999). Both approaches emphasize a particular cognitive faculty rather than articulating an integrated epistemological framework that harmonizes multiple sources of cognition. The Qur'an and Transcendent Philosophy, by contrast, transform this rivalry into a relationship of complementarity and synergy. The outcome is an Illuminative Epistemology, in which the various levels of cognition preserve their distinct functions while collectively participating in the realization of a monotheistic understanding of reality.

3.5. Integrating Transmitted Knowledge and Rational Knowledge within a Comprehensive Framework for Understanding Truth

اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ إِلَيْنَا مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَذَكَّرُونَ (الاعراف / 3)

Follow what has been sent down to you from your Lord, and do not follow any masters besides Him. Little is the admonition that you take (Q. 7:3).

The imperative *ittabi'ū* (follow) denotes adherence that entails both practical commitment and intellectual assent. Tabataba'i (1996, 8: 5) interprets following revelation as acquiring knowledge from an authentic transmitted source while simultaneously engaging it through sound reason. Likewise, al-Ṭūsī (2002, 4: 343) interprets the phrase *qalīlan mā tadhakkarūn* as a warning against neglecting the integration of rational reflection (*tadhakkur*) with faithful adherence to revelation.

Mullā Ṣadrā (1981, 2: 338–342) characterizes revelation as the highest form of presential knowledge, occupying a rank superior to theoretical reason without contradicting it. Reason functions as the instrument through which revelation is understood and affirmed, while revelation extends the

horizons of reason beyond its independent limits. According to Mullā Ṣadrā, this integration becomes possible only in a soul undergoing substantial motion and ascending toward the level of the Active Intellect (*al-ʿAql al-Faʿʿāl*). This approach bridges two enduring divides in epistemology: first, the gap between revealed knowledge and rational knowledge, and second, the divide between the language of revelation and discursive rational argumentation. Within the Qurʾanic-Ṣadrian framework, authentic transmitted knowledge is not treated as raw information requiring unquestioning acceptance. Rather, it serves as the starting point of a rational and intuitive epistemic process in which revelation and reason operate in a mutually reinforcing relationship. Such a model offers a meaningful response to contemporary debates concerning the relationship between religion and rationality, elevating revelation from the status of a merely religious hypothesis to that of a genuine source of certain knowledge.

Within the Western philosophical tradition, Hume (2000) argued that meaningful knowledge must ultimately derive from empirical experience or logical relations among ideas. By contrast, the Cartesian rationalist tradition emphasized the authority of reason as the primary foundation of philosophical inquiry (Descartes 2008), while generally refraining from treating revelation as an independent epistemic source. Aquinas (1947) sought to restore the relationship between faith and reason, yet largely within the framework of theological demonstration. By contrast, the Qurʾanic-Ṣadrian model grounds their relationship not in demonstrating revelation before the tribunal of reason but in their ontological and epistemological convergence (Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī 1981, 6: 221).

3.6. *Epistemic Flexibility and the Acceptance of Gradation in the Levels of Truth*

يَرْفَعُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ (المجادلة/11)

Allah will raise those of you who have faith and those who have been given knowledge in rank, and Allah is well aware of what you do (Q. 58:11).

The term *darajāt* (degrees or ranks) literally denotes ascending levels or successive stages. These degrees encompass both the levels of faith and the levels of knowledge, and acknowledging this diversity is essential for a proper understanding of the path of human perfection (Tabatabaʿi 1996, 19: 272–275). Al-Rāzī (1999, 29: 325–326) interprets these degrees as evidence for the hierarchical character of knowledge, which begins with the elementary stages of faith and extends to the highest levels of presential knowledge.

Within Transcendent Philosophy, Mullā Ṣadrā (1981, 1: 44–47) extends the principle of the gradation of being to the domain of knowledge. Since knowledge constitutes a mode of intellectual existence, it likewise admits varying degrees of intensity and perfection. Accordingly, the Qur'anic statement “*Allah will raise those of you who have faith and those who have been given knowledge in rank*” may be understood as affirming that all forms of human cognition, whether sensory, rational, or spiritual, exist along a single continuum and possess the capacity for ontological and epistemic ascent. This understanding provides the theoretical foundation for epistemic flexibility, allowing truth to be apprehended and represented at different levels without compromising its ultimate unity. Rather than reducing knowledge to a binary distinction between true and false, the doctrine of epistemic gradation recognizes a spectrum of increasing adequacy and perfection. Such a perspective avoids both dogmatic absolutism, which acknowledges only one valid expression of truth, and radical relativism, which regards all interpretations as equally valid. The result is a form of Gradational Realism, particularly well-suited to interdisciplinary and intercultural dialogue, where mutual understanding and reciprocal enrichment become possible without abandoning the objectivity of truth.

Kuhn's (2012) philosophy of science, with its emphasis on paradigm shifts and revolutionary discontinuities, challenges strictly cumulative accounts of scientific development across successive conceptual frameworks. The Qur'anic-Ṣadrian model, by contrast, interprets even profound epistemic transformations as forms of intensification and advancement within the unfolding of a single reality (Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī 1981, 2: 558). Similarly, although Gadamer's (1989) philosophical hermeneutics recognizes the historically conditioned and layered character of understanding, it does not provide an explicit ontological foundation for such gradation. Transcendent Philosophy supplies precisely this foundation by grounding knowledge in the principle of gradation (*tashkīk*), a principle that, from this perspective, finds textual support in Q. 58:11.

3.7. The Multiplicity of Epistemic Faculties and the Necessity of Their Synergistic Integration

وَاللَّهُ أَخْرَجَكُمْ مِنْ بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ
(النحل/78)

Allah has brought you forth from the bellies of your mothers while you did not know anything. He made for you hearing, eyesight, and hearts so that you may give thanks (Q. 16:78).

The three terms *al-samʿ* (hearing), *al-abṣār* (sights), and *al-qf'idah* (hearts) collectively represent the principal cognitive faculties of the human being. Together, they signify sensory perception, intellectual-rational cognition, and spiritual-intuitive cognition, respectively. According to Tabataba'i (1996, 12: 382–385), their juxtaposition reflects the Qur'an's emphasis on the balance and interaction of these faculties rather than the absolute superiority of any one of them over the others. Similarly, al-Rāzī (1999, 20: 234–235) observes that the concluding reference to gratitude (*shukr*) indicates humanity's responsibility to employ these epistemic faculties properly and in concert with one another.

Mullā Ṣadrā (1981, 8: 295–302) interprets these three faculties as successive manifestations of cognition: hearing as the reception of revelation and testimony, seeing as the perception of sensible and intelligible realities, and the heart as the locus of presential knowledge and connection with the World of Command (*ʿĀlam al-Amr*). Through substantial motion, the human soul transforms these faculties from isolated capacities into an integrated epistemic network, so that knowledge emerges through their simultaneous and mutually reinforcing operation. Recognizing the plurality of epistemic faculties and the necessity of their cooperation prevents epistemological reductionism. If sensory perception alone is regarded as the sole path to knowledge, one falls into naive empiricism; if reason alone is privileged, sensory evidence and intuitive insight are neglected; and if cognition is reduced exclusively to the heart, knowledge risks becoming detached from rational evaluation and critical verification. The Qur'anic–Ṣadrian model instead understands knowledge as the product of the dynamic interaction of sense, reason, and heart, thereby providing the theoretical foundation for an Integrated Epistemology.

Contemporary philosophical hermeneutics, particularly in the works of Gadamer (1989) and Ricoeur (1981), likewise regards understanding as emerging through dialogue between the interpreter, the text, and multiple interpretive horizons. The Qur'anic–Ṣadrian framework, however, extends this insight by grounding such integration in an ontological account of the soul's developmental journey (Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī 1981, 8: 298). By contrast, nineteenth-century empiricist philosophies of science, exemplified by John Stuart Mill (1843), assigned epistemic priority to observation and inductive reasoning in scientific inquiry, thereby excluding the intuitive and spiritual dimensions of cognition. This integrated perspective opens new possibilities for knowledge production not only in epistemology but also in interdisciplinary research and intercultural studies, while preventing the fragmentation of truth into isolated and competing domains.

3.8. *The Continuous Dynamism of Knowledge and the Infinite Possibility of Epistemic Ascent*

وَقُلْ رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا (طه/ 114)

And say, "My Lord, increase me in knowledge" (Q. 20:114).

The imperative *zidnī* (increase me) signifies the limitless possibility of the growth of knowledge. According to Tabataba'i (1996, 14: 338–340), this supplication demonstrates that the pursuit of knowledge, even for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), is an unending journey toward perfection. Al-Rāzī (1999, 22: 198–199) similarly argues that the verse establishes an ethics of inquiry, requiring an enduring commitment to the continuous pursuit of knowledge.

Drawing upon the doctrine of substantial motion, Mullā Ṣadrā (1981, 6: 135–141) maintains that the human soul is intrinsically oriented toward infinite perfection. Within the epistemic domain, this entails a continuous progression from lower to higher levels of cognition. Each stage serves as the foundation for the next, without any definitive terminal point. The present verse thus provides the Qur'anic basis for this conception of perpetual epistemic development. Acceptance of the principle of the continuous dynamism of knowledge liberates the evaluation of knowledge from static and absolutist assumptions. Truth is understood not as a fixed destination but as an ever-receding horizon that reveals new horizons with every fresh discovery. From this perspective, epistemology shifts its emphasis from merely validating what is already known to cultivating the capacity for continual intellectual growth and deeper understanding.

This conception differs significantly from linear models of scientific progress, such as classical positivism, which portrays science as a straightforward progression toward complete knowledge (Comte 1855). Kuhn (2012), by contrast, interprets scientific development as a succession of paradigm shifts characterized by discontinuity. Each paradigm operates according to its own assumptions and methodology and is eventually replaced when confronted with fundamental anomalies. Yet this process lacks an overarching teleology or ontological continuity and is therefore portrayed primarily as a sequence of discontinuous transformations in the history of science.

The Qur'anic-Ṣadrian model, while acknowledging the occurrence of fundamental epistemic transformations and even radical discontinuities, interprets them not as isolated ruptures but as successive links within an endless process of ontological and epistemological ascent (Ṣadr al-Dīn al-

Shīrāzī 1981, 2: 558). Consequently, every intellectual transformation is understood as contributing to the unfolding of a single truth and advancing toward the ultimate end of knowledge. This perspective reconciles the apparent discontinuity of paradigms through the doctrines of the hierarchy of cognition and the substantial motion of the soul, thereby establishing an enduring continuity across successive stages of human understanding. Likewise, although Husserlian phenomenology advocates a continual return to “the things themselves” through phenomenological reflection (Husserl 1983), its account of this return remains primarily epistemological rather than grounded in a divine teleology or revealed metaphysical framework.

4. Anthropological Implications

4.1. The Inherent Dignity of the Human Being as the Foundation for Unlimited Human Perfectibility

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَوَضَعْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا
(الإسراء / 70)

Certainly We have honoured the Children of Adam, and carried them over land and sea, and provided them with all the good things, and given them an advantage over many of those We have created with a complete preference (Q. 17:70).

The verb *karramnā* (We have honored) derives from the root *K-R-M*, signifying the bestowal of nobility and ontological dignity. This dignity is intrinsic and comprehensive, rather than merely acquired, encompassing the latent capacities that enable human beings to ascend through the levels of existence toward proximity to the celestial realm (Tabataba'i 1996, 13: 135–138). Al-Rāzī (1999, 20: 25–28) maintains that this superiority arises from a constellation of divine endowments, including reason, free will, and the capacity to establish a relationship with the unseen world.

Within Transcendent Philosophy, Mullā Ṣadrā (1981, 8: 328–334) explains human dignity on the basis of the comprehensiveness of the human mode of existence (*jāmi'īyyah al-martabah al-wujūdiyyah*). The human being encompasses within his or her very substance all levels of existence, from the material and corporeal to the intellectual and suprasensible, and, through substantial motion, possesses the capacity to ascend the graded hierarchy of being until attaining proximity to God. This comprehensive existential constitution constitutes the innate potential underlying the dignity explicitly affirmed in the present verse. Thus, the Qur'anic declaration, “*Certainly We have honoured the Children of Adam*” (Q. 17:70), establishes

human dignity as an inherent characteristic of the human condition.

The recognition of intrinsic human dignity implies that every educational, social, and philosophical project should be grounded in the human being's inexhaustible capacity for growth and perfection. Such a perspective resists reductionist approaches that interpret the human person merely as the product of biological, economic, or psychological forces. Instead, the Qur'anic-Şadrian model views the human being as a microcosm of existence, capable of actualizing the faculties of sense, reason, and heart in order to traverse the authentic levels of reality.

In Kantian moral philosophy, human dignity is grounded in rational autonomy and the capacity for moral agency (Kant 2012). In the Qur'anic-Şadrian framework, however, dignity is rooted in the human being's ontological relationship with the Divine (Şadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī 1981, 8: 298). Likewise, although Sartrean existentialism identifies freedom as the defining feature of human identity (Sartre 1992), it lacks a clearly articulated ultimate purpose or metaphysical end. By contrast, the Qur'an and Transcendent Philosophy understand freedom and responsibility as oriented toward the spiritual journey leading to absolute perfection and nearness to God (Tabataba'i 1996, 13: 143).

4.2. *The Substantial Motion of the Soul and the Dynamic Nature of Human Identity*

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدًّا فَهَلْ أَجْتِدُ (الانشقاق/6)

O man! You are labouring toward your Lord laboriously, and you will encounter Him (Q. 84:6).

The expression *kādiḥ* (laboring tirelessly) denotes continuous striving and persistent movement, closely corresponding to the gradual transformation and perfection of the soul throughout the course of life. According to Tabataba'i (1996, 20: 308–310), this movement signifies the existential journey of the human being from the material realm toward the realm of immateriality, culminating in the encounter with God and the realization of ultimate perfection. Al-Rāzī (1999, 31: 82–83) further observes that this striving encompasses every dimension of the human person, sensory, rational, and spiritual, and that each stage of the journey contributes to the realization of final perfection.

Within Transcendent Philosophy, Mullā Şadrā's (1981, 8: 310–316) doctrine of substantial motion maintains that the very substance of the soul is subject to perpetual transformation. The soul begins at the material level,

develops through sensory and rational cognition, ascends to complete immateriality, and ultimately attains conjunction with the Active Intellect (*al-ʿAql al-Faʿāl*). The verse Q. 84:6 thus reflects this very trajectory: human existence is characterized by a continuous, purposeful, and ontological movement toward Absolute Reality rather than by static permanence. Recognizing this dynamic character transforms human identity from a fixed essence into an open-ended process of becoming.

Within education, this understanding entails the design of a lifelong and transformational educational system operating at multiple levels:

1. The individual level: Learners come to recognize that the pursuit of knowledge is intrinsic to their very existence.
2. The institutional level: Educational institutions should establish structures that sustain continuous intellectual and moral development for both society and their graduates.
3. The civilizational level: Societies inspired by this principle replace a culture centered on the completion of formal education with one grounded in lifelong learning.

Whereas contemporary models of lifelong education are generally oriented toward the changing demands of the labor market, the Qur'anic–Šadrian model advances a broader vision in which education serves the soul's limitless journey toward authentic perfection and nearness to God. Education thus becomes an ongoing process of ontological transformation, each stage preparing the way for a higher level of existence.

In Aristotelian philosophy, the soul reaches actuality through the realization of its potentials, yet its underlying substance remains essentially unchanged (Aristotle, *De Anima*, II.5, 417b–418a, trans. 1986). Mullā Šadrā (1981, 8: 335), by contrast, maintains that the very substance of the soul is in constant motion. Likewise, modern psychological theories that conceive of the self as process, such as those advanced by Mead (1934), share an appreciation for the dynamic nature of identity. Nevertheless, they lack the metaphysical foundation and divine teleology that characterize the Qur'anic–Šadrian model, a teleology that ultimately directs human existence toward absolute perfection and presential knowledge of God (Tabataba'i 1996, 6: 241).

5. Civilizational and Cultural Implications

5.1. Civilization-Building Based on the Hierarchy of Cognition and Substantial Motion

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ (آل عمران/110)

You are the best nation [ever] brought forth for mankind: you bid what is right and forbid what is wrong, and have faith in Allah (Q. 3:110).

According to Tabataba'i (1996, 4: 395–398), this verse constitutes the social and civilizational charter of the Muslim community, provided that three essential pillars are realized: faith, social reform through enjoining what is right (*al-amr bil-ma'rūf*), and the prevention of corruption through forbidding what is wrong (*al-nahy 'an al-munkar*). Al-Rāzī (1999, 8: 335–338) likewise emphasizes the relationship between these three principles and the foundations of civilization: faith serves as the civilizational foundation, *al-ma'rūf* establishes the normative order, and forbidding wrongdoing functions as the mechanism of structural preservation.

Within Transcendent Philosophy, Mullā Ṣadrā (1981, 8: 360–368) argues that the substantial motion of the soul should not be understood merely as an individual process but also as the driving force behind social development. If the hierarchical levels of human cognition, namely, sensory perception, intellect, and the heart (presence-based cognition), undergo development at the individual level, they correspondingly give rise, at the collective level, to the advancement of sensory instruments (science and technology), rational institutions (law and politics), and heart-centered expressions (spiritual culture and sacred art). Together, these three dimensions constitute the structural foundation of a balanced civilization.

Within the Qur'anic–Ṣadrian model, civilization-building unfolds through three integrated layers:

1. The sensory level: the development of material infrastructure and technological capabilities.
2. The rational level: the establishment of intellectual, legal, scientific, and political institutions.
3. The heart-based level: the cultivation of cultural identity, public spirituality, and sacred art.

This model offers protection against the deficiencies characteristic of one-dimensional civilizations. It avoids the crises of meaning often

associated with exclusively technological civilizations while also preventing traditionalist models from neglecting scientific, economic, and institutional development. In Western theories of civilization, such as those advanced by Toynbee (1987) and Spengler (2006), civilizational development is interpreted primarily through historical, cultural, and sociological dynamics rather than through an explicitly theological and teleological framework grounded in divine revelation. In the Qur'anic-Şadrian framework, however, spirituality is not merely one component among others but the animating core of civilization itself (Şadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī 1981, 9: 187), because the substantial motion of the collective human soul directs the entire civilizational process toward its proper end. This perspective offers a model of civilization that is simultaneously scientifically advanced, politically just, and spiritually and culturally enriched (Tabataba'i 1996, 16: 241).

5.2. The Synergistic Integration of Transmitted and Rational Knowledge in Civilizational Cultural Policymaking

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِتَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ أَتَأْسِ بِمَا أَرَاكَ اللَّهُ (النساء / 105)

Indeed We have sent down to you the Book with the truth, so that you may judge between the people by what Allah has shown you (Q. 4:105).

In this verse, the phrase *bil-ḥaqq* (in truth) signifies the immutable foundation of divine law, whereas *bi-mā arāka Allāh* (according to what Allah has shown you) highlights the Prophet's exercise of rational judgment (*ijtihād*) in understanding and implementing revelation. Within the framework of Şadrian hermeneutics, this combination represents the synergistic relationship between the Active Intellect (*al-ʿAql al-Faʿāl*) and revealed revelation (*waḥy*): reason is responsible for comprehending, explicating, and applying divine guidance, while revelation provides the ultimate criterion and teleological orientation for judgment (Tabataba'i 1996, 5: 245–246; al-Rāzī 1999, 10: 158; Şadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī 1981, 6: 180–182).

From the perspective of Transcendent Philosophy, governing according to “*what Allah has shown*” signifies the substantial motion of the collective soul. By embracing both divine and rational laws, society progresses from a fragmented and incomplete state toward a more comprehensive condition that is increasingly aligned with truth (Şadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī 1981, 6: 185–187). Applied to civilizational cultural policymaking, this two-tiered legislative model ensures that immutable values (*al-ḥaqq*) remain compatible with the changing needs and circumstances of civilization without compromising their essential principles or ultimate purposes. Mullā

Ṣadrā (1981, 3: 352–359) describes reason and revelation as two manifestations of the same light of truth, maintaining that at the highest level of intuitive knowledge they cannot genuinely conflict. He argues that the governance of human society and the construction of an ideal civilization require the extraction of universal principles from revelation, followed by their rational interpretation and application in response to changing historical and social conditions. Within the Qur'anic–Ṣadrian framework, cultural policymaking proceeds through three successive stages:

1. Deriving immutable principles from revelation: including fundamental values, the monotheistic worldview, and the ultimate objectives of civilization (Tabataba'i 1996, 2: 351).
2. Rational analysis of changing circumstances: including cultural needs assessment, analysis of global trends, and historical considerations (Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī 1981, 7: 264).
3. Strategic integration of revelation and reason: formulating policies that remain both faithful to foundational principles and responsive to contemporary realities (Motahari 1991, 4: 88).

This integration safeguards against two opposite dangers: textual rigidity, which merely repeats historical precedents without attending to new circumstances, and rationalistic secularism, which severs policymaking from revelation and regards divine guidance as unnecessary.

Contemporary Western approaches to cultural policy, including the UNESCO framework (Bekemans 2014) and liberal-pluralist theories inspired by Rawls (1993), generally privilege public reason, empirical evidence, and rational deliberation in public decision-making rather than revealed religious authority. By contrast, the Qur'anic–Ṣadrian model preserves the epistemic authority of both revelation and reason, ensuring that cultural policies avoid both radical relativism and historical stagnation.

5.3. *Civilizational Dynamism Based on Collective Substantial Motion*

وَتِلْكَ الْأَيَّامُ نُدَاوِلُهَا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ (آل عمران/140)

And We make such vicissitudes rotate among mankind (Q. 3:140).

According to Tabataba'i (1996, 4: 395–398), this alternation of days refers not merely to military victories and defeats, but to the operation of the divine laws (*al-sunan al-ilāhiyyah*) throughout history, whereby communities are continually subject to processes of ascent and decline.

Likewise, al-Rāzī (1999, 9: 175–178), interprets this verse as evidence that social transformations are governed by enduring laws and are contingent upon the internal dispositions and collective conduct of human communities. Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (1981, 8: 278–286) extends the doctrine of substantial motion beyond the individual to encompass the collective soul of society and civilization. Just as the individual soul progresses from potentiality (*quwwah*) to actuality (*fi'l*), civilization likewise actualizes its latent material, intellectual, and spiritual capacities. From this perspective, civilization is not a static entity but a living and evolving reality whose developmental quality depends upon the levels of collective cognition and spiritual wayfaring. Once collective substantial motion is acknowledged, civilizational planning should:

1. Recognize the continuous nature of cultural transformation and establish institutional frameworks to guide it.
2. Treat the elevation of the public's cognitive capacities as the principal indicator of civilizational advancement.
3. Preserve the organic relationship between scientific and spiritual development while repairing any separation between the two.

Accordingly, civilizational dynamism should not be understood as unrestricted or arbitrary change, but rather as balanced, purposeful, and teleological growth directed toward proximity to God at the collective level.

Civilizational cycle theories, such as those advanced by Spengler (2006), generally portray civilizations as organisms passing inevitably through stages of birth, maturity, and death. By contrast, the Qur'anic-Ṣadrīan model transforms this cyclical conception into one of continuous upward motion, provided that society develops its sensory, rational, and spiritual modes of cognition in a harmonious manner (Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī 1981, 8: 189). Such an approach enables Islamic-Qur'anic civilization both to learn from the failures of previous civilizations and to challenge the assumption that civilizational decline is historically inevitable (Tabataba'i 1996, 16: 241).

5.4. *Monotheistic Rationality as the Foundation of Civilizational Unity and Cohesion*

إِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُونِ (الأنبياء/ 92)

Indeed, this community of yours is one community, and I am your Lord, so worship Me (Q. 21:92).

Tabataba'i (1996, 14: 321–323) interprets the expression *ummah*

wāḥidah (one community) as denoting the ultimate unity of the Muslim community in its purpose and identity, despite geographical and cultural diversity. Similarly, al-Rāzī (1999, 22: 112–115) argues that such unity can be realized only through a shared commitment to the divine foundation and common servitude to God. Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (1981, 9: 252–257) maintains that rationality reaches its perfection only when exercised within a monotheistic horizon. He argues that reason detached from revelation inevitably fragments into relativism and intellectual dispersion, whereas monotheistic rationality, grounded in the unity of being (*waḥdah al-wujūd*), functions as an integrating force capable of unifying civilizational values and institutional structures. As the foundation of civilizational unity, monotheistic rationality performs several essential functions:

1. Integrating knowledge and values: preventing contradictions between worldviews across politics, economics, education, and the arts.
2. Creating solidarity amid cultural diversity: transforming differences into mutually enriching forms of diversity within the monotheistic framework.
3. Strengthening civilizational identity in the face of globalization: providing meaning, purpose, and enduring cohesion that transcend short-term interests.

Modern conceptions of collective unity often derive from social contract theories, particularly Rousseau's (2011) account of political legitimacy based on the general will. Such forms of unity, however, are vulnerable to dissolution as political circumstances and collective interests change. By contrast, the Qur'anic–Ṣadrian model grounds unity in the single reality of being and shared servitude to God, thereby providing a metaphysical foundation that is not readily eroded (Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī 1981, 6: 112; Tabataba'i 1996, 18: 421). This approach employs reason as the instrument for understanding reality while recognizing revelation as its guiding principle, thereby fostering the emergence of a stable, coherent, and spiritually integrated civilization.

5.5. Expanding Intercultural Cognitive Dialogue Based on the Qur'anic–Ṣadrian Three-Stage Model of Cognition

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ (الحجرات/13)

O mankind! Indeed We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations

and tribes that you may identify yourselves with one another. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God wary among you. Indeed Allah is all-knowing, all-aware (Q. 49:13).

According to Tabataba'i (1996, 18: 327–329), the expression *li-ta 'ārafū* (that you may come to know one another) signifies not merely superficial acquaintance but an interactive process of discovering truths, experiences, and values. Likewise, al-Rāzī (1999, 28: 116–118), regards this verse as establishing the legitimacy of dialogue among nations and cultures, the ultimate purpose of which is the advancement of knowledge and moral virtue. Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (1981, 8: 310–315) maintains that the levels of being and cognition are common to all human beings, although their modes of manifestation differ according to education, culture, and spiritual wayfaring. On this basis, the proper foundation of dialogue is not competition over conformity to a single language or cultural form, but rather a shared ascent from sensory cognition, grounded in direct and tangible experience, to rational cognition, characterized by reasoning and conceptualization, and ultimately to cardiac (spiritual) cognition, through which the shared reality of truth is directly apprehended. Within this framework, intercultural dialogue can:

1. Move beyond the mere exchange of information toward the mutual sharing of meanings and lived experiences.
2. Employ the hierarchy of cognition to identify shared cognitive horizons rather than becoming preoccupied with disagreements over isolated particulars.
3. Ground the ethics of dialogue in virtue, humility, and the collective pursuit of truth.

Prevailing models of civilizational dialogue, including UNESCO-inspired frameworks (Bekemans 2014), generally seek to promote cooperation through shared historical experiences, cultural values, and mutual interests rather than through a common theological or revelatory foundation. By contrast, the Qur'anic-Ṣadrian model grounds dialogue in both epistemological and spiritual principles, thereby establishing a common intellectual horizon while simultaneously defining a path of collective human development (Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī 1981, 7: 255; Tabataba'i 1996, 3: 174). Rather than reducing cultures to a uniform standard, this model seeks to elevate them through a process of cognitive synergy, in which diverse traditions mutually enrich one another (Motahari 1991, 2: 386).

5.6. The Possibility of Integrating the Human, Natural, and Divine Sciences within a Unified Epistemological Framework

سَنُرِيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْآفَاقِ وَفِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ يَبَيِّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ أَوْ لَمْ يَكْفِ بِرَبِّكَ أَنَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ
(فصلت/53)

Soon We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in their own souls until it becomes clear to them that He is the Real. Is it not sufficient that your Lord is witness to all things? (Q. 41:53)

According to Tabataba'i (1996, 17: 216–219), this verse outlines a three-stage methodology for the discovery of truth: observation of the external world (*āyāt al-āfāq*), investigation of the human self (*āyāt al-anfus*), and ultimately the attainment of knowledge of God. Makarem Shirazi (1995, 20: 274–277) interprets the phrase *sanurīhim āyātīnā* (We shall show them Our signs) as encompassing two complementary epistemic levels: the empirical level, represented by the natural and human sciences, and the revelatory-inspirational level, which completes the journey toward the realization that *annahu al-ḥaqq* (it is the Truth). He argues that this framework provides an ideal model for integrating the empirical sciences with revealed theology without collapsing their distinct methodologies or placing them in opposition.

According to Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (1981, 6: 178–186), the progression from the external world to the self to the Truth (*al-āfāq* → *al-anfus* → *al-Ḥaqq*) reflects a continuous ontological movement in which cognition advances from sensation to reason and ultimately to the heart. Mullā Ṣadrā further maintains that the unity of the levels of being provides the foundation for the unity of the levels of cognition. Consequently, sense (the empirical and natural sciences), reason (the human sciences and philosophy), and the heart (revealed knowledge and theology) constitute three branches of a single tree of knowledge. Moreover, the substantial motion of the soul guarantees the continuity of this epistemic ascent from sensory experience to presential knowledge. Within this perspective, the Qur'anic–Ṣadrian model provides the basis for:

1. Developing a common conceptual language among the natural sciences, the human sciences, and the theological sciences.
2. Resolving apparent conflicts between scientific findings and revealed teachings by distinguishing between their respective subject matters and epistemological instruments.
3. Designing interdisciplinary research programs that employ

scientific discoveries to deepen understanding of the order of the cosmos while drawing upon revealed teachings as a source of intellectual and ethical inspiration for scientific inquiry.

In many Western academic models, rigid disciplinary boundaries, particularly between the natural sciences and religion, have contributed to a profound epistemological divide. In the Ṣadrian framework, however, because the levels of being constitute a continuous and gradational reality, no branch of knowledge is conceived as isolated either from the others or from its ultimate end, namely Absolute Truth. This perspective offers a promising foundation for the development of comprehensive and intellectually integrated systems of knowledge suited to the challenges of the contemporary world.

5.7. Opening New Horizons of Civilizational Synergy through Monotheistic Rationality

وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ (الحجرات/ 13)

And made you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves with one another. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God wary among you (Q. 49:13).

According to Tabataba'i (1996, 18: 327–330), mutual acquaintance (*ta'āruf*) extends far beyond superficial or historical recognition. Rather, it constitutes the foundation for establishing relationships grounded in divine values, in which human dignity is measured according to virtue (*taqwā*). Similarly, al-Rāzī (1999, 28: 55–57) emphasizes that ethnic and cultural diversity exists not to foster conflict or claims of superiority but to enable communities to complement one another's knowledge, capacities, and resources.

Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (1981, 9: 272–275) connects this principle with his doctrine of the gradation of being. Just as the levels of being are distinct yet interconnected manifestations of a single reality, cultures likewise represent diverse manifestations of one underlying truth whose unity is realized through monotheistic rationality. On this basis, monotheistic rationality may function as a shared cognitive language through which different cultures engage one another without sacrificing their distinctive identities. This understanding is reinforced by the Qur'anic invitation:

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئاً وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضاً أَرْبَاباً مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ (آل عمران/ 64)

Say, "O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you: that we

will worship no one but Allah, and that we will not ascribe any partner to Him, and that we will not take each other as lords besides Allah" (Q. 3:64).

Among the principal implications of this perspective are the following:

1. Civilizational synergy: Cultures are able to share their scientific, intellectual, and spiritual strengths within the unifying framework of monotheism.
2. The formation of an intercultural civilizational framework: Previous patterns of cultural interaction can be connected to future interdisciplinary collaboration, allowing dialogue to extend beyond culture into the realms of knowledge production and scientific inquiry.

Within secular models of globalization, dialogue is generally conceived as a political or economic instrument shaped by the interests of competing powers. By contrast, the Qur'anic-Şadrian paradigm understands dialogue as teleological in nature, aiming at cooperation in the pursuit of human perfection and proximity to God, rather than the mere exchange of interests.

5.8. Establishing an Interdisciplinary Framework through Cognitive Exchange among Cultures

أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ (النحل/125)

Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice and dispute with them in a manner that is best (Q. 16:125).

The concept of *al-ḥikmah* (wisdom) in this verse encompasses both theoretical and practical wisdom, together constituting the universal language shared by prophets and scholars across civilizations (Tabataba'i 1996, 12: 522–526). Al-Rāzī (1999, 20: 4) interprets the command *jādilhum bi-allatī hiya aḥsan* (argue with them in the best manner) as establishing a methodological model for scholarly and interdisciplinary dialogue from an Islamic perspective. Al-Tūsī (2002, 6: 482–485) explains that *al-maw'izah al-ḥasanah* (good counsel) includes transmitting the civilizational experiences of earlier nations so that subsequent generations may learn from them and advance. Likewise, al-Tabrisī (1993, 6: 569–572) emphasizes that *al-ḥikmah* provides the intellectual foundation for meaningful scientific dialogue among scholars representing different fields of knowledge. Makarem Shirazi (1995, 12: 355–358) further applies this verse to contemporary intercultural dialogue and interdisciplinary academic conferences.

For Mullā Ṣadrā (1981, 3: 321–326), wisdom is defined as the transformation of the human being into an intellectual world corresponding to the external world. In this sense, wisdom unites theoretical knowledge with existential perfection and thereby provides the philosophical foundation for interdisciplinarity by connecting diverse domains of knowledge within a coherent intellectual framework. Mullā Ṣadrā (2004, 389–396) further emphasizes the interpenetration of the levels of knowledge, arguing that reason and the heart cooperate in integrating scientific, philosophical, and mystical modes of understanding. He explains that the advancement of society depends upon mobilizing every available epistemic resource, including both transmitted and revealed sciences as well as the intellectual achievements of other civilizations. He (1981, 1: 259–261) also portrays reason as a universal human faculty shared by all people, thereby providing the basis for scientific and cultural cooperation across societies. From this perspective, reason is not merely an instrument of individual cognition but a unifying principle that restores the harmony between different domains of knowledge (Nasr 1996). Accordingly, the Qur'anic-Ṣadrian philosophy of wisdom enables the human sciences, the natural sciences, and the theological sciences to engage in meaningful dialogue, provided that their concepts are translated into a shared conceptual framework. Furthermore, the outcomes of intercultural exchanges organized according to the three levels of cognition, sensory, rational, and cardiac, become a model for interdisciplinary cooperation. Through the integration of data, methodologies, and values derived from multiple cultural traditions, the substantial motion of humanity's collective soul is accelerated, thereby facilitating the emergence of new fields of knowledge.

In many contemporary Western approaches to interdisciplinarity, disciplinary integration is primarily technical or problem-oriented (Klein 2010; Repko & Szostak 2020). By contrast, the Qur'anic-Ṣadrian model conceives interdisciplinary integration not merely as a methodological enterprise but as an ontological and teleological one. Its ultimate objective is the realization of humanity's collective perfection rather than the simple solution of practical problems (Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī 1981, 6: 180–182; Tabataba'i 1996, 1: 323).

6. Conclusion

The present study, grounded in the principles of Transcendent Philosophy and employing a Ṣadrian hermeneutical approach, reconstructs the complete hierarchy of cognition, sensory, rational, and cardiac, within a unified and teleological framework. It demonstrates that these three levels

are not static stages of knowing but successive phases in the substantial motion of the human soul. This developmental process begins with immediate engagement with the sensible world, deepens through rational reflection and abstraction, and culminates in presential knowledge attained through the heart, where existential certainty reaches its highest realization.

Within this framework, the study identifies three principal domains of implication. First, the epistemological dimension involves a reconceptualization of the theory of truth on the basis of the presence of reality. It advances a progressive methodology of inquiry that moves from sensory data to rational cognition and ultimately to spiritual intuition. The study also establishes a form of graded realism grounded in the doctrine of the gradation of being and offers a fundamental critique of empiricist, rationalist, and pragmatist epistemologies. From this perspective, truth is understood not simply as correspondence between proposition and reality but as an existential participation in, and presence before, reality itself.

Second, the anthropological dimension explains the inherent dignity of the human being as the manifestation of an unlimited capacity for existential perfection. It interprets the Qur'anic concept of the vicegerency of God as a comprehensive vocation encompassing both the cultivation of the world and the purification of the soul. Furthermore, it emphasizes the comprehensiveness of the human existential rank as a mirror reflecting the Divine Names and Attributes. Such a conception reorients educational, social, and ethical systems away from a narrow functionalism toward the pursuit of ultimate human perfection.

Third, the cultural and civilizational dimension demonstrates the intrinsic relationship between the individual's epistemic and spiritual elevation and the flourishing of civilization. It proposes a revelation-centered and teleological alternative to several influential modern Western models of civilizational development by redefining development as a process that simultaneously strengthens material institutions and their underlying epistemological and spiritual foundations. Within this framework, development is understood not merely as infrastructural or economic growth but as the harmonious cultivation of the intellect, the heart, and the moral character of society.

The Qur'anic-Şadrian model developed in this study presents these three domains of implication as interconnected links within a single intellectual chain, beginning with the emergence of cognition in the individual and culminating in civilizational flourishing. The ontological foundations of this model lie in the doctrines of the gradation of being and substantial motion, while its ultimate horizon is the realization of epistemic unity on a global

scale. Consequently, it offers the possibility of establishing a new intellectual discourse in which diverse schools of thought and civilizations, despite their differences, may cooperate through a shared framework of epistemic concord and collective human advancement.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that the point of departure for realizing the ideal Qur'anic civilization lies in the cultivation of the successive levels of human cognition. The human being begins with sensory perception, is stabilized and perfected through reason, and ultimately comes to experience and embody truth through the heart. It is through this ascending epistemic and existential journey that both individual perfection and authentic civilizational renewal become possible.

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