

# The Possibility of Knowledge in the Holy Qur'an

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**ABSTRACT:** The benefit of the Holy Qur'an in responding to the questions and challenges of the humanities, particularly philosophy and epistemology, opens new horizons. The issue of 'the possibility of human knowledge,' as the most crucial problem in epistemology, is the central thesis of this paper for which the author based on the teachings of the Qur'an attempts to provide appropriate solutions. After discussing several meanings of knowledge in the Qur'an, where it is affirmed, acquired or propositional knowledge, the paper critically deals with various philosophical views regarding the possibility of understanding as well as the problem of skepticism and relativism.

**KEYWORDS:** Qur'an, knowledge, epistemology, possibility of knowledge, realism, sophism, skepticism, relativism.

## *Introduction*

Revelation in general, and the Holy Qur'an in particular, can be of great benefit in stimulating the qualitative growth of the humanities. Following a rational methodology, one can answer various challenges from the humanities with the aid of scripture, and thereby open up new horizons by applying a Qur'anic perspective. Such an encounter with the Qur'an might also lead to a gradual Islamisation of the humanities. A defensible interpretation of an Islamisation of the sciences would be the replacement of the prevailing standards in the humanities, which chiefly rely upon skepticism and

relativism – either hidden or apparent – with metaphysical and theological principles based on Islamic rationalism. This does not mean that the Qur'an discusses everything included in the humanities, but that it takes a specific position regarding some of them. This essay is a modest attempt to reveal the Qur'anic position on some of the serious problems of epistemology, upon which the humanities significantly rely.

Epistemology investigates several important questions such as the essence, nature and the veracity of knowledge. However, its major concerns are the two fundamental problems of (a) the definition and analysis of knowledge, and (b) whether or not knowledge as such is possible for man.<sup>1</sup>

The present essay deals mainly with the Qur'anic perspective on the second problem, with reference to the first for a better elucidation.

### ***A. The Concept of Knowledge in the Qur'an***

The purpose of this essay is to discover how the Qur'an approaches epistemological challenges. Knowledge is defined by contemporary epistemology as an acquired, propositional knowledge which primarily concerns the mind and its correspondences, or in other words, truth and falsity, and this is dealt with according to certain Qur'anic verses<sup>2</sup> in which 'ilm and *ma'rifa* (both meaning 'knowledge') are mentioned.<sup>3</sup>

*As for the meaning of 'ilm, the following verses will suffice:*

a. Make ready for them all thou canst of (armed) force and of horses tethered, that thereby you may dismay the enemies of Allah and your enemy, and others beside them whom you do not know [of whom you have no 'ilm], Allah knows them (8:60). In this verse, God addresses the believers, informing them that they have enemies of whose enmity they are not aware. Such acquired knowledge as 'so-and-so are enemies of Islam' is expressed in the Qur'an with the term 'ilm.

b. O you who believe! When believing women come unto you as fugitives,

examine them. Allah is best aware of their faith. Then, if you know them for true believers, send them not back unto the unbelievers (60:10).

Similarly, *'ilm* is used for the recognition and awareness of something (in this case, after discovering the appropriate evidence). As is clear, what is recognised is 'those women are believers,' which is an acquired, propositional knowledge based on evidence.

*Ma'rifa* is used in a similar way.<sup>4</sup> For instance, when narrating Joseph's encounter with his brothers, when they came to him in Egypt without knowing him, while he *knew* them, the term *ma'rifa* is used for Joseph's acquired knowledge (12:58). Also, it is similarly used for such knowledge in the following recommendation:

O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks close round them (when they go abroad). That will be better, that so they may be recognised and not annoyed (33:59).

## ***B. The Possibility of Knowledge from the Qur'anic Perspective***

The philosophical schools that have generally dealt with the possibility of knowledge can be divided into two groups of realists, one of which considers human knowledge to be a fact, and another which denies human access to knowledge. The latter is in turn subdivided into sophists, sceptics and relativists. These views will be reviewed before dealing with the Qur'anic perspective in this connection.

### ***1. Realism***

The realist believes both in the existence of a reality beyond the human mind, as well as the possibility of human access to it. Supported by most philosophers and scientists, this viewpoint covers a wide range, but they all agree that man can to some extent achieve true knowledge of certain facts. However, the question of what the conditions and limitations of human knowledge are, and what can be known, is a matter of debate amongst them.

## ***2. Sophism***

The view of the sophists is based upon a basic denial of anything beyond the scope of the human mind, that man is the criterion of everything, and that the truth is nothing other than what man realises. The well-known sophist Georgias expresses this as follows: 'It is impossible that something may become existent; even if it can become existent it cannot be known; and even if it is known, it cannot be explained to others.' The prerequisite here is that if there were no known fact, there would be no object of knowledge (the known) and no knowledge (i.e., a knowledge which reveals a fact and accords with it), and therefore true and untrue would be meaningless, since knowledge itself is first of all an instance of a fact, and secondly, in the absence of a fact, there would be no knower or known, and thereby no knowledge, since the existence of knowledge depends upon the existence of the knower and the known.

This is in fact a denial of things which are self-evident, and has been strongly denied by both Greek and Muslim philosophers.<sup>5</sup>

## ***3. Skepticism***

According to one division, skepticism can be regarded as either Global or local.

3.1. Global Skepticism is a perspective which allows for the possibility of error in all human perception, according to which a definitive attainment of knowledge is considered impossible. It argues that no definitive judgement can be made about anything, even something which is for all intents and purposes undeniably self-evident. Thus, any definitive judgement by man on the existence or non-existence of anything is either impossible or suspended. This perspective does not essentially deny facts, such as the existence of the external world, God, spirit or matter and the like, and considers them possible; but the focus is on human error, and it diminishes the sensory and intellectual capacity for attaining knowledge by denying any definitive knowledge. This form of skepticism accepts the passive aspects of sensory

perception and the existence of the world as it appears to be, but believes that accepting such things does not mean that they are facts. This approach has been promoted since ancient times by certain individuals who have attempted to prove it with various arguments.

Like sophism, this perspective has been criticised by the majority of philosophers and epistemologists, and most sceptics have responded by disassociating themselves from the idea of a general skepticism – which questions all knowledge and beliefs – by denying its negative elements. However, when the sceptic claims that he doubts everything, he still necessarily has a definite belief in his own existence as well as his doubt, both of which he necessarily accepts as undeniable facts, which effectively negates the notion of a global skepticism.

3.2. Local skepticism is a perspective which accepts that knowledge of certain things is possible, but doubts the knowledge of others things. This approach covers a variety of views ranging from those who believe only in logical and mathematical laws to those who, while believing in the possibility of more than just logical and mathematical facts, consider that definite knowledge of such things as metaphysics, ethics, religion, free will, causality, God and so forth, is impossible.

#### ***4. Relativism***

Relativism may be considered as either factual relativism or epistemological relativism. The first is a belief in the objective, external facts that we perceive. But although this type of relativism accepts external facts, many people may perceive the same thing and interpret it in different ways. Therefore, if ten people have different perceptions of the same thing, it means that there are ten conflicting facts.

Epistemological relativism is a perspective which considers knowledge not as a mirror revealing the world of facts, but as a product of the mutual relationship between the human mind (with all its conditions and limits) and

the facts of the external world. When Georgias says that if something should somehow become existent, it could not be knowable, and Protagoras' words that 'man is the criterion for everything' and 'any assumed thing is for me the thing that appears to me, and for you the thing that appears to you,'<sup>6</sup> such statements may be interpreted as in the same way.<sup>7</sup> This perspective suggests that the truth of any proposition merely depends upon the perspective of the one who believes it, and not upon any fact independent of the mind which perceives it.<sup>8</sup>

This viewpoint has taken various forms throughout history, all of which, however, agree that the formation of knowledge in the mind is, one way or another, a product of the mutual relationship between the fact and non-cognitive elements. These agencies are engaged in the production of human knowledge in such a way that they make any knowledge of an undeniable truth impossible as such, and such things as the physical condition of the body, time and space, hereditary, genetic and psychic factors, and other factors related to the family, society, religion, history, occupation, politics, the media, and so forth.

According to this perspective, no invariable knowledge which accords with facts and is devoid of the conditions mentioned above is humanly possible. A comparison of opinions to determine their validity on the basis of a general criterion is also impossible, for that very criterion would be relative and epistemologically limited. Consistent human values and ethics would be out of the question too, since different people and societies would have their own particular conditions and specific standards for weighing them up, and this could not be done in any other way. In other words, there is no epistemological knowledge or value system with which to appraise the worth of observable information.

Such a relativistic perspective has met with severe criticism, but this is not our concern here. We wish to merely mention it as a particular form of skepticism.

### ***Qur'anic Epistemological Theory***

A brief perusal of the Qur'an is enough to clarify that all the teachings therein are based on principal facts which are knowable by man. In other words, skepticism and relativism are negated, and are directly dealt with only in specific instances.

In earlier times and certain places, there were some individual sophists or extreme sceptics with special objectives which gradually merged into particular cults, but which never became popular or influential. However, such views were not prevalent in the Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula when the Qur'an was revealed, and so it was a matter of course that it should not specifically address them. The Qur'an is the book of life and guidance which emphasises the objectivity of human life, and was sent down to solve the problems of this world and the next, and to open up horizons for man's eternal happiness. Hence, it would have been inappropriate to address or introduce problems which would not have affected the great majority of people of the time.

However, not to address a problem is one thing, and not to take position on it is another, for the Qur'an has taken a clear-cut position on the principle of facts and the possibility of man understanding them (even in summary fashion), thereby negating relativity. The Qur'an organises all of its discussions by considering the existence of constant realities in the world, and the possibility of knowing them as self-evident. Although certain doubts and denials, unacceptable as they may be, have always existed in various places, the Qur'an explicitly takes a position against them.

The Qur'an considers factuality as primarily an absolute, and that it may be known by man. This does not, however, mean that man attains knowledge of everything and all the existential levels of existence,<sup>9</sup> for the Qur'an states that man's knowledge of certain things is impossible, and that where it is possible, it is limited in certain cases.<sup>10</sup> Nor does it mean that whatever comes to man's mind is true, since by differentiating between right and wrong and explaining certain events in both the past and the present, it speaks of the possibility and

likelihood of man forming false ideas, and therefore seeks to correct this by mentioning obstacles and the conditions for thinking rightly.<sup>11</sup>

### *1. Realism and the Negation of Sophism in the Qur'an*

There is a good deal of emphasis in the Qur'an on realism and the negation of sophism. Here we mention just two instances, while stressing that just about any verse could be used as an argument against sophism, skepticism and relativity, since they express realism above all. However, the following verses are examples:

The first verse states: Say (unto the disbelievers): Travel in the land, and see the nature of the consequence for the rejecters! (6:11).

Here God tells man to investigate certain evidence and deliberate upon it. There are other things in addition to the principal fact: the existence of the addressee (the Prophet), the act of addressing him, those who are to be told, the message itself, the earth, the journey in the land, the fact that man can observe things, recognise them and deliberate upon them, and the fact that there were people living before the Prophet who received a divine message, but denied God and His signs. There is also the fact that the Prophet is able to receive a divine message and deliver it to the people, that God regards the Prophet as a trustworthy mediator, and so forth.<sup>12</sup>

Another verse states: He it is who appointed the sun a splendour and the moon a light, and measured for her stages, that you might know the number of the years, and the reckoning. Allah did not create (all) that save in truth. He details the signs for people who have knowledge (10:5).

This verse denotes the following facts: the existence of God, that of the sun and the moon and their lights, that these lights were created by God, the order of the moon's stations, the existence of men who are addressed, the possibility of them understanding, and so on.

## *2 & 3. Negation of Global Skepticism and Relativism in the Qur'an*

There are many verses that deny any generalised skepticism and relativism. But first of all, two points should be mentioned:

- a. The denotation in some of these verses is implicative, in the sense that they tell us that the possibility of knowledge often implies a responsibility. Hence, divine punishment is not exacted without those concerned being told of it, and suchlike. However, the denotation in certain other verses is immediately evident.
- b. Some verses denote a negation of both skepticism and relativism, while others merely negate skepticism. In order to avoid repetition, we mention both categories here:

### ***The First Group of Verses***

A) Among the verses negating skepticism and relativism is the following: 'We never punish until We have sent a Messenger (17:15).' Here God states a fixed divine principle or law which applies to all humanity, not just a specific race, gender, group, religion, cult, social class, era, etc. The principle is that God never punishes sinful men – whether in this world or the next – unless He has first sent a prophet to warn them.<sup>13</sup> In Islamic theology and jurisprudence this principle is referred to as 'the rule of the reprehensibility of punishment without depiction.'

It also denies any general skepticism and relativism by telling us that once God's message has reached man, he should not ignore it, for if he persists in disobedience, unbelief and wrongdoing, he will merit divine punishment. This rule requires the following: a) that the truth of the divine message has been revealed and has reached a large number of people, thus negating sophism; b) that the message be recognisable and comprehensible for the human audience,<sup>14</sup> thus negating skepticism; and c) that the message be addressed to all humanity without limiting its audience, thus negating relativism.

B) All the verses that censure wrong beliefs, such as polytheism and the denial of prophethood, cancel out scepticism and relativism. For example, the following:

They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the third of three; when there is no God save the One God. If they do not desist from so saying, a painful punishment will fall on those of them who disbelieve (5:73).

This verse shows that as group of Christians believed that God is one of the three hypostases – Mary, Christ and God – which is wrong, since God is unique. Therefore, if the Christians in question were to persist in this false belief, and not accept the unity of God, divine punishment would befall them.

As can be seen, the first proposition implies the proof of various facts, including the one God, and this annuls sophism. The second proposition implies a rejection of skepticism, because if knowledge of the oneness of God were impossible, the threat of punishment for believing in the three hypostases would be unjustifiable.

On the other hand, since the divine call to knowledge of the one God is not restricted to the unbelievers and the Jews of Arabia, but includes Christians as well, the verse also eliminates certain kinds of epistemological relativism and religious pluralism.

C) Among the verses which negate skepticism are all those which invite man to travel the earth and observe the world of creation.

Say: Travel in the land and see how He originated creation, then Allah brings forth the later growth. Verily Allah is able to do all things (29:20).

Such verses also clearly demonstrate that the Qur'an considers the observation of events as a means for man to learn.<sup>15</sup>

As mentioned above, those verses which recount stories of the blessings and hardships of people in the past as examples for the believers, are also among those which negate both relativism and skepticism.<sup>16</sup>

D) All the verses which denote the necessity of offering thanks and obedience to God cancel out both sophism and skepticism,<sup>17</sup> because the requirement to give thanks applies to one who has knowledge of at least the following three things: a) the knowledge of God, Whom he thanks; b) the knowledge of the proper way to do so; and c) the knowledge that God commands this. The lack of any of these three would annul the command to give thanks.

It is worth mentioning that among the verses mentioned above, those addressing all humanity or specific groups signify a negation of epistemological relativism. The following verse is an example:

And We have enjoined upon man concerning his parents. His mother bears him in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years. Give thanks unto Me and unto your parents. Unto Me is the journeying (31:14).

Here the word ‘man’ is not limited by any conditions, time, place or cult.

E) All the verses that recount man’s requests to God also clearly indicate a denial of skepticism, such as: ‘He said: My Lord! Have mercy on me and on my brother; bring us into Your mercy, You the Most Merciful of all who show mercy (7:151).’ This is because of the following points: (a) the affirmation of God, to whom he calls; (b & c) the fact that God hears his call and is capable of fulfilling his needs; and (d) his own ability to call on God.

It is impossible for the knowledge of the person who prays to be illusory rather than real, due to the fact that God Himself has said: ‘Your Lord hath said: Call upon Me and I will answer you (40:60),’ and that the command to call upon God actually presumes an initial knowledge of God. Also, in some places God affirms that He will answer him, which means that the person has called upon God with a knowledge of Him, and that He will answer his prayer: ‘Such as remember Allah, standing, sitting, and reclining... Our Lord! Give us that which You have promised to us by Your Messengers... And their Lord has heard them (and He says): Verily I do not suffer the work of any worker, male or female, to be lost... (3:191, 3:194 & 3:195).’

F) All the verses in which God teaches or issues commands indicate the exclusion of skepticism, since only he who is capable of receiving and comprehending God's message can be addressed by God. Verses beginning with such phrases as 'O, people' or 'O, you who believe' contain such commands. These statements refer sometimes to humanity in general and sometimes to those of certain times or places, and therefore also exclude a generalised relativism.

G) Verses which indicate the epistemological guidance regarding the straight path towards God – based on man's own insight and decision – also clearly exclude both skepticism and relativism. For instance: 'Verily We have shown him the way, whether he be grateful or disbelieving (76:3).' This excludes skepticism by indicating man's capacity to have knowledge of God and the straight path, and excludes any relativity by not giving any conditions on the part of man for achieving it.

H) Among the other verses that confirm what we say here are those which call man to observe and contemplate, or sometimes reproach him for not doing so. These verses – which usually begin with phrases like 'Did they not know?' 'Did they not see?' 'Did you not see?' 'Did they not observe?' and so forth – invite man to study and contemplate the truths of the world, both past and present. Here, in addition to the fact in principle, the possibility of conceiving it is considered unquestionable. For, as was mentioned, any invitation or reproach would be unjustifiable if the capacity for knowledge and understanding were not possible. It is noteworthy that, in some of the verses mentioned, there is an unquestionable denial of relativism.

I) There are many verses where God presents existential signs (*āyah*) to man. The presentation of a sign, and the invitation to recognise it, presupposes the possibility of knowledge.

J) Other verses which cancel skepticism and relativism are those where God speaks of the signs of creation with the purpose of man having knowledge of His power and other attributes.

### *The second group of verses*

He it is who appointed the sun a splendour and the moon a light, and measure for her stages, that you might know the number of the years, and the reckoning. Allah did not create (all) that save in truth. He details the signs for people who have knowledge (10:5).

Here God speaks of man's ability to understand the sequences of the moon in order to measure the stages of time. The knowing subject here is man, and the object is the discovery of the systematic order of the temporal universe.<sup>18</sup>

Thus did We show Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth that he might be of those possessing certainty (6:75).

To show Abraham the heavens and the earth indicates that they need to be objectively real in order for him to be certain. Even if his vision were intuitional rather than propositional – according to the preceding and subsequent verses: ‘... Do you take idols for gods? And when night outspread over him...Surely I am quit of that you associate with God –’ it becomes a concept and mediated proposition revealing an observed fact, and therefore Abraham was then able to guide other people who previously worshipped created things. God also speaks well of how great this guidance is.

But for the grace of Allah upon you (Muḥammad), and His mercy, a party of them had resolved to mislead you, but they will mislead only themselves and they will hurt you not at all. Allah reveals unto you the Book and wisdom, and teaches you that which you knew not. The grace of Allah toward you hath been ever great (4:113).

This verse indicates that certain people decided to plant a false belief in the Prophet's mind. However, God revealed to the Prophet something of which he was unaware, and as a result the conspiracy failed. True information was provided for the Prophet through revelation, and thus became a source of what God refers to as ‘knowledge,’ and thenceforth God considers the Prophet as one who knows it.<sup>19</sup>

And well you know of those of you who broke the Sabbath, how We said unto them: Be you apes, despised and rejected (2:65).

This verse speaks of the knowledge of certain Jews concerning God's commandment that they should not fish on the Sabbath, but that some of them had earlier disobeyed and were punished by Him. The object of knowledge is the historical incident of which they were aware and which conforms with the fact, as the Qur'an states.<sup>20</sup>

Allah verily hath shown grace to the believers by sending them a messenger of their own who recites unto them His signs, purifying them, and teaches them the Book and wisdom; although before they were in flagrant error (3:164).

Here God considers the Prophet, who reads from the Qur'an and instructs people on its wisdom, as a mercy and kindness to His servants. The verse therefore indicates the actualisation of man's knowledge of both the divine Book and the Prophet who teaches.

They ask you concerning the Spirit. Say: The Spirit is by command of my Lord, and of knowledge you have been vouchsafed but little (17:85).

In this verse too, while replying to those who ask the Prophet about the spirit, God emphasises man's little knowledge, and this indicates the fact that man has an awareness of truth, no matter how little.

They who disbelieve say: You are no messenger (of Allah). Say: Allah is sufficient witness between me and you, and whosoever has true knowledge of the Book (13:43).

This verse instructs the Prophet on what to tell the infidels who deny his prophecy and miracles. The mention of the words *true knowledge of the Book* indeed indicates the veracity of the knowledge that the book is from God and that Muḥammad is His messenger.<sup>21</sup>

The explicit mention of *whosoever has true knowledge of the Book* reveals the

possibility that certain people, if only a few, have knowledge of the divine Book, whether this means the Household of the Prophet, certain others or both. What is the important common point here is the possibility of the mind of the knowing subject having knowledge.

And when there cometh unto them a Book from Allah, confirming what is with them, though aforesometimes they prayed for victory over those who disbelieved, when there cometh to them that which they know (to be the Truth) they disbelieve therein. The curse of Allah is on disbelievers (2:89).

Those unto whom We have given the Book recognise it as they recognise their sons. Those who ruin their own souls will not believe (6:20).

These two verses indicate explicitly that certain People of the Book in the Prophet's time had an absolutely clear knowledge of the divinity and truthfulness of the Qur'an, even though they may not have acknowledged it and disagreed with the Prophet.

And We did verily allot unto the Children of Israel a fixed abode, and did provide them with good things; and they differed not until knowledge came unto them. Surely your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein they used to differ (10:93).

This verse refers to the disagreement amongst the Children of Israel after they had attained the knowledge to guide them on the straight path, which essentially means that knowledge of the fact was not only possible, but had already occurred.<sup>22</sup>

#### ***4. The Local Skepticism in the Qur'an***

The holy Qur'an has directly considered local or limited skepticism taking different positions towards it depending upon the object of doubt as well as

its reasons and motives. On the one hand God accepts some limited skepticisms because of limitedness of human knowledge and justifies them, and on the other hand He blames some other doubts of that kind because of mental resistance of some individuals against the truth and the factuality.

As for the first, we may refer to the emphasis of the holy Qur'an upon man's lack of knowledge of numerous events happened in the past or to happen, even for himself, in the future (among which being the death) (31:34), time of occurrence of Resurrection (7:187), and the reality of spirit (17:85) as well as its prohibiting from beliefs dependent upon doubt and hesitation (17:36).

And as for the second, there are several examples in the holy Qur'an; for instance, verses concerning groups and individuals who were summoned by their prophets to the one true God, prophecy, Resurrection and so on, but they resisted and casted doubt upon the prophets' words even when the summons were accompanied by reasoning and miracles. The holy Qur'an blames such individuals because of their doubt in spite of existence of proofs, and responses to their doubts concerning oneness of the Lord (11:62), existence of the Resurrection (45:32), revelation and prophethood (38:8), and other issues.

In such cases, the Qur'an has attempted to guide people to true, correspondent knowledge and protect them from deviation by various means, one of which is to refer them to true, correspondent essentials in which they had no doubt; such as the following verse which refers them to the principle of Tawhīd in creatorship and existential lordship of the world in which they believed:

Say: Unto whom (belongs) the earth and whosoever is therein, if you have knowledge? They will say: Unto Allah. Say: Will you not then remember? Say: Who is Lord of the seven heavens and the Lord of the Mighty Throne? They will say: Unto Allah (all that belongs). Say: Will you not then be filled with awe? Say: In whose hand is the dominion over all things and He protects, while against Him there is no protection, if you have knowledge? They will say: Unto Allah (all that belongs). Say: How then are you bewitched? (23:84-89).

Relying on acceptable, true proofs, therefore, the holy Qur'an closes to them the way of doubt, and not only emphasizes possibility of knowledge of the said affairs but proves their existence.

### Notes

1. George S., Pappas, 'History of Epistemology,' in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Carig, New York: Routledge, 1998; Lois P., Pojman, *What can we know? An introduction to the theory of Knowledge*, 2nd edition, Wadsworth, 2001, 3.
2. Therefore it does not include knowledge by presence and acquired concepts which are not subject to truth and falsity.
3. This does not reduce the understanding of the Qur'an to philosophy, overlooking other aspects, or reducing the meaning so that one might suppose that all the Qur'anic terms meaning 'knowledge' are restricted to that sense. The concept has a much wider scope, which would have to be dealt with elsewhere.
4. There are, of course, some differences between 'ilm and ma'rifa in the Qur'an. However, they do not concern the present discussion. See Muṣṭafawī, Ḥasan, *al-Taḥqīq fī Kalimāt al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, Tehran: Bungāh-e Tarjumeh wa Nashr-e Kitāb, 1360 A.H., vol. 8, 206.
5. Ibn Sinā, *al-Shifā'*, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, Qum: Maktaba Āyatullāh al-Mar'ashī, 1404, 49.
6. Plato, 961C160.
7. A detailed presentation, which includes a survey and criticism of relativism, can be found in Faṭourchī, Pīrouz, 'Nesbī-garā'i-ye Protagoras wa Revāyat-hā-ye Jadid-e Ān,' *Zehn Quarterly*, Vol. 5, 1381; Stich, Steven P, 'Epistemic Relativism,' *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Carig, New York: Routledge, 1999; Swoyer, Chris, 'Relativism,' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zelta, 2003; Siegel, H., 'Relativism,' *A Companion to Epistemology*, eds. J. Dancy and E. Sosa, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992, 428-30.
8. For responses to this perspective see Muṭahharī, Murtaḍā, *Majmū'e-ye Āthār*, Tehran: Ṣadrā, 1382, vol. 6, 172-77.
9. Surely Allah (alone) has knowledge of the Hour. He sends down the rain, and knows that which is in the wombs. No soul knows what it will earn tomorrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware (31:34);  
Has he knowledge of the Unseen so that he sees? (53:35);  
They ask you of the (destined) Hour, when it will arrive. Say: Knowledge thereof is with my Lord only. He alone will manifest it at its proper time. It is heavy in the

heavens and the earth. It does not come to you save unawares. They question you as if you could be well informed thereof. Say: Knowledge thereof is with Allah only, but most of mankind do not know (7:187);

They will ask you concerning the Spirit. Say: The Spirit is by command of my Lord, and of knowledge you have been vouchsafed but little (17:85).

10. He knows (all) that is before them and (all) that is behind them, while they cannot compass it in knowledge (20:110).
11. 'Abdullāh, Javādī Āmulī, *Ma'rifat-shenāsī dar Qur'an*, Qum: Esrā Publications, 1384, 206-207.
12. Otherwise it would be inadvisable to address him if he could not receive, could only receive incorrectly, or was untrustworthy.
13. There are two reasons why this applies to all people generally, the first being that chastisement is suspended in the absence of a messenger, and the second that the word 'messenger' is in the indefinite form, and therefore applies generally.
14. Should the message be incomprehensible, there would be no grounds for speaking of disobedience and punishment.
15. Especially since this is indicated by God's command to 'behold.'
16. Say: Travel in the land and see the fate of the guilty (27:69).
17. Therefore remember Me, and I will remember you. Give thanks to Me, and reject Me not (2:152);

And (Solomon) smiled, laughing at her speech, and said, My Lord, arouse me to be thankful for Your favour wherewith You have favoured me and my parents, and to do good that shall be pleasing unto You, and include me in (the number of) Your righteous servants (27:19);

O you who believe! Eat of the good things wherewith We have provided you, and render thanks to Allah if it is (indeed) He whom you worship (2:172).

18. In addition, it is known that the moon passes through various phases; it appears regularly as a crescent on the first night of each month, gradually becoming bigger until it is full at the middle of the month. After that it becomes smaller until it disappears during the interlunar period at the end of the month. The verse in question points out the benefits of this and their scientific application, namely that the calendar of life is crucial for mankind. However, only by becoming aware of this connection can man benefit from it.

Another example is the following: Allah it is who hath created seven heavens, and of the earth the like thereof. The Command comes down among them slowly, that

you may know that Allah is able to do all things, and that Allah surroundeth all things in knowledge (65:12). This verse indicates the possibility of man being aware of the divine Power through numerous signs.

The following verse also speaks of the possibility of man being aware of the connection between the stars and navigation on both land and sea: 'And He it is who hath set for you the stars that you may guide your course by them amid the darkness of the land and the sea. We have detailed Our revelations for a people who have knowledge (6:97).'

19. Nāṣir, Makārim Shīrāzī, *Tafsīr Nemūneh*, Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, vol. 4, 122.

20. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 297.

21. Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusain, Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, Qum: Daftar-e Jāmi'a-ye Mudarrisīn Publications, vol. 11, 387; Makārim Shīrāzī, *Tafsīr Nemūneh*, vol. 10, 254.

22. Some other instances are:

- 'And confound not truth with falsehood, nor knowingly conceal the truth (2:42).' This verse tells of not confounding the truth and not to conceal it (in this case, the religion).

- 'Conceal not testimony, for whoever conceals it, verily his heart is sinful. And Allah is Aware of what you do (2:283).' In this verse, God tells the believers to testify of what they know, and not conceal it, which indicates not only the possibility of knowledge, but its actuality. In this case it emphasises that the knowledge conforms with the fact in such a way that giving testimony becomes necessary.

- 'And even if you brought unto those who have received the Book all kinds of portents, they would not follow your qiblah, nor can you be a follower of their qiblah, nor are some of them followers of the qiblah of others. And if you should follow their desires after the knowledge which hath come unto you, then surely you would be among the evildoers (2:145).' In this verse, adopting a false way is prohibited when knowledge of the true way is acquired, which indicates the possibility of knowing the right way.

- 'They know the favour of Allah and then deny it. Most of them are ingrates (16:83).' This verse addresses those who deny God's blessings even though they are aware of them.

- 'And (remember) when Moses said unto his people: O my people! Why do you hurt me, when you well know that I am Allah's messenger to you? (61:5)' This verse expresses Moses' complaint of harm done to him by his followers while they were aware that he was a messenger of God.

- 'And when they listen to that which has been revealed unto the messenger, you see their eyes overflow with tears because of their recognition of the truth. They say: Our Lord, we believe. Inscribe us among the witnesses (5:83); And say: Praise be to Allah who will show you His portents and you will know them. And your Lord is not unaware of what you do (27:93).' The first of these two verses refers to those who attained knowledge of the true religion after listening to Qur'anic verses, and the second mentions the signs of the truthfulness of the religion. This provides the grounds for man's knowledge of the verses.

- 'He knows what is before them and what is *behind* them (21:28).' In this verse, God considers it possible for man to attain His own knowledge, if He so wishes.

- 'Or the like of him who, passing by a township ... And when the (matter) became clear unto him, he said: I know now that Allah is Able to do all things (2:259).' When God shows His limitless power to someone, that person attains knowledge by witnessing the evidence.

- 'No scribe should refuse to write as Allah has taught him, so let him write, and let him who incurs the debt dictate ... And fear Allah. Allah is teaching you. And Allah is Knower of all things (2:282).' This verse tells us that some of the believers are aware of God's instructions on certain social activities such as transactions, as well as how to record the respective documents.

- 'I taught you the Book and Wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel ... (5: 110).' This verse indicates that Jesus had knowledge of the divine Books and Wisdom, and that his teacher was God.

- 'O my father! Indeed there hath come unto me knowledge which came not unto you. So follow me, and I will lead you on a right path (19:43).' In this verse, Abraham speaks of the knowledge of the right path coming to him, and the possibility of leading others.

- 'Read: And your Lord is the Most Bounteous, Who teaches by the pen; teaches man that which he knew not (96:3-5).' This verse mentions man's attainment of knowledge of God through the pen and writing.