Dialogue of Cultures: Transformations of Philosophy

The Problem of the Typology of Rationality in Muslim Culture

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Abstract

The typology of rationality is among major issues of modern philosophy. In an attempt to provide a typology to Oriental materials, a researcher faces additional problems. The diversity of the Orient as such poses a major challenge. When we say "Oriental," we mean several cultures for which we cannot find a common denominator. The concept of "Orient" involves Arabic, Indian, Chinese, Turkish and other cultures, and the only thing they share is that they are "non-Western." Moreover, even if we focus just on Islamic culture and look into rationality in this context, we have to deal with a conglomerate of various trends, which does not let us define, with full confidence, a common theoretical basis and treat them as a unity. Nevertheless, we have to go on trying to find common directions in thought development, so as to draw conclusions about types of rationality possible in Islamic culture. A basis for such a typology of rationality in the context of the Islamic world was recently suggested in A.V. Smirnov's logic of sense theory. However, actual empiric material cannot always fit theoretical models, and the cases that do not fit the common scheme are interesting *per se*. On the one hand, examination of such cases gives an opportunity to specify certain provisions of the theory and, on the other hand, to define the limits of its applicability.

Keywords: rationality, classification, Islam, Muslim, culture, Arabs, Iran, pre-Islamic, Byzantine, antiquity.

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Проблема типологизации рациональности в мусульманской культуре

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Аннотация

Типологизация рациональности является одной из актуальных проблем современной философии. При попытке осуществления такой типологизации применительно к условно восточному материалу исследователь сталкивается с дополнительными трудностями. В частности, одной из основных сложностей становится то, что Восток является очень разнородным феноменом, в его лице мы имеем дело со многими культурами, для которых невозможно найти общий знаменатель. В понятии «Восток» оказываются слиты воедино арабская, индийская, китайская, турецкая и другие культуры. Однако даже если ограничиваться мусульманской культурой и рассматривать рациональность в ее контексте, мы имеем дело с пестрым конгломератом различных тенденций, не позволяющим нам с полной уверенностью установить такое теоретическое основание, которое могло бы объединить их все в некоторое единство. Тем не менее, это не говорит о бесплодности попыток определить общие векторы развития мысли, которые бы позволили сделать выводы о возможных типах рациональности, присутствующих в исламской культуре. В настоящее время созданы определенные условия для типологизации рациональности в контексте исламского мира на основании логико-смысловой теории А.В. Смирнова. Однако при этом фактический эмпирический материал далеко не всегда укладывается в теоретические модели, предложенные исследователем,

и отдельный интерес представляют случаи, которые так или иначе выбиваются из общей схемы. Их исследование, с одной стороны, дает возможность уточнить отдельные положения общей теории, а с другой – позволяет выявить границы ее применимости.

Ключевые слова: рациональность, типология, ислам, мусульманский, культура, арабы, Иран, доисламский, Византия, античность.

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Introduction

The definition of rationality is one of the most significant philosophical problems. Besides, there arises a special issue of whether forms of rationality that are alternative to those developed in European philosophy, are possible. If we insist that rationality based on Ancient Greek logic is universal for all cultures, the question of a different typology of rationality for non-Western cultures makes no sense [(1)]. But if we do discuss a special type of rationality in Islamic culture, we have to assume the possibility of various types of rationality.

The problem of the typology of rationality in Islamic culture

The search of a special way for the Islamic civilization was manifested in attempts to reveal a special type of rationality in the Arabic culture. The best-known book in this regard is the *Critique of Arab Reason* by a prominent Moroccan philosopher, Mohammed Abed al-Jabiri (1935–2010) [Jābirī 1984] (2). But even Jabiri pleads for adoption of Western rationality.

In Russia, we have only one theory of rationality typology that discusses rationality in Islamic culture. This is A.V. Smirnov's "logic of sense theory."

This theory assumes that rationality consists in cohesiveness between propositions that makes them meaningful. Meaning emerges due to the coherence of logical categories. For the European type of rationality, this requires coherence of the subject (S) with the predicate (P). The subject remains senseless by itself until it gains a number of predicates, and the predicates are void of sense unless bound in a cluster by a substance, and until we get the following relation: $S = P_1 + P_2 + P_n$ [Smirnov 2015, 24]. For instance, "an apple is round, red, sweet, etc." We cannot imagine an apple without its predicates; nor do the predicates "round," "red" and "sweet" give us an idea of a concrete thing.

According to the theory by A.V. Smirnov, we can see an alternative type of rationality in Islamic thought. From his point of view, this alternative kind of rationality can help us to delimitate the Arabic-Islamic macro-cultural areal [Smirnov 2010, 17–20, 63, 65, 88, 114]. Unlike the above-mentioned substantial rationality, this kind is called processual. While a carrier of substantial rationality is focused on substance that has a number of predicates, processual rationality is focused on process as a correlation between an actor (*fāʿil*) and a recipient (*mafʿūl*).

This does not mean at all that Arabs did not use the notion of a substance. The actor and the recipient themselves can be treated as substances from a certain point of view, moreover in Arabic-language works we can find a lot of examples of reasoning similar to the way that originated in Hellenistic logic and is characterized by A.V. Smirnov as a manifestation of substantial rationality. Nevertheless, discourse of many authors Arabic was based not on the S = P paradigm, but on the actor – recipient correlation. Their cohesiveness is provided by the process, which is denoted by the hyphen symbol in the "actor – recipient" opposition. We did not assign a special term to it in the actor – recipient scheme, because it essentially differs from both – an actor and a recipient. They both are substances, subjects that have predicates and accidental properties of their own, but the process is neither a subject nor a predicate, it is

not even their synthesis. It is a not-substantial correlation between an actor and a recipient.

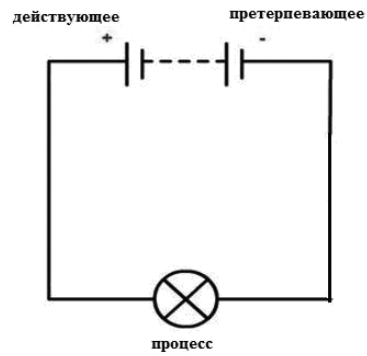

Fig. 1.

To illustrate the process-based (or processual) logic, we can use an example of a simple electrical circuit (Fig. 1). The process (the glow of a lamp, marked as ⊗) appears only if we have both the positive (actor) and negative (recipient) polarities. We will not see the light if one of the polarities is missing. Nevertheless, the glow process is not a part of any of these polarities, and it does not contain them in itself as a whole. The same can be said about the "actor – recipient" opposition in the processual paradigm. Another specific feature of the opposition, which was especially important for Sufi authors, was that the actor and the recipient are mutually reversible. They can exchange their positions: the actor can become the recipient, and in its turn, the recipient can become the actor, yet this will not disrupt the process. The act will take place the same way as our lamp will still glow even if the polarities exchange their positions.

Despite the fact that in Arabic culture there was an idea of a material thing, as well as of its qualities, in many cases the leading role of processual intuition for sense-making can be treated as a condition for considering processuality as a special type of rationality.

Nevertheless, a theory always deals with pure ideas, and their practical realization has certain limitations. Thus, it is natural that a large amount of empirical data cannot fit a pure theory, whether it be the logic of sense theory or the traditional universalism of the Eurocentric approach to Muslim culture. These "non-fitting" data require theoretical comprehension; otherwise the theory will be incomplete.

The purpose of a rationality typology in Islamic culture is a serious challenge for a researcher, for it is not homogeneous and falls into many trends. It seems natural to search for the origin of specific Islamic rationality in pre-Islamic Arabic culture, because it was the

cultural substrate where Islam appeared, the Qur'an was given in the living Arabic language of that time, and even a considerable part of the ritual practice (*ḥajj*, for instance) was part of the pre-Islamic culture of Arabs long before the birth of Prophet Muhammad. But even then, Arabic culture was not unified or autochthonous. Even in the pre-Islamic era it was influenced by both the Byzantine Empire and the Persian Empire. The Judaic influence on pre-Islamic Arabia and on the formation of Islam was a separate issue. Arabia itself was not homogeneous at that time, and its regions displayed great diversity. So, even here we cannot find solid empiric evidence to reconstruct a "pure" Arabic rationality, without assuming possible external influence.

With the emergence of Islam and expansion of Arabs, the situation became even more complicated. At first, the conquest of Iran and the massive inroads of Persians in the field of Islamic culture influenced it a great deal, then the opening of "Houses of wisdom" (*Bayt al- ḥikma*) (for more detail, see: [Siyahpush 2019]), and translation of Hellenistic texts added a Greek component to Islamic culture. As a matter of fact, in Islamic culture we observe a complicated mixture of different trends and ideas of different origins.

In this culture, we can find concepts and ideas to which we cannot give a logically consistent interpretation unless assuming the processual type of intuitions that determined this very special form of posing key questions in Islamic thought. However, there are a considerable number of intellectual and cultural phenomena in the Islamic world that cannot be interpreted in the processual manner, and here the challenge is: how to distinguish between the two types of rationality within this single culture?

The clash of rationality types

Further, we have some examples to demonstrate the problems that a researcher faces when he develops a typology based on a specific body of texts.

Falsafa is mostly based on the Hellenistic, way of sense-making ("substantial" in the terms of logic of sense theory). Nevertheless,

here we can see some models which can be discussed in the context of the processual logic-of-sense paradigm, for instance, the theory of the necessary, the possible and the impossible, proposed by Ibn Sina (3). Those notions are correlated the same way as the paradigm of "actor – recipient," with the process connecting the actor and the recipient. Similarly to the process, the possible is neither a part of the necessary or the impossible, nor is it their synthesis, but it binds them together in some sort of unity. And still we cannot explain this special feature of his philosophy by any local cultural phenomena, as we cannot identify Ibn Sina as a wholly Arabic or Persian philosopher, because he was a member of the larger Muslim world and wrote works both in Arabic and in Persian. There are a large number of conterminal examples, which have attributes of both approaches and defining their status is a separate problem in this regard. Moreover, definition of rationality is not just a typological problem. It is strongly linked with the problem of interpretation.

Here we can give another example of substantial and processual approaches influencing the interpretation of key concepts of Islamic thought. It is a problem of the interpretation of the *waḥdat al-wuǰūd* concept.

Ibn Arabi is considered the author of this concept, though in his surviving texts we cannot find this very term; it appeared in a description of his philosophy given by Ibn Taymiyya. The problem with this concept is that the idea of the unity of being (and being for Ibn Arabi is identical to God's "selfness" *d_h_āt*), understood in a substantial way, leads to an interpretation of Ibn Arabi's teaching as pantheistic: if the world's being is the God's being, we have a classical example of pantheism as a doctrine which identifies God with the Universe. But in a number of contexts Ibn Arabi speaks about mutual otherness of God and the world, about their presence as a unity of two [Smirnov 2012, 43–48]. There emerges a contradiction that cannot be avoided in the substantial interpretation of being. Nevertheless, if we treat being not as a substance or an attribute, but as a process of finding something (the primary lexical meaning of words with the root *w-j-d* is "to find"), we avoid contradictions between God

and the world and arrive at the processual unity of being. This act of being/ finding must have an active and a passive side, remaining a single process. So if *wuǰūd* is a process of finding the world by God, the necessity of the two sides is obvious, and it does not contradict the idea of unity of being [Smirnov 2015, 329–346].

We can also see that a number of Arabic philosophers (Arabs who wrote their works in Arabic, some of the *falāsifa,* for example) would reproduce the Greek way of rational activity without resorting to any kind of processuality. The term *wuǰūd* was frequently used in Arabic writings in the common and well known today meaning "being." At the same time, there would be discussions whether Greek logic was a better instrument for articulation of thought than Arabic grammar [Tawhidi 2012, 549–572]. Here, Hellenistic logic and Arabic grammar were treated as alternatives, i.e., on the one hand, equally possible and, on the other hand, mutually incompatible instruments of articulating thoughts. This can be another argument for the possibility of making conclusions about logical laws, judging by their expression in grammar.

Another example can be the *qiyās* – "co-measuring," or "analogical reasoning" (4). It is a specific procedure of correlation performed for concrete cases from legal practice for a legal precedent in the Qur'an or Sunnah. The same word qiyās referred to a syllogism in Ancient Greek logic. It is very significant that the procedure of deduction from premises differed a lot in these two kinds of *qiyās.* And the author of the logic of sense theory insists that those differences stem from differences between substantial and processual forms of rationality. But these two kinds of *qiyās* were practiced by Islamic authors, in their texts written in the Arabic language [Smirnov 2017b, 72–92], which means that we cannot share the position that thought is strictly determined by language.

At the same time, Mahmud Shabistari (1288–1321), a prominent Persian poet and philosopher, though very much influenced by Ibn Arabi's works, developed his own system of thought that was based on what is called "substantial intuition" in the logic of sense theory [Lukashev 2017]. We cannot find the core opposition

of "actor vs. recipient" (*fāʿil – mafʿūl*) in his works. His discourse is quite different. It is formed as a number of category oppositions, which explicate the "God – world" correlation from different points of view. The way Shabistari solves the problem of *tawḥīd* (God's ultimate oneness, despite the presence of these two: God and the world) is an important indicator that proves the substantial character of Shabistari's thinking, in the context of the logic of sense theory. He totally denies the world, stating that God is the only thing that exists and taking the world as a complete illusion, unlike Ibn Arabi, who insisted on necessity of the two: God and the world as an actor and a recipient.

It could be some kind of evidence for substantial thinking (Persian authors), in contrast to processual thinking of the Arabs. But Shabistari's approach was not neither the only one nor even the dominating one in Persian thought. The ancestor of the ṣūfy maṯ ḥ nawī genre Abu al-Majd Majdud Ibn Adam Sanai (1081–1141), unlike Shabistari, actively uses the opposition "actor – recipient" and its variants ("loving – beloved," "seeking – sought," "cogitative – cogitable," "guiding – guided," etc.):

"King of Kings and the Lord, in truth,
Is the Soul Creator and the Universal Actor.
Everything that is old and new in the Universe (*kawn*),
Is the recipient, and he is the actor for all [of that]" [Sanai 1380 SH, 24].

"The lover is the beginning of the beloved,
The guide (*sābiq*) is opposite to the guided (*masbūq*)" [Sanai 1379 SH, 61].

"The ideas of the Loving and the Beloved can even be mutually identical for Sanai:
Each of the Loving, the Beloved and love in one attribute
Let us make at times Zulaikha, the prophet and Yusuf from Canaan" [Sanai n.d.]

The fact that in some of Sanai's works God and man exchange their places may seem absurd, but it is not so strange when interpreted in the context of processual logic, as we described above in the example of the electrical circuit. It seems to be a good reason to characterize Sanai's thought as processual, but, like Shabistari, Sanai strives for substantial wholeness, from this state of the exchange of categories:

"There is no accepting or accepted besides Him [God],
[No] lover or love, cogitative or cogitable" [Sanai 1379 SH, 92].

All this duality vanishes in the ultimate wholeness of the Divine selfness (*dhāt*), which does not accept duality. Thus vanishes our attempt to interpret Sanai in a completely processual way.

Conclusion

Even from the logic of sense point of view, all this variety of approaches calls for further study and does not let us make any straight correlation between the way of sense-making and the language that the work was written in, or the author's cultural background. However, this does not prevent us from making a typology of rationality based on the logic of sense features of sense formation. A theory is just a theory, as it only proposes a vector, some general direction, and a tendency that gives a general explanation to an amount of empirical data, and the greater the amount of explained data, the more value the theory itself shows.

In the case of rationality in Islamic culture, we still cannot propose a common scheme, which could explain all the variety of material that a researcher deals with. Nevertheless, analysis of such material can do more than complete the empirical basis of the logic of sense theory: it can also improve this theory, clarifying the limits of its applicability, as well as the prospects of its development.

NOTES

(1) That is why we do not have any actual works in English that discuss the Arabic rationality as an alternative to the European type. Most papers that deal with the issue of reason in Islamic culture discuss the importance of ratio for it, without implying the possibility of existence for more than one type of rationality (see, e.g., [Koçak Hemmat 2019]).

(2) Among notable recent works on decolonialism in Al-Jabiri's philosophy, we can list one written by Yasmeen Daifallah [Daifallah 2019].

(3) The mother language of Ibn Sina was Persian, which, unlike Arabic (Semitic), is an Indo-European language. Therefore, an argument regarding the connection between grammar and logic (which implies that in the Arabic-speaking culture there is a specific logic, alternative to the logic of Aristotle) does not work in the case of Ibn Sina. Nevertheless, Ibn Sina's approach to constructing the relationships between the necessary, the possible and the impossible cannot be called typical of peripatetic philosophy. The origins of such a peculiar teaching may become the subject of a separate later study.

(4) On the issue why *qiyās* is not an equivalent of analogy, see: [Smirnov 2017b, 72-92].

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