

IN SEARCH FOR THE INTEGRATION OF HERMENEUTICS AND 'ULUM AL-QUR'AN

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1. Introduction

One of the controversial issues in the field of the interpretation of the Qur'an is whether hermeneutics that is used for the interpretation of the Bible can be used for the interpretation of the Qur'an. Some Muslim scholars point out that it is impossible, or even not allowed for Muslims, to interpret the Qur'an using hermeneutical methods. The most famous reason for this is that hermeneutics does not match with the nature of the Qur'an. Some others tend to see that it can be included into the 'Sciences of the Qur'an' (*'ulum al-Qur'an*). They argue that through it one can even improve the discipline. This essay will show that some hermeneutical theories accord with the Qur'an interpretation and therefore should be part of the *'ulum al-Qur'an*. Before mentioning these theories, it would be to give some reasons why we need hermeneutics.

2. Hermeneutics

First of all, in terms of the definition of hermeneutics (in a broad sense) in the Western tradition of thinking, we find four terms that are related to each other: *Hermeneuse*, hermeneutics (in a sense), philosophical hermeneutics and hermeneutical philosophy. Ben Vedder defines in his work the term *Hermeneuse* as "*die inhaltliche Erklarung oder Interpretation eines Textes, Kunstwerkes oder des Verhaltens einer Person*" (interpretation of a text, arts or behavior of a person).¹ According to this definition, the term refers to the practice of explaining all things that can be or must be interpreted. It does not refer to any exegetical methods. The field that speaks of certain exegetical methods for the purpose of getting 'correct' and deep understanding of an

¹ Ben Vedder, *Was ist Hermeneutik? Ein Weg von der Textdeutung zur Interpretation der Wirklichkeit* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000), p. 9. See also Matthias Jung, *Hermeneutik zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 2001), pp. 19-23.

object is called "hermeneutics".² In "philosophical hermeneutics", the exegetical methods do not take an important position. It rather concerns with things that can be regarded as foundations and requirements of interpretation and its methods. So, its core is to search for conditions that pave the way for the interpretation.³ Hermeneutical philosophy is meant to be a philosophical branch that deals with the interpretation, in which human beings are considered first and foremost as "exegetical beings". Epistemological, ontological, ethical and aesthetical aspects of human beings are mostly discussed in it.⁴

If we look at the Islamic tradition related to the interpretation (i.e. *'ulum al-Qur'an*), we will find that out of the four hermeneutical terms and fields only two terms, namely *Hermeneuse* and hermeneutics in the sense of methodical procedures, are given enough attention by Muslim scholars from different countries and periods. In terms of *Hermeneuse*, or *tafsir/ta'wil* in Arabic, they have produced a huge number of *tafsir*-works, such as *Jami' al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (by at-Tabari), *Mafatih al-Ghayb* (by Fakhr ad-Din ar-Razi), *al-Manar* (by 'Abduh and Rashid Rida) and *Tafsir al-Mishbah* (by Quraish Shihab). To this field belong also some works that are by intention not dedicated purely to the interpretation of the Qur'an, but consist of the interpretation of several Qur'anic verses. Preachings in mosques and other places, in which preachers quote and explain the meaning of Qur'anic verses, belong to *Hermeneuse* as well. In short, all exegetical practices can be included into this term. As in relation to *Hermeneuse*, Muslims have long tradition with Qur'anic hermeneutics. This can be seen from the fact that many scholars (*'ulama*) have written so many books on methods of interpreting the Qur'an, such as *al-Burhan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* (by az-Zarkashi), *al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* (by as-Suyuti), *al-Fawz al-Kabir fi Usul at-Tafsir* (by ad-Dihlawi), *Mabahith fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* (by as-Subhi) etc. However, it seems that the exegetical methods would not be improved by the majority of Muslim scholars in the contemporary

² See Vedder, *Was ist Hermeneutik*, p. 9-10; Jung, *Hermeneutik zur Einführung*, p. 9. On page 20 Jung defines hermeneutics as *Methodenlehre der sachgerechten Auslegung* (method of correct interpretation).

³ See Vedder, *Was ist Hermeneutik?*, pp. 10-11; Jung, *Hermeneutik zur Einführung*, p. 21-22.

⁴ Vedder, *Was ist Hermeneutik?*, p. 11.

period, in which Western scholars have experienced deeply with hermeneutical methods in interpreting texts, the methods which are seen to be more appropriate with modernity and modern civilization. Only few Muslim scholars, such as Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd,⁵ Muhammad Talbi⁶ and Abdullah Saeed,⁷ are eager to develop the Qur'anic hermeneutics by adopting some hermeneutical methods embeded in the Western tradition in order to respond to contemporary challenges.

Unlike *Hermeneuse* and Qur'anic hermeneutics, philosophical hermeneutics and hermeneutical philosophy have not yet received enough attention from Muslim scholars. On the contrary, Western experts of hermeneutics are very familiar with these two fields. I believe that the embryos of the philosophical hermeneutics and hermeneutical philosophy were already proposed by Muslim philosophers and scholars in the past. However, these are not improved by later Muslim generations. In order to develop Islamic theories of interpretation, Muslims have to search for what the Muslim philosophers and scholars proposed in this field and to learn from Western hermeneutics. However, this article would focus on what Muslims can learn from the Western hermeneutics.

3. Muslim Thinkers and Hermeneutics

As stated above, few Muslim thinkers are interested in integrating hermeneutical theories in a broad sense to the *'ulum al-Qur'an*, insofar that they accord with the nature of the Qur'an as divine revelation. This can be accepted for some reasons. First, to adopt knowledge from other cultures was conducted by Muslim scholars in the past. Such philosophers and theologians as al-Kindi, al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd learnt Greek philosophy, Indo-Persian sciences and technology. Thank to this openness, they could establish 'advanced' Islamic civilization. Second, hermeneutic and *'ulum al-Qur'an* have the same object, i.e. text. Third, many hermeneutical theories may strengthen what is found in the *'ulum al-Qur'an*. Fourth, through hermeneutics (in a broad sense), the *'ulum al-Qur'an* can be developed more

⁵ See Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Ishkaliyyat al-Qira'a wa Aliyyat at-Ta'wil*.

⁶ See Muhammad Talbi, *'Iyal Allah* (Tunis: Saras li-l-Nashr, 1992).

⁷ See Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

sophisticatedly, especially if the field of 'ulum al-Qur'an is combined with philosophical hermeneutics and hermeneutical philosophy. It will not only represent a pedagogic knowledge of the interpretative strategies, but also become stronger and more advanced due to philosophical thoughts. Fifth, the interpretative product would be more appropriate for contemporary needs, if one combines between exegetical methods found in the 'ulum al-Qur'an and those in the hermeneutics.

4. Text and Context: Gracia

Although the usage of hermeneutics in the interpretation of the Qur'an is plausible, it does not mean that all hermeneutical theories can be applied. One should search for some theories that are in accordance with the nature of the Qur'an as divine revelation. One theory that does not accord with its nature is, for example, that one should go into the psyche of the author in order to understand correctly a text he composes. The theory that is proposed by Friedrich Schleiermacher is impossible to be applied to the Qur'an, because its author is Allah and no one can go into His psyche.

However, there are many applicable theories. Here I would like to give two examples: Jorge J. E. Gracia's and Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics. Gracia builds a quite comprehensive concept of hermeneutics. In his book, *A Theory of Textuality*, he discusses the fundamental issues on hermeneutics. He begins his book by proposing the nature of text, which is the object of his hermeneutics. Having discussed it, he continues to explore a theory of understanding before focusing on the nature and method of interpretation. In this article, I outline explore his theories of interpretation and how far they can be used for developing Qur'anic hermeneutics.

In relation to the concept of text, Gracia defines a text as a historical entity, in that it is produced by the author or emerges in a certain time and place for a certain purpose. Thus, it is always part of the past, and when we interact with it, someone should play a role as a historian and try to 'go into' the past. The problem arising is that the interpreter almost does not have direct access to the meaning of the text. The interpreter only has access to the entities used by the author of a text in conveying certain message

or meaning. So, an effort to discover the historical meaning is a fundamental problem in hermeneutics. Gracia tries to propose a solution to this hermeneutical problem by "the development of textual interpretation" whose aim is to bridge the gap between a situation in which a text was produced and a contemporary one in which an interpreter who tries to discover the meaning of a historical text. Before elaborating his thoughts more deeply, his idea on the nature of interpretation is first explained here.

Gracia explains that "interpretation" is an English term from the Latin "*interpretatio*" derived from the verb *interpretes* which etymologically meant "to spread abroad". He asserts that the word *interpretes* also means an agent between two parties, a broker or negotiator, and an explainer, expounder and translator. The Latin term *interpretatio* comes to at least three possible meaning: (1) "meaning", so that to give interpretation is equivalent to give the meaning of whatever is being interpreted, (2) "translation" (a translation of a text from a certain language to other), and (3) "explanation" and by this an interpretation is meant to bring out what is hidden and unclear, to make plain what is irregular, and to provide an account of something or other.⁸ Gracia realizes that the object of interpretation is essentially not only a text, but also facts, behavior, people, and even the world. He asserts however that hermeneutics he builds in his two major books is a textual hermeneutics, in which the terminological meaning of interpretation is as below.

Gracia states that terminologically, interpretation can be defined into three meaning. *First*, an interpretation is the same thing as an understanding one has of the meaning of a text.⁹ In this case, he refers to, for example, Hirsch.¹⁰ In some cases, understanding is indeed only one, for example: $2+2=4$. However, in many cases, interpretation is indicated by two things: (1) a certain interpretation is not the only possible and valid understanding of a text, and (2) the interpreter's subjectivity plays

⁸ See Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality: the Logic and Epistemology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 147.

⁹ Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality*, p. 148.

¹⁰ See E.D. Hirsch, Jr., "Three Dimensions of Hermeneutics," *New Literary History* 3 (1972), p. 246.

significant role in interpretation.¹¹ With regard to this matter, Gracia states that the truth of interpretation can be plural. *Second*, an interpretation is a process or activity whereby one develops an understanding of a text. In this meaning, an interpretation involves decoding to the text to understand its meaning, and this understanding is not to be identical with the meaning itself.¹² *Third*, an interpretation refers to texts which involve the three things, (1) *interpretandum* (the text being interpreted), (2) the interpreter, and (3) *interpretans* (the commentary added to it). *Interpretandum* is a historical text, while *interpretans* is the commentary one added by the interpreter, so that *interpretandum* is more easily understood.¹³ Thus, interpretation consists of both of *interpretandum* and *interpretans*.

According to Gracia, the general function of interpretation is 'to create in the contemporary audiences' mind understanding to the text being interpreted'. He divides it to the three specific functions, i.e. historical function, meaning function and implicative function. First, an interpretation functions to produce in the contemporary audiences the understanding of the author and historical audiences to a text. This is the historical function. The second function is to produce in the contemporary audiences the understanding, in which they can understand the meaning of the text, whether or not the meaning is intended by the author or historical audiences or not. The third function is to produce an understanding so that contemporary audiences can understand the implication of the meaning of the text being interpreted.¹⁴

As stated before, each interpretation, according to Gracia, must contain information/explanation added to the *interpretandum*. It then brings out what Gracia called as 'interpreter's dilemma', especially related to the function of

¹¹ See Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality*, p. 148. See also Ernst Konrad Specht, "Literary-Critical Interpretation-Psychoanalytical Interpretation," translated by John M. Conolly dan Thomas Keutner, in John M. Conolly dan Thomas Keutner (ed.), *Hermeneutics versus Science? Three German Views* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 154.

¹² Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality*, p. 148.

¹³ Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality*, p. 148-149. The concept of differentiation between understanding and making understandable found also in Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics*, p. 96. This differentiation is rejected by Hans Georg Gadamer dalam *Truth and Method*, p. 274.

¹⁴ See Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality*, p. 155-164.

historical interpretation. In one hand, the additional commentary indicates the distortion of the text being interpreted, and on the other, without *interpretans*, the interpretation may be not be able to make contemporary audiences understand the text being interpreted for there are cultural and time distance between them and the text. To solve this problem or dilemma, Gracia proposes 'the Principle of Proportional Understanding'. This principle requires that the interpretation must firstly produce the objective meaning. Gracia argues that the understanding of the contemporary audiences through interpretation must similar to that of the author of the text and the historical audiences. Thus, the main aim of interpretation is:

To create a text that produces in the audience (the contemporary audience) acts of understandings that are intentionally the same to those produced by the historical text in the historical author and the historical audience of the historical text.¹⁵

Furthermore, an interpreter has the right to develop understanding as the continuation of the objective understanding, so that the text being interpreted has the significance and is applied in accordance with the time and place in which it is interpreted. It is this development of the meaning to which Gracia refers by the meaning and implicative function.

Gracia then divides the interpretation into two categories: (1) textual interpretation, and (2) non-textual interpretation. Whether an interpretation is classified to the first or second one depends on the aim of interpretation. Gracia said that:

A textual interpretation is precisely the sort of interpretation we have been discussing in this chapter. It is an interpretation of a text that adds to the text whatever is thought by the interpreter to be necessary to get certain results in contemporary minds in relation to the text, when those results are taken in one of three ways: First, as the re-creation of the acts of understanding of the historical author and the historical audience, that is, as the understanding of the meaning the historical author and the historical audience had; second, as the production of acts of understanding whereby the meaning of the text, regardless of what the historical author and historical audience thought, is

¹⁵ Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality*, p. 157.

understood by the contemporary audience; and third, as the production of acts of understanding whereby the implications of the meaning of the text are understood by the contemporary audience.¹⁶

The definition above shows that textual interpretation is an effort to grasp the meaning of the text being interpreted (*interpretandum*). On the basis of the reality of interpretation, textual interpretation aims to grasp the original or historical meaning of *interpretandum*, as intended by the author and the historical audiences, to produce a new meaning by the interpreter assuming that the interpreter has a role in producing the meaning for the context in which the text is interpreted, and to grasp the implication of a text. Gracia's exploration of the three interpretative functions and result of interpretation here does not relate to the concept of interpretive truth, but merely to the reality of interpretation.

As for the second type of interpretation, i.e. non-textual interpretation, he defines that "it is one that, although it may be based on a textual interpretation, has something else as its primary aim even if such an aim involves or is a kind of understanding."¹⁷ To him, this non-textual interpretation does not function or aim to reveal the meaning of the text and, or the implication of the meaning of text, as is intended by the textual interpretation, but to reveal what beyond the textual meaning. According to Gracia, historical interpretation in broad meaning, in which an interpreter tries to add some historical accounts that are not mentioned in the text under interpretation, is one example of the non-textual interpretation. Historical interpretation does not only interact with the meaning and implication of the text being interpreted, or in Amin al-Khuli's terms "*ma fi n-nass* (what is inside the text), but also reveals and explains "*ma hawla n-nass* (what is surrounding the text).¹⁸ Gracia's statement below is interested to be considered:

The ultimate aim of the historian is to produce an account of the past and that account includes not only textual interpretations,

¹⁶ Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality*, p. 164.

¹⁷ Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality*, p. 164-165.

¹⁸ See Amin al-Khuli, *Manahij Tajdid fi n-Nahw wa-l-Balaghah wa-t-Tafsir wa-l-Adab* (Kairo: Dar al-Ma'rifah, 1961), p. 312-317.

but also the reconstruction of the larger context in which the text was produced, the ideas that the historical author did not put down in writing or express in speech, the relations among various texts from the same author and from other authors, the causal connections among texts, and so on.¹⁹

In sum, the historical interpretation and other non-textual interpretations, such as psychological, philosophical, legal, scientific, literary, and inspirational interpretations, aim to produce understanding which involves not only the text being interpreted, its meaning and implication, but also its relation to others.

When we carefully look at the theory of the nature of interpretation proposed by Gracia, we will come to the conclusion that interpretation, textual or non-textual, is composed of some other information that is added to the authorial meaning. This is closely related to the theory of interpretive truth.

For Garcia, the truth value of interpretation can be plural. The questions arising are what interpretive truth is and whether it is possible to say that an interpretation is correct or incorrect of true or false. He insists that it is not easy to determine the truth value of an interpretation, especially textual interpretation, for, as it has been mentioned above, it has three functions. Someone who conducts a historical interpretation claims that her or his interpretation is true, for he or she has produced in contemporary audiences an understanding that is the same as what was understood and intended by the author of a text being interpreted. One who focuses on the meaning function states that his or her interpretation is true, for he or she succeeds in producing in the contemporary audiences an understanding of the "significance" of a text being interpreted for contemporary period. Meanwhile, an interpretation stressing on its implicative function considers his or her interpretation as true, because it produces an understanding of the implication of the text's meaning to contemporary audiences. Accordingly, Gracia says that it is not relevant to determine whether an interpretation is correct or false. What is relevant is to say that such interpretation is more effective or less effective, or more appropriate or less

¹⁹ Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality*, p. 165.

appropriate.²⁰ The relativity of exegetical truth here does not tend to 'negative relativity', unlimited relativity. This relativity of truth does not mean that everybody is allowed to interpret a text on the basis of his or her own willing or subjectivity, unlimitedly. An interpreter who wants to know the original or historical meaning of a text should analyze the language used at the time in which it emerged and pay attention to its historical context. Moreover, when one is willing to extend the interpretation into its meaning and implicative, he or she is subjects to a certain rule, so that his or her explanation still has close connection to the original meaning.

On the basis of the nature and reality of interpretation explained above, Gracia argues that interpretive truth is not monolithic, but plural. The plurality of interpretive truth is not only related to the non-literal interpretation in which an interpreter has more roles in determining the meaning, but also to the textual interpretation. The meaning and implication functions of the interpretation admit interpretive differences among interpreters due to the diversity of their horizons. Gracia shows the example that, in the reality of interpretation, Aristotle's works are interpreted by many people. In this case, Gracia agrees with Immanuel Kant who argues that we will never reach the 'final and definitive descriptions in science and philosophy.'²¹ This statement is in line with what is said by Issa J. Boullata, an emeritus professor in McGill University, when he describes the reality in the Qur'anic interpretation. He says, "Meaning has been shown to depend on so many elements in the text and its context, as well as in the relationship of both to other texts and contexts, that a single interpretation can no longer be considered to be sufficient or claim finality for itself."²² Jane D McAuliffe says, "No exegetical agenda is ever finally fixed. The last word has yet to be spoken."²³

The plurality of textual interpretation does not mean that interpretive truth is relative and unlimited, or in Gracia's term,

²⁰ Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality*, p. 173.

²¹ Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality*, pp. 168-169.

²² Issa J. Boullata, "Introduction," in Issa J. Boullata (ed.), *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000), p. xi.

²³ Jane D. McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: an Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 292.

'infinite regress', for each interpretation must contain *interpretandum* (the text being interpreted) and *interpretans* (additional commentary which is still related to *interpretandum*),²⁴ in which the additional commentary depends on many factors, such as the expertise of the interpreter and his or her background and experience. It also does not mean that all interpretations are true, in the sense that an interpreter interprets according merely to his or her will. An interpretation will be considered true as long as the additional commentary (1) explains the intention of the text being interpreted, and (2) is not contrary in principle with what is intended by the text.

That an interpretation must be composed of *interpretandum* and *interpretans* indicates that, for Gracia, it must contain objectivity and subjectivity at the same time. It raises the question of to what extent the subjectivity of an interpreter and the objectivity of *interpretandum* play a significant role in an interpretation. On that basis, an interpretation will be considered highly subjective, if an interpreter pays only little attention to the language of a text being interpreted and its historical factors having role in determining the meaning of the text. An interpretation is regarded as highly objective, if in the interpretation *interpretandum* and other factors determining the historical meaning of the text become the priority of an interpreter.²⁵

5. Gracia's Hermeneutics and Uloom al-Qur'an

Understanding Gracia's hermeneutical theory and method, I would prove that his thought is beneficial to develop the 'Qur'anic sciences' (*'ulum al-Qur'an*) as well as the exegetical activity. I would discuss some significance of the integration between Gracia's hermeneutics and *Uloom al-Qur'an*. In this regard, this integration has, at least, two benefits: (1) the possibility of developing a philosophical theory of the Qur'an interpretation, and (2) the strengthening of interpretation ethics.

We acknowledge that it is difficult to find philosophical works on *'ulum al-Qur'an* in Islamic world. Only few works

²⁴ Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality*, p. 171.

²⁵ Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality*, p. 174.

discuss about the subject. On the other, philosophical hermeneutics, a branch in General hermeneutics which discusses fundamental issues related to interpretive activity (*tafsir*, *exegesis*, *Auslegung*; *Hermeneuse*) and method of interpretation, has rapidly developed in the West. Such works as *Truth and Method* by Hans Georg Gadamer and *A Theory of Interpretation* by Gracia are just examples. Further, Western scholars, such as Heidegger in his Work *Sein und Zeit*, have achieved what they called hermeneutical philosophy.

The small number of such works in the Islamic world is partly caused by a pragmatic factor, in a sense that '*ulum al-Qur'an* is merely viewed as the pedagogical aspect in the field of Qur'anic interpretation. It only accommodates what are applicable in the interpretive practice. Scholars of '*ulum al-Qur'an* do not consider important the addition of philosophical aspects to this methodical one. The embryo of philosophical hermeneutics, however, has been found in some classical works in Islamic history, such as *Qanun al-Ta'wil* by al-Ghazali dan *Fashl al-Maqal* by Ibn Rusyd. Nowadays, some works of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Hasan Hanafi and Muhammed Abid al-Jabiri can be classified as works on '*ulum al-Qur'an*, which have philosophical characteristics. This model needs to be developed.

To develop '*ulum al-Qur'an*, Muslim scholars need to study what have been thought by some Muslim scholars in the past as well as by scholars of hermeneutics of the Western tradition. To pay attention to hermeneutical thoughts from the Islamic tradition is needed, because, in addition to the fact that one would find the embryo of such philosophical hermeneutics, the thought are rooted in the same, or similar, theological tradition. The 'necessity' of taking into account the Western thought on this field is based on the fact that contemporary scholars of hermeneutics in the West have succeeded in achieving a huge number of hermeneutical theories. Moreover, they have come to what they called hermeneutical philosophy. These are expected to strengthen the position of '*ulum al-Qur'an* in the future.

One example of how some aspects of '*ulum al-Qur'an* can be developed concerns with the definition of the term *tafsir*. In the books of the discipline, the term *tafsir*, which etymologically means *kasyf* (to reveal) and *bayan* (to explain), is defined as: "*fahm*

kitab Allah al-munazzal 'ala nabiyyihi Muhammad wa-bayan ma'anihi wa-istikhrāj ahkamīhi wa-hikamīhi" ²⁶ (to understand the book of God, to explain its meaning and to extract its laws and wisdom). The above-mentioned definition of *tafsir* proposed by Badr al-Din al-Zarkashi shows us three substantial activities in the interpretation of the Qur'an: i.e. (1) to understand (*fahm, verstehen*), (2) to explain (*bayan, erklāeren*) and (3) to extract (*istikhrāj, extrahieren*). These three components have essentially covered substantial matters in the activity of interpretation. However, they are not explained sophisticatedly. The question of 'what is the distinction between these three words is not found in the work of al-Zarkashi.. Probably, he wanted to let his readers to check them in other works. However, without direct explanation, the readers may not realize the significant distinction of them. It is clear that Gracia's exploration of the nature of understanding and interpretation (including the definition and functions of interpretation) could complete the explanation of the definition of *tafsir*. Gracia explores the term 'understanding' deeply. He says: "Understanding is not, however, the same as meaning. Understanding is a kind of mental act whereby one grasps something, which in the case of texts is their meaning."²⁷ Understanding is a mental act, an effort to grasp the meaning of the text. Thus, understanding is psychological and personal, in the sense that it is on the interpreter's mind before he or she expresses it publicly, in a written or oral form.

Bayan (explanation) is the continuation of *fahm* (understanding). After an understanding of a text emerges in the interpreter's mind or soul, he or she continues another activity, i.e. to explain the meaning of the text by analyzing possible aspects that are related to it, such as linguistic and literary ones, in order to deliver its message to the public through a written or oral form. This activity is called in Arabic *bayan*. Unfortunately, al-Zarkasyi does not deeply explore the term *bayan* in his definition of *tafsir*. Probably he did not need to do it for a certain reason. Therefore, it is then the responsibility of contemporary scholars to complete this lack. The theory of the function of interpretation, especially

²⁶ Badr al-Din al-Zarkasyi, *al-Burhan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Maktabat Dar al-Turath, n.d.), 1:13.

²⁷ Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality*, p. 103.

historical function and meaning one, can help us to explain the form of *bayan*. Likewise, the concept *istikhrāj ahkāmihī wa-hikāmihī* can be elaborated by the term 'implicative function of interpretation'. In sum, there should be such explanation of the definition of *tafsir* in the Islamic tradition, for it really helps the readers to understand its aspects. Yet, we are difficult to find them in the works of 'ulum al-Qur'an. By integrating the hermeneutical theory, in this case the theory of Gracia, into the Islamic tradition, we can construct a more sophisticated and deeper definition of *tafsir*.

The second benefit of the integration of hermeneutics into the 'ulum al-Qur'an is that it may develop the ethics of interpretation. For example, such theories as those of pluralistic truth, diversity of interpretative functions and subjectivity-objectivity in the interpretation can play an important role in avoiding the truth claim. Recently, fundamentalist groups have emerged in many places in the Islamic world. They consider their own interpretation of religious texts as the only true. This kind of view and attitude is contrary to the ethics of interpretation. This ethic says that an interpreter should not claim that his or her interpretation is the only true interpretation, for in fact there are many factors which limit an interpreter to come to the only exegetical truth. Practically, some earlier scholars had provided us lessons to avoid the truth claim. Al-Imam al-Syafi'i, for example, said: "What I think is true, but it is possibly false, while what others think is false, but it may also be true". His statement indicates that he did not regard himself as the most correct. Mutual respect among scholars of Islamic law, *sufis*, and Muslim philosophers in the past also showed clearly that they were in the correct ethic of interpretation. Such ethic should continue to be strengthened and developed in the current situation, so that we have tolerant attitude towards different interpretations.

6. Gadamer and 'Ulum al-Qur'an

Another example of hermeneutical theories that might develop 'ulum al-Qur'an is what Hans-Georg Gadamer mention in his works. He proposes the theories of 'historically effected

awareness',²⁸ 'pre-understanding',²⁹ 'fusion of horizons'³⁰ and 'application'³¹ proposed by Hans Georg Gadamer. In short, we can say that, according to these theories, everyone has his own horizon of understanding which results from historical situations in which he lives. This horizon creates pre-understanding, through which he can understand a text and make 'dialogue' with it. However, this pre-understanding should not impose on his understanding of the text in order that he does not misunderstand it. In reverse, he should let the text speak to him. He should also be aware that the text has its own horizon. So, if one interprets a text from the past, he must consider its historicity, meaning that he must look at its historical situations. In this case, both horizons have their own position and must be fused in the process of understanding. The awareness of the historicity of a text can prevent interpreters from misunderstandings. Thus, the pre-understanding of the interpreter and his/her contemporary horizons of understanding could impose on the interpretation without any proper reflection. This was already emphasized by Gadamer:

Das [d.h. den Text zu verstehen] bedeutet aber, dass die eigenen Gedanken des Interpreten in die Wiedererweckung des Textsinnes immer schon mit eingegangen sind. Insofern ist der eigene Horizont des Interpreten bestimmend, aber auch er nicht wie ein eigener Standpunkt, den man festhält oder durchsetzt, sondern mehr wie eine Meinung und Möglichkeit, die man ins Spiel bringt und aufs Spiel setzt und die mit dazu hilft, sich wahrhaft anzuzeigen, was in dem Texte gesagt ist.³²

The interpretation of a text, Gadamer argues, is like a conversation in which an interviewer tries to understand those who are being interviewed: "Die Auslegung ist wie das Gespräch

²⁸ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, pp. 306-307.

²⁹ Gadamer, *Das Problem des historischen Bewusstseins*, p. 5.

³⁰ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 367.

³¹ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 313; Idem., "Text and Interpretation," pp. 393-394.

³² It [i.e. to understand the text], however, means that the thoughts of the interpreter are always brought in the reawakening of the meaning of the text. To this extent, the horizon of the interpreter could be influential, but it is not like a specific position that must be enforced firmly; it is rather an opinion and a possibility that one brings into play, and through its help, it is truly shown what is said or meant in the texts. See Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 392.

ein durch die Dialektik von Frage und Antwort geschlossener Kreis"³³ (the interpretation is like the conversation through the dialectic of question and answer closed circle). This comparison aims to avoid any misunderstanding of what someone says or what a text means. In conversation, this avoidance is easier than that in the interpretation of a text, but the hermeneutical mechanism is the same. The task of an interpreter resembles the task of a journalist: to get true information about what happened and what someone said. In other words, the first task of interpretation is to find out the original historical meaning which is in fact something fixed and immutable. The other task of interpretation is to explain how the Qur'an can be of importance for Muslims living in the moment of interpretation (i.e. in the present and future), in which the challenges and situations are or will be different from those at the time of the revelation.

In terms of religious and moral texts that should be implemented in the life, Gadamer adds the theory that these texts should be reinterpreted by paying more attention to their main messages ("meaningful sense", *Sinngemäß*), not to their literal meaning. This represents balanced hermeneutics that gives fair position to the objectivity of the text and the subjectivity of the interpreter. To my mind, these theories are very suitable with the interpretation of the Qur'an. They accord, for example, with the theories of *asbab an-nuzul* (occasions of revelation), *naskh* (abrogation), *makki-madani* (Meccan and Medinan revelation) etc. Even, through the hermeneutical explanation these theories of 'ulum al-Qur'an become more 'elegant' and reasonable.

³³ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 392.

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