

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE ISLAMIC WORLDVIEW AS THE MANIFESTATION OF *AL-TAWHĪD*

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Abstract

Islamic Worldview as an embodiment of *ṭawḥīd* is the main foundation of man in pursuing a goal that leads to perfect happiness (*al-sa'ādah*). It provides concepts that complement and prepare the way for this life and after. This research concerns the idea of worldview as a manifestation of *ṭawḥīd*. Using library research methods, it was found that: (1) Islamic Worldview provides an overview of two dimensions of life: the world and the hereafter; (2) Islamic Worldview emphasizes the importance of moral education which could produce in the human soul various emotions and sentiments that ensure the operation of the moral criteria by inspiration from the self.

Keywords: *Islamic Worldview, Moral Education, Fiṭrah, Īmān.*

A. The Worldview of Islam: An Introduction

The worldview of Islam affirms “only One Reality and Truth, and all Islamic values pertain ultimately to it alone. Any endeavour towards perfection by Muslim, individually and collectively, is invariably determined by the worldview that projects the vision of the One Reality and confirms the affirmation of the same Truth.”¹ The One Reality has different modes. It cause the actualization of other diverse and multiple and evanescent realities. The affirmation of existence and distinction between the One Reality i.e. Being (*Wujūd* or God) and external existent (*mawjūd*); between unity (*waḥdah*) and

¹ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM), 1978), 84.

Multiplicity (*katsrah*); between Subsistence (*baqā'*) and Evanescence (*fanā'*) does not mean a dualistic worldview for the two are not of equal in status

metaphysically and ontologically. Rather, one is Existence necessary by Itself, pertains to absolute Existence, while the other is existent that is made necessary by the Existence of the absolute, i.e. concrete existence of the world of empirical things which pertains to pure non-existence; one is independent and subsistent while the other is dependent upon it; the one is absolute and the other relative; the one is by Himself manifest and brings others into manifestation; and one by Himself visible makes other things visible.² With this understanding, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas observes that:

In this way in practice Muslims have been able to live their lives in accordance with the belief without suffering any change to be wrought that would disrupt the harmony of Islam and of their own selves; without succumbing to the devastating touch of time, or to the attendant challenges in the vicissitudes of worldly existence.³

In order to attain the vision of the One Reality, we must have correct attitude towards God by knowing His nature (i.e. an aspect of God when He is related to His creation) and knowing how to behave towards Him. We must accordingly practice a proper moral introspection (*murāqabat al-qalb*), and progress from mere letter of the profession of faith to its complete understanding through a deeper reflection on its meaning. These will possibly produces good effect in man's internal state and actualizes correct inner self disposition, which becomes the principle of movement to the body and give derive to a proper virtue. In this manner, Muslims have dealt, and

² Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 81- 84.

³ Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 84 -85.

continue to deal with the issues of intellectual, linguistic, cultural and religious pluralism; with real tolerance and justice, while maintaining their values that cannot be weakened by relativism.⁴ As the result, Muslims can be sure of the place and function of the spiritual *vis a vis* the material, this world *vis a vis* the next, of man *vis a vis* woman in religion and society, of individual and collective responsibility. This is due to the nature of the worldview of Islam⁵ which is: (1) authentic and final that points to what is ultimate; (2) its fundamental elements are permanently established; and (3) encompass existence and life altogether in total perspective.

The worldview of Islam is not expectations or speculations. It is something that had been implanted by God in our heart. We cannot construct it, neither to steer it with our intellect. The method to realize it is through the enlightened heart (i.e. the heart that had been enlightened by the divine light (*nur al-ma'rifat*) which involves man's returning (*al-raj'*) from the world of dominion (*al-mulk*) to the spiritual world of sovereignty (*al-malakūt*). The heart is an aspect of the soul (*al-nafs*) which occurs in it the firm believing which characterized *īmān*, and which confirms and affirms the truth by *tasdiq*. The heart is also the spiritual organ of cognition by which the soul perceives spiritual truth. It has been endowed with a character that can intuitively recognize the right and wrong through the guidance of Revelation. It is also the intellect (*al-'aql*) operating at a higher spiritual level of

⁴ Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *An Outline of the Educational Philosophy and Methodology of al-Attas*, p. 40.

⁵ For an excellent elaboration on the fundamental elements of the worldview of Islam, see Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1995), 1, 39.

experience.⁶ In this case, the heart adheres to that which it knows, and fully grasps it, and is of such nature so as to exclude all possibility of the opposite.

The journey leading to transcendental reality could be possible if we subjugate the ego self with sincere exertion and continuously performing transformative spiritual actions (*'amal al-Ṣaliḥāt*). At certain stage, the man will become absent to himself and experiences the intuition of existence (*dzaug*) when his heart presence (*ḥudūr*) to God whom he ever contemplates in deep meditation. When the heart agitated (*wajd*) by the vision of God, the heart will expand (*bast*) and it calms the heart by way of contemplation (*musyāhadah*). By God's grace, it will remove the covering from one's state of being, or cognition (*'ilm*), or vision (*'ayn*) that enables one to feel, to know, and to see the reality and truth.

Therefore, the worldview of Islam that forms the value system and projects the vision of the One Reality and confirms the affirmation of the same Truth is, according to al-Attas:

... not based upon philosophical speculation formulated mainly from observation of the data of sensible experience, of what is visible to the eye; nor is it restricted to *kawn*, which is the world of sensible experience, the world of created things.⁷

It is contrary to secular worldview which must of necessity be changed in correspondence with changing circumstances because it is not based on revelation but on philosophical speculations which are syakk, uncertain, and doubtful.⁸ In this manner, secular worldview was a result of

⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Ihya 'Ulum al-Din* (Egypt, 1346 A.H., 4 v), vol. III.

⁷ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, 1.

⁸ For further enlightening explanation and elaboration on Western secular worldview, see *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, 1 -39.

misunderstanding of *al-Tawhīd*. In his elaboration on the worldview of Islam, al-Attas expounds that:

The worldview of Islam is characterized by an authenticity that points to what is ultimate, and it projects a view of reality and truth that encompasses existence and life altogether in total perspective whose fundamental elements are permanently established.⁹

With regard to the system of value, he asserts that:

....the system of value are not merely derived from cultural and philosophical elements aided by science, but one whose original source is Revelation, confirmed by religion, affirmed by intellectual and intuitive principles.¹⁰

The function of the worldview of Islam is to regulate human activities in accordance to the concept of *fiṭrah* manifesting the meaningful, right, correct, and proper actions as against the erroneous and wrong ones. Al-Attas elucidates the meaning of *fiṭrah* by saying:

Fiṭrah is the pattern according to which God has created all things. It is God's manner of creating, *sunnat Allāh*, and everything fits each into its pattern created for it and sets in its proper place. It is the Law of God. Submission to it brings harmony, for it means realization of what is inherent in one's true nature; opposition to it brings discord, for it means realization of what is extraneous to one's true nature. It is *cosmos* as opposed to *chaos*, justice as opposed to injustice.¹¹

⁹ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, 4 – 5.

¹⁰ Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 4.

¹¹ Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 57 – 58. In synthesizing the idea of *fiṭrah* upheld by Ibn al-'Arabi, Mohd Sani stresses that, "mankind, in their natural state of being (*fiṭrah*), affirm the existence, oneness and transcendence of their Creator. Originally, this affirmation consists in the Primordial Covenant between them and God (*al-mītsāq*), which pertain to the event when He brought forth the Children of Adam's offspring from their loins, and call upon them to testify concerning themselves: "Am I not your Lord (*Rabb*)?" – to which they answered: "Yea, indeed, we do bear witness thereto!" (al-Qur'an, *al-A'raf*, 7: 172). See his

As for man, returning to *fiṭrah* means to live up to the requirement of his covenant with God, to render his absolute obedience to God, to function according to His laws, and to strive in full awareness in fulfilling his duty as the servant of God and the vicegerent of God on earth. He will realize that any adverse conditions would spoil the soul and cause spiritual deform. This realization could be possible if he is always conscious of his covenanted self that had bear witness of the Divine Existence and Unity when he is not yet in a material or corporeal sense, when the soul is still in the form of thing that cannot being divided, fixed in God's knowledge and always articulating what they are. It happened in the world of spirit which was far beyond our own power to ever imagining such an affirmation.

The primordial covenant is having a moral and religious significance. It binding and determining our purpose, attitude and action with respect to ourselves in our relation with God. This is the binding and determining in religion which entails true submission (*al-Islām*). In this case, knowledge and religion are natural correlates in the nature of man, the original nature in which God has created him (*al-fiṭrah*). Therefore, man's purpose is to know and to serve Him (*'ibādah*), and our duty is to be obedience to Him (*ṭā'ah*). In accordance to this, man will be suffered the agony if he rejects God. However, he can find peace, salvation, tranquility, ease and satisfaction through belief in God and if he aspires to always try to remain attach to Him. This is the way of how God explains and expound humanity, and this also the way how He issues commands and communicate truth in us.

article, "Ibn al-'Arabi on Fundamental Religious Notions: Natural Disposition (*Fitrah*), Divine Law (*Syar*), True Faith (*Īmān*) and Disbelief (*Kufr*)", in *al-Shajarah*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1999), 93 – 121.

B. The Worldview of Islam and Its Implications on *īmān*

Man cannot just insist the centrality of action and good deeds by neglecting the importance of *īmān*. At the same time, believing in God's existence and His oneness does not guarantee salvation. We must do something corresponding to what that He requires revealed through His prophet. There is something about *īmān* that cannot be explained by reason and science but believe in that does not make us irrational. It is just a matter of we accept it or not. By not having proper *īmān*, we will become indifference in our focus towards the nurturing of praiseworthy attitude and more apt to push us to gratify our passions and evil inclinations.

īmān will bring in consciousness in oneself about limit and proper place. For example, by knowing about limit, it will make man accept the limit of reason in thinking about God, and also know His place in the system of existence. Knowing the limit and proper place of something is wisdom. It will lead man to proper submission (*aslama*) and subject totally to His will. *īmān* also will bring in man a sense of true value and purpose in life which correspond to one's ultimate destiny known to him by God through Revelation.

The real act of faith is not performed by reason. It springs from the divine light that has enclosed within man's heart at the time when Allah breathes His spirit into him. This is the light of *ma'rifah*¹² which reflects the way of how God revealed Himself to us to a limited extent. Therefore, our

¹² *Ma'rifah* is the special kind of knowledge initiated by and dependent upon *īmān*. It is a God-given insight.

individuality is not separate from this light. With respect to the *mu'min*, this light penetrates all of his feeling and consciousness, reason, emotion, and motive. It infuse and enlighten every faculty of his soul whether rational soul or animal soul, and it also control their deed and thought. It will make them devote their mind exclusively to Him, and through the medium of proper and right actions, they could become communion with Him. Spiritual communion with God will effects the senses and strengthened the heart. Through this way, the person will be endowed by God with insight which enables him to see the invisible realms. Someone asked Sayyidina Othman, "will anyone after Rasulullah receive revelation from God? His answer was that, "None will receive it in the way that Rasulullah did, but beware of the insight of the faithful for he sees with the light of Allah".

The resistance to this light is from the elements of visible world because what we see are veils whether veils of imagination or veils of preconception. The true and real meanings and understandings of it cannot be attained unless the veils are being lifted until divine light penetrate our heart and enable the eye of the heart to see things as they really are. However, the eye of the heart can be blinded by arrogance, egotism, desires, and lust. The person of this nature of heart is like the blind who feel the warmth of the sunshine but unable to see its light.

Īmān reflects the man's intimate relationship with the only One, the focus of all reverences and gratitude, the only source of values. What Allah desires of man become value for him and become the ultimate end of his endeavour. The main implication from *īmān* is the total, vigorous and positive commitment to His guidance which involves knowing with certitude, believing without doubt, complete obedience, perfect submission, and

devotion at level of excellence (*iḥsān*). It will bring good effect to the intellect whereby man will be able to think about the consequences and thus subdue the appetites that drive man to seek immediate gratification of his basest instinct. In the same manner, it will protect oneself against the harmful or evil consequences of one's conduct whether in this world or in the *ākhirah*. In this case, the man's heart will be pervaded by fear that comes from an acute sense of religious responsibility. He will always observe the limit established by God that not to be violated and transgressed. Should it been transgressed, he will repent and redress the imbalance in his personality.

In so far as the aspect of certitude is concerned, the degree of *īmān* must be to the extent of rejecting totally the possibility of disbelief based on definite and true knowledge, not on delusions and heresies. The soul must definitely convinced of the truth, become at rest and confirms it, and by no means feels the possibility of its opposite. This is the only way man can possibly receive direct and immediate apprehension of the existence of God and of religious truth, and accordingly, control over his lower self. When this is being achieved, it will form the foundation of pious actions (*ʿamal al-ṣāliḥāt*) which can save man from committing corrupted practices (*fasād*) or any futile actions because he has the ability to think about consequences and thus subdue the appetites that drive man to seek immediate gratification with all immoral means. According to Rasullullah, this is the sign of a wise man, the one who able to take control over his self and works for what will comes after death. In due to that, he reminded us not to involve with things that do not benefit us because this is the sign that Allah has turned away from man.

C. The Worldview of Islam and Its Significant Relation with Knowledge and Virtue

Knowledge is not neutral to values. Its true value is based on its significance in the sense of *Syarī'ah*. In order for knowledge to be exact, precise, definite, and right, it must be qualified with a religious moral dimension provided by Revelation because the true knowledge is with God alone (see al-Qur'an: *Sūrat al-Aḥqāf*, 46: 29). Therefore, true knowledge is certain and secure from any error, and it is absolute and identical with revelation. Truth is disclosed in it in such a manner that no doubt will remain along with it and no way that it could be denied. Those who are endued with true knowledge will observe the correct measure proportionate to his self (*fiṭrah*), and he will stand firm on justice.¹³ Further, he will be able to deal with everything in the precisely correct manner in accordance to its real nature so all will maintain in order. On that account, it is necessary for man to differentiate between harmful and useful knowledge in order to avoid error and confusion, especially when it is involving judgment between right and wrong, truth and falsehood.

In Islam, knowledge precedes will and power. Even God's act of creating (*khalaqa*) signifies the idea of knowledge because through His Will and Power of creating, each of His creation was given the proper measure and due to that, everything fits into its proper place. In relation to man, his free-will, i.e. his intention and determination to do or not to do something, must base on his power of reason, power of understanding, and power of discernment. In this case, freedom of choice bestowed upon him is true

¹³ In this case, al-Qur'an mentions a group of people who learn what is harmful and not useful to them. See 'Ali 'Imran, 3: 18.

freedom, not just nominally or apparently true. He is not compelled to choose, otherwise man cannot be responsible for his actions, nor deserve reward and punishment. In Islam, the choice is not between many alternatives but only two alternatives. In order to make the right and true choice, it requires a person to have the knowledge about what is the best for the soul. Ultimately the meaning of freedom is submission to God. Paradox of present day is that most people having intelligent about anything but they failed to understand the nature of man, his origin, his duty on earth in accordance with his nature, and his actions and its significant relation with *akhirat* aspect. As a consequent, they have no idea about the limit of truth and the proper place. By not knowing the limit of truth, it would not lead them to proper submission (*aslama*).

The person who does not know the limit will incline towards something that is not agreeable to his nature, and lack in anything that could bring perfection appropriate for the self which could bring unpleasant to his soul. Indeed, what can suit and what is being demanded by the soul is the knowing of God which is not possible unless the person is having knowledge of his real self, and as the result, be able to subjugate and control over his animal soul. Pertaining to this, the Holy Prophet (may God bless and give him Peace!) said:

“He who knoweth his Self knowest his Lord”

Thus spiritual knowledge of God is more pleasant than any other knowledge because the pleasure of the soul is in spiritual insight and spiritual knowledge (*al-ma'rifah*).¹⁴ Comparatively, the pleasure which is due to the soul is more powerful and stronger than any other pleasure of the senses. It

¹⁴ The spiritual knowledge (*al-ma'rifat*) is the seed of spiritual witnessing (*al-musyāhadah*) which is the highest degree of perfection with regard to the nature of the soul.

presupposes the knowledge attainment from the lowest level of sense perception to the highest form of abstraction, from psychological temporal and terminal states, i.e. feelings and emotions to spiritual and consciously experienced. It is the reflection of epistemological process towards arriving at meaning which undergoes various grades of completion leading to perfection. The process cannot be completed if a person only indulges himself on the pursuit of secular philosophy and sciences, and contemplation of facts derived from them. It is a necessity also for a person to make sure that his needs and wants are achieved through right conduct in accordance with the nature of virtue.

Virtue is reflection of one's real and true personality and good conscience of the individual. Therefore, the movement to arrive at virtues cannot be the functions of the animal soul but as a result of rational reflection based necessarily on the fundamental elements grounded within a theoretical reason of the rational soul. The reason was endowed by God with the ability to intuitively recognize virtues and vices through the guidance of Revelation. Accordingly, man may able to discern between truth and falsehood, distinguish good from evil, and able to know how to arrive at good deeds and disposition. This shows that the notion of virtue is intimately linked with knowledge about how to govern one's self in order to realize good traits and do good acts. The human being is at once the rational soul possessing the faculty of reason, and the animal soul made up the faculty of anger and desire. The faculty of reason is the principle of movement to the faculty of anger and desire that able to channels them to the mean between two extremes. Therefore, the virtues in the self are always means between extreme of excess and extreme of falling short. In order to achieve this

perfection, man has to be habituated through *ta'dīb*¹⁵ beginning from nurturing of good deeds in childhood to the perfecting of one's intellect in adulthood so that he may be able to be watchful, conscious, and aware of his every deeds in order for him to become good man. The good man is the one who always supervise his self, subordinating his animal soul, and purify the soul. When the animal soul is under control and one's self is devoid from its corrupting influences, he has capacity to inherently realize the knowledge of the truth.

D. Conclusion

The worldview of Islam as the manifestation of *al-Tawhīd* is the basis to transform the notion of human life by putting man's propensities for taking pleasure in its proper place. With such a transformation, real and true purpose of man's existence can be achieved. In this manner, a person, is able to evaluate all the actions he takes based on the truth of Revelation. Therefore, he will know that not everything dictated by personal interest is permissible. The righteous person is the one who, in his various capacities, moves by the guidance of Revelation in order to achieve the glorified success (*al-falāḥ*) and real happiness (*al-sa'ādah*).

The worldview of Islam reflects a realistic explanation of life. The understanding of life in its real form will be the platform that prepares the way for the life in the next world in which human being could achieve happiness proportional to his efforts in this worldly life to attain God's pleasure. According to religious notion of life, society's problems are

¹⁵ For further elaboration of this key term, see Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam* (Petaling Jaya: Muslim Youth Association of Malaysia, 1980).

reflections of as those of the individual. Therefore, the worldview of Islam build a close link between personal motives and the path leading to good in life in such a way as to make individuals believe that their personal interests and the real general human interests are interrelated. As Iqbal has correctly maintained, it could be understood as a “system of general truth which have the effect of transforming character when there are sincerely held and vividly apprehended”.¹⁶

However, this form of transformation cannot be held in a secular view of life which views people as naturally not attentive to anything other than their present involvement in this world. This is contrary to the realistic explanation of life which Islam offers which broadens the horizon of a human being. It bestows on him more profound view of his motivations, interests and benefits. As Allah says in the Qur’an, *Sūrah Fussilat*, 41: 46:

He who does right, it is for his right, and he who does wrong, it is against his soul.

Allah also says in *Sūrah al-Taubah*, 9:120 -21:

That is because no thirst, hardship or hunger afflicts them on the path of God. They do not take any step that harm the disbelievers. And they do not gain anything from the enemy; but by virtue of that, a good deed is recorded for them. God does not lose the wages of the good. They do not spend anything, be that small or large, nor they do cross any valley; but it is recorded for them that that God will repay them the best of what they had done.

It could be summarized that the worldview of Islam emphasizes the importance of giving a true explanation of an eternal life, not in order that human being lose interest in the present life, nor in order that they yield to

¹⁶ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of the Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1950), 2.

wrongdoing and settle for what is unjust, but in order to regulate themselves by the proper ethical and moral criterion. At the same time, it also emphasizes the importance of moral education which could produce in the human soul various emotions and sentiments that ensure the operation of the moral criteria by inspiration from the self. Thus, the spiritual comprehension of life and the moral education of the soul are, in Islam, the two important factors treat the deeper causes of the human moral crisis.

A major point of this worldview is an individual is not considered the central principle in legislating and governing, whereas the larger social existence is not the only thing to which the state must pay attention, and for whose sake it enacts its laws. Any system of value that goes along with the individual and his personal inclinations only will expose social life to the most intense dangers either in a form of suppression, discrimination, or exploitation of others. It also must not be confined to the purpose of protecting society at large and its interests at the expense of individuals or minority. By giving due respect to others as well as to one's self, the worldview of Islam provides a comprehensive and unified system of life, society, politics, economics, and at the same time, advocates principles of ethics and morality on the broadest scale by taking into consideration the physical well-being and spiritual happiness of man individually and collectively. The principle of this spiritual-moral understanding of life also could show a proper treatment to the basic problem that causes all the social evils which results in various kinds of misdeeds.

Therefore, it is imperative for a Muslim to internalize the worldview of Islam because it provides the best opportunity for self- realization and for creating a proper realm of life. It is on this basis that they could built a

profound structure of thought in order to analyse the basic social, moral and spiritual needs of contemporary society in consonance with the spirit of Islam. He thus would be able to adopt an integral approach which look at man and his environment from all possible angles – biological, psychological, moral, sociological, metaphysical, and economic – and then evaluated the role of religion in building up morally autonomous personality of an individual and in establishing a moral dynamism in a society.

E. Daftar Pustaka

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