Al-Attas's View on the Importance of Man in Our Understanding of the Cosmos

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Abstract
This article affirms man's special position and existence as the most established point of departure in the realm of creation to comprehend both God's existence and the cosmos. By means of the method of *tafsīr-taʾwīl* and *muḥkamāt-mutashābihāt* appropriated by al-Attas as a way of understanding the cosmos, it is argued that man proceeds to understand the different degrees of existence through his understanding of metaphors and man as a metaphorical concept. Man, then, is able to recognise a higher degree of existence that is the cause of his own existence, which is God's existence. Furthermore, with knowledge and its transmissions through various chains of authority of knowledge, man accepts the validity of true report (*khabar ṣādiq*) which is especially true with regard to the reality and the truth of God's Revelation.

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Introduction

In explaining the importance of man's existence in the understanding of the cosmos, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (b.1931) says that man is a new and special creation intended by God to be His vicegerent on earth.[1] He says that "this vicegerency is clearly demonstrated by the fact of man's domination over the Three Kingdoms of Nature."[2] Man's vicegerency also implies man's possession of rational powers and faculties that God has equipped for man so that he is able to know and distinguish reality from non-reality, truth from falsehood, and rectitude from error.[3]

It follows that a true and proper understanding of man will become an important basis in understanding many aspects of man's life.[4] The restatement of the place of man is crucial in the midst of confusion about man which is regarded only as a further development of the animal species[5] based on the scientific and technological development by the Western civilisation. Indeed, our understanding about man will have significant consequences on the cosmos cognitively and ethically.

In the perspective of objectivism, man's role is denigrated to its least significance as possible so that any potential and

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1. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *On Justice and the Nature of Man* (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2015), vi, 28, 33.
2. Ibid., 41.
3. Ibid., 5–6; Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995), 145.
4. This is evident in all his works which discuss, among others, religion, education, philosophy of science, meaning of happiness, language, knowledge, Islamisation, culture, and even God's existence.
5. Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 116.

probable subjective distortions will not contaminate the object being studied, that is, the cosmos. The universe, including man himself, is understood merely as an object existing outside of himself and is made possible to be controlled through the objectivist's sophisticated instruments developed from a confined method of inquiry. Further, the cosmos becomes detached from spiritual realities such as God.

The objectivistic obsession in the evolutionary scientists is also not in line with investigation of the philosophers, especially the postmodern philosophers of language, such as Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951 CE) who inclines to a more positive recognition of human temperaments and values to its extreme value-laden position. It is impossible for them to separate human inclinations and values in relation to the cosmos. This means that our language cannot be sterile from such dimensions. However, these subjectivist tendencies as such will not necessarily provide clarity to man's understanding of the cosmos because of its separation from the spiritual aspect of man, and ultimately from God.

It is not surprising that man's experience within the frame of secularisation has resulted in the reduction of man himself to the same level as the beastly animals or even lower, such as when he is equated with technological inventions.[6] The diminution and ultimate eradication of the spiritual aspects of the universe and the exaltation of its physical aspects will drown man into its physical and worldly dimensions.

This article aims at explaining the importance of man's existence in the understanding of the cosmos within three parts. The first part will delve into the method of *tafsīr-ta'wīl* and the role of metaphor in our language and thought will be

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6. Khayrurrijal, "Several Aspects on Human and Artificial Intelligence" (Unpublished, Skudai: Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 2012), 22. This paper was presented at the Conference on "Dialogue of Civilization: Towards Humanization of Science and Technology," organised by the Faculty of Islamic Civilisation (FTI-UTM), held in Skudai, Johor Bahru, 3rd.–4th. December 2012.

elaborated. Secondly, a discussion regarding man's journey in understanding the origin of the cosmos before and after the Revelation. Thirdly, the cosmos will be discussed based on certain observations about man's understanding of his purpose of existence in conjunction with the Revelation.

Method of *Tafsīr* and *Ta'wīl*

The birth of the science[7] of *tafsīr* as the first science among Muslims was due to the scientific nature in the structure of the Arabic language. Al-Attas even says that it approaches the nature of an exact science because it emphasises upon the condition of established knowledge of the given linguistic symbols and their significations as determined by the semantic contexts.[8]

The difference between *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* is that "*ta'wīl* is but an intensive form of *tafsīr*." If *tafsīr* is the discovery—detecting or revealing of what is meant by an ambiguous expression—then *ta'wīl* refers to what that expression ultimately means. The example of *tafsīr* is in God's Act in bringing forth a bird from an egg as an interpretation to His Word that He brings forth the living from the dead. Whereas, the example of *ta'wīl* is in the form of interpreting that Allah brings forth the believer from the unbeliever or misbeliever, or that He brings forth the knower from the ignorant.[9]

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7. The term "science" in this passage does not exclusively refer to science as the study of nature, but as an organised knowledge, that is an organised body of accumulated theoretical knowledge and discoveries, named through scientific consciousness which arises as a result of the process investigating a well-defined subject matter with a certain method [Alparslan Acikgence, *Islamic Scientific Tradition in History* (Kuala Lumpur: IKIM, 2014), 10]. For al-Attas also defines "science" as definition of reality. [Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1980), 2].
8. Ibid., 4–5.
9. Ibid.

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For al-Attas, science[10] is a kind of *ta'wīl* or allegorical interpretation of the empirical things that constitutes the world of nature. It must "…base itself firmly upon the *tafsir* or interpretation of the apparent or obvious meanings of the things in nature."[11] Adi Setia, in explaining the vision of science in Islam as projected by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (1149–1210 CE) and Badī'uzzamān Sa'īd al-Nūrsī (1876–1960 CE), says that science "can be understood as the conceptual and empirical investigation of the phenomenal manifestations of the underlying spiritual reality of existence, by which means belief in that reality can be founded on verified experiential certainty, and thus freed from doubt and blind dogmatic imitation."[12] Such an appropriation is based on the tradition of the exegesis of the Holy Qur'ān which is developed as a method of understanding and interpreting the Open Book of the Cosmos.[13]

The Cosmos: *Muḥkamāt* and *Mutashābihāt*

For al-Attas, it is clear that there is connection between *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* as valid methods of approach to knowledge and scientific methodology and our study of the world of nature. He explains that "both the Holy Qur'ān as the Open Book, and the world of nature as another Open Book demand that their Words be interpreted in accordance with the valid methods of *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* which are unique to Islam."[14]

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10. The term "science" which is stated by al-Attas as referring to a specific type of organised knowledge that studies the world of nature. It is referred to also as "ilmu pengetahuan sains." [Al-Attas, *Risalah untuk Kaum Muslimin* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2001), 42]. Science is also a sophisticated elaboration of the ordinary level of reason and experience into an interpretation of the nature of reality. [Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 209].

11. Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 137.

12. Adi Setia Muhammad Dom, "The Qur'anic Concept of *Taskhīr* in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Badī'uzzamān Sa'īd al-Nūrsī (Part 2)," *Al-Hikmah* 19 no. 2 Tahun 7 (2001): 62.

13. Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, in the chapter on Islam and the Philosophy of Science.

14. Ibid., 7.

Within the method of *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl*, there are categories of *āyāt* which are based on their clarity in meaning such as *āyāt muḥkamāt* (established) and *āyāt mutashābihāt* (ambiguous). Due to the clear connection between *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* as method to approach knowledge and our study of nature, the categories of *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* can also be applied to see the cosmos. Therefore, the cosmos consists of the established (*muḥkamāt*) and ambiguous (*mutashābihāt*) aspects. The established aspects of cosmos become the basis to understand the more obscure and ambiguous aspects.[15]

It is clear that such a framework exhibits a clear experience and process of how man thinks. He thinks based on what he knows to what he does not or yet to know. This is exemplified by Nūrsī for his extensive use of allegories, analogies, metaphors, parables and similes in order to clarify the abstract by means of the concrete, or to infer from the better known to the lesser known, or from sensible experience to metaphysical and spiritual realities.[16]

As explained by al-Attas, thinking is the soul's movement toward meanings.[17] If one is exercising one's ability to think in a proper manner, then one will be able to arrive at the truth and reality of a thing.

When the soul eventually arrives at meaning (*wuṣūl*) and when the meaning of an object of knowledge arrives in the soul (*ḥuṣūl*), both arrivals describe knowledge itself.[18] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (1058–1111 CE) says that knowledge is "seeing things as they really are."[19] In this condition, as explained by al-Attas,

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15. Generally, due to its physical nature, the cosmos is obscure and ambiguous as it refers to itself, and has an independent, individual and self-subsistent reality. But in fact, it is considered real, not an illusion, due to its profound and dependent connection with what it symbolises. Idem., *Prolegomena*, 136.

16. Adi Setia, "The Qur'anic Concept of *Taskhīr*," 60.

17. Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 124.

18. Ibid., 17.

19. Mohd Zaidi Ismail, *The Sources of Knowledge in al-Ghazali's Thought* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2002), 4.

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a person will recognise "the place of anything in a system which occurs when the relation a thing has with others in the system becomes clarified and understood."[20] This understanding of meaning implies that difference underlies the very nature of reality.[21] The conditions of various objects in reality is very important for us to grasp meaning and knowledge; for knowledge can also be defined as units of meaning coherently related to other such units thereby forming ideas, concepts, conceptions, and judgments.[22] Without their position and limits, then the forms of things would vanish from our sight and the very meaning of things would perish.[23]

A further and more interesting question: Just as there are *āyāt* in the Qur'ān which are considered to be obvious and established (*muhkamāt*), when we appropriate this into the cosmos, what then are the *muhkamāt* of the cosmos as the Created Book?[24] As an application of the categories of *muhkamāt* and *mutashābihāt*, the *muhkamāt* of the cosmos is man himself. This is evident within the history of Islamic thought which puts man as the climax, epitome, or zenith of creation.[25] For a direct concern with man is the way to see the truth and reality when one is going to the labyrinths of legalism, and even culture, including the journey to explore the "labyrinth" of the cosmos.[26] This will be clear in the following elaborations about metaphors which demonstrate

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20. Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 123.
21. Ibid., 132.
22. Ibid., 124.
23. Ibid., 138.
24. Thank you to Dr. Mohd Zaidi Ismail for discussing this passage and creating awareness about this question. This discussion arose during IKIM Research Project titled *The Cosmos in Sunnite Theology* which started in September 2016.
25. Al-Kindi mentions that God has made humankind the epitome of creation; al-Farābī uses the term "climax of terrestrial process of generation and corruption"; Ibn Sīnā says that the human soul marks the zenith of the biological or generative process. Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism, a Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1997), 27, 42, 53.
26. Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 16.

that the cosmos will be clearer to our understanding through contemplation about man himself.

The Role of Metaphor in Language and Thought

In *Metaphors We Live By*,[27] Lakoff and Johnson state that the "metaphor is pervasive in everyday language and thought…" Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is also metaphorical in nature.[28] The metaphor structures how we perceive, think, and do.[29] In essence, "…*metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another*."[30] When discussing metaphors, we refer to the metaphorical concept.[31] It is characterised by systematicity,[32] and it will simultaneously highlight and hide aspects of a concept.[33] From this, we may understand that the metaphorical structuring involved will be partial, not total.[34]

Far before Lakoff and Johnson, al-Ghazāli provides us with an interesting distinction of *mithl* and *mithāl*. In contrast to *mithl*, which provides equivalent and equal description in all aspects, *al-mithāl* does not require such a condition. So, it functions further by providing more clarity to something. Whereas *mithl* functions to give total similarity regarding something, as its partner.[35]

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27. At the end of their explanations, both provide an account of the experientialist approach which provides a perspective that considers man as part of his environment, and not separated from it. For them, the experientialist views of understanding provide a richer perspective on some of the most important areas of experience in our everyday lives. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 229–230.

28. Ibid., 3.
29. Ibid., 4.
30. Ibid., 5.
31. Ibid., 6.
32. Ibid., 7.
33. Ibid., 10.
34. Ibid., 13.
35. Mohd Zaidi, *The Sources of Knowledge*, 51.

Lakoff and Johnson further explain that no metaphor can be understood properly and adequately when separated from its experiential basis.[36] They assert that the metaphorical concept is grounded in simple spatial concepts, such as "up."[37] This is related to "our constant physical activity in the world, even when we sleep, makes an up-down orientation not merely relevant to our physical activity, but centrally relevant."[38] Although, those physical activities are "…never merely a matter of having a body of a certain sort; rather, *every* experience takes place within a vast background of cultural presuppositions." It means that "…we experience our 'world' in such a way that our culture is already present in the very experience itself." The differences are that there are experiences that are "more" physical, such as standing up, and those that are "more" cultural, such as organising a wedding ceremony.[39]

That is why the most fundamental values within a culture will cohere with the metaphorical structure of the fundamental concept existing within those cultures.[40] Lakoff and Johnson do not claim that physical experience is in any way more basic than other kinds of experience. But they assert that we typically conceptualise the non-physical *in terms* of the physical. This means that we conceptualise the less clearly delineated in terms of the more clearly delineated.[41]

Different metaphors also provide different metaphorical models of thought, thus allowing us to focus on different aspects of mental experience.[42] An object of knowledge which is inhuman can be metaphorically understood in relation to humans through the personification metaphor.[43] In examining

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36. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 19.
37. Ibid., 56.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., 57.
40. Ibid., 22.
41. Ibid., 59.
42. Ibid., 28.
43. Ibid., 33.

metaphorical structures, we find that coherency to be a more common relationship between metaphors.[44]

Our understanding of the metaphor presupposes a *gestalt* experience, which is defined as a condition of unified whole, where it wholeness is bigger than the sum of its parts. Hence an experiential *gestalt* means a multi-dimensional structured wholes.[45] It means that the dimensions of an experience are captured concurrently and imply one another.

Furthermore, Lakoff and Johnson focus heavily on the metaphor because it unites reason and imagination. The metaphor is also explained as an imaginative rationality.[46] It is imaginative due to it being able to create and change realities in changing our conceptual system that we consider as real.[47] It also influences how we see the world and act upon those perceptions.[48] Therefore, for them, the truth will be relative to our conceptual system,[49] that is, worldview.

In a different discussion, the metaphor is considered the core aspect in language,[50] and not merely seen as a semantic form. The metaphor is a basic anthropological condition in which man can only understand the world by relating similarities between that which he knows, with the symbols which he has created himself. [51]

In Islamic thought, the metaphor is discussed not merely as a semantic phenomenon or an anthropological condition, but as a type of existence called metaphorical existence (*wujūd majāzī*).[52] It means "a property, possession, or condition (*milk*) of

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44. Ibid., 44.
45. Ibid., 81.
46. Ibid., 193.
47. Ibid., 145.
48. Ibid., 146.
49. Ibid., 193.
50. Bambang Sugiharto, *Postmodernisme Tantangan bagi Filsafat*, (Yogyakarta: Penerbit PT Kanisius, 1996), 101.
51. Ibid., 163.
52. Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 292.

real existence."[53] Based on the analysis of *majāz*, al-Attas further transfers it into the metaphysical context which asserts that the world itself does not possess real existence (that is eternal and self-subsistent existence), but it only looks as if it has existence because of its apparent continuance in existence.[54]

If we relate the discussion of metaphorical existence to man, then it is clear that man himself is included as metaphorical existence. Man and the cosmos thus also have a metaphorical relation as can be clearly seen in the statement that man is an epitome of the cosmos, a microcosmic representation (*'ālam saghīr*) of the macrocosm (*'ālam kabīr*).[55] But, through a deeper understanding about man with the aid of the Revelation, we will realise that man's existence, despite small physically, provides a significant clarity in order to understand the cosmos, i.e., man as a metaphorical concept.

Al-Ghazālī mentions that "if there were no connection and relationship between the two, the way of climbing to the rational world would be blocked. If climbing were impossible, travel to the presence of lordship and nearness to God would also be impossible."[56] This is evident in the following two enquiries regarding the origin of the cosmos and its purpose of existence.

Man and the Origin of the Cosmos

Man's understanding of his origin will be very closely related to the origin of the cosmos. Man's contemplation about himself will lead him to a preliminary understanding of God as the Creator of the cosmos. Furthermore, the acceptance of *khabar ṣādiq* and an aided understanding of God through the Revelation will help man in understanding the nature of God and also His

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53. Ibid., 295.
54. Ibid., 294–295.
55. Ibid., 58.
56. Abū Hāmid Al-Ghazāli, *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, A parallel English-Arabic text, translated, introduced, and annotated by David Buchman, *The Niche of Lights*. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1998), 26.

Names and Attributes. From Revelation, man also knows about his nature and reality.

Man's Understanding of His Origin

Al-Attas says that "the man who ponders seriously his origin will realize that a few decades ago he did not exist, and the whole of mankind now existing neither existed nor knew of their possible present existence."[57] This method of thinking was also mentioned by al-Ghazāli as one of the two methods of arriving at the knowledge of God. Such contemplation of one's origin is more suited to the ordinary intelligence.[58] By thinking about origination in the background as we contemplate the cosmos, we should realise that it is man who contemplates, not just any being. The contemplation of the works of God should be considered as clearer to the mind of the questioner.[59]

Indeed, man is the only being capable of positing questions concerning many issues including that of his own being.[60] Instead of trying to ponder upon the object of the question, it is more strategic to ponder upon the one performing the act of contemplating.[61] It is because if one starts from the object of the question and continues to collect answers without clarity of the reason and purpose of the inquiry, these answers will not be meaningful.

Man is aware that he comes into existence naturally through his parents. Indeed, the same process is also experienced by both parents, and their parents, and this goes on back to

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57. Ibid., 45; idem, *Risalah*, 30.
58. Abū Hāmid al-Ghazāli. *Kimiya-e Saadat*, trans. Claude Field, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, revised edition 2007 (Kuala Lumpur: IBT, 2007), 17.
59. Ibid., 48.
60. Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 116.
61. This is done based on an appropriation from al-Attas' statement that to solve the problem of the Muslims today, it is better for us to start from the individual as a correct strategy. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993), 114; idem., *Risalah*, 155.

something distant in the beginning. However, it is difficult to arrive at the understanding of the ultimate beginning due to the limitations of our external and internal senses and faculties of imagination and cognition.[62] This discussion of man's origin can be termed as "the biological meaning of origin."

Besides biological origin, man also understands origination through his own experience in his activities making or creating[63] something tangible and intangible.[64] Man's ability to create something is due to his attribute of speech (*nāṭiq*) in the sense of the ability to create symbols which can be manifested into tangible and technological artefacts, all of which constitute his culture. This discussion can be termed "the cultural meaning of origin." Al-Ghazālī says that from his own creation, man comes to know God's existence.[65]

By combining both biological and cultural meanings of origin above, man is naturally inclined to frame the entire existence as having a Creator.[66] This conclusion is derived from the premise that all the things which are originated need an originator, which when combined with another premise that the cosmos is something which seems to be originated, leads then to the cosmos having an *originator*. The term originator has a close meaning with the creator as a result of man's tendency to value things in relation to his own existence. Man's understanding of origin in the cultural sense provides him with a direct experience on the need and plausibility of an artist, maker or creator.

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62. Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 138.
63. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 69–74.
64. Man's creative activity consists of something tangible and intangible. The intangible things become the basis of his making of tangible things. The results or products will be evaluated due to its distance from man himself. When it is more intimate to man, it then becomes more everlasting, and more valuable (al-Attas, *Risalah*, 67).
65. Al-Ghazāli, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, 19.
66. Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 42, 51, 52.

True Report (*Khabar Ṣādiq*), Theological Domain of Reality, and Cosmos as a Book

Following one's assenting of God's existence through the recognition of his biological and cultural origins, man's acknowledgment of God becomes even more evident through his very experience of the nature of knowledge, its origin, transmission, and the place of authority of those who transmit and explain it. Further, man accepts the position of true report, which consequently assents the reality and truth of God's Revelation. The discussion of true report (*khabar ṣādiq*), especially about God's Revelation, is closely related to the discussion of language and its origin because the coming of language to man implies also the coming of knowledge which is conveyed through the medium of language.

Based on the study of the origins of language, it is impossible for the capacity for language acquisition to be self-actualised.[67] This is self-evident when we recognise that language requires an actuator external to itself in order for it to manifest. Based on the teachings of Islam, man's capacity for speech is activated from an intelligential source that is superior to man's own intellect. With this, we can extrapolate according to the Qur'ānic conceptual scheme that the superior source must be from that of the one who is the ultimate Creator.[68] By virtue of man's faculties, humans develop the actualisation of their potentials beginning from the level of imitation to the level of innovation. All these point to the reality that culture itself comes

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67. Noam Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics, a Chapter in the History of Rationalist Thought* (3rd printing, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 106. The existence of language acquisition device is elaborated more in his *The Syntactic Structures* (2nd Printing, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1957).

68. See more explanations in Khayrurrijal, "Kritikan Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas terhadap Falsafah Bahasa Barat Moden dan Pascamoden (*Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas' Critique of the Western Modern and Postmodern Philosophy of Language*)," (M.A. Thesis, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 2015).

into being from God's Revelation in the beginning. Indeed, Al-Attas says that religion is the mother of culture (*bunda kebudayaan*).[69]

Furthermore, in the case of recognising evidential proof of the truth and reality of something through *khabar ṣādiq*, al-Ghazālī's arguments in support of the validity of prophecy as a unique medium of authoritative transmission of knowledge in his *Munqidh* should be observed. Firstly, for one to adhere to the possibility of the concept of prophecy itself, there must be an acknowledgment of the existence of a sphere beyond reason.[70] Secondly, the position of dreams as an important feature of man's life serves as an analogy in providing a glimpse concerning the realm of prophecy.[71] Thirdly, should doubt arise if a designated person is conferred upon prophethood, its certainty can only be reached and verified (*taṣdīq*) by direct acquaintance with his conduct, either through personal observations, or by hearsay as a matter of common knowledge. Lastly, adhering and assenting to other's true experiences by walking in their path. For example, if one is familiar with law and medicine, one can recognise lawyers and doctors by observing who they are, or, where observation is impossible, by hearing what they say.[72] Similarly, if one understands what it is to be a prophet, and has devoted much time to the study of the Holy Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, one will arrive at a necessary knowledge of the fact that Prophet Muhammad is the highest grades of prophetic calling. When one has attempted trials over a thousand or several thousand instances, one will arrive at the necessary knowledge beyond all doubt.[73]

In a specific manner, the acceptance of *khabar ṣādiq* presupposes a rational and intellectual acceptance of the integrity and trustworthiness of someone in transmitting and explaining a report. Additionally, there are confirmations and corroborations

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69. Al-Attas, *Risalah*, 76.
70. Al-Ghazāli, *Deliverance from Error and the Beginning of Guidance*, trans. W. Montgomery Watt (Kuala Lumpur: IBT, 2007), 75.
71. Ibid., 61.
72. Ibid., 61–62.
73. Ibid., 62; al-Ghazāli, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, 52.

from various other sources which have preceded the coming of a new report. Through this acceptance, the Qur'an provides clarity and can be properly called "light," just as the light of the sun is called "light."[74] Thus, God's revelation of Himself is known. God as explained from the Revelation is God as *Ilāh*, in addition to God as *Rabb*. It is God who is related to the theological domain of reality which provides guidance in the form of religion and ethical values exemplified by His prophets.

From the Revelation, the knowledge of man's nature and reality also becomes clear in the details. According to Islam, man is a special creation of God.[75] Man is considered the highest creation in the universe. He is the jewel (*khatim permata jauharnya*) in the bracelet (*gelang*) of the universe.[76] He is the only creature to whom God commanded the angels to prostrate;[77] the only creature taught by God the names of things;[78] and the one created as the servant (*'ābid*) of God[79] and His vicegerent (*khalīfah*)[80] on Earth as long as he follows His guidance.[81] Humankind has been bestowed the weighty burden of trust (*amānah*) to rule according to God's Will and Purpose and His Pleasure.[82]

Al-Attas defines man as an articulated being (*al-ḥayawān al-nāṭiq*).[83] Man is understood as a new creation[84] that does not have any evolutionary connection with previously created beings. Through al-Attas' exposition, it is clear that *al-ḥayawān*

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74. Al-Ghazāli, *The Niche of Lights*, 10.

75. *Al-Baqarah* (30): 30–31; *al-Rahmān* (55): 1–4; *al-Mu'minūn* (23); 12–14; *al-Ḥijr* (15): 29. See also Al-Attas, *On Justice*, vi.

76. Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam dalam Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: UKM, 1972), 20.

77. *al-Baqarah* (2): 34.

78. Ibid., 31.

79. *al-Dhāriyāt* (51): 56.

80. *al-Baqarah* (2): 30.

81. Ibid., 38.

82. *al-Ahzab* (33): 72.

83. Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 22; idem., *The Concept of Education in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1980), 14.

84. Al-Attas, *On Justice*, vi, 33. See also Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *Islamization of Contemporary Knowledge and the Role of University in the Context of De-Westernization and Decolonization* (Skudai/Johor: UTM Press, 2013), 19.

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al-nāṭiq which refers to the rational nature (*rational animal*) and also speaking nature (*animal language*) of man,[85] is a definitive (*ḥadd*) definition that distinguishes in kind (*jins*) between man and other creatures. Such a definition reflects a comprehensive view of man with a speaking attribute as his ability to create symbols (*animal symbolicum*) and culture.[86]

As remarkable as man's creation is, he is characterised with forgetfulness (*nisyān*) which is the cause of disobedience. Yet, with the powers and faculties to know and distinguish reality from non-reality, truth from falsehood, and rectitude and error; with his sincerity to his noble nature, man will not be deprived from aid and guidance to attain the truth and to achieve right conduct. The purpose of religion is to return man to the state he was in before he existed. This requires the pursuit of true knowledge.[87]

According to al-Ghazālī, man's attributes are a reflection of God's attributes. Not only that, the mode of existence of man's soul affords some insight into God's mode of existence.[88] Therefore, we can also understand why man is also endowed with attributes that are reflective metaphorically of Allah's Attributes. Such attributes are established in man. The attributes (life, power, will, sight, hearing, and speech) are impossible to negate because every negation will end in affirming the attributes themselves.[89]

The cosmos as a sign is affirmed and confirmed through true report (*khabar ṣādiq*) ultimately deriving from the Revelation. There are abundant verses in the Holy Qur'an and reports in the Hadith that convey the message that the cosmos is, indeed, God's signs and symbols (*āyāt*). Through its relationship with man, the universe is understood within the frame of a book, language,

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85. Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 122; idem., *On Justice*, 31.
86. Idem., *Risalah*, 64.
87. Ibid., 111.
88. Al-Ghazāli, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, 19.
89. See more explanations in Khayrurrijal, "Kritikan Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas."

and signs. Therefore, it is more instructive to understand the universe using the *muhkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* categories. Al-Attas illustrates a metaphor of a signpost[90] and a chair[91] to explain that the cosmos is a signpost which points to something other than itself, in which resides its meanings.

Man's knowledge of the cosmos also becomes clearer with the aid of the Revelation which affirms its symbolic nature. As explained by al-Attas, the universe as the Created Book can only be properly understood if it is based on the readings of the Holy Qur'an as the Revealed Book.[92] Man's existence also functions as a metaphor in understanding the cosmos due to the word "book" itself indicating a metaphorical significance in relation to man's life. For, a book is meaningful only in man's life.

Man and the Purpose of Cosmos

The path to comprehend God's existence could also proceed from the search for the purpose of the cosmos, including man's specific purposes. Man's contemplation of his own existence will lead him to a sense of and search for purpose. This is implied in the teleological arguments for God's existence. The question of purpose will compel man to ponder about what he is doing here and where he is heading to. The search for purpose is not restricted to man himself but also includes the entire cosmos.

If it is accepted that the universe has an originator and creator, then it is natural to ask: what is the purpose of our existence? How can we know our purpose of existence? Or if the concept of creator is yet to be accepted in relation to the universe, will life totally end upon death? But what about the question of the meaning of life? Will life with all the just and unjust acts, degenerate as the body approaches death?

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90. Al-Attas., *Prolegomena*, 136–137.
91. Idem, *Islam, Secularism, and the Philosophy of the Future* (London and New York: Mansell, 1985), xvii–xviii.
92. Idem, *Prolegomena*, 135–136.

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The above questions encompass discussions regarding the biological, and cultural and spiritual purposes of man in regard to the present (what he is doing here) and to the future (where he is heading to). The purpose or end which is sought after cannot be fully known by himself. It is clear that a strong moral demand to life pushes man to acknowledge the possibility of life after death and also affirm moral value in this life as an important dimension to his purpose of life. Al-Ghazālī says that even if a person is doubtful about future existence, reason suggests that he should act as if there were one, considering the tremendous issue at stake.[93]

The search for purpose will eventually lead man to considering information about the purpose of life coming from authority, including the religious authority. He shall have to opt for either the acceptance or even rejection of *khabar ṣādiq*, which presupposes a rational and intellectual consideration of the integrity and trustworthiness of the one involved in transmitting and explaining a report. If a person accepts reports coming from the Prophets, he will then be aided to see that he is created so that he may serve (*'ibādah*) God.[94] *'Ibādah* ultimately leads to knowledge (*ma'rifah*) of God.[95] Man exists in this world temporarily and will proceed to the hereafter (*akhirah*) since this world (*dunyā*) is but a preparation for the hereafter. Thus, the purpose of the universe shall be clear through the aid of the Revelation, framed in close relation to man's existence.

There is a relatively current discussion on man as a methodological parameter in understanding the cosmos. This is called *anthropic principle* which was for the first time expressed by Brandon Carter in 1973 in a symposium.[96] The principle

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93. Al-Ghazāli, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, 54.
94. *Al-Dhāriyāt* (51): 56.
95. Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 60.
96. Riliana Oktavianti, "Prinsip Antropik," *Jurnal Filsafat Driyarkara*, Th. XXXIII: 1 (2012), 59. Nidhal Guessoum, *Islam's Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, & Co Ltd, 2014), 245.

should be seen more as a methodological principle to explain and understand the formation of the universe[97] in the form of the orderliness of the cosmos. However, it cannot be the only basis for the teleological interpretations of the universe due to the dependent nature of the principle on other assumptions.[98]

For Guessoum, the Islamic tradition has a stand with respect to the anthropic principle. For him, the Islamic literature has always strongly adopted the *Argument from Design*. He calls explanations of man's place in the universe as ultra-anthropic because man is placed squarely at the centre of its worldview.[99] For example, the argument from design was discussed also by al-Rāzī and Nūrsī. Adi Setia says that both are essentially "arguing for transcendent intelligent design by means of scientific inference from the purposeful arrangement and dynamic coordinated interactions quite self-evident in observable physical phenomena."[100] In modern cosmological terms, Adi Setia considers *taskhīr* as clearly refering to "the extremely high degree of fine-tunedness of the design parameters of the universe for the support of life on earth, and ultimately, conscious and intelligent human life."[101]

It is clear that both the cosmos and man have purpose. Al-Attas emphasises that the coming of man on earth is to accomplish God's purpose for man.[102] Al-Ghazālī says that man is not created in jest or aimlessly, but marvelously made and for some great end.[103] This is why purpose—as well as the search of origin—will be related to man's natural inclinations or yearnings and which should not necessarily be negated merely because we cannot understand what it is that he yearns

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97. Oktavianti, "Prinsip Antropik," 67.
98. Ibid.
99. Guessoum, *Islam's Quantum Question*, 269.
100. Adi Setia, The Qur'anic Concept of *Taskhīr*, 54.
101. Ibid., 63.
102. Al-Attas, *On Justice*, vi.
103. Al-Ghazāli, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, 1.

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for.[104] John Cottingham (1943 CE)) says that a theist views the universe as a teleological and moral universe. Meanwhile, an atheist needs to fight against these good impulses or yearnings as a force that has drawn them essentially to God.[105] So, man's inclinations, especially to have a purpose in life, are important aspects which are framed as metaphor in understanding the cosmos.

After establishing man's inclination to search for purpose for himself and the cosmos, man's understanding of the cosmos becomes clearer with the aid of the Revelation while affirming its symbolic nature. This symbolic nature is analogous to the nature of signs and symbols, such as in the case of a word. When one is reading, one can delve into the form of the word, letters, and even further, the nature of the ink which is used to write. Yet, this effort will only carry oneself into a meaningless inquiry. For the reality of a sign is exactly in that level of existence that enables the sign to be read properly. In other words, there is a need for proper distance,[106] either ontologically, epistemologically, aesthetically, or ethically, to properly read a sign. If a man, upon seeing a beautifully written letter, should suppose that it had written itself without a writer, or had always existed,[107] then that man has possibly failed in placing man and his natural inclinations as an important connection to our knowledge of God. It is through *khabar ṣādiq* that man knows of God, and of His relationships with His creatures, and of the universe. Furthermore, his readings on the cosmos need to begin with a proper and serious reading of man.

104. John Cottingham, *Why Believe?* (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009), 32.

105. Ibid., 32–41.

106. Idem, *Islam dalam Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Melayu*, 1–3.

107. Al-Ghazāli, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, 26–27.

Conclusion

Al-Attas emphasises man as a new and special creation intended by God to be His vicegerent (*khalifah*) on earth. He also highlights that the coming of man on earth is to accomplish God's purpose for man. It is clear that the cosmos and also man have purpose as indicated by the phrase "vicegerent on earth."

Man has a special position as a means to comprehend God's existence and the cosmos. From al-Attas's elaboration of *tafsīr-ta'wīl* method, and as an application of the categories of *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt*, the *muḥkamāt* of the cosmos is man himself. Man has the natural inclinations to use himself as a frame, as metaphor to acquire understanding. This frame is further strengthened by the Revelation.

Direct concern towards man, al-Attas said, provides clarity of the truth and reality to the journey in exploring the "labyrinth" of cosmos. As explained by al-Attas, the universe as the Created Book can only be properly understood if it is based on the readings on the Qur'ān as the Revealed Book. The word "book" as a metaphor which is used to understand the cosmos itself indicates a metaphorical significance in relation to man's life.

Without increased awareness of man's important place in understanding the cosmos, man's growing accumulation of knowledge concerning the cosmos shall be called into question, especially in terms of its fundamental relationship to man's life. As aptly described by al-Ghazālī: If man knows not his own soul, which is the nearest thing to him, what is the use of his claiming to know others?[108]

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108. Ibid., 14–15.

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