

AL-ATTAS ON ACTION, THINKING FRAMEWORK AND THE HUMAN SOUL

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses al-Attas's definition of thinking as "the movement of the soul towards meaning" which he developed based on comparison and synthesis of expositions on the metaphysical reality underlying the nature of man and knowledge of the philosophers (*al-falyasūf*), theologians (*al-mutakallimūn*), and metaphysicians (*al-ṣūfīyyūn*). Thinking, intellection, and making judgment are not independent of a framework of thought or a worldview. According to al-Attas, in its active quest for knowledge, the soul arrives at meaning; and as thinking involves sensibles (*maḥsūsāt*) and intelligibles (*ma'qūlat*) to arrive at meanings and as they are intellectual forms, they have limits—another novel concept brought forth by al-Attas as the limit of truth for every object of knowledge. It is difficult to grasp and understand intelligibles, because they do not have the empirical sensitive counterparts. It argues that al-Attas' emphasis on rational proof, the prerogative of the intellect (*'aql*), that is not the product of conjecture or doubt is something new that al-Attas brought forth, because it has to conform to the true and real ontological and logical conditions, a finer and substantial analysis of the epistemology of the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamā'ah* in addition to sense perception and true reports. This study sheds light on the result of thinking in Islām which is to arrive at certainty (*yaqīn*). This article has established the importance of the heart (*qalb*) over the intellect in the reception of *ma'rifah* in support of al-Attas' emphasis that the *qalb* is the spiritual organ for cognition, higher than that of rational and logical signified knowledge.

Keywords: Thinking, cognition, worldview, metaphysics, *qalb*

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I. ACTION AND THINKING¹

Right action is an act in conformity with knowledge of both the ontological real and the logical truth at once.² By ontological real, we refer to the realities of things (*ḥaqā'iq al-ashyā'*), which are firmly established in their ontological condition in God's knowledge as the permanent archetypes (*al-a'yān al-thābitah*).³ By virtue of that condition, knowledge concerning them, namely their truth, can be verified (*mutahaqqiqun*).⁴ Any conclusion or judgment made based on verified knowledge (*taḥqīq*) is a wise decision because it is taken with due consideration, given in weighing the different aspects involved in arriving at said judgment or conclusion. The conclusion arrived at, which is a judgment nonetheless, involves arriving at the purpose (*maqṣad; intentio*) of an act to be taken, having considered its prerequisites (*kayfiyyah*) and requirements (*takmilah*) to engender benefit (*maṣlahah*) for common good and to minimize as much as possible negative implication (*mafsadah*) in order to ward off evil (*sharr*) both for the individual as well as the public at large.

Thus, thinking is both deliberate and active; it demands cognizant presence of the whole person to execute; and does not take place in the absence of social, moral, and ethical frameworks—a worldview, either derived or intuitively constructed—working in the background.⁵ Thinking is thus the verification of what is observed, sense-perceived and experienced within a specified framework of thought, without which thinking would be an inert, vacuous act, devoid of both purpose and consequence.

“Thinking”, for Aristotle specifically, “is different from perceiving” which is an activity of one or more senses on something or some facts, “and is held to be in part imagination, in part judgement.” As thinking is part imagination and part judgment, it can be further appreciated, as Kwame Anthony Appiah said, since “thought,” that end product of thinking, is an act “saving the phenomena,”⁶ which implies the capture and holding of an image or event within the mind, hence, thought, in association with phenomena, is “a simplifying idealization...to allow us to cover the past record and predict the further course of our experience”⁷ within a construct or framework of a theory to “allow us to predict what will happen over a wide range of cases even if we know that it is false.”⁸

Therefore, thinking does not take place in a vacuum and thought does not arise *sans* context. Thinking and thought involve inclination, biases, or stances, for “the correctness of a logical result lies in practice, and the purpose of thought must be sought not in the reflection of so called objective world, but in rendering possible the calculations of events and of operations upon them.”⁹ Thinking can only take place rightly or in conformity with—if and when there is—a framework of ideas outlined with certain conditions that define and limit what is proper, right, and true, without which all manner of talk about right conduct, moral or otherwise will be futile. “The saving of phenomena” and the “purpose of thought is to keep us constantly in a position to deal with things so that, with given conditions, we may receive an exactly ascertainable sense-impression” because it provides us with a sense of repeatability and familiarity, a “known” that we can work with.¹⁰

Aristotle separates imagination from judgement because, while judgement involves science and intelligence, imagination seems to lead to opinion. Hence, imagination is, at best, held suspect by Aristotle, since it is not sense, i.e. the five physical senses, because sense, e.g. sight or seeing, is either a faculty or an activity. He says:

1) Imagination takes place in the absence of both, e.g. in dreams; and 2) while sense is always present, imagination not. If actual imagination and actual sensation were the same, imagination would be found in all the brutes: this is held not to be the case ; e.g. it is not found in ants or bees or grubs; 3) Again,

6 Kwame Anthony Appiah. *As If* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 18.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., 19.

10 Ibid., 20.

1 I wish to thank En. Roslan Jelani, Dr. Mohd. Hilmi Ramli, Dayang Nurhazieqa Hamzani, Sharifah Hajar Almahdaly, Muhammad Syafiq Bin Borhannuddin, Luqman Johani and Nik Mohd. Ayman Haniff Bin Raja Azlan, for their invaluable assistance in the preparation of this article.

2 Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam* (first impression, Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1995; reprinted Johor Bharu: Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) Publishing, 2014), 18. Hereafter cited as *Prolegomena*.

3 Idem., *Commentary on the Ḥujjat al-Ṣiddīq* (Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Culture Malaysia, 1986). Hereafter cited as *Commentary*.

4 Idem., *The Oldest Known Malay Manuscript: A 16th Century Malay Translation of the 'Aqā'id of al-Nasafī* (Kuala Lumpur: Department of Publications University of Malaya, 1988), 53, 65. There are three degrees of verification which lead to certainty of knowledge in epistemology as espoused by Islam as outlined in the Quran, *Sūrah al-Takāthur* (at the end) namely: 1) the logical and rational verification (*'ilm al-yaqīn*); 2) witnessing (*'ayn al-yaqīn*); and 3) experience (*ḥaqq al-yaqīn*). *A Commentary On The Creed of Islam: Sa'd al Dīn al Taftāzānī on the Creed of Najim al Dīn al Nasafī*, Translated With Introduction and Notes By Earl Edgar Elder (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950). See also al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 105.

5 I have excluded the political framework because political nuances and biases are products of society's moral and ethical framework. It is unfortunate that today's politics is imposed on social, moral and ethical frameworks.

sensations are always true, imaginations are for the most part false. Sensations are so to speak raw data, and as “facts” they are as true as they get; 4) Once more, even in ordinary speech, we do not, when sense functions precisely with regard to its object, say that we imagine it to be a man, but rather when there is some failure of accuracy in its exercise; 5) Visions appear to us even when our eyes are shut. Neither is imagination any of things that are never in error; e.g. knowledge or intelligence; for imagination may be false.¹¹

It appears that imagination and judgement, which are involved in thinking according to Aristotle are akin to the logical modes of thought; namely, what is understood as concept (Ar. *taṣawwūr*), which is the purview of imagination, as it were in his terms, while judgement is assent (Ar. *taṣdīq*) in arriving at the conclusion from syllogism, the prerogative of the intellect.¹²

The most succinct definition of *thinking* is given by al-Attas. He defines *thinking* as “the soul’s movement towards meaning, and this needs imagination.”¹³ In its active quest for knowledge, the soul arrives at meaning; when meaning passively arrives in the soul, knowledge is gifted from on high.¹⁴ Knowledge becomes established in the soul as intelligible forms, affording meanings to the soul with “the recognition of the place of anything in a system”; as it becomes clear in the mind, such “a recognition occurs when the relation a thing has with others in the system becomes clarified and understood.”¹⁵ The system mentioned, albeit in the mind and abstract, presupposes a network of meanings, comprising of concepts, is a structure of interrelated thoughts. The underlying framework assumed by the structure is constructed from a set of key ideas established in the mind via both *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge.

A priori knowledge¹⁶ does not involve any deliberate action by the soul. It is almost akin

to, but not to be identified or equated with, gifted knowledge (*‘ilm ladunnī*) in the tradition of Islam. *A posteriori* knowledge involves the deliberation of the intellect. The intellect possesses an intelligential capacity with the ability to arrive at meanings derived from patterns and symbolic forms. These patterns, rightly referred to as meaningful patterns, are arrived at through the process of clarifying, making judgment, discriminating and making distinction of intelligible forms that are posited in the intellect as sense-perception, conveying information from the external senses to the intellect. This dynamic and subconscious act of the intellect is intensive, hence the signification of meaning is referred to as *intentio* in Latin, and in Arabic it is referred to as *maqṣūd*. The *intentio* or *maqṣūd*, when verbalized, written, or externalized in any other form or medium, is meaning, or *ma’nā* in Arabic. Al-Attas says,

Meaning as denoted by ma’nā is a form in the sensitive and rational imagination of the soul which the soul’s act of intellection identifies as something sensible or intelligible placed in relation to other such things forming a complex whole. It is the soul’s recognition of the place of anything in a system which occurs when the relation a thing has with others in the system becomes clarified to the understanding. There is therefore intrinsic connection between meaning and knowledge. In this way concepts of objects and concepts of concepts, their relations and associations, judgements about them involving discrimination and clarification become ever increasing knowledge.¹⁷

It is therefore clear as to why scientific undertakings and observations on the workings of the natural world, mathematics included, the results of what are encapsulated, written, and known as formulas; whereas non-scientific conclusions, or judgments which are the intellect’s assent to what is true and real, are written out in words stringing lexical meanings one with another.¹⁸ Artistic expressions on the other hand intensively and exclusively use colors and forms to capture and manifest the meanings intended albeit hidden within those colors and forms.¹⁹

17 Al-Attas, *On Justice*, 17.

18 See M.Z. Uthman, “Merupacita Makna dalam Kata-Kata” in *Leksikologi dan Leksikografi Melayu*, Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin & Rusmadi Baharudin (editor), (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2008), 473-494. In page 486, the author asserts that translation is indeed a scientific endeavor because to translate one language to another language, the translator is required to know the language and the content of knowledge that is being translated.

19 M.Z Uthman, “Beauty is the Meaning Written between the Lines” in *Alegori: Ekspresi Seni Kontemporer*

11 Aristotle, *De Anima*, 427b-428a. I am using the translations of Aristotle in *The Works of Aristotle*, translated under the editorship of W.D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931).

12 See Shams C. Inati, *Ibn Sina’s Remarks and Admonitions, Part One: Logic* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 5. I have adopted the translations of *taṣawwūr* and *taṣdīq* based on the work of Inati.

13 Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 124 and in his *Islam and the Philosophy of Science* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1989) which was published separately as an independent monograph, 16.

14 Al-Attas, *On Justice and the Nature of Man* (Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Islamic Banking and Finance Malaysia (IBFIM), 2015), 16-17. Hereby referred to as *On Justice*.

15 Ibid.

16 Often mistaken as intuition—active, albeit episodic—a *a priori* knowledge is dormant and becomes effective when the conditions are ripe for it. In the epistemological scheme of Islam, intuition (*ilhām*) is gifted knowledge from God on high and its contents are not of mundane, worldly concerns. *Ilhām* is a degree lower than *Hikma*, a gift of a higher order that is given to select individuals and the Prophets; thus intuition is akin to knowledge of guidance and right path. See al-Attas, *On Justice*, 14.

II. THE HUMAN SOUL

The soul, which is both the repository and the locus of epistemology, axiology, and knowledge, is the reality of man. The Greek philosophers referred to it as the *entelechy*: the perfection of man. For Aristotle, the soul is not a substance separate from the body, but the *entelechy* of an organized body.²⁰ As it is “immanent, organizes the body and gives it its characteristics,” Aristotle is of the position that the soul does not have “any activity independent of the body.”²¹ The perfection of the soul is indicative of the perfection of man. That activity which indicates the perfection of the soul is thinking, of the rational and logical kind; the faculty solely associated with logical, rational and reasoned thought is the intellect. The higher the intellect, the more perfect is the soul, according to the Greek philosophers.²²

The soul (Ar. *nafs*) employs the intellect (*‘aql*) to operate on the intelligible forms—these are sensible forms having gone through the soul’s internal senses of common sense (Ar. *al-hiss al-mushtarak*), imagination (Ar. *khayāl*) or representative (Ar. *al-khayaliyyah*), retention-recollection (Ar. *ḥāfiẓah*), and estimation (Ar. *wahm*).²³ These powers of the intellect, innate in every human being, are of different capacities (Ar. *wus’*),²⁴ some lower while some others higher depending on the intellect’s degree of actualization. Al-Attas describes the actualization process as the progress of development of the material potential intellect (*al-‘aql al-hayūlāni*) from potential intellect to habitual intellect and eventually active intellect.²⁵

Al-Attas illustrates the human soul as having the faculties and activities of two other ‘souls’, namely the vegetative and the animal (See Illustration 1 below). The perfection of the human soul is in the maintenance of the just balance among all these faculties and

activities—vegetative, animal, vital and rational-cognitive of the soul or the articulate soul.²⁶ the perfection of the soul is, unlike the Aristotelian concept which is only fixated to the attainment of the intellect of the highest order, the employment of these faculties and activities of the vegetative and animal souls in their due measures under the control of the rational and cognitive soul to attain tranquility (*sakīnah*) as the subset of happiness (*sa‘ādah*).²⁷ To be sure, the circumspective sway of the human or rational soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqah*) must be paramount over the animal soul (*al-nafs al-ḥayawāniyyah*) and the vegetative soul (*al-nafs al-nabāṭiyyah*).

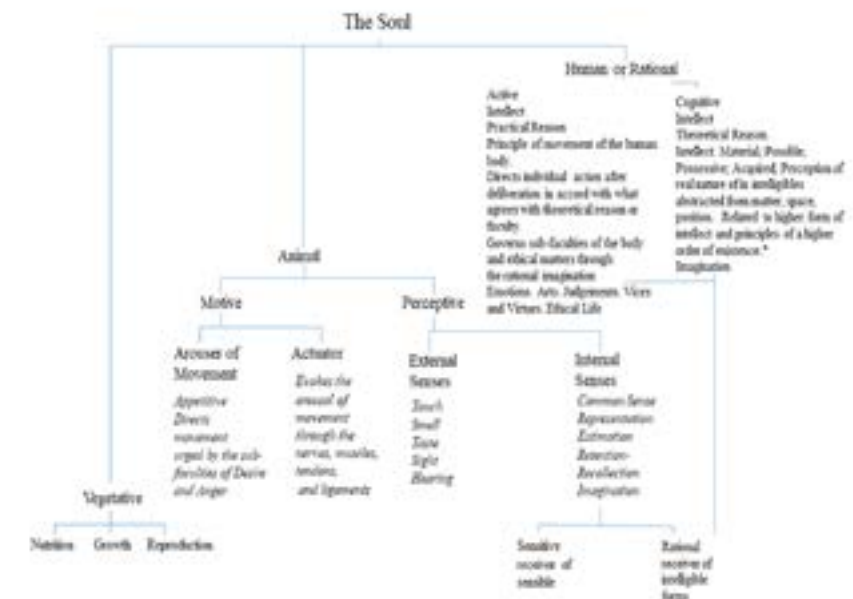


Illustration 1

Berasaskan Manuskrip Melayu (Kuala Lumpur: Institut Terjemahan & Buku Malaysia (ITBM) & Galeri PETRONAS, 2018), 111-116. See page 111 to 112.

20 Fazlur Rahman, *Avicenna's Psychology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1981), 3. Hereafter cited as *Avicenna's Psychology*.

21 Ibid., 4.

22 This is in stark contrast to the idea of the perfection of the soul of the mystical Eastern traditions, Christianity and Judaism, and the religious tradition of Islam. More elaboration of the perfection of the soul from the religious tradition of Islam is treated in the following pages of this article.

23 Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 150-154.

24 Per its usage in Qur'an 2:286, whereby the soul will not be overwhelmed to bear any burden beyond its capacity. “لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا.”; see also al-Attas, *On Justice*, 7, 9.

25 For the philosophers' description on the development of the intellect, see Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1958), 34. Hereafter cited as *Prophecy in Islam*. See also al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 158-163.

26 Al-Attas, *On Justice*, 35-37.

27 Ibid., 20-23. See also his ‘The Meaning and Experience of Happiness in Islam’ in *Prolegomena*, 91-93; and in the Malay translation of the same pages in al-Attas, *Ma'na Kebahagiaan dan Pengalamannya dalam Islam*, trans. by M Z Uthman (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2014), 8-15.

Based on the explanation by al-Attas, in its operation the intellect employs its intelligential capacity (see *Illustration 2* below),²⁸ the soul's faculty in making a conclusion because it involves judgment, clarification, discrimination and distinction.²⁹ It is difficult to grasp and understand the "intellectual" and the so-called "theoretical matters" because intelligibles, or *intelligibilia* (*ma'qūlat*), do not have what the physical senses are able to acquire, which are the *sensibilia* (*maḥsūsat*), the empirical sensitive counterparts that are related, identified, and associated with each and every one of the different sensations, and the more so when each of the sensation is limited to what it is appointed for³⁰ — for instance, the tongue is limited to its capacity or sensation for taste of sweet and sour; the sense of touch grasps the sensation of smoothness and roughness, of cold and hot; sight perceives all the spectrum of what is visible; hearing admits what is audible and differentiates between noise and harmony, musicality; and lastly, smell senses that sweet pleasant bouquet from the odorous, reprehensible.

The reality of man, generally referred to as the soul, is also known as the intellect (*'aql*), the heart (*qalb*), the spirit (*rūḥ*), and the soul (*nafs*).³¹ The intellect is associated with the internal non-physical senses, which are entirely different from the external physical senses: when it is performing its task of "intellecting," commonly understood as thinking, in its quest to arrive at meaning. "Meaning" that is arrived at does not have any of the empirical, sensitive counterparts, which the soul can register and grasp as "taste", "smell" and "perceive" and other sensations, because the process of abstraction denudes all physical qualities from that which is intellected upon. It is easier, relatively speaking, to find things physical that we have lost or misplaced because we have perceived and seen the object or "know what it looks like," and the soul has some kind of an abstracted "imprint" of the physical aspects from the lost item, and by the powers of the soul's internal senses, which are common sense (*al-ḥiss al-mushtarak*), retention (*ḥāfiẓah*), estimation (*wahmiyyah*) and imagination (*khayāl*), what were sense-perceived allowed the mind to recreate, locate, and eventually find the lost item. Our active imagination (*mutakhayyilah*) and estimation (*wahmiyyah*) allow us to innovate and enable us to produce what we conceive as something creative using the forms, dimension,

colors, and scents so familiar to our physical senses. Al-Attas explains the relation between the intellect and the soul in the following:

In relation to the soul, the intellect is a faculty or power of the soul that becomes manifest in man as the rational soul. This intellective power is something different from the rational soul, since the active agent is the soul, and the intellect is in this respect its instrument, like the knife and the cutting. But in reality intellect, soul, and mind, point to the same entity, being called intellect because the entity is perceptive; being called soul because the entity governs the body; being called mind because the entity is predisposed to the apprehension of realities.³²

It is difficult to attain and grasp the counterpart of the internal senses because that which the intellect works on to glean meanings is not readily perceived as defined, limited, and shaped by the known physical dimensions with forms and qualities. It is not heard, seen, tasted or touched and certainly far from smelled. The intellect operates not on one at a time, but many at once. They are referred to as intellectual forms—abstractions, which are devoid of physicality of tastes, smells, shapes, colors, dimensions, and limits. It is only when these intellectual forms are held, preserved, recollected, and associated with other related aspects in a system of meanings readily established in our soul is knowledge arrived at—hence, understanding is attained and achieved (*mafḥūm*).³³

The soul is *independent* of the body; however, it "requires the body in this physical world in order to acquire principles of ideas and beliefs."³⁴ In his description of the process by which the soul arrives at ideas and beliefs, al-Attas emphasizes the use of imagination and estimation, which are employed in the making of comparative relations and ratios between single universals in a series of negation and affirmation. The process of how intelligential capacity works can be illustrated as below:

28 The illustration is made based on the explanation of al-Attas in his *Prolegomena*, 122-123. See his explanation of the difference in the faculties and functions of the soul in *On Justice*, 31-44.

29 Al-Attas, *On Justice*, 8.

30 Al-Attas, *Oldest Manuscript*, 54.

31 For an elaboration of the many names and descriptions of their functions of the one and same reality of man, see al-Attas, *The Nature of Man and the Psychology of the Human Soul*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1990), 5-8. Hereafter cited as *Nature of Man*; and *Prolegomena*, 146-148.

32 Al-Attas, *Nature of Man*, 28; Also in idem., *Prolegomena*, 165.

33 εἶδος (*eidos*) are the conceptual forms whereas λόγος (*logos*) is when this form undergoes particularization and limitation. See Rahman, *Avicenna's Psychology*, 4-6.

34 Al-Attas, *Nature of Man*, 28; idem., *Prolegomena*, 165.

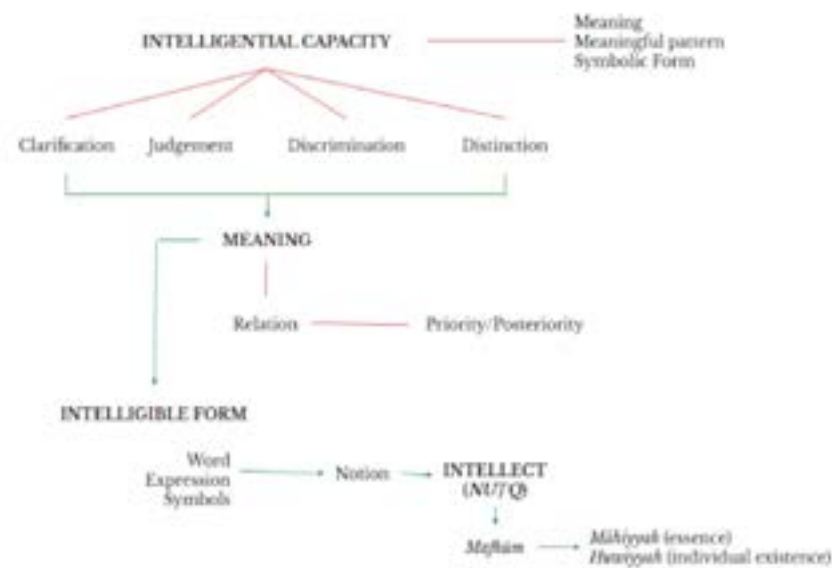


Illustration 2

Judgment or conclusion that is right and true, is arrived at based on the cognitive apprehension of the truth and reality by the rational soul having performed these processes represented in the illustration above (Illustration 2). The process of making relations with negation and affirmation is the process by which the soul, namely the intellect, establishes “the limits of truth to every object of knowledge”, another novel concept of al-Attas.³⁵ He explains thus:

The apparent and obvious meanings of the objects of knowledge have to do with their respective places within the system of relations; and their ‘proper’ places become apparent to our understanding when the limits of their significance are recognized. This is then the position of truth: that there are limits to the meaning of things in the way they are meant to be known, and their proper places are profoundly bound up with the limits of their significance. *True* knowledge is then knowledge that recognizes the limit of truth in its every object.³⁶

35 idem., *Islām and the Philosophy of Science*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1989), 29; idem., *Prolegomena*, p. 134-135. Also see *Introduction* to *Prolegomena*, p. 15. The notion of the limits of truth in every object of knowledge implies the *maqūlāt* of the philosophers (*falāsifah*) and the theologians (*mutakallimūn*), also known as the Ten Categories. These categories are fundamental in the thought process, outlined by Aristotle, and the conclusion arrived at can go beyond the limits of these defined categories, and thus lead to error in thought, and this was not clearly said by Aristotle or philosophers and theologians alike. This is as mentioned above a novel idea of al-Attas.

36 idem., *Prolegomena*, 15.

The inability to establish, arrive at or recognize the limits of truth, and go beyond the limits,³⁷ namely the two extremes of deficiency and excess, to every object of knowledge is among the contributing factors in the making, producing, spreading of untruth, post-truth, fake news and false information.³⁸ This is because the limits to their truth are broken, and for other than what is obvious to the eye, or sensible and rightly perceived, it is the intellect that is the final measure of truth and falsehood. Appiah also observed, idealization and ideals of a theory is only “true within a certain limited range of environments,”³⁹ which shows agreement with al-Attas’ limitations on truth.⁴⁰

The perfection of the intellect is when it has reached its actuality where the intelligential capacity is actively performing its processes of judging, clarifying, discrimination and distinguishing the intelligibles to arrive at meaning. Meaning is arrived at when the proper place of anything in a system is clarified to the understanding. To arrive at the proper place of anything in a system, there is a limit of truth for every object of knowledge, attained by common sense or achieved through practical or theoretical wisdom. True knowledge is knowledge that recognizes the limits of truth in every object of knowledge.⁴¹ The limits of truth in every object of knowledge do not imply a gap between theory and practice as understood in the West which gave rise to subject-object dichotomy.

The acquisition of knowledge that empowers its recipient with the ability to recognize the limits of truth in every object of knowledge that includes moral purpose is through a process known as *ta’dīb*, that is the inculcation of adab. It actualizes the soul its ability and capacity to recognize “the proper place of things in the order of creation, such that it leads to the recognition of the proper place of God in the order of being and existence.”⁴²

As previously mentioned, a system or network of meanings is assumed in order for justice

37 Al-Attas uses the example of the soul or rather its inner faculty called the heart (*qalb* or *fu’ād*) to establish the proper ‘inner vision’ that does not waver nor go beyond the limits of its “sight” at apprehending the vision of what is true and real that is gifted for it to “see”. See his ‘The Intuition of Existence’ in *Prolegomena*, 203. By the same token, the human soul can and should exercise restraint in arriving at judgment and conclusion by adhering to the “limits of truth to every object of knowledge, beyond which it is false.” See idem., *Islām and the Philosophy of Science*, p. 29, and in *Prolegomena*, 135.

38 idem., *On Justice*, 16.

39 Kwame Anthony Appiah, *As If* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 76.

40 Sound senses is one of the three sources of knowledge and epistemology in Islam. The other two are true reports (*khbar ṣādiq*) and reason (*‘aql*). For the discussion by al-Nasafi in his *‘Aqā’id*, see al-Attas, *Oldest Manuscript*, p. 53-54, 66. For al-Māturīdī’s discussion on the same topic, see Mustafa Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islām* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995), 84-90.

41 Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 14-15.

42 Ibid., 16.

in the mind and in action to take place, a manifestation of wisdom theoretical and practical at once; hence the connection and network of meanings are ever more emphasized, yielding a *tawhīd* method of epistemology and knowledge.

The gap that arose out of the bifurcation of theory and practice sets that duality of subject versus object, the detached observer, despite his or her interest in the object of study under observation. This predilection has given rise to the assumption “that what should be accepted are theories only that can be reduced to sensational elements, even though such theories might involve ideas pertaining to domains beyond the empirical spheres of experience,... that cognition is subjective, arbitrary, and conventional” leading to the idea that knowledge is logical in structure with emphasis on its empirical content.⁴³

Contrary to Aristotle who holds the faculty of imagination as being prone to false and erroneous judgment, al-Attas sets aright the function of the faculty of imagination in the soul’s quest for meaning and knowledge. In the soul’s conception and perception of abstract realities, “unlike the intellect, which undergoes transformation from a state of potentiality to that of actuality, the imagination is from the beginning active.”⁴⁴

The powers of imagination are employed in two different capacities: 1) when it is focused and directed to the world of senses and sensible experience it is known as sensitive imagination or phantasy, and it serves the practical intellect providing it with the forms or images and meanings of particular objects of knowledge,⁴⁵ and it can also produce “fictitious imaginations”; 2) And when it is focused and directed to the realms of the intellect and the spiritual realities it is cognitive imagination capable of reflecting the forms of the real world of images.

As it actively mediates between these two necessary functions it is opened to distraction because it cannot preoccupy itself to its own world.⁴⁶ Other internal senses of the soul are preoccupied with that which each and every one of them is appointed for, their own specific *intelligibilia*, just as the external senses with their specific *sensibilia*, whereas the faculty of imagination is employed to entertain both the sensitive as well as the cognitive realms. This is the fine point which has escaped Aristotle which led him to conclude that imagination is always false, and it is Al-Attas who has reinstated this paramount and fundamental function of the faculty imagination. Imagination is not prone to falsity or erroneous judgment; for that lies in

the faculty of estimation which directly influences the quality of the judgment or conclusion. The faculty of imagination is already in its actuality, from which proceed all possibilities of the two realms of senses and sensible experience as well as the higher intellectual and the spiritual, specifically cognitive realms. Al-Attas further elaborates:

The power of imagination is not equal in men and differs according to their degrees of intellectual excellence and nobility of the soul. In some it is stronger than in others, so that some may be able to see true visions of the intermediary world and others may not. We who affirm prophecy cannot deny the possibility that the forms of the world of images that are reflected in the cognitive imagination may get imprinted in the sensitive imagination or phantasy to the extent that the perceiver of these forms may actually see them in their sensible guise. Indeed in the case of the Prophet, for example, his cognitive imagination was so powerful that he was able to perceive intelligible realities in their sensible forms (e.g. the Angel in the form of a man); and sensible realities in their intelligible forms (e.g. the dead as alive in the other world).⁴⁷

The function of the imagination is then to create sensible things, or rather it is the soul itself that created sensible things and perceptible forms from within itself as well as images of unperceived objects. The thinking and feeling entity to which perception, whether sensitive, imaginative and intellective, is attributed is then in reality not the external and internal senses, but the soul itself exercising its cognitive powers of intelligence and imagination. The soul therefore is not something passive; it is creative, and through perception, imagination and intelligence it participates in the “creation” and interpretation of the worlds of sense and sensible experience, of images, and of intelligible forms and ideas.⁴⁸

In Islam there are three main schools of thought namely the philosophers (*falāsifah*), the theologians (*mutakallimūn*), and the Sufis who with their own method of analysis have demonstrated their intellectual achievements in the theoretical domains of thought that serve as the structure of worldview of Islam in framing the thinking process.⁴⁹ The theologians were responding to the philosophers, while the Sufis, in making their own unique contribution in philosophical investigations on intellectual and metaphysical matters, have taken into consideration the views and conclusions of the two schools,⁵⁰ as authoritative knowledge

47 Ibid., 171.

48 Ibid.

49 The jurists (*fuqahā*) have exclusively devoted their energy to the practical domains (*mu‘amalāt*).

50 For resume of the different schools of thought in Islam, see Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, ed. Muḥyi al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo: Maktabah al-Naḥḍah al-Miṣriyyah, 1950); also Abū Maṣū‘ al-

43 Ibid., 114.

44 Ibid., 169.

45 Ibid., 170.

46 Ibid.

in Islam leads to obligation, which means “duty, obedience, and loyalty to God and to His Prophet and Messenger; then to those among Muslims who are legitimate Possessors of Command (*ūlū al-amr*) who follow the Holy Prophet and are charged with authority over the Community to ensure that God’s commands (s. *amr*) and prohibitions (s. *nahy*) are duly and properly implemented.”⁵¹

After the Holy Prophet, authority is vested in his closest Companions who are known as “the Rightly Guided Successors (*khulafā’ al-rāshidūn*), His Companions (*al-aṣḥāb*), who were men of knowledge of the religion and its allied sciences such as language, exegesis, and interpretation of the sunnah. They were followed by the Followers of the Companions (*al-tābi’ūn*) and the Leaders (s. *Imām*) of the various schools of law followed by other men of discernment in knowledge of religion and its allied sciences (the *‘ulamā’*): the jurists (*al-fuqahā’*), the theologians (*al-mutakallimūn*), the metaphysicians (*al-ṣūfiyyah*), and the philosophers (*al-ḥukamā’*), who follow the Holy Prophet adhering to his sunnah and to the Holy Qur’ān.”⁵²

In agreement with the theologians, al-Attas emphasizes true reports (*khābar ṣādiq*) as a source of knowledge in the discussion of epistemology in contemporary Islam, as outlined in the *‘Aqā’id al-Nasafī* and other books of tenets belief of Māturīdī and Ash‘ārī *madhāhib*.⁵³ Al-Attas emphasizes tradition in many of his writings, and by tradition, he refers to the Qur’ān, the Ḥadīth and the Sunnah of the Prophet. The *‘Aqā’id al-Nasafī*, lists two kinds of true reports: the reports by those whom the majority of people acknowledge and agree that they do not purport to construct and propagate a lie, and this includes the reports of those who are experts and learned in any field of science or discipline of knowledge; and the second is the report from the Prophet.⁵⁴ In many of his introductory remarks to his works, al-Attas is an unapologetic in his emphasis on the Qur’ān as the source of true knowledge and from there he would develop expositions on theological, philosophical, and *taṣawwūf* discussions with the exegesis drawn from the Qur’ān, the commentaries of the Ḥadīth and the interpretations of the Sunnah of the Prophet. And the last of the sources of knowledge in Islam as outlined in the *‘Aqā’id* is *‘aql* or reason, also referred to as intellect.

Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, ed. Muhyi al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Hamīd (Beirut: Maktabah al-‘Asriyyah, 1995).

51 Al-Attas, *On Justice*, 4.

52 Ibid.

53 Al-Attas, *Islām and the Philosophy of Science*, 9; idem., *Prolegomena*, 118. For an independent study on al-Māturīdī and his theological thought, see Mustafa Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islām*.

54 Idem., *Oldest Manuscript*, 54, 66.

III. INTELLECTION AND THOUGHT

The intelligential capacity as in Illustration 2 above, which is based on the succinct description by al-Attas, demonstrates the process of what takes place in the soul’s quest in arriving at meaning. Intellection is to arrive at meanings and as they are intellectual forms, they have limits—another novel concept brought forth by al-Attas as the limit of truth for every object of knowledge. Limits are necessary for the intellect to grasp intelligible forms, else the forms and symbols will be meaningless. These limits allow the intellect to locate the right word or a string of words in order to articulate the meanings intended of the said objects of thought.⁵⁵ Hence, words bind meanings. A thing (*shay’*) achieves its status as being-existent (*mawjūd*) by virtue of the act of existence (*wujūd*) actively bringing things (*ashyā’*) into manifest, exteriorized, externalized condition of being (*zāhir*) that is referred to as reality that exists out there. Yet in the mind or the intellect as it performs its intellection, it analyses the quiddity (*māhiyyah*) of that thing; thus *wujūd* that is active is *esse*; while as mode (*mawjūd*) it is known as *ens*.⁵⁶ That mode of a thing existing when it is mentally posited is referred to as the quiddity (*māhiyyah*) of existent things as they are being-existents (*mawjudāt*) which are objects of the mind. A reference to Jāmī is appropriate here:

If the quiddity (*māhiyyah*) is the object of qualification (*mawṣūfah*), and existence (*wujūd*) is the quality and since the object of qualification always precedes the quality, then quiddity (*māhiyyah*) is prior to existence. However, priority requires the antecedent to exist first and since quiddity cannot exist by itself without existence, therefore quiddity cannot exist prior to existence.⁵⁷

When the mind analyzes an object of thought, that which renders it being-existent, the active agent is existence itself, and it is also its final purpose because the purpose of the thing is to exist. That is to say, for every existent thing to become manifest, there is a substratum that is associated with it, either in form or matter, which gives it its innermost ground to exist, the “what-is-it” (*māhiyyah*) or quiddity of the thing. This is the prerogative of the intellect, that

55 Idem., *On Justice*, 10, 16. See also al-Attas’ discussion of this in his *The Concept of Education in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1999) 2; and in his ‘Islām and the Philosophy of Science’ in *Prolegomena*, 124.

56 Idem., *Commentary*, 243.

57 M. Z. Uthman, *Laṭā’if al-Asrār*, 38.

activity which arise in the mind by analyzing it in a bifurcated mode of genus and species. The considerations what makes a thing is “what it is” in the mind are the inter-layered and overlapping queries of 1) what is its active agency; 2) for what purpose does it serve; 3) what is the ground of its “matter”; and 4) does it have a form—all these form the conceptualization of the quiddity of a thing. This is the conceptual structure of an actual thing at the level of intellection (*ta’aqul*).⁵⁸ Meanings thus arrived at, leading to new knowledge because it has reached a veritable state and unassailable by doubt.⁵⁹

Doubt (*shakk*) and conjecture (*ẓann*) are now regarded as methods to arrive at knowledge under the guise of criticism⁶⁰ because criticism is thought of as having the power to push the current state of knowledge to advanced knowledge; however, criticism is neither conjecture nor doubt.⁶¹ Doubt is to vacillate between two sides whereas conjecture, on the other hand, is to incline towards one side without any preponderating evidence to the truth of it. Indeed doubt and conjecture are states of the soul, and they do not lead to knowledge because they are two separate symptoms of an unsettled soul in its movement to arrive at the limits of truth, because it undergoes a vacillating status from one extreme of excess to the other extreme of deficiency, all in the process of arriving at meaning.⁶² Hence the preponderance towards the empirical evidence or facts, and as facts just are, they are readily taken as the final decisive measure of and what is the truth.⁶³ Therefore, doubt and conjecture are anathema to and cannot reinforce or reaffirm rational proof, which have attained the level of certainty (*yaqīn*) because it is that which is arrived at by the intellect, an emphasis made by al-Attas, concerning conclusion of an intellection. Arriving at the truth, to reiterate the end and the purpose of the process of intellection, involves the apprehension of the truth, that immediate grasp of the true meaning as well as comprehension of the truth after having appropriately weighed and measured, with the use of imagination and estimation of, the limits of meaning from the abstraction of the seen observable and perceived data.⁶⁴ His emphasis on *rational proof*, the prerogative of the intellect (*aql*), that is not the product of conjecture or doubt is something

new that al-Attas brought forth, because it has to conform to the true and real ontological and logical conditions, a finer and substantial analysis of the epistemology of the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa’l-Jamā’ah* in addition to sense perception and true reports. Not only is the intellect to be employed in logical and rational steps, but as the final arbiter; intellection which is the veritable act of arriving at the truth of reality submits to rational proof.⁶⁵ This is in line with the spirit of the Qur’ān which exhorts thinking (*tafakkur*),⁶⁶ contemplating (*tadabbur*),⁶⁷ and intellection (*ta’qilūn*).⁶⁸

Logic is a science of examined and measured thought process and we can see how al-Ghazālī has devoted several works emphasizing the importance of sound intellect in arriving at knowledge and among them are *Mihakk al-Nazar*,⁶⁹ *al-Qisṭās al-Mustaqīm*⁷⁰, *Mi’yār al-’Ilm*⁷¹ and the introduction part of his *uṣūl al-fiqh* work *al-Mustasfā min ‘Ilm al-Uṣūl*.⁷² That measured and examined thought process is one of the many operations of intellection involving the abstraction of form and matter from any object of knowledge and that is the prerogative of the intellect. The materiality is abstracted and examined to differentiate its essence as opposed to the quiddity of the object in question.⁷³ The view of those who hold to the primacy of existence, essence is the being of a thing whereas quiddity is the fundamental aspect of a thing and that is existence.⁷⁴ It is existence that brings manifestation things as they are — their being — to gain a status in temporal and spatial dimensions.⁷⁵

65 Rational proof is that indubitable conclusion of the truth arrived at within its worldview after exhausting all levels of the impossible and the possible such that one is left with the one and only option, namely the necessary conclusion. To cite two examples where he employs the preference to rational proof over archeological and documentary evidences are his treatment in arriving at the correct date of the Terengganu Inscription in his *Correct Date of the Terengganu Inscription*; and over suspicious documentary evidence is his analysis in *Historical Fact and Fiction* in arriving at the name of the first Muslim king of Sumatra as Sultan Muḥammad and not Merah Silau (page 17-18), and the name of the first sultan of Melaka as Sultan Muḥammad not Sultan Iskandar (page 61-62). Idem., *Historical Fact and Fiction*, (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit UTM Press, 2011), 17-18, 61-62.

66 Qur’ān 6:50, أَفَلَا تَتَفَكَّرُونَ

67 Qur’ān 4:82, أَفَلَا يَتَذَكَّرُونَ

68 Qur’ān 2:44, 76. 3: 65. 6: 32, أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

69 Al-Ghazālī, Abū Hāmid Muḥammad, *Mihakk al-Nazar*, ed. M. B. al-Na’sānī (Beirut, 1966).

70 Idem., *al-Qisṭās al-Mustaqīm*, ed. Victor Shalḥat (Beirut: 1983).

71 Idem., *Mi’yār al-’Ilm*, ed. S. Dunyā (Cairo: Dār al-Ma’ārif, 1961).

72 Idem., *al-Mustasfā min ‘Ilm al-Uṣūl*, 2 Vols. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-’Arabī, n.d).

73 See al-Attas, *Mysticism of Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī*, 150; also his *Quiddity and Essence* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1990), 2-7, hereafter cited as *Quiddity and Essence*; idem., *Prolegomena*, 218-219, 220-222.

74 Al-Attas, *Quiddity and Essence*, 8-9; idem., *Prolegomena*, 223-224.

75 See Al-Attas, *Commentary*, 91; see also M. Z. Uthman, *Laṭā’if al-Asrār*, 41-42.

58 See Al-Attas, *Commentary*, 331-332. See also, *Prolegomena*, 230.

59 Idem., *Prolegomena*, 159.

60 It includes all general forms of criticism, such as cultural and literature criticism, hermeneutics, critical thinking and so forth.

61 See Imre Lakatos, ‘Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes’, in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 96.

62 Al-Attas, *Islām and Philosophy of Science*, 8; idem., *Prolegomena*, 117. Doubt is to vacillate between two sides; conjecture to incline towards one side without any preponderating evidence to the truth of it.

63 Ibid., 5, *Prolegomena*, 115.

64 See al-Attas, *Nature of Man*, 20-21; idem., *Prolegomena*, 159-160.

IV. THE LIFE OF THE INTELLECT

The intellect is subconsciously active⁷⁶ when it is preoccupied with the maintenance of bodily functions for the life of the physical body. The activity of the intellect is indicated by not merely its logical and rational inference, for that is reached later in life as and when the intellect goes through the stages of its evolvment in realizing its potentiality as it reaches the stage of active intellect, but as early as by what is understood as the “brain function”, whereby its activity is detected with the beginning of life of the fetus while it is developing in the womb. The soul (*nafs*) of man begins its tenure association with the physical body (*jasad*) as and when the spirit (*rūh*) is breathed in it. At that early stage, the animal soul (*al-nafs al-hayawāniyyah*), albeit its early stages of association with the body, holds the sway over it for that is its main task, namely growing and maintaining life. When the child is born and as it grows into a mature adult the rational soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqah*) begins to evolve to take its role, along with sense and its sensibility culminating in the maturity of the intellect coinciding with the evolvment of the intellect from potentiality to actuality, by which man is known as the rational animal (*al-hayawān al-nāṭiq*). The sensitive imagination is propitiously employed to serve the practical intellect initiating the animal soul (*al-nafs al-hayawāniyyah*) to motivate the internal as well as the external physical organs in service of appetite and desire for growth and motion. When it is performing its specific task of thinking or intellecting it is conscious and deliberate with the cognitive imagination in full capacity in service of the theoretical intellect. The intelligential capacity functions deliberately to establish the limits via judgment, classification, discrimination and distinction of the sensible forms and intelligible forms in its control over the animal soul is to have a firm handle in attenuating the appetite and desire, employing them in due measure and that specific control is the prerogative of the rational soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqah*). This is the specific function which serves that rational and intellectual faculty of the soul associated with the perfection of man. The employment of the cognitive imagination in arriving at the right conclusion or judgment in affirming the just measure in actions which when conducted in conformity with the right and true reality, these are deemed as ethical and moral conduct. Herein lies the perfection of man — the culmination of ethical

76 The intellect is one of the four realities or faculties of the soul, and as the soul is not of this temporal and spatial dimension beginning and end do not apply to the intellect. Hence its activity does not have a beginning as it is primordially predisposed to performing intellection albeit in varying capacity and capability from potentiality to actuality. See F. Rahman, *Avicenna's Psychology*, 35. See also his *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1958), 34.

and moral conduct in words and actions which are deemed as acts of virtue and the value associated with them enhance the pleasure from within the person and extends the pleasure of good conduct to others.⁷⁷ This is the virtuous life, a spiritual life, a happy life, and the good life.⁷⁸

Secular humanism propounds a humanistic philosophy aided by the process of secularization and secular philosophy and science. It has made tragedy,⁷⁹ instead of religion, the exaltation of man. Man is made the arbiter of good and evil. Left alone and beset with fear, man seeks to purge fear not by faith in God, but by banishing God from the realm of creation. With no place to turn for refuge and safety, self-pity is assuaged with pride in humanity and defiant acceptance of the human predicament.⁸⁰ Hence the idea of the hero, as one who has to suffer all trials and tribulations that come his way due to his own flaw in judgment and decision. Al-Attas made the observation that “the causal factor in tragedy is no longer the old Greek Fate nor the God of religion, but social and individual conflicts, biological heredity, the psychology of the unconscious, defeat by frustration, man confronted by the mystery of the universe, the eternal quest of man and the absurdity of life. Freedom of the will becomes a firm belief because it helps in the perpetual struggle against obstacles that prevent from reaching the goal. But the goal itself is evershifting.”⁸¹

Art imitates life as the saying goes; and tragedy, is imitation of action, *mimesis praxeos*, where human beings are compelled to tread a path of suffering which raises the questions of the ultimate nature of life and the right path to take.⁸²

Tragedy is the mainstay of life since the days of the Greeks. Plutarch, in his description of the Life of Alexander says that Aristotle implanted in Alexander the interest in philosophy.⁸³ He was devoted by nature to all kinds of learning and during his war campaigns he would

77 The four cardinal virtues are wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. See al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 94.

78 Al-Attas, ‘Meaning and Experience of Happiness in Islam’, in *Prolegomena*, 91-110. See also its translation with explanatory notes by M.Z. Uthman, *Ma'na Kebahagiaan dan Pengalamannya dalam Islam*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2002).

79 Aristotle, *Poetics*, Book VI. The central theme of tragedy is *mimesis* or imitation of action. It is the imitation of life where the spectator (*theoros*) observes actions in life being imitated and played out in a theatre. That separation between the spectator and the play is essential for the audience to experience catharsis, a derived pleasure from observing their predicament being acted out by others. This is tragic philosophy. See also Simon Critchley, *Tragedy, the Greeks and Us* (New York: Vintage Books, 2019).

80 Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1975).

81 Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 101.

82 Critchley, *Tragedy, the Greeks and Us*, 4.

83 Plutarch, *The Age of Alexander* (London: Penguin Classics, revised edition 2012), 286-287.

have with him a copy of the *Iliad*⁸⁴ with annotations by Aristotle, a work, which he regarded as a manual or a handbook on the art of war. His treasurer, Harpalus, according to Plutarch sent him books written by the renown tragedy writers Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides to read. Literature are works of outstanding and lasting quality and they serve as the written testimony to great works of artistic merit and Aristotle classified them into three categories: Tragedy, Comedy and Poetics. By the eighteenth century a new genre of the Novel became popular to replace the epic works of the Greeks to become the main attraction in the West.

Tragedy imitates life and as Henry James observed by the 19th century, its the novel that has “a direct impression” and he was referring to Aristotle’s meanings of mimesis, the one in general circulation. In a reply to Henry James, disapproving of his observation, Robert Louis Stevenson said something which is telling of those who live the tragic that fits the description of those who are without guidance (*hidāyah*) and belief in God. He says:

Life is monstrous, infinite, illogical, abrupt and poignant; a work of art in comparison is neat, finite, self-contained, rational, flowing, and emasculate. Life imposes by brute energy, like inarticulate thunder; art catches the ear, among the far louder noises of experience, like an air artificially made by a discreet musician (p. 182).⁸⁵

In relation to this, al-Attas cited *Sūrah al-Baqarah* verses (16-20) to describe their predicament and these verses reverberate the description of life by Stevenson above:⁸⁶

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرُوا الضَّلَالَةَ بِالْهَدَىٰ فَمَا رَبَحَتِ تِجَارَتُهُمْ وَمَا كَانُوا مُهْتَدِينَ. ١٦ مَتْلُفُهُمْ كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي اسْتَوْفَدَ نَارًا فَلَمَّا أَضَاءَتْ مَا حَوْلَهُ ذَهَبَ اللَّهُ بِنُورِهِمْ وَتَرَكَهُمْ فِي ظُلُمَاتٍ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ. ١٧ صُمُّ بُحْمٍ عُمَىٰ فَهُمْ لَا يَرِجَعُونَ. ١٨ أَوْ كَصَيْبٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ فِيهِ ظُلُمَاتٌ وَرَعْدٌ وَبَرْقٌ يَجْعَلُونَ أَصَابِعَهُمْ فِي آذَانِهِمْ مِّنَ الصَّوَاعِقِ حَذَرَ الْمَوْتِ وَاللَّهُ مُحِيطٌ بِالْكَافِرِينَ. ١٩ يَكَادُ الْبَرْقُ يَحْطِفُ أَبْصَارَهُمْ كُلَّمَا أَضَاءَ لَهُمْ مَشَوْا فِيهَا وَإِذَا أَظْلَمَ عَلَيْهِمْ قَامُوا وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَذَهَبَ بِسَمْعِهِمْ وَأَبْصَارِهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ. ٢٠

16. Those are they who have bartered error for guidance; but their trade does not profit them, and they are not guided; 17. Their likeness is that of a person who kindled a fire; when it illuminated all around him, God took away their light, and left them in darkness, unable to see; 18. Deaf, dumb, blind. They will not return; 19. Or like a cloudburst from

84 Homer, *Iliad* (London: Penguin Classics, 1998).

85 Keith Oatley, “Does Art Imitate Life?” *Psychology Today*, 11 April 2011. Retrieved on 17 July 2020. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-psychology-fiction/201104/does-art-imitate-life>

86 Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 87-88.

the sky, in which is darkness, and thunder, and lightning. They press their fingers into their ears from the thunderbolts, in fear of death. But God surrounds the disbelievers; 20. The lightning almost snatches their sight away. Whenever it illuminates for them, they walk in it; but when it grows dark over them, they stand still. Had God willed, He could have taken away their hearing and their sight. God is capable of everything.

The tragic life presupposes a tragic way of thinking in facing life. There is no certainty, because of its constant shift of ephemeral fortunes, which is not in the hands of the “hero”, hence tragedy’s philosophy is sophistry.⁸⁷ It is accompanied by a constant search for meaning of life, because of its predicament, and the search for identity. According to Plato the anecdote to the tragic way of thinking is philosophy — the contemplative life, which is associated with his teacher Socrates and later was developed further by his long time student Aristotle. Yet the contemplative life of the philosophers is the privilege of the few, hence philosophers and philosophy came to be known as that of the leisurely class.

Tragedy as a dialectical mode of experience,⁸⁸ with its beginning, middle, and end is peculiarly in agreement with Hegel’s thesis, antithesis, and synthesis involving the movement from dialectical thought of confined and profound grasp with hopeful idealism to be followed by dissolution and resolution which accentuates skeptical realism and this mode or framework thought that hope and courage afford meaning to the hubris of tragic life. Philosophers such as Plutarch, Plato, Socrates and Rousseau are against the tragic mode of thought as it would lead to the degradation and sickness of the body politic.⁸⁹

V. THE HEART, SPIRITUAL COGNITION, AND CERTAINTY

In his “The Nature of Man and the Psychology of the Human Soul,” al-Attas summarizes the psychology of the human soul based on the refinement of ideas from the *Ma‘ārij*⁹⁰ of al-Ghazālī, from the *Shifā*⁹¹ and the *Najāt*⁹² of Ibn Sīnā.⁹³ Just as Ibn Sīnā added his own interpretations to what is

87 Critchley, *Tragedy, the Greeks and Us*, 11.

88 Ibid., 28.

89 Ibid., 23.

90 Al-Ghazālī, Abū Hāmid Muḥammad, *Ma‘ārij al-Quds fī Madārīj Ma‘rifat al-Nafs*, (Beirut, 1978).

91 Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥusayn, *Kitāb al-Shifā’ (al-Tabī‘iyyāt: al-Nafs)*, ed. G. Qanawātī and Sa’id Zāyid, (Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-‘Arabiyyah, 1975).

92 Ibid., *Kitāb al-Najāt*, ed. Majīd Fakhrī, (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīdah, 1985).

93 Al-Attas, *Nature of Man*, 29, n. 60; idem., *Prolegomena*, 166, n. 167.

essentially Greek conception of the soul,⁹⁴ so did al-Ghazālī who has added important modifications of his own. According to al-Attas, the philosophers' analysis on the animal and rational powers of the soul⁹⁵ does not contradict religion but, their claim "to the primacy of the intellect as the sole guide to knowledge of the ultimate nature of reality is disputed."⁹⁶ While religion does not underestimate the role of the intellect (*'aql*), it emphasizes the role of the heart (*qalb*) as a spiritual organ of cognition.⁹⁷ "The heart, also called *fū'ād*, is the organ of spiritual perception (see for example in the Holy Qur'ān, *al-Najm* (53): 11). This spiritual perception, which is of the nature of perceptive experience and tasting, is connected with the imaginative faculty of the soul."⁹⁸

Here is the hallmark of al-Attas; his departure from Western epistemology. He says, "It becomes obvious from this that in Islamic metaphysics epistemology and the epistemological process is quite different from that understood in Western Philosophy. The heart (*al-qalb*) in which occurs "firm believing" which characterizes *īmān* and which confirms and affirms the truth by *taṣdīq*, is an aspect of the soul (*al-nafs*); it is the spiritual organ of cognition by which the soul perceives spiritual truths. It is also the intellect (*al-'aql*) operating at a higher, spiritual level of experience,"⁹⁹ and at the higher level, spiritual level or transcendental order, "the rational has merged with the intellectual, and the empirical with what pertains to authentic spiritual experiences such as inner witnessing (*shuhūd*), tasting (*dhawq*), presence (*ḥudūr*) and other interrelated states of trans-empirical awareness (*aḥwāl*)."¹⁰⁰ He states firmly on the authority of Jāmi: "We observe that there is already a significant difference between the *Mutakallimūn* and the *Ṣūfīs* in the manner of approach leading to the affirmation of reality to the world and to the understanding of the nature of existence"¹⁰¹ Epistemologically, the *Ṣūfīs*' method of approach is by direct evidence (*al-ḥawāss al-khamsah*) as a result of personal verification (*taḥqīq*), whereas the theologians employed the indirect method of rational proof and demonstration. And certainly their ultimate conclusions do not really mean the same thing.¹⁰²

There is another important explanation by al-Attas on the soul and its activity, which distinguishes

further his position representing the Sufi metaphysicians as opposed to Ibn Sīnā and the philosophers. He reaffirms, "The soul's consciousness of itself is not only something intellectual in nature, it is something imaginal as well; and this means that not only the intellective power of the soul, but the imaginative power also survive physical death."¹⁰³ And this puts the "*cogito ergo sum*" of Descartes, beneath and lower to "the imaginative power" where imagination is a cognitive power of the soul. He emphatically reiterates that the imaginative power is not *phantasy* of the philosophers but it is "a spiritual, or intelligential 'creative' imagination reflective of a real world of images (*'ālam al-mithāl*) ontologically existing independently between the world of gross matter and the world of pure ideas."¹⁰⁴ On the contrary, according to Aristotle, imagination is only a faculty of the human soul, whose position is lower than the intellect, contrasted with both thinking or judging and sense perception,¹⁰⁵ as well as being mostly false.¹⁰⁶

When the imagination forms a representation of an object, that imagined form has a mode of existence different from its other modes – essential existence, sensible existence. It is in a form of mental existence and thus it is of analogical existence. At any level of the thought process, God as He is in Himself is not in any mode or form as conceived by the mind at any of these stages.¹⁰⁷

Al-Attas explains that the idea of a real world of images (*'ālam al-mithāl*) and the science of symbolism pertaining to the interpretation of the reflections of that world in our world of sense and sensible experience, have their roots in al-Ghazālī and perhaps also in Ibn Sīnā. This was developed in Muslim metaphysical thinking especially by Ibn 'Arabī, who derived many of his interpretations on the nature of reality from the writings of al-Ghazālī. They are certainly not the Platonic Ideas.¹⁰⁸

103 Al-Attas, *Nature of Man*, 30-31; idem., *Prolegomena*, 167-168.

104 Al-Attas, *Nature of Man*, 30-31; idem., *Prolegomena*, 167-168.

105 Aristotle, *De Anima*, 428a12. I am using the translations of Aristotle in *The Works of Aristotle*, translated under the editorship of W.D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931).

106 Ibid.

107 Al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-Tafriqa bayn al-Islām wa-l-Zandaqa*, edited by M. Bejou (Damascus: 1993), 152. As said by Shaykh Ibrāhīm Raqqī, "*Ma'rifah* is to affirm the Truth Most Exalted as above and beyond everything imaginable." Quoted from Raniri's *Laṭā'if* in M. Z. Uthman, *Laṭā'if al-Asrār*, 224. The saying "I am as the servant conceives of me" refers to the literal meaning, namely it is a mere conjecture on the part of the servant to "think" of God but God as He reveals himself (*tajallī*) to the heart of the servant cannot be encapsulated in words and description; and the descriptions approved of God of Himself are those that He has described of Himself, as captured in the Ḥadīth, "I cannot extol praises to You as that by which You praise Yourself." For the first ḥadīth, see Muḥammad b. Ismā'il al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī bi Ḥāshiyah al-Sindī*, in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, ed. Ḥasan 'Abd al-'Āl & Ḥasan Khalīfah, vol. 4 (Beirut: Maktabah al-'Aṣriyyah, 2013) 1497, no: 7403; and Abū al-Ḥusayn Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, in *Kitāb al-Dhikr wa al-Duā' wa al-Istighfār*, ed. Muḥammad Fuad 'Abd al-Bāqī, vol. 4 (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1954) 2061, no: 2675, and the second ḥadīth in Abū al-Ḥusayn Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, in *Kitāb al-Ṣalāt*, ed. Muḥammad Fuad 'Abd al-Bāqī, vol. 1 (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1954) 352, no: 486.

108 Ibid., 30. In his *Mysticism of Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī*, al-Attas makes a note saying that, "Furthermore the Muslims

94 See F. Rahman, *Avicenna's Psychology*, 20.

95 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1321 A.H), 70-71.

96 Ibid., 71. See Rahman, *Avicenna's Psychology*, 35, where Ibn Sina's highest level of intelligence is the acquired intelligence, which is a faculty of the theoretical intellect. "These then are the degrees of the faculties which are called theoretical intellects. At the stage of the acquired intelligence the animal genus and its human species are perfected, and here human potentiality becomes at one with the first principles of all existence."

97 Al-Attas, *Nature of Man*, 33; idem., *Prolegomena*, 170.

98 Ibid., 168.

99 Al-Attas, *Commentary*, 131.

100 Ibid., 135.

101 Ibid., 300.

102 See the classification of affirmation of divine unity, *tawḥīd*, as classified by Rāniri in M. Z. Uthman, *Laṭā'if al-Asrār*, 69.

The heart (*qalb*), according to al-Attas is the organ of spiritual cognition connected with the imaginative faculty of the soul.¹⁰⁹ As mentioned earlier, the soul's capacity (*wus'*) are not equal in every human being, so too are their degrees of intellectual excellence and nobility of soul.¹¹⁰ In the same manner, the cognitive imagination is not equal, and insofar as "the Holy Prophet, his cognitive imagination was of eminent degree that he was privileged to perceive intelligible realities as it is captured in a saying attributed to him, "Arinā al-ashyā' kamā hiya"¹¹¹ —make us see things as they really are. That the heart (*qalb*) is something subtle, divine, and spiritual and also the spiritual organ of cognition, can be traced to al-Ghazālī.¹¹² Something that is created cannot contain its Creator otherwise the transcendence of God will be seriously compromised; it may possess knowledge about its Creator, for knowledge is non-material, thus its receptor and locus must also be of the same kind, immaterial, thus al-Ghazālī's conclusion that the locus of cognition is a spiritual entity.¹¹³

Early Greek thinkers including Aristotle did not attribute to the heart a cognitive or intellectual function. In the works of Aristotle, he affirms the heart's importance in being the origin of circulating blood,¹¹⁴ which then brings heat to the rest of the body,¹¹⁵ as a counterpoise for the brain,¹¹⁶ the earliest organ that is developed in sanguineous animals and the main organ for sense faculties.¹¹⁷ Heart is the organ that undergoes palpitations, and is involved in respiration.¹¹⁸ Heart is looked at as a biological and physiological organ. When he does make a connection between the heart and the soul, it was not to assign spiritual and cognitive functions to the heart, but to associate feelings and sensations. In his *Laṭā'if*, al-Rānīrī, in quoting one of the scholars, shows the function of the heart as "witnessing" at the reception of *ma'rifah*, in contradistinction to the intellect, which uses proofs to signify and indicate.

were not merely passive translators of the Greeks. Their philosophy centered around concepts mainly influenced by the Qur'anic worldview. This worldview is non-Aristotelian in nature —a worldview that Korzybski would perhaps define as 'non-elemental' as against 'elemental' worldview of Aristotelianism.", 190, n.31.

109 Al-Attas, *On Justice*, 32.

110 Qur'an 2: 286. See footnote 22 above; also in al-Attas, *On Justice*, 39.

111 Al-Attas, *Nature of Man*, 34-35; idem., *Prolegomena*, 171; This Ḥadīth can be found in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's commentary on the Qur'an, *al-Taḥfīr al-Kabīr*, 32 Vols. (Cairo, 1934), vol. 21, pp. 37; 39-40. Also cited by Al-Attas in *Quiddity and Essence*, 3, n. 6; idem., *Prolegomena*, 219, n. 236.

112 Al-Ghazālī, Abū Hāmid Muḥammad, "Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Qalb", in *Freedom and Fulfillment: an annotated translation of Al-Ghazālī's al-Munqidh min al-dalāl and other relevant works of al-Ghazālī*, transl. by Richard Joseph McCarthy (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), 365.

113 See Averroes' *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, trans. by Simon van den Bergh (E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Series, reprint 1987), two vols. bound in one, 33.

114 Aristotle, *De Somno et vigilia*, 456b1.

115 Ibid., 458a15, 17, Aristotle, *De Juventute et senectute*, 469b10, 12.

116 Idem., *De Sensu et sensibili*, 439a2.

117 Idem., *De Juventute et senectute*, 469b10, 12.

118 Idem., *De Respiratione*, 479b17.

: عليه شيخ أبو طيب المراغي رحمة الله قال للعقل دلالة وللحكمة إشارة وللمعرفة شهادة. فالعقل يدل، والحكمة تشير. والمعرفة تشهد أن صفاء العبادات لا تقبل إلا بصفاء التوحيد.¹¹⁹

Shaykh Abū Ṭayyib al-Marāghī (may God bless him) says: "The intellect (*'aql*) has a sign (*dalīl*), wisdom (*ḥikmah*) has an indicator (*ishārat*) and illuminative knowledge (*ma'rifah*) has a mark (*tanda*). The intellect assigns, wisdom indicates and illuminative knowledge makes clear; verily, purity in service (*ṣafā segala 'ibadat*) is unacceptable unless [accompanies] with true affirmation of Divine Unity (*ṣafā tawḥīd*).¹²⁰

This establishes the importance of the heart (*qalb*) over the intellect in the reception of *ma'rifah* in support of al-Attas' emphasis that the *qalb* is the organ for cognition, indeed higher than that of rationally signified knowledge. In the *Commentary on the Ḥujjat al-Ṣiddīq*, he makes a clear assertion that while the *Ṣūfīs* affirm the function of reason and Tradition, meaning the Qur'an, the *Sunnah* and the *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet, in arriving at knowledge, they did not assign the same level of importance to sense perception. They admit the function of sense perception in arriving at knowledge but the function, "insofar as it concerns the world as it really is, is transferred to spiritual unveiling (*kashf*) and direct spiritual tasting (*dhawq*)."¹²¹ These acts are quintessentially that of the heart (*qalb*).

CONCLUSION

The nature of man is such that he is composed of body and soul. The soul is equipped with internal senses attendant with the internal faculties. For a long time, the perfection of man is associated to, not only the perfection of the physical body, but more importantly the perfection of his intellect. Intellectual prowess is in turn associated with wisdom. Aristotle classifies wisdom into theoretical and practical wisdom. The theoretical wisdom is associated with the knowledge of metaphysics. In this writing we put forward another aspect to be considered as the primary for the perfection of man, and that is his heart (*qalb*), one that is more along the lines of the teaching of revealed religion, because the proof to our claim lies in the historical involvement of all prophetic missions. The ultimate and final Prophet is

119 M. Z. Uthman, *Laṭā'if al-Asrār*, 769.

120 Ibid., 413.

121 Al-Attas, *Commentary*, 296.

the emblematic figure, not only as closure of Prophetic Mission but also as the Perfect Man to which this proof is drawn. His is the ultimate model of man, that his intellectual faculties are at the highest and he is gifted with Revelation. The foregoing assertion posits the heart as the ultimate and highest receptacle and crucible of knowledge. To further affirm this assertion, al-Taftāzānī says that *ilhām* is the source of knowledge for selected people of God's chosen and inspiration (*ilhām*) is a different form and lower than the prophetic revelation (*wahy*)¹²²; and as the *Qur'ān* attests that Prophets were gifted with revelation and wisdom (*ḥikmah*), we can surmise that *ḥikmah*, as al-Attas defines it as that which is lit from the lamp of prophecy, we can outline here the rank and degrees of knowledge accorded to man as follows: 1) Revelation (*wahy*); 2) Wisdom (*ḥikmah*); 3) Intuition (*ilhām*); and 4) Knowledge (*'ilm*).¹²³

The heart is the crucible and receptacle for the highest knowledge, namely revelation is attested in the verse below: **فَأَنزَلْنَا نَزْلَهُ عَلَىٰ قَلْبِكَ** He revealed it, the Qur'ān unto your heart.¹²⁴ The heart of the Prophet receives revelation; but the prophetic intellect does not perform any of its operations on the received revelation—neither estimation nor imagination, because the heart of the Prophet is endowed with a faculty of higher operation of spiritual cognition; thus revelation as the Prophet receives it is not a product of the intellection. The heart (*qalb*) is connected with the imaginative faculty of the soul,¹²⁵ but the power of imagination is not equal in men and differs according to their degrees of intellectual excellence and nobility of the soul. Al-Attas defines *wahy* as “the speech of God concerning Himself, His creation, the relation between them, and the way to salvation communicated to His chosen Prophet and has represented in words, then conveyed by the Prophet to mankind in linguistic form, new in nature yet comprehensible, without confusion with the Prophet's own subjectivity and cognitive imagination.¹²⁶

Thus certainty (*yaqīn*) resides in the heart, not in the intellect, and this corresponds with the degrees of certainty as classified in the Quran, namely certainty derived from knowledge (*'ilm al-yaqīn*), certainty derived from witnessing (*'ayn al-yaqīn*) and certainty derived from experience of the truth (*ḥaqq al-yaqīn*). The final certainty is that certainty which is affirmed in the heart that renders calmness, peace, and gives solace in man.

122 See Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*, 36.

123 See al-Attas, *Oldest Manuscript*, 50; in his *Islām and the Philosophy of Science*, 9; in his *Prolegomena*, 121; and in his *On Justice*, 10.

124 Qur'ān (2):97. Translation is based on Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*. See also Qur'ān (26):194.

125 Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 170.

126 *Ibid.*, 6.