



*On Justice and the Nature of Man: A Commentary on Sharh Surah al-Nisâ' (4):58 and Surah al-Mu'minûn (23):12-14*,  
 Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Banking and Finance Institute Malaysia (IBFIM) in collaboration with Akademi Kenegaraan, 2015, (ix + 57 pp), hardcover, ISBN 978-983-52-0789-1, price 180 RM, @ USD 40.00

**They are like torches that light the way along difficult paths; when we have such torches to light our way, of what use are mere candles?**

In the science of *tafsîr*, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas argues for a kind of exegesis void of learned guess and conjecture (*ẓann*), subjective readings (*hawā*) or historical relativism. The process of interpretation is supposed to be applying the scientific method of *tafsîr* as having two sides: *tafsîr*, the ultimate meaning of an expression in the Quran and the *ḥadīth*; and *ta'wīl*, an extensive form of *tafsîr* which seeks to interpret ambiguous meaning of the expression by the knowledge of semantic 'fields' of the Islamic vocabulary.<sup>1</sup>

This scientific method has been realized in al-Attas' *On Justice and the Nature of Man: A Commentary on Sūrah al-Nisā' (4):58 and Sūrah al-Mu'minūn (23):12-14* (hereafter cited as *OJNM*). In this *tafsîr*, he selects the above verses as representatives of other verses on the subject of justice and the nature of man, with an interpretation not been elicited before.<sup>2</sup> Al-Attas' *OJNM* is unique for it is meant to be the rebuttal to the modern theory of man which posits man as *homo sapiens*. He challenges this theory as false by forwarding the Quranic linguistic interventions of man as a new creation (*khalqan ākhara*), which proves that man is not a genus or species, but a new and a special creation; a merging of both the physical (*bashar*) and spiritual (*insān: al-naḥs al-nāṭiqah*) natures.<sup>3</sup>

1 Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1980), 3-6, hereafter cited as *CEII*.  
 2 *OJNM*, preface, v-vi. One of the profound interpretations of these verses can be found in Fakhr al-Dīn Ibnu Dīyā' al-Dīn 'Umar al-Rāzī's *Tafsîr Fakhr al-Rāzī* vols. 32 (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, first impression 1981), vol. 23, 84-7, hereafter cited as *Tafsîr Fakhr al-Rāzī*.  
 3 *OJNM* in the introduction.

Sūrah al-Nisā' (4): 58 and Sūrah al-Mu'minūn (23): 12-14 and their translations are as follows:

إِنَّ الْإِنسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنُفٌ إِنَّ شَاءَ إِلَّا تَأْتِيكُمُ الْآيَاتُ الْآرِثَةُ أَفَأَعْتَابُ مَا جَاءَ رَحْمَةً مِنِّي لِيُبَيِّنَ لَكُمْ أَنِّي أَخْلَقْتُهَا بِأَنْوَاعٍ

Allah commands you to deliver the trusts to keepers worthy of them; and when you judge between people, that you judge with justice....

فَلَمَّا خَلَقْنَا الْإِنسَانَ مِن سُلَالَةٍ مِّن طِينٍ ۚ ثُمَّ نَزَّلْنَاهُ نَجْوَءً مِّن رَّبِّهِ ۚ ثُمَّ قَدَّمْنَا نُوحًا وَإِبْرَاهِيمَ ۚ وَنُوحًا وَآلَهُ إِذْ جَاءُواكَ بِالْأَشْجَارِ أَصْحَابِ الْأَيْمَانِ نَذِيرًا ۚ ثُمَّ أَنشَأْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا لِّتُنَبِّئَ الْبَنِيَّاتِ ۚ إِنَّ الْإِنسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنُفٌ ۚ إِنَّ شَاءَ إِلَّا تَأْتِيكُمُ الْآيَاتُ الْآرِثَةُ أَفَأَعْتَابُ مَا جَاءَ رَحْمَةً مِنِّي لِيُبَيِّنَ لَكُمْ أَنِّي أَخْلَقْتُهَا بِأَنْوَاعٍ

We created man from a choicest selection of clay; then We made from it sperm and lodged it in a stable dwelling; then We created the sperm to become a clot, and of the clot We created a lump, and of the lump We created bones and clad the bones with flesh; then of it We originated another creature. So blessed be God, the Best of creators.

Al-Attas signifies 'man' by the term *insān*<sup>4</sup> which connotes '*al-ḥayawān al-nāṭiq*' with the English equivalent of "the living being that speaks" instead of "rational animal".<sup>5</sup> Muslim thinkers, particularly the Sufis, did not conceive of what is understood as *ratio* as something separate from what is understood as *intellectus*; they conceived the '*aql*' as an organic unity of both *ratio* and *intellectus*. Man as *al-ḥayawān al-nāṭiq*, where the term *nāṭiq* signifies 'rational' in the sense that man is possessed of an inner faculty that formulates meaning (*zū nuṭq*), while the term 'animal' is meant to be a living, moving and self-generating being; a new and separate category, different from the 'animal kingdom'. *Nuṭq* signifies a certain power and capacity in man to articulate meaningful pattern. It is the outward, visible and audible expression of the inner, unseen reality ('*aql*). This defining the inner reality by its outward manifestation is what defines man.<sup>6</sup>

4 Al-Attas devotes two important works on man (*insān*), i.e. *The Nature of Man and the Psychology of Human Soul* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1990), hereafter cited as *NM*; and *On Justice and the Nature of Man: A Commentary on Sūrah al-Nisā' (4):58 and Sūrah al-Mu'minūn (23):12-14* (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2015), hereafter cited as *OJNM*.  
 5 *OJNM*, 37-9, 41-43. Literally *al-ḥayy* (pl. *al-ahyā'*), its antonym is *al-mayyit*, while *al-ḥayawān* is every living being (*kullu shay' in ḥayyin*). The word *nāṭiq* literally is *ism al-fā'il* which originates from the word *naṭāqa* (*naṭāqa al-nāṭiqu yanṭiqu nuṭqan*) which means *takallama* while *manṭiq* is *al-kalām*. In *Lisān al-'Arab*, the word *ḥayawān* technically means a body that grows, conscious and moves with will (*al-jism al-nāmī al-ḥassās al-mutaharrrik bi 'irādah*). Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibnu Mukarram Ibnu Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab* 9 vols., (Cairo: Dar al-Hadith, 2003), 693 co. 2, hereafter cited as *LA*.  
 6 *OJNM*, 31, 46-47. Cf. al-Attas, *NM*, 174-5; and *The Positive Aspects of Tasawwuf: Preliminary Thoughts on An*

It is established in Islam that man has a dual nature, both body and soul, physical being and spirit (al-Hijr (15): 26-29); a theory which is different from the modern psychology. Psychology used to be the science which investigated human nature, but the developments after the nineteenth century in the West led to a different conception of psychology which no longer studies human nature, rather, devoted to the study of human behavior. As a result, the study of human nature is left to a new branch of philosophy which is called 'philosophy of man'. Classical psychologists (like al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī, al-Ṭūsī and al-Rāzī) assumed that the study of human nature is at the same time the study of human soul, which in turn yields the conclusion that human nature and the human soul are identical. This primary assumption means: man is not only a physical or material being; he does not merely consist of a physical body, but also of a deeper reality which characterizes him as human being. If we consider man as merely made up of a body, then we are denying him the possibility of transcending what is merely perceived by the senses; whereas man's perception is not limited to the five external senses but also some (internal) senses which can perceive and provide him with the experience of what is not physical. Based on this fact, traditional Islamic thought posits psychology as the science of human nature, such nature which distinguishes him from the rest of the animals.<sup>7</sup>

To al-Attas, man is neither soul, nor body, nor is he a composite of the two, but a third entity constituted out of the two.<sup>8</sup> God taught him the names of all things (al-Baqarah (2): 31). By the 'names' al-Attas infer that it means knowledge (*al-'ilm*) of everything (*al-ashyā'*), not of the specific nature of the essence (*al-dhāt*) or the inmost ground (*al-sirr*) of a thing (*shay'*), like the spirit (*al-rūh*); rather, of accidents (sing. *'araḍ*) and attributes (sing. *ṣifah*) pertaining to the essences of things sensible and intelligible (*maḥsūsāt* and *ma'qūlāt*). It is to make known the relations and distinctions existing between them, and to clarify their natures within these domains in order to discern and to understand their meanings (causes, uses and specific individual purpose).<sup>9</sup> Man is also given limited knowledge of the spirit<sup>10</sup> and of his

true self or soul<sup>11</sup>. By means of this knowledge he is able to arrive at knowledge about God (*al-ma'rifah*) and His absolute oneness, that God is his true Lord (*al-rabb*) and object of worship (*al-ilāh*).<sup>12</sup> *Ma'rifah*, is from the root *'arafa*; and from it is derived *ta'rīf* (an arrival at the limit (*'urf*) of a thing (i.e. its *ḥaqq*)).<sup>13</sup> God taught man *ilm 'al-bayān*<sup>14</sup> to enable him to discriminate. By means of *qiyās* (analogical reasoning) he comes to know things and their relations within a system and distinguish logical divisions of genera, species, differentia, kinds and individuals, an ability which effects justice.<sup>15</sup>

The seat of knowledge in man is a spiritual substance which is referred to as heart (*al-qalb*), soul or self (*al-nafs*), spirit (*al-rūh*) or intellect (*al-'aql*). In relation to *al-mūthāq* (7: 172), knowledge and religion are intrinsic in the nature of man, but man is also "composed of forgetfulness (*nisyān*)". He is called *insān* basically because having testified the covenant he sealed with God, he forgot (*nasiya*) to fulfill his duty and purpose. Forgetfulness is the cause of man's disobedience, and this blameworthy nature inclines him towards injustice (*zulm*) and ignorance (*jahl*)<sup>16,17</sup>

However, God has equipped him with the powers and faculties of right vision and apprehension, of real savouring of truth, of right speech and communication; and He has indicated of him the right and the wrong.<sup>18</sup> The choice for the better (*ikhtiyār*) is left to him.<sup>19</sup> The terms heart (*al-qalb*), soul or self (*al-nafs*), spirit (*al-rūh*) or intellect (*al-'aql*), which are conceptually related to the choice given to man, convey two meanings: one referring to material physical aspect of man (body) and the other non-material imaginal intelligential or spiritual aspect (soul).<sup>20</sup> From the first aspect originates the blameworthy qualities in man, the animal powers, beneficial and yet in conflict with the intellectual powers. The human being is created "in the best moulds",<sup>21</sup> but it is the animal powers which is urged to be in *jihād* with.<sup>22</sup>

11 Fuṣṣilat (41): 53.

12 Āli 'Imrān (3): 81, al-A'rāf (7): 171.

13 *OJNM*, 16-7.

14 Al-Raḥmān (55): 1- 4.

15 *OJNM*, 28.

16 Al-Aḥzāb (33): 72.

17 *NM*, 144-5.

18 Al-Balad (90): 8-10, al-Aḥqāf (46): 26, al-Naḥl (16): 78, al-Sajdah (32): 9, al-Mulk (67): 23, al-Mu'minūn (23): 78.

19 *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995), in the introduction, 33-4; hereafter cited as *Prolegomena*.

20 *Prolegomena*, 146.

21 Al-Ṭīn (95): 4-5.

22 The *ḥadīth* "*a'dā 'aduwwika naṣīka 'ilatī bayna janbaika*" which means "the worst enemy of yours is what

*Islamic Philosophy of Science* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Academy of Science (ASASI), 1981), 3, hereafter cited as *Positive Aspects*. In *NM*, al-Attas states that he relies his elucidation of the nature of man on Ibnu Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Najāt fil Hikmat al-Manṭiqiyyah wa't-Ṭabī'iyah wa'l-Ilāhiyyah* and al-Ghazālī's *Ma'ārij al-Quds fī Madārij Ma'rifat al-Nafs*.

7 Alparslan Açıkgenç, "Kant and Ghazali on Human Nature," *Knowledge, Language, Thought and the Civilization of Islam: Essays in Honor of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas* ed. Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud and Muhd. Zainiy Uthman (Kuala Lumpur: UTM, 2010), 163-197.

8 *OJNM*, 21.

9 *NM*, 143.

10 Al-Isrā' (17): 85.

*Insân as Khalqan Ākhar*

What makes *insân insân* is explicated before: his dual nature and possession of 'aql. But what adds more to this quality to al-Attas, is man being a distinct species not in the animal kingdom, but as the *khalīfah* governing the three kingdom of animal, vegetable and mineral.<sup>23</sup> This additional meaning is linguistically proven by the three terms in (23): 12-14: *khalaqa* (created), *ja'ala* (made) and *ansha'a* (originated):

1. *khalaqa* means the bringing into existence of something for the first time, the thing not having been before, it is the act of God only, (*awjada al-ashyā' ba'da an lam takun mawjūdah*).<sup>24</sup> Verse 12 tells us about the beginning stage of creation of man, saying that God created (*khalaqa*) him from a choicest selection (*sulālah*) of clay. *Sulālah* basically refers to a drawing forth of the best or choicest parts (extract) from a congested mixture of many different parts.<sup>25</sup>
2. *ja'ala* means made a thing, its synonym is *waḍa'a* (put or laid a thing), but having more general signification than *fa'ala* and *ṣana'a*. An example is making pottery from clay and making something bad good.<sup>26</sup> As for *ja'ala*, it is the drawing out of some latent thing from something else, the something else having been before. Verse 23:13 says that from this extract (*sulālah*), God made (*ja'ala*) a germ of male animal life or sperm and lodged it in the womb uniting it with the female germ.<sup>27</sup> *Ja'ala* is also a creative act in the sense of making, producing, manufacturing, inventing rather than creating. The Quranic verse: "*innā ja'alnāhu qur'ānan 'arabiyyan*", refers to the creative act of making the Quran speaks (*bayyana*) of itself in Arabic. As a new Islamized language, Arabic is a new language developed by Allah from a language already existed, a language which has been given new understanding and perspective.<sup>28</sup>
3. *ansha'a* is causing to come into being from an earlier thing or after the similitude of a former thing, a thing of a later period, the later thing not having been before (*hayiya, wa ansha'a Allahu 'l-khalqa i.e.* began to create or originate; it also means *al-ba'thah*

(resurrection) and *rabā wa shabba* as in the stage of puberty.<sup>29</sup> Verse 23:14 goes on to say that from this fusion of the two gametes God created (*khalaqa*) a new individual organism; then an embryo; and then a fetus. Then from the final foetal stage, God originated (*ansha'a*) another creature by breathing of the spirit (*al-rūh*).<sup>30</sup> Al-Attas remarks that one of the basic meanings conveyed by the term *ansha'a* from its root *nasha'a* is 'to elevate' or 'become elevated'. This means that the introduction of the spirit into the animal being (i.e. *al-nafs al-nāṭiqah*), elevates the animal state of being to another level, man. It is no longer a mere species of the genus animal, it has now transformed into another and special creature (*khalqan ākhara*), man the Vicegerent.<sup>31</sup>

The three verbs have become a strong point to al-Attas' elucidation of *khalqan ākhar*: "Man is neither soul, nor body, nor is he a composite of the two, but a third entity constituted out of the two"<sup>32</sup> is understood by man is neither (in his state of) *al-nafs al-nāṭiqah* nor a fetus<sup>33</sup> but a new creation breathed with the Divine spirit.<sup>34</sup> This is an understanding which is not in line with the Western understanding of man (in Greek, *homo* or in Latin, *humanus*) from their dualistic view of body and soul. The ancient Greek conceived man as eternal and allocated the science of soul to study man. But gradually when secularization undertook the Western thought, man is perceived not as soul but as physical and has been studied externally through acts and behavior in the modern sciences of psychology and anthropology. This new development has its root in the theory of evolution whereby the development of man is seen as a 'transition' into 'civil society'.<sup>35</sup>

Al-Attas' detailed analysis of the nature of man as having these key characteristics: *nuṭq*, 'aql, 'ilm, *ikhtiyār* and *khalqan ākhar*; will finally links to the implementation of justice in man, inter-man and inter-creation. The relationship of *insân* with that of *iktisāb* is made compulsory due to the givenness of the faculty of 'aql and *nuṭq* in man. Nevertheless, *insân* and *bashar* in both its *insāniyyah* and *bashariyyah* forms complement man for they are in fact

29 *OJNM*, 45-46. Cf Ibnu Manzūr, *LA*, on *khalaqa*, 3: 195-197; on *ja'ala*, 2:146-147; and on *nasha'a*, 8: 546-548.

30 *OJNM*, 35. In al-Ḥijr (15):29, the angels prostrated to Adam after this breathing of *rūh*.

31 *Ibid.*, *Tafsīr Fakhr al-Rāzī*, vol. 23, 85-6.

32 *OJNM*, 21.

33 Al-Shams (91): 7-8. *Wa nafsin wa mā sawwāhā faalhamahā fujūrahā wa taqwāhā* (and a soul and Him who perfected it, and inspired it (with conscience of) what is wrong for it and (what is) right for it.)

34 Al-Shams (91): 9-10. *Qad aflaha man zakkāhā wa qad khāba man dassāhā* (He is indeed successful who causeth it to grow, and he indeed a failure who stunteth it).

35 *OJNM*, 33-38.

lies in between your ribs". *NM*, 146.

23 *OJNM*, v.

24 *Ibid.*, 45. Cf. Ibnu Manzūr, *LA*, col. 2 vol. 3 of 9 vols., 195.

25 *OJNM*, 34.

26 *LA* 146-7.

27 *OJNM*, 34-5.

28 *LA*, on *ja'ala*, 2:146-147.

the dual aspects of spirit and body in man. To conceive man as lacking from any aspect of the two, leads to undermining optimal potentiality in him, a condition of injustice (*zulm*) towards him and the world surrounding him. The concept of man understood properly relates to the concept of justice.

The concept of justice is denoted by the Arabic term '*adl*'. Al-Attas has elaborated on this subject in a new perspective by semantically analyzing the key word '*adl*', its antonym *zulm* and its related key terms. In interpreting sūrah al-Nisâ' (4): 58, he elucidates that there are two parts complementing each other in the verse: the first part refers to trust (*amānah*) and recognition and acknowledgement of authority in the Keeper (*ahl*) of trust – “*inna Allāha ya'murukum an tu'addū 'l-amānāti ilā ahlihā*”. It is assumed that the Keeper of trust must possess moral integrity and authentic knowledge of what is entrusted. The second part refers to acts of judgement in arbitration (*ḥakama*), in that the arbitrator (*ḥākim*) should deliberate with justice ('*adl*) – “*wa idhā ḥakamtum bayna 'n-nāsi an taḥkumū bi 'l-'adl*”. The divine command (*amr*) is directed to Muslims as a community as well as an individual in both religious and worldly affairs.<sup>36</sup>

According to al-Attas, there are five important elements in the verse: *amr*, *amānah*, *ahl*, *ḥakam* and '*adl*'. These elements must be elaborated in three contextual or situational realities: (i) to God in relation to His creation, (ii) to man in relation to God and His creation, and (iii) to man in relation to his own self. The first context refers to His Oneness (*tawḥīd*), Lordship (*rubūbiyyah*) and Divinity (*ulūhiyyah*); as well as His Existence (*wujūd*). This relationship is beyond the scope of explicability except of what He has made known. The second refers to man's vicegerency, duty and responsibility to the physical environment surrounding him. The third refers to man's origin, his covenant with God, his acceptance of accountability and responsibility, his knowledge and freedom of choice between good and evil, his purpose in creation and ultimate destiny. This involves his duty and loyalty to God, unconditional obedience ethically and morally.<sup>37</sup>

*Amr* refers to the Law (*shara'*) and Obligation (*taklīf*). *Shara'* is more than the moral and legal ordinances which come under the science of jurisprudence (*al-fiqh*) but also the theological, metaphysical, philosophical and ethical principles upon which the ordinances are based. Obligation (as indicated in verse 4: 59) refers to duty, obedience and loyalty to God, His Messenger, legitimate Possessors of Command (*ulū l-amr*) from the Rightly Guided Caliphs

and his Companions, the Followers of the Companions (*al-tābi'ūn*), the Leaders (*a'immat*) of the various schools of law and the men of discernment.<sup>38</sup> In our present time, *ulū 'l-amr* is the ruler or government, provided that they follow the Quran and the Sunnah, and in agreement with the Community. Al-Attas argues that, the Possessors of Command in our time must possess a right balance of adequate knowledge of Islam as well as worldly knowledge. They must also possess knowledge on human nature in order to recognize individuals of moral integrity and authentic knowledge, so that they can be the Keepers of trust (*ahl al-amānah*), upon whose the Possessors of Command depend.<sup>39</sup>

The origin of trust as (*amānah*) goes back to the beginning of creation when God created Adam to be His vicegerent (*khalīfah*) as in verse 2:59. God gave him consciousness, and power of speech, taught him the knowledge of everything sensible and intelligible, taught him to distinguish between true and false as in verse (7:172). The origin of *amānah*, then, is the Trust of Vicegerency which involves responsibility and accountability, knowledge of good and evil, power to act accordingly, freedom of choice, obedience, justice and happiness. The term *amānah* is derived from the word *amn* meaning security, freedom from oppression (*zulm*), caused by ignorance of the order of proper place. In relation to the individual self, *amn* refers to freedom from disquietude, the agitation of mind and heart uncertain of destiny, and fear of the unknown.<sup>40</sup>

As for the Keeper (*ahl*) of trust, he must possess “some knowledge of the positive and negative qualities inherent” in his self gained by means of “critical examination”. He must overcome his soul which incites towards evil (*al-nafs al-ammārah*) in order to purify himself. His rational self (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqah*) must watch over his animal self. Critical examination will help observe the carrying of duties and its accomplishment.<sup>41</sup>

Whereas the meaning of the intellectual and practical act expressed by the word *ḥakama* has its origin from the word *ḥukm*, which is derived from the word *ḥikmah*; meaning wisdom. *Ḥukm* here refers to “the practical application in the making of judicial decisions and the administration of justice”. In the case of Community, *ḥakama* refers to prudential judgement exercised by the *ḥākim* (judge); whereas in relation to the self, it refers to moral judgement exercised by the *ḥakam* (mediator). Both arbitrators are answerable to their dependents and

38 The genuine '*ulamā'* of religion and religious sciences: the jurists (*al-fuqahā'*), the theologians (*al-mutakallimūn*), the metaphysicians (*al-ṣūfiyyah*) and the philosophers (*al-ḥukamā'*).

39 *OJNM*, 4-5.

40 *Ibid.*, 6-10.

41 *Ibid.*, 11.

36 *Ibid.*, 1-2.

37 *Ibid.*, 2-3.

authorities which appoint them and accountable to God for their justice or injustice. Aberrations or misplacement of trusts in this particular context is due to political maneuvering, lack of understanding and irresponsibility.<sup>42</sup>

Justice ('*adl*'), like the word *ḥikmah*, is derived from the Beautiful Names of God. It cannot be defined by setting a precise limit (*ḥadd*), rather only by describing its distinctive characteristics (*rasm*) as defined in the science of ethics (*al-akhlāq*). Justice is a state of being, a condition of things being in their proper places. It involves the knowledge of the nature of the thing and its association with other things in a system of relation. It also involves the recognition of the soul of the thing's proper place and the act towards the thing accordingly (*adab*). *Adab* is the discipline of body, mind and soul; the discipline that assures the recognition and acknowledgement of one's proper place.<sup>43</sup> An educated man is a good man, and by 'good' al-Attas means possessing *adab* in the all inclusive sense, "...encompassing the spiritual and material life of a man that instills the quality of goodness that is sought after". Al-Attas defines a truly educated man in Islam as a man of *adab* (*insān adabī*):

A good man is the one who is sincerely conscious of his responsibilities towards the true God (*insaf akan tanggungjawab dirinya kepada Tuhannya yang hak*); who understands and fulfills his obligations to himself and others in his society with justice (*memahami serta menyelenggarakan penunaian keadilan terhadap dirinya dan diri-diri lain dalam masyarakatnya*); who constantly strives to improve every aspect of himself towards perfection as a man of *adab* (*insān adabī*).<sup>44</sup>

The science of ethics (*al-akhlāq*) is one part of the sciences of religion, dealing with virtues and character.<sup>45</sup>

However, every soul has its limitation or different capabilities. This is as stated in al-Baqarah (2): 286, where *lā yukallifū Allahu nafsan illā wus'ahā* means "on no soul doth God place a burden greater than it can bear" and the prayer Allah teaches *rabbānā lā tuḥammilnā*

*mā lā tāqata lanā bihi* meaning "(Pray:) Our Lord! Lay not on us a burden greater than we have strength to bear". According to this verse, al-Attas argues that it is not Allah that is burdening man with responsibilities, but it is the *al-naḥs al-ammārah*. To commensurate with capacity is an act of injustice. To have justice, we must first have *ma'rifah* (knowledge of the thing itself), '*ilm* (knowledge of the relationship between the thing with other things), *ḥikmah* (wisdom) and *adab* (discipline of mind, body and soul; knowing proper places of things).<sup>46</sup>

Al-Attas asserts further that the second part of verse al-Nisā' (4): 58, implies that man has already known the concept of justice, he is created with the inclination to it (*an taḥkumū bi'l-'adl*). This inclination is the reason why society has arisen and become state. The idea of society and state is not natural, but the artificial creation of man.<sup>47</sup> He relates this to another verse in chapter al-Aḥzāb (33): 72 where the heavens, earth and mountains refused the offer of *khilāfah*. It is man, or some among them, who unjustly and ignorantly accepted the responsibility. But here in this verse being 'unjust' and 'ignorant' are signified by the terms *ḥalūman jahūlan*, the kind of ignorance composed with arrogance, obstinacy and intractableness. Simple ignorance can be remedied by learning and being structured by knowledge for it is instigated by innocence, but *ḥalūman jahūlan* within the man of power (*wa ḥamalahā al-insān*) is incapable of being corrected.<sup>48</sup>

We observe that very little attention been given to explicate al-Attas' method of *tafsīr-ta'wīl*. The ways in which al-Attas sought to clarify many metaphysical, epistemological, historical and historiographical, as well educational issues remain a neglected gray area. The writing of this book *On Justice and the Nature of Man: A Commentary on Sūrah al-Nisā' (4): 58 and Sūrah al-Mu'minūn (23): 12-14* is a resurgence of a right *tafsīr* in the right time because of two reasons. First and foremost, it is a significant model to interpret Islamic texts, much closer to truth than hermeneutic and historical explanations. Second, this important work has sufficiently dismissed the theory of man as "homo-sapiens" long accepted in our Muslim educational systems. This is a thin modern *tafsīr* with heavy chains of 1400-year-old Islamic tradition.

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<sup>46</sup> In his lectures for example, CASIS Saturday Night Lecture, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 13-4.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 15-6. Cf *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2001), first appeared in manuscript form in 1973, 42-64; *Tinjauan Ringkas Peri Ilmu dan Pandangan Alam* (Pulau Pinang: Penerbitan USM, 2007), 9-25, 39-46; and also Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud, *Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1998), 73-75, 76-97, 97-109, 112-9, 132-167; hereafter cited as *EPP*.

<sup>44</sup> *EPP*, 16.

<sup>45</sup> Al-Attas, *OJNM*, 14-8.