



AGENCY, RATIONALITY, AND MORALITY  
A QUR'ANIC VIEW OF MAN

MONA ABUL-FADL

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AND MORALITY:  
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## Foreword

Mona M. Abul-Fadl (1945-2008) had a mind of dazzling brilliance making her one of the pioneering female Muslim scholars of her generation and a keen observer of the rapid devolution of society divorced from spiritual tradition in the modern context. She was also married to the late and eminent scholar Dr. Taha Jabir Alalwani. Abul-Fadl, an intense thinker, made significant contributions not only to her field of research but also notably to Islamic theology, advocating for the morality and ethics of its spiritual perspective to be given a place in modern academic discourse. Hers was a didacticism that emphasised that people are not inhuman units, cogs in a machine, but a complex, nuanced creation that needed to be understood more than studied. Her interests covered a range of topics from Islam and the Middle East to political theory, epistemology, cultural studies and feminist scholarship. And as the decades slip by it seems she was incredibly perceptive for her ideas and commentary not only endure but seem to gather momentum and carry weight. For this reason she must not slip into obscurity.

Abul-Fadl gained a PhD from the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London before becoming professor at Cairo University. She was also a Fulbright scholar at the Old Dominion University in Virginia and an exchange scholar at the Center for Research and Study of Mediterranean Societies (CRESM) in France before joining IIIT to become a close and long-standing associate of the Institute. Indeed Abul-Fadl's work was first noticed by former IIIT president and late renowned scholar Professor Ismail Raji al Faruqi. Impressed by the scope of her reading, knowledge of Western thought and tradition, and ability to critique these both from Western and Islamic perspectives, al Faruqi was keen for Abul-Fadl to use her skills and knowledge to further the development of the Institute's Western Thought Project. Active in inter-cultural dialogue, Abul-Fadl took full responsibility for the Project following the latter's assassination, and started processing materials which had been collected under

al Faruqi's supervision whilst also beginning to cover new ground herself. In 1999 she founded the Association for Studying Women in Civilization (ASWIC), a Cairo non-profit organization which aimed to raise awareness concerning the position, role, and status of Muslim women throughout history by conducting historical research, promoting academic scholarship, and organizing seminars and training programs.

Abul-Fadl's faith provided the basis for her intellectual stature with matters pertaining to the secular humanistic perspective a life-long passion. She was clear that there are fundamental issues that epitomize the human condition for which only a spiritual viewpoint can offer deeper and unique insights, allowing objective truths to be discovered, and guiding people to navigate the upheavals of life and in fact better themselves in the moral context. For her that theocentric humanist worldview, as epitomized in the Islamic paradigm of knowledge, was a potential force for cultural renewal. Committed to intellectual engagement Abul-Fadl powerfully challenged the hegemony of 'truths' built on little more than consensus, asking awkward questions, pointing out flaws, and espousing through rigorous logic the self-evident truth of God and creation with an erudition that enhanced her academic reputation. Bringing to the fore eternal truths as opposed to ephemeral time bound ones, she devoted her life to this philosophical vision, as realised in her writings, teaching, and public lectures, establishing her credentials as a scholar of great exegetical clarity and systematic exposition.

Bear in mind that Abul-Fadl had grown up between two cultures, the greater part of her childhood spent between England and Egypt, and was a keen advocate of inter-civilizational dialogue. Hence, her refusal to yield to supposedly uncontested 'scientific' and 'rational' truths on the human condition as well as orientalist approaches to understanding the Muslim presence, did not signify for her the building up of a theological wall and then refusing to engage with those outside, that is, opposing it. Rather, through articulating rejection and commonality, critique and commentary, she sought to open dialogue and engagement, to penetrate beyond the Western sense of historical rivalry and explore the potentials of a shared consciousness.

Abul-Fadl felt the urgency of that conversation given the decay she was witnessing, of a modernity suffering a crisis of values and even moral anarchy. Not driven by purposes or goals, what kind of self-government can Man hope to achieve? What good the triumph of technology or the god of progress, if provoking nihilism and a universalized state of existential angst or anomie?

In this powerful and instructive essay she anticipates the flaws of a purely secular humanistic understanding of man as *insān* proving thereby that in a world of appearances versus reality, God cannot be dismissed so easily. Her assertive critique of a utilitarian understanding of the human being, buttressed by denial of notions of ultimate consequentialism, gives readers acute insight into the limits and scope of core liberal, secular humanistic ideas, and the modernist perspective, that she contends lack explanatory power.

Abul-Fadl is careful to point out that the treatise's use of the term man/mankind to mean men and women as a translation of *insān*, is purely a matter of convention with reference to modern English and western tradition. This is not to eclipse *insān's* true import however, for she decries its translation in the Qur'anic context arguing that every time the Qur'anic gender neutral and universal term "*insān*" is used, subsuming men and women under the category of humankind, it is rendered in English or French as "man" or "homme". This is problematic because despite the fact that these terms are conventionally used to denote universality, their gendered bias remains inherent to the detriment of their universality. Thus whenever the Qur'anic universal address to "*nās*" (plural of *insān*,) is rendered as "O Men" the essential universality of that address is at stake, just as the generic human being is lost in rendering "*insān*" as man.

Man is a moral creature as much as he is a deeply corrupting force. Accordingly if we abandon absolute morality in favour of a relativistic ethics to promote in effect a society of 'rational' individuals governed by haphazard values, or a 'practical ethics' as Bertrand Russell would contend, built on pure trust devoid of spiritual belief, then to what extent are we endangering a civilisation we so wish to hail as technologically advanced? That is, juggling plates in a system of ever-eroding social control, where technological achievement, or the benefits of



progress, are clearly not enough. A true and accurate understanding of the human being is no doubt vital and whilst modern disciplines in the context of the human sciences are right to make man the focus of study, a data-driven, spiritually devoid analysis misses the fundamental purpose of human life, and is a gamble. Man has nothing to live for.

In the author's view the Qur'an is the best explanation of man as *insān*. It makes the human being the focal point of exposition acting as a blueprint for our existence, and guiding humanity through the journey that is life. Of greater significance, God is the Creator and origin of everything. Origins are fundamental, impacting definitions, engagement, and the type of society humanity chooses to structure for itself. Like ripples in a pond, life is lived relationally from the family unit to wider society, linking human beings in a chain that ultimately traverses across national borders to shores beyond our own. Thus, how are we to conceive of origins? Are we to view *insān* as simply an evolutionary creature, mere matter and energy, governed by animalistic tendencies which prioritise survival? Is he governed by his passions, drives and impulses? If so, from where do these emerge? If man's growth and development, whether alone or within society, demands a 'practical ethics', then who decides and what defines the forms of that value system (and trust) and the extent of its conservatism? In other words if man chooses to be driven by alcohol, drugs, pornography and other dark pleasures, then why not unleash this potential? If judgements are to be made on a utilitarian basis then who decides the criteria and how to account for conflicting normative ethics and competing interests?

These questions deeply vex the human sciences, which increasingly try to make sense of non-practical/non-rational, non-ethical and indeed illogical behaviors such as war, social problems of crime or the darker appetites of men including pedophilia, as well as various psychiatric disorders, with an ever burgeoning development of ideas, research, questions, and hypotheses. Despite some inevitably valuable insights (the importance of reason and education for instance) there are also fundamental flaws, inescapable from honest appraisal, because the premises at the root of secular liberal humanism governing its theoretical framework are inadequate and contradictory, if not false.

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The author makes an impressive case for the Islamic perspective in her own brilliantly erudite and scholastic style betraying the breadth of her knowledge. Her penetrating observations are clear and easy to understand, focused on central tenets without having to articulate each and every aspect of analysis, contributing to a greater understanding for readers and allowing them to form their own assessment.

The Qur'an allows both for a powerfully complex understanding of *insān* and his motives as well as a powerfully simple one. It speaks to both a broader audience as well as a highly specialised one. The arguments put forward have logic and coherence. Man as *insān* is the moral centre of the universe, and has a fundamental purpose to play within it. He has been created to 'know' God and designated the task of being Vicegerent, the perspective of his existence demanding a constant ethical engagement with the objects placed around him in this vale of tests (people, animals, nature) to realise his moral potential. He is utterly dependent on God, from the very air he breathes to the food and water he consumes, his assumption of freedom and independence being nothing but delusion. His tinkering with the world of objects in the name of science and expressions of liberal triumphalism for having understood some of the laws/working mechanisms of an infinitesimally complex universe, border on narcissism. The cosmos has its place but *insān* is the heart and soul of it. Ultimately, to make the world spiritually meaningless is to fail to foresee the consequences in human terms. In relation to this perspective, if we were on one level to base understanding on principles of cause and effect, then the cause would be Iblis (Satan) and the effect would be turmoil in this world should people choose to follow him, and stray from the blueprint set out for man as *insān* by God through Revelation and the ultimate model of man as Vicegerent, the final Prophet Muhammad (ṢAAS).\*

*The one who turned to Him while in seclusion  
Learned from His Lord that all else is illusion.\*\**

RUMI

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\* (ṢAAS) – *Ṣalla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*. May the peace and blessings of God be upon him. Said whenever the name of Prophet Muhammad is mentioned.

\*\*Jalal al-Din Rumi, *The Masnavi, Book Two* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), trans. Jawid Mojaddedi.

We are now entering a new frontier in human technological ‘progress,’ the brave new world of humanoid robots, challenging notions of what it means to be human, or *insān*. Abul-Fadl’s treatise matters even more, to lay down clearly in the new AI context, true and divine principles that distinguish Man as a unique creation, with mind, body and soul, whose essence is the capacity to make *moral choices*, and whose ultimate purpose is to forge a relationship with God.

The perplexities of comparison, blurring the lines between Man and robot, positing the superiority of one over the other is a disturbing trend, with AI-generated art/photography for instance winning competitions against skilled human artists, sparking controversy, and moreover disturbing because intrinsically art constitutes imagination not calculation. It is a dangerous development which will increasingly move towards considering the robot as an entity to have emerged out of non-entity, of having an “intellect,” and no doubt speculatively at some stage, conscience. Is “Agency, Rationality, and Morality,” capable of realisation through machine learning and algorithms? The philosophical foundations of what constitutes thinking, of sentient AI, cannot be grasped without reference to the sacred, the spiritual, and the metaphysical, the essential definition of *insān* in a world of matter. Yet this profound and vital debate does not seem to be happening, the secular and accelerated march of progress unquestionably leaving it unable to keep pace with the wondrous and morbidly fascinating new reality – robot “rights” and “personhood” for instance already a strange subject of legal discussion:

While Saudi Arabia is the first country to grant citizenship to an AI-enabled android, it is not alone in pushing for more rights for robots. In 2017 the European Parliament proposed a set of regulations to govern the use and creation of artificial intelligence, including the granting of ‘electronic personhood’ to the most advanced machines to ensure their rights and responsibilities.

The British Council, “Should Robots be Citizens?” <https://www.britishcouncil.org/anyone-anywhere/explore/digital-identities/robots-citizens>. [Accessed 6 June 2023]

Is humanity oscillating between complacency and hubris, and like Icarus flying too close to the sun? Were she alive today, Abul-Fadl would very likely agree.

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Abul-Fadl leaves behind a timeless intellectual legacy for future generations which sees her author of books and articles including:

- *Where East Meets West: Appropriating the Islamic Encounter for a Spiritual-Cultural Revival* (IIIT, 1992, revised edn. 2010).
- *Toward Global Cultural Renewal: Modernity and the Episteme of Transcendence* (Occasional Paper), IIIT, 1995.
- *Islam and the Middle East: The Aesthetics of a Political Inquiry* (Research Monographs, 2) IIIT, 1990.
- *Introducing Islam from Within* (The Islamic Foundation, 1991).
- “Community, Justice, and Jihad: Elements of the Muslim Historical Consciousness” *American Journal of Islam and Society*, 1987, 4(1), pp. 13–30. <https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v4i1.2867>
- “Paradigms in Political Science Revisited: Critical Options and Muslim Perspectives,” *American Journal of Islam and Society*, 1989, 6(1), pp. 119–124. <https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v6i1.2694>
- “Beyond Cultural Parodies and Parodizing Cultures: Shaping A Discourse,” *American Journal of Islam and Society*, 1991, 8(1), pp. 15–43. <https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v8i1.2642>
- “Squaring the Circle in the Study of the Middle East: Islamic Liberalism Reconsidered,” *American Journal of Islam and Society*, 1991, 8(3), pp. 525–548. <https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v8i3.2611>
- “Contemporary Social Theory: Tawhidi Projections,” *American Journal of Islam and Society*, 1994, 11(3), pp. 305–347. <https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v11i3.2414>
- “Revisiting the Women Question: An Islamic Perspective,” *The Chicago Theological Seminary*, Winter – Spring 1993, vol. LXXXIII, no.1-2). <http://www.aswic.net/Content/DrMonaPapers/REVISITING%20THE%20WOMAN%20QUESTION.pdf>

As Abul-Fadl passed away in 2008, respecting the quality of her scholarship and in memory of her work, no content or structural change has been made to the original, other than correction of typographical and other errors. The Foreword is a new addition and it is hoped does justice in introducing readers to aspects of the content.

Since its establishment in 1981, the IIIT has served as a major center to facilitate serious scholarly efforts. Towards this end it has, over the decades, conducted numerous programs of research, seminars, and

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conferences as well as published scholarly works specializing in the social sciences and areas of theology, which to date number more than six hundred titles in English and Arabic, many of which have been translated into other major languages.

**IIIT**

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# Agency, Rationality, and Morality: A Qur'anic View of Man<sup>1</sup>

## OUTLINE AND SEQUENCE

The general purpose of this essay is to provide a reading of the Islamic view of man against a background of the preoccupations of modernity, whether these are made explicit or are left implicit. The emphasis is on rationality, freedom and morality and the goal is the reintegration of man and the recovery of community through a reconciliation of self and the rediscovery of the essential meaning of divine guidance in so far as it relates to human life in this world. I have attempted to do this by taking the Qur'an for my main source and pillar in constructing that reading. Taking the Qur'an as a divine discourse of many tiers and depths, I have singled out aspects of the discourse on creation and taken it as a pivot for developing a view of moral man and moral community, with the focus remaining on the former. The main message is one of relevance, urgency, and opportunity. The urgency and the opportunity lie with man, and the relevance shines through the light of the eternal message and comes from God.

### 1. INITIAL REFLECTIONS ON A THEME

The idea is to put the Islamic View of Man in the context of the modern mindset. A Modern Muslim lives the ideas and the problems of his age, and in this light he or she comes to see the relevance of the Islamic worldview in a new light. Living our age means living in the shadows of the dominant paradigm, which is Western, humanist, and materialist. It is out of an awareness of the moral emptiness and dilemmas

inherent in this paradigm that a Muslim rediscovers the contemporary relevance of his worldview. He reaches out to his contemporaries with a reading of the times, and his diagnosis carries within it the elements of the Islamic view of man and projects it on the dominant paradigm. One of the immediate advantages of recovering the Islamic view is the possibility of gaining a unique standpoint to critique and reflect upon the modern stage. This is the first step to retracing the way out of the current impasse. It could spell light and man's rediscovery of himself and his spiritual bearings, and an end to his estrangement and dispossession.

## 2. ISLAM REMEMBERED

This section addresses the need to explore the Islamic Sources which retain a particular significance to the plight of modern man as they elucidate a distinctive view of man as God's honoured creation, privileged with unique endowments and charged with a universal trust. Constitutionally, man is a composite of material and divine elements. Morally, he is a cultural being, and culture must be understood in terms of an enduring and pervasive dialectic between Reason and Revelation. Man is endowed with the faculties and the purpose to grapple with this dialectic, and his own perfectibility and the soundness of the civilization he constructs are contingent on understanding and acting within the parameters of this dialectic. We learn this from a covenant established with the Creator at the outset of creation, historically renewed through prophethood from one generation and one people to another, and crowned with the seal of prophethood and preserved in the Qur'an for all time. This is also a covenant which is existentially renewable with every individual believer. Emphasis throughout is on man's freedom as a moral agent, and on the elements of his cognition and volition.

This is essentially a profile of man as it might be projected at a primary level from a novice encounter with Islam. Coming from the modernist in search of an alternative, the tone is still tentative and the questions raised reflect this. There is a need to be led through a

reasoned sensibility to explore the sources for the Islamic view at some depth: first hand. The gist of this reasoning is that man's autonomous search founders unless it is backed by some external instruction. In the process, further insights are acquired into dimensions of the Islamic view of man in relationship to his universe and its dynamic, to the account of man's original descent into earthly toil, to the unique relationship to his Creator, etc. Some brief incursions into relevant aspects of the Muslim scholarly heritage are made.

### 3. A REPLENISHMENT FROM THE SOURCES

This section begins by addressing itself to the Qur'an as a Book of Guidance which is the key to self-understanding and to recovering man's view of himself (and, ultimately of the world in which he lives). In this self-instruction we stand to learn more than a substance, but also a technique or approach which is reflected on the insights that accrue from taking Qur'an as a Guide. Our first insight to this effect discloses something of the nature of the unique relationship implicit in guidance and response between Man and his Creator and Sustainer. The lesson occurs in the context of man ascertaining his measure between autonomy and dependency, self-centeredness and otherwardness and guidance becomes the means for informing and inciting: enlightening the mind as to the terms of man's mission on earth, and urging him to act on them. Next, step by step we come to learn something about the characteristics of the human addressee as recipient, subject and object of the divine discourse. The picture which emerges is one of an intelligent and intelligible person, who has a mind and a will of his own, who is capable of reason, remembrance and return, and who is just as capable of perversity, and of the kind of 'stiff-neckedness' and 'hard-heartedness' attributed to the Children of Israel (*banī Isrā'īl*) in their own Scriptures, but which is not confined to them. More is learned about human rationality and free will and about the special *fiṭric* endowments in the *nafs* which enable it to choose between its own felicity and damnation. As we draw closer to the Sources we also come to learn more about man, and conversely,



the more we learn about man, the more we are drawn to God. This is another way of rendering the Delphic Oracle in an Islamic context. Reason points beyond itself to Revelation and Revelation plays its vital role in enlightening reason and cultivating the self. Man, the viceroy as *khalīfah*, privileged with a trust and assigned a labour of love and devotion (*‘ubudiyyah*), takes his bearings from this dialectic.

#### 4. MAN’S CREATION RECONSIDERED

Three relevant levels of the Qur’anic discourse were distinguished at the outset of Section three and woven throughout: the discourse on creation, that on *takrīm/taklīf* and that on Guidance. In fact they all radiated from a common center pivoted on guidance. To show how they overlap the discussion takes the first level for a focus to point out some of the salient characteristics in profiling the view of man. The emphasis is still on how the Qur’an teaches as much as on what it instructs, and on how it structures a psyche, a frame of mind, a way of seeing and being that is integrated and oriented. The gist of the pursuit is that the Islamic view of man taken from the perspective of man’s creation is inherently (1) a wholistic view that enlightens as it expands the horizons of our knowledge and experience, (2) that it deepens and confirms one’s interiority and belief in God, (3) that it reconciles man to the world in which he lives in the widest sense, and that at the same time as it does so, (4) it orients him to the world beyond and enables him to gauge his priorities, evaluate perspectives and behave, endure, accomplish and live out the meaning of his life accordingly. A brief incursion into the shaping of Muslim thought about man and into its variations and constancies is made before the discussion leads to considerations of moral man and moral community.

#### 5. MORAL *INSĀN*, MORAL COMMUNITY

The creation of man continues as a focus for sharpening perspectives in this round on ‘questions ontic and ethical’. The points made here

are that the central questions which concern man about himself, his origin, his purpose and his destiny – and which constitute the nodes of philosophical speculation are all answered in the Qur'anic discourse. They are further reinforced and supplemented by an ethical code which instructs man in the fundamental values that should guide his life. In this sense man's heart is not simply set at rest in the tranquillity of knowing the Truth, but his energy is constructively channeled in the light of knowing what is expected of him and the principles he should observe along the Way. In this context some key concepts relating man to others, the individual to the community, men and women to one another, human communities among themselves are explored and project a vocational perspective of man as *khalifah*: God's elected and crown of creation who has been entrusted with a mission, qualified for its discharge, tested on the way and rewarded for the effort. With this the presentation comes back full circle to underline the original themes of human rationality and moral agency. The essentials of an Islamic view of man converge on an ethos of a theocentric humanism.

## Initial Reflections on a Theme

Next to God, “man” has probably been one of the most contested topics throughout human history. What qualifies the modern age though is its compulsive obsession with that subject. There is a pathetic edge to this obsession. The compulsion is only compounded by a blind groping in an age where, having arrogated to himself the measure of all things, man finds himself with neither rudder nor compass to guide him in the wilderness. The trajectory began with a seemingly sound and innocent exhortation given by an enlightened mind of its times in seventeenth century England, “Feign not the Heavens to scan... For know thee that... the proper study of mankind is man”. There was nothing wrong with that exhortation. Indeed, given its context, it was the most sensible bit of advice that Alexander Pope could have given to his fellow-minds in an age which was riven with vain propositions parading under the garb of a knowledge immaculate. This advice was taken up zealously and all too literally, in a radicalizing and exclusivist temper which was bred of the times and its controversies. Eventually, its yield was to be even more controversy and much detriment. The problem was not with the advice, but with the context, and with the way in which a sensible exhortation was taken up and followed out.

The history of mankind and of human culture and civilization has been variously defined and classified. Depending on which cognitive perspective is in command at any given moment in time, one or the other classification might gain currency and command the scene. The resulting perspective then constitutes the dominant paradigm comes to prevail with its mainsprings of diffusion and its particular historiogenesis. Today, like any other industry in a global technological age, the modern culture industry, which is the bearer of the dominant paradigm and its perspectives, has its main centers in the trans-Atlantic community and is conventionally identified with Europe as

progenitor of the “cultural West”. This is a notion which defers to a core legacy molded in the mixed crucible of a pagan Graeco-Roman antiquity qualified by a Biblical gloss. More precisely, it was the dialectics of an early medieval antiquity and a later classical medievalism which saw the transmutations associated with the modern West. In this emergent perspective, the principal division which qualifies the modern consciousness is the distinction between tradition and modernity: or the modern and the pre-modern age. This classification produces its own understanding.

According to this division, knowledge is of two kinds: there is that knowledge which has been shaped by tradition, knowledge as given and transmitted down the generations. It is a knowledge that is premised on trust and faith. Then, there is that knowledge which is conceived as a rational and systematic enterprise, the function of the scientific, as opposed to the mythological mind. This is the kind of knowledge rooted in skepticism and nurtured on doubt. Yet, the key to distinguishing two worlds of knowledge would seem to lie not in their contrasting premises; for ultimately it was found that this binary perception was misconceived and that the differences are more subtle than is at first imagined. For no knowledge is possible without an element of faith, and there is always an element of uncertainty, and not just curiosity, which instigates a search. The more pertinent question would appear to lie in a *residual orientation* which subsumes faith and doubt and sets the tone of the quest. It is these elusive subtleties which in time cloud perceptions, so that once again, the issue is not whether the proper study of mankind is man, but it is what the parameters of this study should be.

The distinctive mark of the grand divide between the “modern” and the “pre-modern”, it would seem lies in identifying the crucial center in the respective charts: Does knowledge take its bearings from man or from God? Is man’s consciousness of himself and his world egocentric or theocentric? What constitutes the ultimate knowable reality, is it the physical universe or the metaphysical one? Which is the ultimate valid source for human knowledge, is it Reason or Revelation? What are the instruments of verification of the different kinds of knowledge, and how are they developed? These are among a

host of other fundamental questions which could be raised and which all take their common point of departure from establishing the initial bearings that set the currents of human thought.

By virtue of the dominant paradigm, modernity has been defined by its “anthropocentrism”. This *homo*-centeredness found its source in a resurrected humanism during the Italian Renaissance and developed its main characteristics over a turbulent three centuries-long period of cultural ferment peaking in the eighteenth century Enlightenment. The fruits of this process were gleaned with the steady consolidation of the institutional matrix of modernity throughout society in a process that has been identified in Weberian sociology as a progressive rationalization and differentiation of all departments of life. Alternatively, it has been identified with the steady disenchantment of the world and the secularization of culture.

The single most momentous consequence of modernity has therefore been the shifting of the agency and responsibility for life and mortality away from the divine to man. This process has been variously associated with conflicting trends to deify man and nature. In the one case, naturalism has taken precedence, in the other humanism. The outcome of the contest is more often a function of the understanding of the stakes involved. Where materialism has triumphed, as most frequently it has, then nature resolved into the physical world and its materialist elements won out. In this scheme of things, man was himself reduced to his biology, and there was little reason to attribute a primacy to that biological organism with its chemical compound. At best the science of man would be a behavioural science, and in a world of engineering formulas ready at hand, there was no reason why the behaviour of a particular biological organism, and its physiological reactions, should not be brought to subscribe to the rules of the lab and the clinic. One would assume that with the progress of science, man could be taken to pieces, put under the microscope like the rest of nature, and, in a matter of decades, assimilated in the mega-brain and corpus that constituted society. The latter could itself be conceived mechanically or organically, but regardless of the approach, it was an object of mass engineering: manipulation and control: whether whole, or in its constituent parts. As the human became dissolved and

resolved into another corporate abstraction, society became the graveyard of humanity, and the chances of retrieving anything in the nature of an essence receded even further.

Consistent with his naturalization man was denaturalized. The age had started out celebrating the reconciliation of man to his misperceived origins, an unfelicitious humanism, by restoring his links to nature and to the lifeworld. That was his natural and worldly habitat from which he seemed to have been so unnaturally cut off during a protracted era of imposed constrictions, all in the name of the gods, and under the stringent control and governance of a holy magistrarium that claimed to represent the gods and to mediate man's fate and destiny. This imposed alienation from nature and from the world had for long been accepted by man as a consequence of his guilt and in retribution for his fallen nature. As the credentials of the Magistrarium wore out, a new wave of ideas swept in. With it the seeds of doubt in old faiths were sown and new perceptions crept in imbuing man with a false sense of recovery of his identity, his mind and vitality culminating in a burst of energy that would make and remake the world. It was with the "recovery of nerve", in the words of Peter Gay, that the new age was born. With its guardians discredited, the Spirit had been spirited away, and man was at last free to indulge his repressed instincts and enjoy the fullness of his desires and whims. Narcissus too could see his beautiful face amid the sweet lilies of the pond as Orpheus played his lyre wistfully in the shade. The notes would usher in the phoenix rise of Prometheus, and presage the coming of a new Dionysian Spring – though all this would no doubt take its time. Meanwhile, the wanton abandon of sheer virulence in the air, the indulgences and excesses that once shaped the Italian Renaissance, as its historians have depicted it to posterity, were posthumously vindicated. In that age it would seem, a mass catharsis of a repressed humanity had temporarily knocked man off balance – just when he thought that he was being restored to himself. It is inscribed in Nature as the divine order of creation, that all wantonness and excess must exact its retribution: the prize at stake was threatened with extinction before its time has come.

The natural pulls and tensions that secured life its survival came into play to check the ebullience afoot and a new methodism was instituted. Man came to be defined in terms of Reason as much as Passion, and Power came to be celebrated alongside Beauty. Motion, it was discovered, was as much part of life as the space of its enactment was; and the search for history with a Vico is launched. Man was now set on a journey of discovery of his past, and his hopes propelled him to a boundless future, as he celebrated his newly recovered sense of the world and of worldly life.

There was here a new sense of confidence and daring that was reinforced by his discovery of a direction to history: Progress is proclaimed and the enunciation is not without its concrete foundations for Science has been crowned as the instrument of this progress. Torn between the instrument and its vehicle, science and history, man would switch his evasive faith eclectically between scientism and historicism. These would duly become two more credited authorities and creeds competing for the allegiance of the modern age. Scientism is naturally allied to naturalism just as historicism is the brain child of a faith in an unswerving temporality and immanence: a new gnosticism is born. Yet, in the midst of an abundant learning, ignorance takes root: and the light of the Enlightenment is overtaken by the shadows of a hovering darkness as man comes face to face with himself as the Unknown.

Under the combined weight of conflicting and not altogether reconcilable faiths, man succumbs to a new kind of fatalism, one where he has lost his command to the monsters of his own creation. Man is steadily marginalized, from agency to incumbency, to submersion into processes and forces that are beyond him. Where reason fails him he must believe. And where the grounds for that belief are not ascertainable with the instruments of verification he has conditioned himself to rely upon, then he must now condition himself to trust to an untested sense of discernment, notwithstanding his full-bodied realization of the groundlessness of his convictions. The anthropocentric age which started out with man at the center of the universe ends on a dismal note of decenteredness. Wherever he turns, man is hounded by the new ghosts of alienation and vexed into the shattered

prism of a world denuded of all meaning. It is a downward spiral entailing a deconstruction to the dregs. In the midst of abundance man is destitute, the possessor is dispossessed. It is hardly surprising that the end of the twentieth century should be celebrating an absurd sequence of ends in anticipation of a confounded eschaton: Together with the End of History signifying the immanence of the millenium, there is also the fear that there will be no one there to come to the party. The "End of Man" has itself been contemplated in a permissive and dismissive mood qualifying the arrival of an era of incertitudes and blind addictions: post-modernity [..."they have forgotten Allah so Allah has made them forgetful of themselves"] (59:19).

It is in this context that the search begins anew: and that a new age of remembrance out of the womb of time is called forth, in the hope of awakening the memories out of the deep past that can save man. It is here that the other oft disdained, ignored, and now long-forgotten pole of knowledge is activated. With anthropocentrism at the end of its tether, sound reason argues, has not the time come for a search for God? Having exhausted his own measure to little avail, a stern and judicious reason remonstrates, surely man can no longer maintain the preposterous claim of being the measure of all things. The time of putting things in their place has arrived. Just as there is a measure for all things, man included, so for everything there is a season too. Justice, so the voice of sweet reason urges, must be done and Truth prevail. For the only certainty is that the time will come when the ought will prevail. ["Say: Truth has come, vanity is gone, truly all that is vain is evanescent"] (17:81). This voice, it must be added, was never entirely silenced in the human conscience. It simply operated at another wavelength where it served to keep memories and sensibilities alive; some found it with the mystics, others with the "Orient" and still others within their innermost selves. Wherever its source might be, it remained preserved like the timeless echoes of the seething waves cloistered in a shell, destined to be recovered time and again from the depths of the ocean. The path for exploring the Islamic view of man is decked with these shells.



## Islam Remembered

Exploring the Islamic view of man is a means of recapturing and modulating a voice from the depths of the human past, that of every individual human being as well as the collective, through an enhanced articulation and audibility. It is man in search of his true sense, his essence and himself, in his God created *fiṭrah* that is at stake. The present setting highlights the relevance of a timely and consuming search for an audience that goes beyond an immediate cultural circle and transcends the purview of a parochial setting. Indeed, so pervasive has the condition induced by modernity become that there is little room left for invoking either an impaled affinity or a stricken parochialism in what has come to constitute a universal moral quest. To the Muslim the onslaught of modernity has hardly spared him his traditions, and it has left him stranded in the post-traditional age, together with many other erstwhile tradition bearers. To those of the West and therein, modernity has outstripped itself, and it has left its former adepts weary dreary at the threshold of a post-modern age. While the world has changed, some things have not.

What is significant about tapping the sources of Islam for the answer to this universal quest lies in an awareness of the nature of these sources, as well as of their place in the scheme of a mortal economy and a salvation history. In Islam, a “sacred history” (*Heilsgeschichte*) coincides with an empirical or a universal history (*Weltgeschichte*) whose subjects are not confined to saints and prophets and to the metaphysics of a sacred creation. But this history spans within its purview a concrete version of creation and mortality, with man occupying a pride of place in the outcome. At this point, we shall venture to contour a vignette in anticipation of engaging the particulars in due course.

The man at the center of the picture here is not an autonomous entity, a being that exists in, of, and for itself. The Islamic view rules

out the *Ding an sich* as a human category in the Kantian mode. As al-Asfahani would put it, the designation of “man” here subsumes the term as a signifier of the generality of a species, without retaining a substantial significance for the signified. For man to be the *insān* worthy of his design, he would have to be other than that autonomous entity that is trapped in the trammels of Nature or that is assumed to be caught in the womb of an inhospitable universe out of which it must fight every inch of the way if it wanted to wrest its “emancipation” and realize itself. The man who emerges here is a relational entity crowning a hierarchy of creation and distilling its very essence. He is a created being conceived in a web of dependencies, astraddle a world of benign and reciprocal relationships of dependency, that are woven of the stuff of a Mercy and Compassion that sustains the universe. It is this beneficent element which constitutes the ambience and qualifies the setting for his pre-ordained exertions in the quest of self-realization in a journey of assured ascendancy. It is because of the texture and subtleties of this weave that man is not cramped in, hedged, or iron-caged in the course of that journey. He is certainly not the abandoned “cosmic orphan” in a vast and forlorn expanse that is the universe.

Rather, that man who has graduated as “*insān*” has issued forth from the loins of Adam, the primal man. He is there as a species in the hierarchy of creation who from the outset has been assigned a mission set for him by an Almighty and Omniscient Creator in a habitable world that constitutes the stage and material for implementing that divine assignment. This site is constituted of a benign universe that is itself the handiwork and the reflection of the same Munificent Creator who has set Himself up as the Lord of a Multitude of Worlds of His own bountiful creation. Herein lies the primal and inviolable bond between man and his habitable world, the mortar that binds man to the cosmos, and assures him beyond the place within, a place throughout as the microcosm of a whole, constituted into a whole. The *homo concord* is contingent on this inviolability as both, the mortal and the setting issue of the same Omniscient Munificence. Both have in consequence been accorded their privileged status of meaningful purpose: one through *taklīf* (trust and charge) and *takrīm* (ennoblement, or honoring); the other through *taskhīr* (subjection,

rendering malleable). The earthly world that is man's habitat and temporary abode constitutes one of the plurality of possible worlds. It is as a sign of Mercy and Munificence, that it has been subordinated to man's delegated agency through this providential act of *taskhīr*.

In consistence with that same measured munificence, man is endowed with the faculties that are designed and destined to enhance his capacities and ensure his ability to go about his temporal mission. Foremost of these are the faculties to know and to act. The lynchpin of this Economy of Measure and Munificence, is the ability to synchronize man's capacity to acquire knowledge and to act on it. Without culture man would have graduated little beyond the beasts who shared with him his earthly habitation – and many of his instincts. But culture is itself a graduated constituent which in the Islamic view is unsustainable without its guiding compass and core which have been revealed with the Shari'ah. As others have shown, the essence of culture is predicated on a relationship between Reason and Revelation and the assurance of man's balance and felicity in his worldly mission, the warranty of his *khilāfah* so to speak, is a function of this relationship.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, at a more basic level, without this potential in the make of man for synchronizing between his knowledge and his action, the mind and the deed, *ilm* and *fi'l*, then civilization, as we have known it throughout recorded history, would not have emerged from the vast and undifferentiated expanse of a created nature (*khalq*).

In the course of realizing the purpose of his creation man has two faculties at his command: one is assured by virtue of a practical and communicative Reason which crowns, mediates, and arbitrates a host of ready instruments of knowledge. The other is sought in an innate inclination in the self to "unfold" and to strain to imprint its setting as much by doing as by withholding. This is the *nafs* which provides the seat and site for a volition which grounds the disposition to act in one way or the other. The *nafs*, as will be presently seen, is that active agent that is capable of commanding and restraining and that is ultimately responsible for whether man's inner condition is in turmoil or at peace. In this view, man is capable of reason and, as such, he is essentially a reasonable being; his senses have been tuned to a world he has

been called upon to husband. At the same time, the elected human agent is a moral agent: and this morality is conditioned on a capacity to choose (*ikhtiyār*). Choice presupposes a bifurcation of paths in a situation which calls for a deliberate response embedded in the capacity to discern and discriminate (*idrāk / tamyīz*). To observe the terms of a primordial Covenant with his Creator is the pivot of this choice (7:172-173). In tracing out the story of man, it is just as important to keep this primordial event in view as it is to learn of man's faculties and to chart out his course. Without knowing something about this Covenant, it makes little sense to speak in terms of a mission, or a purpose of creation, or indeed to attempt to make sense of man in his world.<sup>3</sup>

To recap on a vignette without filling in the lines may be frustrating; it leaves so many gaps and raises a host of queries. One can only concede the premises without engaging the argument and come back with a raincheck. The premises include (1) a recall of man's mission as constituting the purpose of his timed earthly sojourn in a worldly setting, and (2) the notion that this mission is embedded in a founding Covenant which also sets the terms for its conduct. The queries start. Where can one learn the terms of this Covenant? In the profusion of the encumbrances that are of this world, should one forget the terms, where can one turn for remembrance? Remembering is the counterpart of forgetting and one is endowed with the disposition for both experiences. The train of reflective queries goes on. As a knowing agent one is further expected, it might be recalled, to act in all consciousness; one cannot plead a mitigating ignorance of foundations or a dimming flow of awareness. Endowed with the disposition to learn, one cannot obliterate either learning or consciousness. Again, it is only as a free agent who is capable of reasoning ahead, and considering the consequences of one's actions, that one is ultimately taken to account for one's choice and rewarded the measure of one's actions. Such is man as a knowing and willing agent that, to claim the responsibility and to be taken to account for it, he would need to be qualified for the task. It is in this context that the lofty and majestic event has been paraded before the eyes of our minds by the Almighty in the truest of all Utterances:

Verily, We did offer the trust to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up – for, verily, he has always been prone to be unjust and foolish (through his ignorance of the nature of that trust and its consequences).<sup>4</sup>

With Asad and Zamakhshari, we take the *amānah* or the trust to mean reason and volition, and with Qurtubi, we also assume its substance to be the *farā'id*, or the ethical and moral responsibility which might be summed up in the vocation of the *khilāfah*. The injustice and folly to which most men and women are generally prone,<sup>5</sup> denotes the failure to measure up to that moral responsibility and it lies less in their qualifications, than in their disposition. With this conception that man was born and destined for a vocation and a destiny, we might address the qualities which prepare him for the task. These are qualities which also provide us with a core concept of man as an integral being, essentially created in that perfect mould whose essence is balance – and whose test is to maintain that balance.

His cognitive ‘equipment’ would include such instruments as memory, reason, senses, intuition; while his affective disposers would include a constituent vortex of energy propellers manned by such impulses as motivation, passions, desire, and conscience. All this is confirmed by an observation of man as an intelligent and active agent inhabiting this life-world. It all confirms however the need to look beyond this world to locate the terms and purpose of this active and intelligent earthly sojourn. Indeed, from a perspective which we may refer to as the “*tawhīdī* episteme”,<sup>6</sup> the terms of the quest by man for man have already been framed with the grounds in view. Charting a worldview presupposes an actor and a goal, a role and a destination in a journey which cannot be intelligibly and intelligently intercepted midway in any earnest attempt to understand it, without knowing something in advance about its beginning and its end.

This line of reasoning supposes that one knows something of what man is about; or at least that such an end is knowable to man himself. It suggests, in addition, that this measure of self-knowledge is mandatory, neither a matter of option, nor a preserve for the few. The Delphic oracle: “Know thyself” had etched this elemental bit of wisdom in the

annals of human reason so that the Occident would also be party to that which the Orient long knew. But whereas the end of self-knowledge has generally remained the source of much ambiguity in the Western tradition, in the Islamic paradigm in particular, this admonition has derived its force from its unequivocal end. To know oneself was the beginning and not the end; it was the way and the precondition to knowing God as ultimate reality in an episteme, a world of knowing, where no doubt existed about the uniqueness and complete otherness of the Creator from the worlds of His creation. Man needed to know something about himself, in order that he might act responsibly, and that he might attain the graduated shades of certainty of the grounds of his knowledge. Let us see briefly how in this tradition of knowledge the task and its elevations was understood. There are many illustrious landmarks in this tradition, and notwithstanding the classical distinctions between the sufis, the theologians, or the *mutakallimūn*, the *falāsifah* and the *mufasssirūn* and *muhadithūn*, the exegetists and hadith scholars, one can identify commonalities which pertain to the basic tradition they all shared.

For expediency, we shall again turn to al-Asfahani to see how the grades of knowledge were perceived in this tradition. There is, we are told, a broad base of general conceptions, a *taṣṣawur ʿām*, which is shared by the broad majority of all rational beings. Beyond that, one begins an ascent amongst those privileged accesses, from a weighted opinion, borne on the brunt of a circumstantial evidence, (*ghalabat al-dhann*), to a further stage of a more assured knowledge, *ʿilm al-yaqīn*, which is one more grade up the ladder of a certain and ascertainable knowledge, until eventually one may reach to the highest point of transparency in penetrating reality with the eyes of certainty, *ʿayn al-yaqīn*. In a world of benevolent dependencies, where man is not nurtured on the illusion of a misplaced autonomy, certainty appeared to be attainable without carrying the threatening overtones of a heretical gnosticism, such as that feared in other cultural traditions.<sup>7</sup> In rooting his knowledge in an element of certainty, his beliefs and his convictions which underlie his actions are also assured of a cogency. Yet, the gap between the broad conceptions and unsubstantiated opinions and the mounting gradations of certainty can hardly be

covered in the stride of unaided human reason. Where can one turn for this knowledge, and how can one know that what one knows is true? How can one know that one's knowledge is reliable and that it constitutes a valid and viable foundation for being – one's own and that of the world around? In short how can one distinguish knowledge from opinion, and how can one unravel the strands to distinguish truth from its illusion?

So the ball is set rolling on the Socratic Way in the allegorical cave, and to this day, in an age which takes pride in its liberal rationality, it has not landed its goal. To do so, the terms of the enterprise would need to be renegotiated. The search for the covenant and the mission is the legitimate target for every man and woman in the modern age. It cannot be launched in the absence of divine Revelation, although not every such revelation has retained a historical integrity that can render it the source for unequivocal answers. In Islam, one does not have to look far for such answers, not merely to the question of the covenant and to the purpose of man's creation, but rather to a host of vital questions relating to the privileged species of Adam's descent. It is the range of questions answered and the comprehensiveness and unequivocation of the answers provided which sets the stage to dialoguing with the Islamic view of man. This is not without reason.

We might here take up the matter of why knowing about man has been assured such a comprehensiveness in the subjunctive mood and attempt to locate the matter in a range of its kind. In the *tawhīdic* perspective, existential questions are foundational questions and, as such, they are not left to the hazards and tribulations of trial and error. This understanding is integral to an economy of Mercy which is inscribed in Creation. Consequently, the answer to the question of man is not left to man's own divinations, falterings, and gropings in an Olympian contest to serve as a cruel device in testing his mettle. Nor is it an object for testing man's measured expertise in an arena marked out for delegated competences. It is true that the human ambition might overreach itself. Behind the straining human perceptions, however, the world may be seen to constitute a multi-layered stage of unfathomable depths that beckons the human to strive towards the infinite. But there is a finitude to the life-world which is the site for this

very striving. With this latter qualification, the life-world becomes one constituency or realm among others and is ultimately conditioned to a *measured* complexity by the Master of all measures. Seen as such it provides the qualified setting in which man has been singled out by his Lord and Creator for a task of selective competencies. In it he is, moreover, destined to live out his span in a cycle where the range of his experience is bound to outweigh his "expertise". The latter is equated to a technical proficiency and is distinguished from a range of experiential potential, given man's mixed and innate constitution which does not stop at his physique. By definition too, a technical proficiency can only be exacted in a domain of its kind, such as is perceived to lie in the physical realm.

In the course of an adopted and adaptive selectivity – (which is a far cry from the modern evolutionary code which expounds a random selective adaptation) – human agency is prescriptively, and not merely proscriptively, circumscribed. To the few eminent thinkers who have cared to reflect on the matter, it might appear paradoxical that while man was more effectively equipped to deal with the physical universe, he was hardly qualified to understand himself (Huxley, Alexei Carrell, and others). Yet this should come as no surprise. In a universe which has been tuned by its Creator to receive man's ministrations, proficiency is a matter of contingency, not necessity. This contingency presupposes an intimate, ongoing and interactive ecology of compassion and of gratitude (*shukr*). It is predicated on a dynamic of life which is geared to a dialectics of the active and the passive polarities of creation. It is, moreover, a function of the principle of a benevolent dualism ingrained in creation on the one hand as much as a field for activating the forces of a systemic repulsion on the other, (*mabda al-zawjiyyah* and *mabda al-daf'iyyah*).<sup>8</sup> These are principles which are not unknown in one form or another in other cultural traditions – an observation which confirms something more than the universality of a stock of primal human wisdom. It is a testimony to the universality of the divine revelation. On this plane of conceptions, man stands to act at the one pole and the universe is distended to be acted through at the other. This conception of a functional discontinuity or of a terminal autonomy is restricted to one level of analysis.



At another as we shall see there is an “organic” continuity. Whether the relationship between man and his environment is seen in terms of the one dimension or the other, the point is to confirm the tensions of a complementarity, and not of an antagonism, in an ecology of husbandry and not of rape.

In this pre-ordained dynamic of a life-procuring situation, there are limits to which man can go in exploring both himself and the miniscule segment of the universe that is his habitat. In fact, he can only know so much about himself with a degree of self-reliance and critical aptitude, and he can only verify that much of his acquired knowledge empirically or otherwise to the extent that he is a part of the physical universe. Beyond that he can only indulge his imagination and engage in clever suppositions which cannot be verified. The pastime is not without its perils.

Speculation can fill a void for the spiritually ravished, or vanquished, self in a long and forlorn journey through the unknown. But it remains a largely questionable exercise in a journey which need not necessarily be as forlorn and in an expanse whose essentials can be known. The metaphor of a forlorn journey however is embedded in the text of a collective and primal mind where it seems to have been etched from time immemorial. Sufists have often spoken of the journey from the world of the evanescent to that of the everlasting (‘*alam al-fanā*’ to ‘*alam al-baqā*’). Biblical thought has been wont to assign the start of journey’s trudge to a momentous event qualified as the Fall. Its counterpart in the Islamic view is referred to as the *khurūj*, the exiting from Paradise, which is seen as more of a pre-ordained and necessary event although it begins with the divine utterance: “Descend and thereout!” Rather than a mark of debasement and abandonment, the eviction to an earthly sojourn was attended by providential signs that would constitute its redeeming parameters as a journey between journeys. This difference in interpreting a cardinal cosmic event in the revealed traditions hinges on the Qur’anic version of the account. The details of the beginning of that journey are of particular consequence not only for substantiating the essentials of the temporal passage, but for clearing man’s conscience and establishing his credentials in a world where his presence has frequently been skewed into ambiguity

through the injustice and folly of his own kind. So we may pause here to elucidate the gist of a misplaced preoccupation.

From the outset of the encounter with the story of Adam, we are struck by the fact that everything in creation seems to be poised in awe in anticipation of a great event. This was announced by God in a declaration to the inhabitants of a supreme realm, the angels, and its purport was that He would appoint a vicegerent upon the earth, one to whom He had vouchsafed the qualities which would entitle him for the charge. The angels being creatures of light and assuming a certain foreknowledge in their translucency, were perturbed at the prospect of a creation that could wreak much havoc on the earth. But they could only see part of the picture, and could not know of the command to all other creations to bow in deference to this privileged being. All heeded the command, except one among those beings who happened to be in their midst, though not of them, at the moment of the great decision. That was Iblis, the 'fallen angel' in biblical tradition, but in reality, as the Qur'an makes clear, he belonged to another species in the multifarious worlds of creation, one which was created of fire and endowed with its particular faculties including an independent will and a limited power to exert it within their own sphere.<sup>9</sup> These are the jinn. Like Adam's offspring would turn out to be, not all jinn are wayward and some are benevolent and believers. Iblis was of the wayward group. There is something in the account which makes the relationship between Adam and his descendants and Iblis and his own, one of propinquity, almost of necessity. From the very beginning, Iblis was the symbol and instrument for waywardness and distortion in the life of man and in his vocation as *khalifah* (7:27; 20:117; 17:53). Henceforth it would seem that wherever there was man there was also the possibility of evil, of rebellion and defiance, of arrogance and corruption. The seeds for the disruption of man's peace of mind and the prospects of peace and goodwill on earth were sown from the moment Iblis had refused to submit to the command of his Lord to bow to Adam with the rest of the Angels (2:34; 7:11-12). From that moment, damnation was spelled on Iblis (not on man) as he was excluded from the Mercy of God down to the end of time (15:35). Out of spite for man, who appeared as an unworthy rival in the hierarchy

of creation, being created of an inferior make of “dust and clamorous clay”, and as the cause of his own satanic degradation, Iblis became his foresworn enemy (7:13-18; 17:61-65). So with the descent from the Garden of Eden, the site of man’s prehistory and preparation for his worldly vocation, his coming into this world was indeed to be attended by such enmity and strife. Yet, this was not man’s pre-ordained lot: for Adam was created for a noble vocation, and earth was no site for purgatory, but a stage of trial on a “pilgrim’s progress” for the Children of Adam and, accordingly, it was a site for achievement as well as for tribulation. The instance of Adam’s – and Eve’s – forgetfulness and temptation before the seduction and false promises of Iblis, was a crucial lesson and vital warning and reminder of what they needed to heed and what to guard against in the pursuit of their destined temporal vocation. Above all, it was a lesson in *tawbah* and genuine return to God on the part of mortals, who for all their learned virtues and endowed qualities, would remain vulnerable to their mortal weaknesses. On the other hand, it was a lesson in God’s forgiveness and overarching mercy, a conditional grace that would however remain within the reach of all who sincerely sought it. In the Islamic view of man the lesson of the fall in short is a lesson in recovery in the full sense of the word: a recovery of consciousness, of resolve, of grace and acceptance. It is also the discovery of the Way to secure against a relapse, should it recur, and to assure the return and uphold the resolve that restored Adam to the wholeness of his *fiṭrah*, and that would be the boon and legacy of mercy to the generations that followed.

On this neder trajectory of the *ḥayāt al-dunyā*, God’s chosen and honoured creation, would remain within the orbit of a saving grace and mercy as long as he observed the guidance God had promised to send him (2:38-39; 20:123-126).<sup>10</sup> That guidance would assume the form of a Light, a Criterion, a Remembrance, a Summons, a Solace and a Healing, a lucid Exposition and a Book that would set forth the terms for man’s covenant with God, and demonstrate and instruct in the way to follow in discharging the trust and mission for which man was created in this world. It would come through the office of those who would be chosen among men and prepared for their divine calling of communicating the Guidance. These were the prophets and

messengers who would come to their people as warners and bearers of good tidings, and as living examples and pointers to the Way. So that if men and women were in a general way the elect of their Lord and Creator in the divine economy, the prophets represented a class within a class of the chosen ones, *al-mustafīn*, assigned the specific calling of recalling their fellows in humanity to their honoured status and the terms of their trust. The prophets would be simply heralds and enunciators, without the authority or the power to coerce into recall. Freedom was after all a privilege in itself, like the ability to discern the call and to distinguish right from wrong and the true from the false. The rest would constitute the burden of man's morality, his test and tribulation, or *ibtīlā'*. Within this divine scheme of mercy as *rahmah*, Satan's power would be confined to those who wilfully neglected the guidance of their Lord and who in their neglect and oblivion could become easy prey to his machinations (15:39-42).

This is a condensed account of origins, or an ontological account, which has been communicated through the prophets and scriptures from the Source of all true knowledge. The full account can be traced through a systematic pursuit of the above cited verses in the entirety of their sequence. They provide a comprehensive account which has retained its integrity in the preserved and unadulterated text of the final revelation. As such, it comes to inform the Islamic view of man. It also comes to set the record straight not only by expunging Adam of a fallen nature, and clearing him of the stigma of an original sin that was visited on his offspring, but just as important, it comes to clear Eve of any stigma of complicity in the fall. Rather, the story of creation, and of man's vocation, of the covenant and the trial and tribulation, the strengths and the weaknesses, the honour and the "shame", comes through the Qur'anic version as a joint account which includes both Adam and Eve, from start to finish. This conception of an ontic parity and identity has its ethical consequences as we shall see below. Beyond this account there can only be speculation.

Taken up for a vocation, the well-intentioned speculation of philosophers on the subject of man can only be the breeding ground and putrid site for vain illusions. To most men and women who engage in it, without the grace of a numonosity and without revealed

guidance, it nurtures the mind-set of the gambler. Life is then simply a wager. In its venture, few may be saved on the reefs of theosophy at the eleventh hour of their discontent. More often, many self-professed speculators end up disillusioned confirmed in an innate cynicism about man and, oblivious to the hallowedness in creation, are convinced of the hollowness and absurdity of the world. From this perspective, speculation can hardly constitute the grounds for either reliable knowing or for sane being. Man is perpetually hounded with uncertainty, and the prospects for any sense of security, or for a serenity or for peace of mind are irrevocably shattered. This is a conclusion which might be logically consistent with its wager premises. But it is radically opposed to the principles of a divine economy of Mercy which is the node and pillar in a *tawḥīdī* episteme. It is a conclusion which further demands and warrants the comprehensiveness of the answers which can only be sought in the pristine sources of a universal revealed guidance.

## A Replenishment from the Sources

By turning to the Qur'an to learn about man, one is assuming the only posture that is consistent with the Islamic perspective on the subject. Beyond its key and access in the *Fātiḥah*, the opening of the Book constitutes a constant vigilant and reminder in this regard: "This is the Book in which there is no doubt, in it is a Guidance sure, to those who take heed, the God-Fearing and God-Conscious" (2:2). If the Book is the only reliable point of departure in a quest as elusive and yet as vital as that of 'What is Man?' what do we know about ourselves and what can we know? Our quest need not end there either. It is of the essence of the injunctions of this divine Guidance for man/*insān* to exercise a critical reflection on his experience and on his surroundings in order to arrive at some reliable and considered knowledge. "Say, (O Muhammad) 'Go forth in the land and examine the traces of those who have gone before'" (30:42) and also "Do you not stop to reflect upon yourselves, (your own make up and constitution)?" (30:8) and see what you can learn or yet again, the many injunctions to investigate for ourselves the signs of the universe and its constituents, that we may arrive at a knowledge that beyond its utility can lead to a conception of the truth. There is in such injunctions on methodology a significant elementary lesson to be learned by man about himself. It suggests that he must begin by seeking his Creator as a premise and condition for edifying his temporal abode.

The lesson further confirms that all true knowledge begins with the Guidance, even if it does not end there. It is a reminder for those who take heed that in its absence, man's search for reality remains a matter of sheer speculation which can neither substitute nor compensate for real knowledge. The love of wisdom and the pursuit of its light, can only verge on delusions and vanity if it is cut off from its moorings in revealed guidance. *Falāsifah* and theologians began with reason and ended with *wahy*. They were speculating on behalf of an

audience that might not have an initial access to *wahy*, or may have been unaware or dubious about it. In the presence of revealed guidance and in its acceptance, it becomes the natural starting point for exploring life. Parallel to knowledge is the search for mastery/dominion. If this quest too is pursued independently of its moorings it can only lead to infamy and self-destruction. The guidance encompasses man in his knowledge and his action as this is the only plausible compass for a being created with the faculty for both. As will be seen below, this conception itself is derived from the very mode of the Qur'anic address as much as from its content. From this address moreover we learn something vital about the exercise of these faculties.

We learn that such knowledge and action in their tempo-spatial extension and actualization, exact *measure and proportion*; if these qualities are lost, the balance founders. Man himself is a cosmion of a balanced order – the microcosm of creation – and any excess in his pursuits spells turmoil. *Ṭughyān*, the Qur'anic term for this excess, is a cause and symptom of disorder: a disrupting sign in the balance of creation which is equated with injustice. As all things in creation are subject to this balance, so the pursuits of the human faculties call for the yardstick that would assure them their balance. This too is a function of the Guidance, the absence or the neglect of which constitutes the signal for chaos. It is because creation is in essence good and has a purpose, and because the Creator is essentially the All Merciful and All Beneficent, that in His magnanimity He has provided for this Measure and this Guidance throughout Creation, even before its differentiation.

Allah the Most Merciful! It is He who has taught the Qur'an! who has created Man: And taught him speech (the power of self-expression and of intelligently apprehending relations of things and explaining them); the Sun and the Moon follow courses (exactly) computed; And the stars and the trees, both alike bow in adoration; and the firmament He has raised high, and He has set up the Balance (of justice): In order that you may not transgress (due) balance. So establish weight with justice, and fall not short in the balance... (55:1-9)

MAN THROUGH THE QUR'AN

There are at least two possible approaches to learning about the Islamic view of man from the Qur'an: One is the obvious one of seeing *what* it says about man: and there is abundant material on that score, both direct and indirect. The other is to see *how* the Qur'an addresses man. It is from the address as much as from its content that we can arrive at a true-to-life portrait that is closest to identifying man as a species of creation, and that we come to learn about what is unique to that species among creation (as well as what might be common). The Islamic view of man is predicated on a certain uniqueness which makes man stand out from the rest of creation as well as on a basic affinity which exists within and throughout creation. This understanding is at the center of the Qur'anic address of the subject and might provide a key to the psychology of the Divine Discourse. Yet, it is more usual for those who have turned to the Qur'an for their source to have confined their attention to what it says and only rarely to how it is addressed when there is so much to be learned from the one as well as from the other.

Our framework of inquiry here postulates the value of approaching the Glorious Qur'an as a divine discourse addressing man. Through analyzing the categories of this discourse we shall attempt to construct the conception of man as it comes through – beyond the explicit statements which are found in the verses themselves. The idea then is to see man through the Qur'an in the context of what the discourse contains, as well as how it unfolds. i.e. through exploring the strategy of the discourse. But first a number of misunderstandings will have to be cleared: and in the process, we will be setting the parameters of the Islamic view of man.

REVELATION AS DIVINE DISCOURSE

*Introducing a Theme*

One can postulate three levels of discourse in the Qur'an relating to generic man – *insān*. One is the discourse on man's creation, the other



is a discourse on man's elevation and ennoblement into: "God's Honoured Creation", the third is a discourse on man's guidance and instruction. The three levels overlap, as they all issue from the same source and all share the same subject. The difference is one of emphasis, but they are all aspects of what ultimately constitutes an integrated and integral discourse. The discourse on man is itself part of a complete and comprehensive discourse addressed to man by God to assure him guidance. This calls for some brief elaboration in the light of the Qur'anic ethos, which provides the firmament and basis for this discourse.

Guidance itself constitutes the bonding ligament in an economy of divine mercy. It institutes the principle of man's essential being as a relational entity, a potential whole whose effective wholeness and wholesomeness can only be fulfilled by reintegrating with the greater whole to which it is intrinsically related. In the absence of this perception of man's being and his place in the scheme of creation, all kinds of deviation result. The pendulum moves between two poles: one of imagining an absolute autonomy, which is transmuted into claims to absolute mastery. The other is a mystical delusion of an absolute unison with the world and is translated into various shades of pantheism. In the one case man becomes victim of an alienation which can ultimately push him beyond an urge to domination and subjugation to an illusion of transgressing all boundaries of otherness and an indulgence of the self. But the licentious and inflated self leads to its own excesses and pushes to the other extreme, of seeking its own destruction and total dissolution into the vastness of the Other. It is because of man's innate relatedness to something other than the egoistic self, that there is a ceaseless quest to establish a relationship beyond himself: and the problem becomes one of finding the proportions between autonomy and dependency, self-centeredness and otherwardness.

This is where divine guidance serves as Mercy ingrained: it points him to the poles of self and alterity by cultivating him in the truth of the perceptions of *ʿubudiyyah* and *ulūhiyyah*, a relationship which is nowhere more tellingly represented than in the designation: *ʿabd Allāh*. The balance of man's being in this world, of culture and of

society, is a function of perfecting this relationship. In securing man a glimpse of the Way, Guidance does not impose itself on man and does not deny him the measure of autonomy that has been granted him from the outset of creation. There is no room for a monstrous vision of "forcing men to be free" as the mythical legislator of Rousseau would have it. While men may entertain misfounded illusions about the truth and their own good, there is no surgical purging them of their "false consciousness" by herding them into enlightenment by a revolutionary vanguard. Beyond freedom, there is dignity, which is assured man by the breath of divine creation, and man is free to choose and free to err, provided he is made aware of the Way, and cognisant of the consequences of his choice. Guidance is there to assure him the opportunity of ascertaining the proportions without which he could hardly hope to attain the peace and prosperity for his worldly sojourn and the beyond. This is the twin goal-propelling conceptions of *falāḥ* (prosperity, achievement, success) and *najāt* (salvation). Beyond salvation, it is fulfillment that is man's end in life. The revealed guidance assures man the way, but it does not assure him its pursuit. Therein lies the test and the burden: the test of his freedom and the burden of his morality.

An Islamic ethos is one which is perhaps best illustrated by an outside view. In a culture where existence itself has traditionally been conceived as problematic Hamlet's dilemma: to be or not to be epitomizes a cult. In the Qur'anic ethos the problem is not one of being but of doing and the issue is not that of what we know and how we know, but rather of what we believe and of how we live our lives in accordance with our beliefs. In a way, the Qur'an teaches the irrelevance of the central questions of philosophy and draws our energies to the central tasks of life. It does so not by ignoring such questions as where do we come from and whither are we bound, but by providing the simple, comprehensive and conclusive answers which set the human heart to rest and spare it the futile anxieties.<sup>11</sup> It goes beyond that. Given the fact that man has been created for a purpose and that the divine guidance addresses him to assure him the soundness of its pursuit, it is only consistent that the Message should have as much to tell us about the addressee as about the terms of his pursuit.

Interpreting the Message of Guidance from the perspective of the addressee invites its own challenges and one will have to be selective. The discourse addressed by the Creator to Man has a very special resonance about it. It is an authoritative discourse which issues from the All-Knowing about the subject of His creation. We can therefore expect to find in it a key to understanding one of the most elusive subjects in the contemporary discourse among the moderns. However, the Qur'an is not a manual on who man is and what his characteristics are, and what his story on earth is all about. It is an exhortation to man to rise to his innate created humanity and to fulfill the purpose of his creation, and it is a statement of the consequences of his observance or failure to observe this mission. In this context, we acquire an insight into reality and come to learn about its dimensions. Our cognitive chart is enriched by the concepts of time, space, events and characters, and in the pursuit of this enrichment we come to realize our own perceptions as human beings who constitute the target of a live and vibrant discourse. In the process, our self-understanding matures.

The Revelation is not simply or even primarily a book we read, but it is a compelling voice which we hear and which we strain to listen to. It contains a message and a meaning we perceive through the range of our activated senses which begin with hearing and sight. The message then penetrates through the senses to our hearts and minds in a manner that enables us to witness a discourse in which we come to partake with our responses. Hearing constitutes the first filter for these responses. In this sense Revelation is a call from Heaven which we are summoned to witness live: so that our sight is fixed to the source of the call, and we begin to listen, reflect, conceive, perceive and understand, that we might observe the meaning of the message in our action: in our life. In the Islamic view there is no disjuncture between the life of the intellect or of contemplation and that of action, or volition. The conventional distinction moreover in the annals of human learning has been between "reason" and "revelation"; a distinction which somehow conveys a dualism, if not an opposition. Yet this distinction has been overlaid to the extent of obliterating an essential consonance between the two.

The Qur'anic discourse draws our attention to this consonance, as we come to see how revelation depends on reason as a medium for its processing. The voice of Heaven addresses man in a speech that penetrates the heart without losing its intelligibility to the mind. Indeed, revelation directs men to the essence of reflection and understanding by pointing to the seat of the intellect as residing in the inner core of the heart: it reminds listeners, lest they confound the reality of the matter, that it is not the eyes that are blind, but that the real blindness rests in the hearts that are within our breasts. The sensibility and its vehicle are not to be confounded. Indeed, too, the revelation defines itself in terms of categories that can only be appreciated through recalling the functions of the mind.<sup>12</sup>

The mind examines: it analyzes the signals it receives, it remembers, it recognizes, it discriminates between the elements it recognizes or identifies, it can also synthesize the pieces of information it receives to construct the meaning of a message; hence, the mind is not merely a receptacle, it is a store, a retrieval system, a processing agency, a screening and monitoring device. And beyond the network of sensory perceptions which undertake the various processing functions, the mind also functions as a headquarters for commanding operations: i.e. it directs and coordinates responses beyond its inner workings at the level of perceptions and conceptions to stimulate and activate another formidable reserve energy chamber in the human machine, the human will, so that it too can transform the received signals into impulses, and resolve is transferred to action. In this sense then it is not surprising that the message of divine guidance should be addressed to the human core that is constituted of an integrated matrix comprising all the complex agencies/processes of perception and resolve.

If we realize that the Qur'an is primarily an oral Recitation/a voiced Reading that has retained a precise, intricate and impeccable system of oral transmission and vocal delivery uninterrupted down the centuries, we can appreciate the utility of a cybernetic approach. Impeccability and precision refer to the nature of a divine promise to keep the word intact and to assure the revealed guidance its indubitability and its infallibility. At the plane of such a reflection on its communicational integrity, the Revelation becomes a system of

signals that are initially picked up from the air through the faculty of hearing, and that immediately trigger off a chain of responses in the brain centers that filter through a series of mental, psychological, bodily and spiritual responses. This is why occasionally we get graphic descriptions by the voice of Truth anticipating reactions of a mixed audience. Those who wish to resist the message are from the outset bent on an irrational course. It is irrational because they have taken their position on an issue before they have even listened to the case. Man is capable of prejudice, as well as reason and the Qur'anic discourse to man about man addresses both possibilities. Prejudice is a function of either misinformation and misunderstanding, or it can be a function of sheer perversity: a will to resist the truth, whatever the motivation might be. It is a prejudiced stance because they have screened their minds by transposing their whims or passions and their preconceived interests in the place of their reason and their real interests.

The Qur'an depicts this screening quite graphically. It does so in consistence with a dialectics of persuasion that glibly moves from the surface to the depth, and works its way back to the surface again. In this context, the "locks on the heart" which impair perception is a telling metaphor in conveying an attitude of sheer wilfulness. "Will they not, then, ponder the Qur'an or are there locks upon their hearts?" (47:24)<sup>13</sup> They can be visualized perhaps, but only their consequences can be seen with the naked eye. This carries into another level which conveys the visible reactions that embody the complexities of an invisible process which takes place within the heart. Some men and women, in this case the unbelievers, attempt to bar access. They stop their ears, and close their eyes, throw their garments over their faces, and try to get away from the witness stage, literally, attempting to shrug off the event. It is a pathetic attempt to block out the message at the sources of its reception so as to prevent the series of voluntary and involuntary operations which are bound to flow upon the emission of the signals of the Recitation and the delivery of the Message. They do so out of arrogance, which evokes its own discourse. Or they act out of fear, and an apprehension of changing their ways, despite the fact that the perception of the need to do so and the ability

to change oneself remains one of the most characteristically human and valued qualities.

They imagine that by blocking the accesses to Revelation, they can avoid the chain of processes which are triggered off upon picking up the signals and then they might be induced to an understanding they have no wish to entertain, or they might come to see the futility of the self-imposed inhibitions, they have no wish to abandon. Such conduct would appear to defy rationality. But this would presume that man is pure reason, an emanation of a rational essence. While rationality may be presumed to crown man's personality, the latter is a composite, and there is nothing to assure that reason would unconditionally prevail. Assuming that a calculated self interest is part of a practical human rationality, there are other factors which rule out recourse to rationality however it is qualified. Man is also disposed to inflict pain and suffering upon himself, and in this sense he can wrong himself and not only others. In all cases such conduct as is wrought in the vain attempt to turn a deaf ear to the Message is irrational, and against the interests of the human agent as the voiced reasoning of Revelation repeatedly remonstrates. It is this repetition of the principal leitmotifs of the message on various occasions and in a variety of contexts, that serves more than the reminder it is meant to be. It is a safeguard to protect the wilful from himself, always maintaining that necessary distance which compels the returning heart and reason without imposing from without.

In the Islamic view, while man can certainly fall prey to the range of his caprices and to his vanity, and while unreason and the self-destructive impulses indicated above can take over, yet he is not incorrigible, nor is he beyond the pale of salvation. This belief is rooted in another original Islamic concept relating to an ingrained disposition to righteousness and truth which is innate to man's created nature, i.e. a humanistic *fiṭrah*. Ultimately, given the right conditions and the will to truth, reasonableness and sound reasoning are possible and are expected to prevail. This is another reason why *al-dhikr al-ḥakīm* as a Gracious Remembrance is always there, a commanding presence, in an accessible form to those who only will. The reason-in-revelation note it contains operates on this assumption of ultimate

reasonableness, embedded in that innate sensibility and goodliness, which is assured man by the benevolent mettle into which he was originally kneaded. However it is also clearly acquiescent in man's free agency which can avail him of either a perversion of that benevolence or of its consecration and its perfection. "Assuredly We have created man in the best of forms; then we caused him to revert to the lowliest of the low (through his own perversity); except for those who believed and did good deeds, for they will have a reward uninterrupted" (Qur'an 95:4-6). Degradation in this world and damnation in the hereafter are consequences of a moral choice which is predicated on the human faculty of discernment and the ability to distinguish right from wrong. So the reason-in-revelation note, here again in its function as *dhikr* (reminder/remembrance) and *bayān* (clarification, elucidation), addresses this faculty in its patient summons and repeated admonition and exposition. In so doing it simultaneously upholds the freedom of conscience as a universal and all-embracing principle and it re-asserts the integrity of man's consciousness as two conditions for preserving human dignity. More on this below.

If religion is the highest value in a range of life-promoting values, this is because man's intrinsic *fitric* religiosity is the crystalline expression of his being in this world as relatedness and dependency as opposed to autonomy and self-sufficiency. To maintain the principle of freedom in religion is the ultimate in securing the freedom of conscience. The Qur'an says "There is no compulsion in religion: for truth is clearly distinguishable from falsehood" (2:256) just as light is from darkness, an explanation which further adds reason to volition and consecrates rationality in the same breath as it guards freedom. However it is hardly sufficient to uphold the principles of human agency, i.e. freedom and rationality, without also cultivating some awareness of the conditioning or predisposing factors to this agency. These begin from deep within the self, and are stimulated by catalysts in the external environment. Left to himself man can speculate and ponder the secrets of the psyche and the elements of society. There has been no dearth of opinion on the subject throughout the ages and in different cultures. But this abundance has been matched only by disarray and confusion induced by the variety of conflicting views on man's psyche and on the implications of society for human conduct.

As the urge to act in one way or another is contingent on those innermost behests which emanate from the self as *nafs*, the voice of divine reason holds that self up in the mirror for man to see. Here again the admonition to look into oneself, in order that one might act responsibly and knowingly, is predicated on a practical injunction about the self: from the All-Knowing – as always, as a sign of His englobing Mercy and compassion. It is the injunction to stop to scan and scrutinize ourselves which, as we have seen above with the Delphic oracle, opens out in the Qur'anic context onto many levels which make ground for both the contemplative and the scientific outlooks in its train. “And within yourselves [are signs of the existence of God]: Can you not see?! [*wa fī anfusikum afalā tubşirūn!*]”<sup>14</sup> Whereas the introversion of the philosopher and the sage might be of uncertain consequences, the Qur'anic injunction is uttered in a context which can both secure it against the hazards of the journey and assure it its ultimate destination. These safeguards are contingent on an integral discourse on creation and on its attendant ontic and ethical dimensions – as a selective and cursory glimpse below will illustrate.

The created agents who have been honoured by an ennobling status and mission in a temporal crossing which takes them beyond their worldly sojourn are neither the emanations of a pure intellect nor the instruments of pure will. Both categories are meaningless abstractions which are figments of the imagination and constitute wanton projections of the speculative mind. Instead, they are simply created as human beings with a composite of reason and will. It was to the credit of Islamic thought to have invested its genius in the attempt to ascertain their possible “sites” in the complex of the human constitution and to nuance depths and dimensions in the human faculties, instead of indulging in various reductionist and exclusionist practices. Examples to this effect may be sought in the various representative traditions in the Muslim legacy left behind by Ibn Sīnā (1037 C.E.), al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 581/1185), al-Jīlānī (d. 561/1165), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), and al-Işfahānī (d. 429/1037), among others. The different projections with these thinkers and scholars may have been a matter of emphasis, but it was rarely one of neglecting any of the human faculties and constituents at stake. The



integrating conception which runs throughout and provides the parameters and the variables which structure the discourse is primarily derived from the Qur'an. This is where we might clearly turn to profiling that conception as we develop our presentation. A synoptic reading may be given in anticipation. It could also instruct us on the core perceptions on the subject which might be found in the legacy of Muslim thought.

*Insān* is essentially that perfected and perfectible being, a microcosm of a universe that has been conceived and created to perfection. As an active agent, and like the greater universe of which he is a part, he was not created in jest. He is endowed from the outset of his embryonic/fetal conception and before he has even left the womb that carries him, with an innate disposition to both good and evil, a disposition which is backed by a cognitive faculty enabling it to distinguish between the two by virtue of an "inner light". The latter in turn is supplemented, insured, and reassured by an "external light" that is there for all to see. This is the import of the Clear Signs brought forth by a noble line of Messengers throughout history and inscribed, for all time, in the Book that is to be preserved for all to consult until the end of time. Such is the irrefutability and the power of the Guidance, in its inner and its outer variants, for the individual and the community alike, that there can be little excuse, or pretext, left for the conscientious to wilfully err. Allah has sent Messengers so that people may not expunge their consciences before God from the burden of denial and ignorance (see 4:165). Indeed, such too is the Decree of Magnanimity passed by the Dispenser of Justice and Mercy who has kept His pledge to His servants and bondsmen "to have Mercy inscribed for His rule in creation" (cf. 6:12) and "to embrace the breadth of all things in His Mercy..." (cf. 7:156 and 40:7), "And who can be truer in His promise than Allah!" (4:122)

The above gives the essential outlines of the Islamic worldview constructed in light of the discourse on Guidance. In this view, the integral and balanced conception of man/*insān* is really contingent on a wholistic perspective which is permeated by a cluster of related concepts pertaining to God, the Universe, prophethood, destiny: such that no discourse on man in Islam can be complete without an under-

standing of the nexus of conceptual and existential relationships in which he has been created and in which he finds himself. In brief, the discourse on man in the Qur'an is a discourse of reason as much as a discourse of faith and it is commonly grounded in the belief and rationale of *Tawhīd*. This is the example and lesson of the first *ḥanīf* and Muslim, in a long line of Messengers and Prophets sent to their people, Ibrahim (Abraham), upon whom be peace.

#### THE ABRAHAMIC WAY

We have emphasized man's ability to think, to reason, and to act and we have pointed out how man is born with inherent capacities and powers to be realized in the course of living out his life. He is also created with certain needs to fulfill. These capacities and powers begin with the ability to learn and to understand and they include the ability to apply this knowledge and understanding. Foremost of the needs experienced is that of seeking meaning that would give his strivings in life goal and purpose. Religion is intrinsic to man and to all human civilization because it meets that basic need and challenges man's abilities and powers to learn, to reason, to understand and to act, at their most primal level. There can be no meaning without understanding, and understanding is such as to challenge established practice and ideas if they become devoid of meaning. Acquiring knowledge and learning is the prerequisite for attaining understanding and elucidating meaning. The key for this process and to its moral outcome lies in the heart. These are insights we glean from the Qur'anic discourse, in what it tells as well as in how it tells it. The lesson of Abraham as one that turned away from all that was false, the *ḥanīf*, and as the first true Muslim provides an ideal point of reference in this regard. "And who could be of better faith than he who surrenders his whole being unto God and is a doer of good withal, and follows the creed of Abraham, the true in Faith? – seeing that God did take Abraham for a friend" (4:125; cf. 2:135; 6:161; 16:120; 22:78).

There are as many perspectives on the story of Abraham in the Qur'an as there are on the story of Adam. In the present context,

Abraham is sought as the archetype of man at the moral and historical level. Whereas Adam exemplifies man at the ontic/cosmic plane, Abraham, as the father of a line of prophethood that came to an end with Muhammad, God's peace and blessings upon them, comes on the stage midstream. We encounter him in a setting that is already peopled, where men and women have established their ways and patterns of life or have found them there before them. By exercising his inherent or *fitri*c abilities and powers, Abraham reflects upon these ways, questions them, and finds them wanting. He turns his face away from the false gods of his people in search of the truth, the meaning, and compass of life and finds it in the One God, the Creator and Sustainer of himself and all that is in the Universe (6:74-80); 37:83-99). Abraham's way to God is the way of reason and the logic of his reasoning is simple, impeccable, and open to all (26:69-102). His is not the esoteric conviction that was represented by the companion of Moses (18:65). Abraham's rational, enlightened and persistent inquiry however was far more than a speculative curiosity. It was inspired by and fed on an inner urge for the truth and was attended by a fervent passion to reach it, such that when he did he would wholeheartedly embrace it and make it into the pattern, the code, and goal of his life. The important thing about the rational way then is that it is part of an integral way which is anchored in a heart that is untarnished and whole: open and pure, the *qalb salīm*.<sup>15</sup> The heart here is taken as the seat of intentionality and the scale that tips the balance in favor of or against every human act.

In the Islamic view, the way of Abraham, which is the way of integral reason backed by a sound heart, is a way open to every man and woman of intellectual and moral integrity. It is the way of wholehearted devotion and unswerving commitment such as the Qur'anic injunction goes:

Say: "Truly my prayer, and all my acts of worship, and my living and my dying are for God alone, the Sustainer of the worlds, in whose divinity none has a share: for thus have I been bidden – and I shall [always] be foremost among those who surrender myself unto Him." Say: "Am I then to seek a sustainer in other than God when He is the Sustainer of all things?" (6:162-164)

Living in the midst of historical societies with their prevailing measures for reality, such men and women, like Abraham, will find that they need to take a stand and make a decision, which could lead them to break away from their people and their ways, and to embark on the course of striving, hardship, and sacrifice launched by Abraham and trodden by all those prophets who came after him and by their followers. For Abraham's way was not just the way of reason and faith and commitment, but it was also a way of trial and tribulation to be borne with a single-minded devotion.

In the Islamic view of man, moreover, there is always a personal and existential dimension which operates at the inner level in the intimate and unique relationship of man to his Creator and there is also an interpersonal and social dimension which carries with it historical implications for the shaping of communities and events. Both dimensions are operative in the example of Abraham: on the personal and intimate level as he goes through his consciousness transformation, recovers/rediscovers his true identity and vocation, and ends up affirming his pledge or *‘ahd* to his Lord and Creator. He is at the same time the founder of a lineage and a following with whom however his affinities would remain on the plane of a moral piety and a spiritual, rather than a biological kinship (2:124). It is hardly surprising that in the Qur'an the two figures held up for mankind as archetypal examples and models in whose path to follow are those of Abraham and Muhammad (60:4; 33:21). The one laid the paradigmatic foundations of the Way and the Community which the other came to perfect, and to provide for its pragmatic demonstration and fulfillment. For Project Man-*insān* to be achieved, the human potentials and needs would have to converge on that Way. Then the elements of an integrated and even personality (*sawiyyah*) which emerged would be consonant with the demands of the narrow ridge that, for man created as a being in time and beyond it, bridged journey's start to its end. The search of fulfillment and morality lay in this Way.

So far we have engaged elements of the discourse on Guidance in the Qur'an in a manner which has enabled us to come up with characteristics of a human profile and potential. This discourse we might recall flows from the command to "Read!" and to begin the course of

self-instruction in the Way of the All-Knowing and All-Merciful, supplemented by and alongside an instruction in the ways of the world. The Prophet is the paradigmatic man to whom this injunction is given in the very first Signs brought down from Heaven. That he could neither read nor write when this divine command was uttered through Gabriel, serves perhaps to emphasize the gist of its addressing a *fitric* potential. Its implication is that everyone with a sincere intent can start from a clean slate. The command is thus predicated on an intimate knowledge of human nature and on its latent possibilities. It comes to confirm the traits of man's intelligibility and sensibility which we have just inferred.

At this point we might shift to another plane of the Qur'anic discourse on man as we turned to a more exclusive concern with its substance. This could entail a reflexive reading of the human self, starting from the inside out, as we moved through the concentric orbits of overlapping and expanding dimensions which bridged man's origins to his destiny in a span which was authentically proper to the Qur'anic account. Some comparative perspective on the score from other traditions would put into relief the particularities of that account and enable readers from different cultural backgrounds to relate more directly to it and to enhance their appreciation of much that might otherwise be taken for granted. This proposed outline however will not be taken up here and will be left as an option as much as a challenge to stimulate further inquiry on the score. Instead, the selective focus this essay brings to bear will take aspects of the Qur'anic discourse on creation to highlight other facets of the Islamic view of man.

## 4

# The Qur'anic Discourse on the Creation of Man

One might start out the reading with some general observations. The view of man's creation which emerges from the Qur'an is at once factual and scientific and most profoundly spiritual and mystical. The creation of the *nafs* (self), like all creation, is at once a sign of wonder (an *āyah*) and a key proof (*burhān*) to the Creator. It is an empirical and historical testament of man's being in this world which points to its source and to the truth which has been revealed. In the Qur'an, man is repeatedly urged to look into himself and into his own creation and into the past as the record and documentation of his present and as an indicator of his future. He is expected to do so with an eye that investigates and an intellect that scrutinizes and comprehends. Here We might elaborate on a divine instruction/injunction cited earlier. "And upon yourselves do ye not (stop to) reflect/Can you not see" (*wa fī anfusikum afalā tubşirūn?!*) The terms used to urge man's critical self-reflection include such key root verbs as *ab-şa-ra*, *ta-da-bba-ra*, *ʿa-qa-la* and they generally occur in the form of a strong rhetorical question: *afalā*, which might be rendered into English as "Indeed, do you not" or "Truly, would they not" to convey that elemental reprobation inherent in all sound reason. As if to leave no doubt, the rhetoric is substantiated by an affirmation in the divine promise and assurance: "Indeed, We shall show them Our Signs in the (furthest) horizons and (innermost/nedermost) in themselves, (and We shall continue to do so) until it becomes (self-) evident to them that It is the Truth" – *It* signifying the Revelation and the Meeting with their Lord and Creator upon their ultimate return and judgement (41:53). This again is one of the standing challenges contained in the Qur'an. It is directed to human reason and to the kind of knowledge which is cumulatively acquired, in particular that scientific and objective

knowledge, which comes through direct observation and careful investigation, and which is mediated by its accompanying indirect inferences and discoveries about the phenomenological and historical reality that constitutes its subject-matter.<sup>16</sup> This is the meaning gleaned from interpreting this divine assurance in the immediate context in which it occurs, i.e. the particular Surah 41, or in the more general context of the related verses that recur throughout the discourse of the Qur'an. The Islamic view of man cannot be taken outside its context and frame of reference and this context is no less than the whole as our next observation will clarify.

The view of man taken from its Qur'anic sources is not an isolated incident. It is a thread and a filament in the warp and woof of an entire reading in creation. It usually occurs in a related context which directs to some positive affinity with the universe and which carries beyond creation to its common source and referent in a commanding and sustaining Cherisher and Creator. Deriving from an understanding and a way of seeing which do not stop at the outer manifestations of being, this view of man probes into causality and essence. The one is not to be achieved at the expense of the other, nor is either complete without the other. This in its turn constitutes a reflection on the kind of scientific/philosophic mind which the Qur'anic culture engenders and which sees the truth as indivisible. Here there is no place for misconstruing a fact/value dichotomy.

Following the sequence and context of any of a number of verses which address one aspect or another of man's constitutional make-up and evolution will suffice to establish this regard. Thus, for example, the knowledge imparted in the following verse:

It is He who created mortals of water: then has He established out of it (that watery substance) the network of (social) relationships through lineage and marriage... (25:54)

This occurs in a context which addresses water as a vital constituent in the physical universe in affirmation of the precept of water as elemental to all life (21:30).<sup>17</sup> The fluid of which man and his progeny ensues and which proceeds from between the loins and the back is

essentially pure and it is the same water that blends with the good earth to perfect the ingredients of his mortal physique. Man's creation is invoked throughout in such a manner as to draw attention to his intimate affinities with the universe he inhabits at every level. Physically he is of dust and onto dust he will return. "And from it (the Earth) We have created you and to it We will return you, and out of it We will bring you forth again" (20:55). "And God has caused you to grow out of the earth (as with a sapling that is germinated and gradually matures into its fullness); and thereafter He will return you to it (in death); and then He will bring you forth from it (in Resurrection)" (71:17-18). Spiritually, he is potentially at one with a universe that draws its elemental harmony from its being in tune with its Creator. "Do you not see how to God bow down in worship all things that are in the Heavens and on Earth..." (22:18) and "Whatever beings are in the heavens and the earth prostrate themselves to Allah...(13:15). The reverence that is inspired by man's reflection on creation encompasses him as part of that creation which is never seen as an end in itself but always in terms of its reverential bond to its source and Creator. In this view there can be no nature worship, no deification of man. There can only be an infinite serenity that draws on the sense of being in touch with the source of all life and which is nourished from a pervasive affinity which binds all of creation.

In his physical creation and in his spiritual vocation man in Islam is essentially at peace with the world – if he so chooses. This peace is a function of his inner integration. Anything which distracts him from this condition becomes an element in his disintegration, a catalyst to his estrangement. Worship as devotion to the One true God, to Allah, is man's self-fulfillment in life and as such it metes its own reward.<sup>18</sup>

This integrated and integrating outlook then has the advantage of preventing fragmentation, atomization, and estrangement in the human psyche. Instead, it engenders a synthetic and synthesizing strain and fosters elements of wholesomeness and wholeness and a consistency which reflects on human perceptions, conduct, and way of life. In the event, these elements can be frustrated and stunted, or they can be fully developed to fructify in their consequences, depending on how they are reinforced by other dimensions of human



conduct and social organization. These are dimensions which are equally integral to the Islamic view of man, and while they cannot be addressed at any length here, it is important to keep them in mind as the prerequisites and the fulfillment of man's psychic integration and moral well-being.

A view of man developed in a perusal of the Qur'anic discourse is further reinforced from yet another direction. The integrated and integrating discourse which is also a factual and a spiritual discourse, is above all teleological and purposeful. There is no room for a randomness in all creation including the creation of man, whether this randomness is clad in the garb of myth (as with Fortuna) or science (as with the fallacy of natural selection). There is even less room for any misconceived 'scientific' determinism in terms of man's becoming, or of the world's going, whether this is conceived in terms of material substance and evolution or in terms of historical dialecticism. Everything conforms to a meticulous measure and a design knowable to Him, but only partially verifiable by us: He it is who "creates everything and determines its nature in accordance with a meticulous design" (25:2). With specific concern for human creation, God knows what any female bears (in her womb) and by how much the wombs may fall short[in gestation], and by how much they may increase [the average period]; for with Him everything is created in accordance with its scope and purpose (13:8). And in the same context, "Did We not create you out of a humble fluid, which we then let remain in the womb's firm keeping for a term pre-ordained?" (77:20-22). In a more general sense, "He it is who sends down, again and again, waters from the sky in due measure: and as We raise therewith dead land to life, even thus will you be brought back to life" (43:11). In short, "Behold, everything We have created in due measure and proportion" (54:49). The *qadar* which signifies measure and proportion, scope and purpose, due and design, is equally applied to destiny, which in fact conveys the dimensions implicit in design, purpose and measure. It recurs in different contexts to convey the apportioning of creation, including human beings, its dues and the revelation of guidance to man occurs at such a temporal juncture, which is designated as the Night of Power and Destiny (*laylat al-qadr*, cf. Surah 97). The

cardinal failing in man is in his own failure to measure up to his destiny and vocation, a failing which starts by withholding measure where it is due (6:91; 22:74; 39:67). In denying his Lord and Creator, man's sense of measure and proportion founders, and he begins to lose sight of meaning and purpose in life. In an Islamic view of man, meaning is inherent to man, not because it is self-subsistent in him, but because the sound *fiṭrah* has been weaned on it by its source. In the absence or obfuscation of this source, man's sense of meaning and balance are jeopardized.

It is this conception of meaning, purpose and design underlying creation which is rooted in their faith and nourished on its precepts. It undergirds the worldview of Muslims today as it has in the past, and brands all their authentic cultural and literary output. It also explains why certain philosophical trends which might have originated elsewhere only found a limited resonance in the Muslim climate of opinion where they did, while others never developed. The view of man that prevails in a culture-area at any given moment is decisive in shaping the philosophies which emerge, and this applies to Islam as a culture-area, where the variety of philosophies that are articulated within its orbit, reflect the boundaries of a view shaped in its authentic crucible. It is the source of this shaping which merits our attention here and to this we return.

Thus, if we took the same divine instruction about the constitution of man at other levels of contemplation, another discernible pattern emerges. In every case the admonition occurs in a context which entails a commitment to an injunction, or a conviction in an article of faith. The reminder that "It is Allah who has brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers, not knowing anything, and (it is) He who gave you hearing and sight and intelligence and affection that ye may be grateful" (16:78) occurs in a more general context of alerting to responsibilities: foremost of which is the obligation to observe justice, excellence and generosity, to renounce evil, wrongdoing, and rebellion, and to fulfill one's pledges (16:90-92). This in fact is a recurring pattern: human creation and origins are invoked as a reminder and an urge to human piety and to observe one's obligations in discharging one's trust. The beginning of Surah *al-Nisā'* which is

one of those Surahs revealed at Madinah and is primarily addressed to legislative and moral obligations in the context of the family epitomizes this pattern (4:1).<sup>19</sup>

In most cases though the facts of creation are adumbrated, to convince of the truth of a re-creation beyond the terms of the phenomenal world (23:14; 86:5-8). The belief in the Unseen being the most difficult for a being bound and encumbered by the density of his own materiality, the logic of the conviction must be impeccable. In one typical verse (22:5-6) the essentials are flashed out in a synopsis contouring life's journey from its inception in the pre-world phases, *‘alam al-dhar* through its cycles of growth, maturation and decline, in order to induce, through a logical and empirical induction, the conviction that "Verily the Hour will come: There can be no doubt about it; or about the fact that God will raise up all who are in the graves" (22:7). The inimitable discourse persuades by invoking reason in a logic that overwhelms by its directness, its simplicity, and its irrefutability. "Do they not see that He who began Creation is able to restore it?" (29:19; also 30:27; 21:104; 46:33) and "Is not He who created the Heavens and Earth able to create the like (again)?" (36:81; 17:99). The logic is to induce men and women as reasonable and reasoning beings to believe in what they cannot know firsthand because of their very finitude and temporality, by leading them through that which they already know, or that which they can eventually come to know, by immediate experience or through scientific inquiry.

This is the logic which inspired the great works in the Islamic legacy which have given us enduring figures like *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzan* of Ibn Ṭufayl, and the masterpieces of al-Ghazālī and his peers. Beyond the written word, many a life was shaped in its purview, from those of the great Sufi masters of the past like al-Junayd al-Baghdādi and Ibn Atā‘allāh al-Iskandarī down to their contemporary heirs and followers including countless others who remain unknown. In all cases, it was the spirit of the Qur’anic logic that was imbibed and exemplified in a cognition and a volition, and in every case it inspired the sense of wonderment and beholdenness which acquired its knowledge and certainties by inviting its initiates and adepts to proceed from the realm of the seen to the Unseen to become enthralled with what they

witness. It is the same logic too that induces the scientists and experts in their specialized fields in modern times to rediscover the perennial relevance of an unadulterated Scripture and to stand in a recovered sense of reverence and humility before the “scientific marvels of the Qur’an”. Man in Islam is essentially man the knower, the seeker after knowledge, and everyone who has set his foot on the path and dedicated his heart in single-minded devotion to his Creator and Sustainer is potentially capable of attaining to the station of the Perfect Man. Notwithstanding the fact that Perfection belongs to God alone, and that man’s reward is in the striving, rather than in the attainment. Conversely, it is man’s lot to strive and to toil, and where his will is distracted and his knowledge faulted, then he toils in vain.<sup>20</sup>

THE PARAMETERS OF A VIEW:

*Unity and Variety, Change and Constancy*

The above observations about the nature of the Islamic view of man are constructed in the light of a Qur’anic reading which continues to be its guide and crucible. We need to address two related questions before exploring more substantial aspects of that view. First, in referring to a perennial core of constancy in the unchanging and changeless sources, are we thereby inferring a similar constancy and immutability in the Islamic view of man? Is this an implicit indictment of a static element in Islamic thought which might conduce to its sterility, as some orientalist infer? The other related question addresses the implicit homogeneity in the Islamic view of man. Given that the sources are changeless and that by definition they are an integral constant in shaping that view, then how can we expect variety and, if such variation occurs, what are its parameters? The answer to both questions may be found in the legacy of Muslim thought on the subject, and inferred from its evolution. Again, neither is the object of this essay, but an allusion by way of demonstration will be helpful.

To take up the second question first, the Islamic view of man can hardly be described as monolithic. There is a wealth and variety that animated the controversies in the classical period, and it is a variety which persists to this day, and which makes it possible to distinguish

between how any two contemporary Islamic thinkers who address the same topic in a debate may come up with entirely different readings, which may not necessarily be contradictory, but which are definitely conceived at different planes of thought and evoke different moods. One can take Iqbal from the Indian sub-continent in the mid-twenties of the twentieth century and Syed Qutb writing in the fifties and sixties. Iqbal writes in a mood that evokes the poetic and the intuitive, as well as the intellectual and the philosophical; he writes in the tradition of Muslim Sufi masters of the past, evoking the poetry of the Anatolian Rumi and possibly strains of the Andalusian Ibn ʿArabī. His ideal too is the *insān al-kāmil*, a concept introduced at the theosophical level in the writings of ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī. His themes which emphasize the *nafs* and the *qalb*, the numinosity and ethereality of man, would moreover find their echoes with the heirs of a theosophical tradition which include contemporary shiʿites like Shaikh Fadlallah Haeri and even a modernist intellectual like the late Ali Shariʿati, as well as Sunnis like the late Shaikh al-Azhar Abdel Halim Mahmud and countless other lesser known figures who texture and influence the cultural life and Muslim practices of the average educated and devout Muslim throughout the Muslim world. (To take Egypt alone, one could cite lay professionals and officials turned mystics, talented enough to compose their own chants and writings and with charismatic appeal to lead circles of *dhikr* and classes. eg. Hassan Kamil al-Malatawi, Abbas al-Dib, and Hassan Abbas Zaki).

Syed Qutb on the other hand may ostensibly have very little to do with anything hailing from those philosophical, theosophist, and Sufist currents. (Note that we are already confronted with variety here!) His focus is the social problem, not the existentialist dilemma. In addressing the need for Muslims to be better Muslims, he is invoking their lapsed obligations to one another, in this worldly life, and how this lapse constitutes a default on their original covenant with their Creator and a betrayal of their *dīn*. His concern is with man as *khalīfah*, God’s vicegerent on earth who has somehow fallen short on his trust, and his task is to redefine the Islamic worldview so as to anchor man firmly in its vision that he might be able to reform and perform at the level of that trust. In the process he inadvertently taps

on a wealth of sources and resources in the legacy, coming this time more from the 'legists', and the leaders of public opinion, the *fuqahā'* and the imams. Notably, in this regard, Ibn Taymiyyah's influence stands out as all the fundamental concepts and categories which were to structure Qutb's thought were already developed and articulated by him. Categories like *tawhīd*, *'ubudiyyah*, *ulūhiyyah*, *rubūbiyyah* were all the building blocks of a worldview the restitution of which would secure man, conceptually and emotionally, that network of relationships necessary for his refurbishment, and ultimately for reforming his society. Yet, by no means, is Qutb writing in the vein of the *faqīh*: there is rather a strain of the mystic and the intuitionist as he ploughs into the field such as has led a Western critic to detect there echoes of an Islamic 'postmodernist existentialism.' This is the strain which permeates his *tafsīr* of the Qur'an, and which informs an abstracted volume on the aesthetics of the Qur'anic discourse [*al-Tafsīr al-Fanni fī al-Qur'an al-Karīm*].

Perhaps the problem with the questions posed lies in the implicit assumptions that prompt and inform them. They are above all modern questions for they assume a virtue and direction to change which is not necessarily there, and, notwithstanding the contradiction, they postulate a basic skepticism, which questions any ultimate values or goal model. Yet, regardless of the substance and nature of these assumptions, it would seem that the fault lies more in a structure or mode of reasoning than in its content. They are prompted by a mindset riveted to the 'either-or' dichotomy preconceiving a categorical exclusivity and presuming polarities to be necessarily antagonistic and irreconcilable. In the Islamic worldview, unity and variety are compatible categories, for the Qur'an teaches the unity of mankind through the unity of its Creation and Sustenance, and at the same time it makes of its diversity an element in its splendour as well as a catalyst to its complementarity and integration. Similarly, change and constancy may be seen to relate in much the same way, to use a theological metaphor, as the rim relates to its axis. The idea that there are prescribed laws, or norms, in creation – as with *sunnan Allāh* and that movement and change (*tabaddul*, *tahawwul*, *taghayyur*) are as much part of that changeless order as they are dynamic elements in it. This

movement can be cyclical, pendular, or linear, depending partly on perspective and partly on function or purpose. Regardless of its rhythm or form, change is ultimately subject to a principle of measure and calculation (*bi ḥusbān*) which in human affairs, as opposed to natural or physiological/neurological events, might be rendered as “predestination”.

In the evolution of Islamic thought we can expect the same possibilities of variety and shifting emphases and issue-ranges within parameters which lend it unity and constancy. It derives its uniqueness, and from the former its commonalities or affinities with other human and humanistic thought. The variety derives from the historicity of the human condition: the fact of its being situated in time and place, which are both a function of a created and pre-ordained flux and diversity. Its ‘fixity’ on the other hand, owes to its double grounding in the perennial dimensions/concerns of the human condition and, more significantly, in the disclosed matrix of orientations and responses provided for them in the Islamic Sources. It is this which we refer to as a core matrix and which makes it possible for example to distinguish between a skepticism of Descartes and a skepticism of al-Ghazālī. The latter, as some modern scholars have duly observed, never doubted the tenets of the faith.<sup>21</sup> Through it we realize moreover, today as in the past, the boundaries that make it possible to distinguish a category of one broad range of human thought, such as the *maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn* in our classical heritage, from its counterpart in the modern secular culture, or in its European medieval and classical pagan variants, or in a variety of Asian traditions. It is the rediscovery and recovery of this core-matrix and its renewed articulation and formulation in relevant and vital terms, which has become the moving spirit behind the current intellectual and cultural revival among Muslims in the world today. It is also these constants which provide us here with the enduring guidelines for interpreting the ontic and ethical implications of a humanism which addresses some of the preoccupying issues of modernity: like issues of human equality and privilege.

QUESTIONS ONTIC AND ETHICAL, OR:  
*Sparing Man the Ordeals of the Philosophic Quest*

Philosophy is that department of human knowledge which was invented by man as the truth seeker to provide him with the methodology and logic in his search for truth. (The fact that it often ended up emphasising the mode at the expense of the quest does not obviate its elevated origins.) It therefore emerged to address some of these very questions which are at the center of religion. In fact, the relationship between the one and the other may be counterposed in terms of questions raised and answers given. The art of raising questions and pursuing them logically, systematically is ultimately an art of abstraction from life; religion addresses man as an integral whole, where his reason is subsumed within his entirety, and it addresses him on concrete aspects of reality. The upshot is that philosophy is more of a method in the pursuit of reality which might or might not achieve the mark, depending on which aspects it chooses to address. Ultimately however, its range remains bound to the range of human reason, and the answers it might provide, no matter how eloquent, are more likely to remain problematic, speculative, and have certainly little authority to oblige. It ensues from reason and its appeal stops there.

Still, it is in the nature of reason to soar beyond its range whether in its immediate temporality or in its finitude. This capacity is sometimes attributed to the imagination and at other times to an enigmatic storehouse: the memory. Given the fact that the flights of the imagination and the stirrings of the memory express something which transcends the abstract sensibility, there is nothing really enigmatic about the one or the other in the Islamic view of man. Rather, they are expressions and urgings of the *nafs* which we have already encountered above and which we meet again here as the site of life itself and the seat of immortality. It is of the nature of the soul that is the Self to be curious and anxious about the questions which concern it most such questions which relate to its creation, its destination and its tribulation. These constitute the nodes of philosophy. They are the fundamental, or the ontic questions, about which man craves to know, and yet cannot hope to know for sure being a creature who was



born in time, and who could therefore hardly hope to learn directly about issues which lay at the interstices of dimensions that went beyond the time boundaries of his sensibility, whether these were defined in terms of his arrival into this world or of his departure from it. Unless there was a means of informing about them outside man's limited range of experience, these were bound to remain open questions consigned to the travails of human/philosophical speculation. Yet, in the Islamic view, to leave issues which were at the orienting core of worldly life to speculation constituted an aberration from the essence of a just order. Creation was not intended to be tested beyond its measure by a Creator who was conceived to be All Merciful and All Compassionate. Consequently, what gives the Islamic view of man its consistency is the fact that it is developed within a core matrix which takes for granted the answers to the ontic questions of existence as they are provided in the *Wahy*.

The fundamental questions relating to man's creation are dealt with simply, succinctly, and conclusively. The very first revelation to the Prophet establishes the unique purposeful and relational position of man within a created universe. We might paraphrase its essential message here: "Read in the Name of thy Lord who created man of a clot. Read! for thy Lord is most gracious Who taught with the pen, taught man that which he knew not. Yet clearly, man is inclined to transgress; once he is (empowered), he feels he can dispense with his Lord and Creator and become self-sufficient (a law and end unto himself). Nay, remember this, that ultimately your sure return is to your Lord."<sup>22</sup> From the outset we thus meet man as a biological entity with capacities for moral and intellectual achievement which are originally assured him by virtue of a Munificent Creator and Sustainer and, inferring from their noble origins, which are intended to be used to the good. However, we equally encounter the possibility, almost the imminence, of a deviation from the norms instilled in man's *fiṭrah* at creation together with a hint at the immoral consequences (*tughyān* and *istighnā*). The crux comes with the certainty of the Return. It corresponds to journey's start and marks the culmination of a life-course in this world at a juncture where the outcome of the "reading" is evaluated and man's achievement duly retributed. Throughout, the

Gracious Remembrance enunciates and elaborates different aspects of the same basic truth.

Man's ultimate fate and return occupies a priority in an ontic discourse that is premised on a rational sensibility.<sup>23</sup> Being an event in a future that, like its antecedent in man's remote past, cannot be immediately experienced or materially substantiated and directly verified, it belongs to the realm of the Unseen: a category which demands faith upon being informed about it, particularly when this knowledge is dispensed by One who is All-Encompassing, All-Knowing – *Al-ʿĀlim Al-Khabīr*.<sup>24</sup> Such faith in the Islamic view can never be blind, it must be reasoned and reasonably inclined, a quality which is already implicit in the injunction to “read” and to pursue the means and disposition associated with its requisites. Consequently, it is reiterated in different contexts and approached from diverse angles. That the return is the logical sequel of death and that it is attended by the resurrection. Without that ultimate court of justice, where each soul shall be meted its just dues, and where none shall be wronged by a “hair's breadth,”<sup>25</sup> there would be no meaning to man's striving in this world. Meaning is of the essence of creation.<sup>26</sup> As man “toils his way to meet his Lord” (84:6), he bore his share of trial and tribulation which beset his worldly lease on life, in anticipation of a just return. In a nutshell, creation, re-creation, life, death and the Hour (of Resurrection and Judgement) are all links in a consistent and unbreakable chain, which gives essence and fundamental structure or order to man's being.<sup>27</sup> In the absence of this perspective, and failing that ontic bond and bondedness to a Creator, to a beginning, to a return and to a beyond, not only would life be thrown off balance, but man's very humanity would be impaired.

If the above provides the core answers related to being, then nothingness, or a philosophy of nihilism was meaningless within the cultural parameters of the Islamic view. Man's knowledge about his beginning, his end, and his very existence in the immediate world was after all no mere speculation on his part, no wager *a la Pascal*. Just as in his creation man was beholden to his Creator, so too in his knowledge he was bound in guidance to the wisdom and experience of the All-Knowing, the Encompassing – *Al-ʿĀlim Al-Khabīr*.<sup>28</sup> Such knowledge

spelled its own assurance for it owed to a certainty that transcended man's finitude. Endowed with hearing and understanding, man could readily recognize and acknowledge the voice of revelation through the legacy of prophethood. With the seal of prophethood, that divinely communicated knowledge was consummated, perfected and preserved untarnished to be read, listened to, contemplated and reflected upon. Above all, it was a voice that was intelligible, as indicated earlier, because its address was tuned to man's logic and reason, and its credibility was enhanced through the consonance of its content to human nature.

Having resolved these ontic questions to the satisfaction of man's reasonable curiosity however was not enough in itself to still other anxieties. Once man was instructed about his beginning and his return, and once he realized that his creation was for a purpose and not in vain jest, and that consistent with such purpose, he would be answerable for his actions and intentions, he needed to learn something about the Criterion. As a moral being his actions were such as to invoke censure or praise. In the same way as there was meaning in life there could be no neutrality, or amorality in the course of its actualization. Other than the ontic dimension there was an equally pressing dimension concerning the question of values. In the phenomenal world, where diversity and plurality were the rule, how was it possible to arrive at knowing with any certainty something about the measure and the yardstick that distinguished truth from falsehood, and good from evil? Left to himself, man could either wax into an infinity of latitudes and relativities which would render all measure a hoax. The alternative was to standardize or absolutize the measure. But then which measure? There was nothing to recommend the standards of one man or one segment of humanity rather than another for this onerous task, and in the end it would be a matter of rival claims with nothing to weigh them against one another save the use of force. Instead of right constituting its own force in the affairs of men and women, it would be subverted by its own nakedness. This could only be the beginning of dogma and the unabashed reign of tyranny in human affairs. Once again, to avert chaos and abandon, there was a need for a source beyond the multiplicity and diversity that could set the standards which would in principle oblige all.

In the Islamic view there is in *insān* potentiality but no self-sufficiency. Man acknowledges this need for an external source and renounces any claims that are not his due as he strives to live up to an ideal of justice-in-truth and truth-in-justice. It might be noted that Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*) is at the root and base of all value and that justice (*al-ʿadl*) attends truth as its rider and sheath and for this reason it usually occurs in an active form as instrumental to the fulfillment of Truth. Truth it might be recalled, is a Name and attribute of God as well as a qualifier or a signifier of His Will. ( See eg. *al-Ḥaqq*, 22:6, 62; 31:30; 24:25 and for *al-ʿadl* 16:90; 7:159, 181; 5:8) Integrity in word and in deed as referred to in *ṣidq* is derived from its absolute and intransitive form in the same way as truthfulness is a derivative of the Truth. *Ṣidq* is a virtue that can be acquired by man, whereas *Ḥaqq* is the end and the purpose to be striven for and the measure for ascertaining the worth of his deeds. In striving for *Ḥaqq* man seeks the Authority that binds, and in this search man affirms his morality. The only authority worthy of his allegiance must be the one authority qualified to set the terms for such allegiance in a realm where loyalty is of the essence of faith and virtue is its enactment. *Dīn, religio*, is that elemental indebtedness which structures and gives meaning to a way of life.

As the human delves into the foundations of his morality, there are no half measures, man is either beholden or he is not. He cannot be half-hearted about his grounding condition in this world, and between truth and falsehood he cannot afford to dither in a zone of trepidation and vacillation lest he skid to his detriment and ruin. There can be no autonomy for value, and no alternative source for its conception. It can be owed and claimed to none other save to Him who has created, for it is He who sustains, and unto Him is the return and before Him is the final Judgement. In this view then, there is an ineluctable logic and a simple but compelling consistency: the Source of all life must also be its ultimate measure. Failing that there would be an elemental disorder in creation, a 'cosmic dyspepsia' (21:22; 23:71).<sup>29</sup>

In this measure human worth essentially lies in *taqwā* as piety and God-Consciousness. This value is measured against its ultimate source and not against its interposed surrogates or intermediaries. "And refurbish yourselves well (for the journey that is your worldly

life): and remember that the worthiest of all refurbishments is that of *taqwā*” (2:197). As a born achiever, man/*insān*’s deeds that are deemed worthy, like his being, begin by his achievements and his strivings in the scale of his devotion to his Maker and Cherisher. Himself and his deeds being subject to this primary scale, there can be no title to merit nor status into which he is born or over which he can boast an unfair advantage over his fellow-beings. In piety and good works, there is room to excel and scope for distinction for both individuals and communities, for there is no end to striving and no levelling in achievement. Beyond that, the human condition is one of an intrinsic equality which is itself owed to man’s createdness and indebtedness to his Creator.

Other than that dignity with which he is initially and inviolably endowed by virtue of his createdness and creation, there is no intrinsic value in man as such i.e. man is not a source of value in himself even if he is inclined to arrogate such a station for himself through a surfeit of knowledge, wealth, or material achievement (cf. 28:76-79; 96:6-7). The dignity which he claims against his peers is assured him however by virtue of the very breath which animates his life and gives it sanctity and through no virtue of his own. It is the divine breath that has been breathed into him and transformed him from the compound of organic and inorganic matter into the new creation in which it emerges. Moreover, thanks to his Creator, Most Beneficent and Merciful, man has been created in the best of forms and endowed with all the faculties that make him worthy of a mission for which he has been set. For ultimately, if there is any special station for which man is singled and by which he is privileged, it is constituted by his selection and election over a multitude of creation for a special role on earth in the *khilāfah*/vicegerency. Man’s indebtedness in his privileges as in his very creation remains to his Maker and Arbitrator. He is meant to assume this privilege with confidence, trust, and resolve, not arrogance or excess.<sup>30</sup> We might note that on all the above-mentioned planes, dignity is innate to human beings by virtue of their physical, mental, psychic and spiritual constitution and by virtue of their appointed mission – and its disposing faculties. It is such, moreover, as to reinforce and affirm the precept of fundamental human equality.

The test of humanity for men and women lies in the way they consciously observe this dignity and in how they use or abuse a privileged position. The condition for the one and the other lies in man's freedom to choose, and in his conscious awareness of the nature and the consequences of that choice.

In the Qur'anic account of creation it is possible to infer all three dimensions of a moral agency residing in cognition, will, and – bridging the two – a coherent valuational core. *Tawhīd* of *ulūhiyyah* and *tawhīd* of *rubūbiyyah*, might be rendered as the self-commitment to the absolute oneness of God as Creator, Lord and Sustainer and they are the essence of that core. This is the devotional commitment which provides the umbilical cord to the Source of man's life and to his ultimate return, such as the lessons sought and learned from creation instruct. At the heart of man's consciousness and vital to his will are two memorable moments experienced in creation, at the outset of human life in its pre-physical and pre-temporal cycle. The one might be taken for a "cosmic" moment and the other for an "ontic" moment. Both are interrelated and converge on the scales of the "eschaton", or the Day of Judgement. The *āyāt al-amānah*, conferring the Trust, and the *āyāt al-shuhūd*, marking the primordial Covenant made with the offspring of Adam in the pre-physical world may be taken as specific instances of the first moment. While the story of Adam's creation, Iblis' temptation, and their common and synchronized descent into earthly life, provides us with the nexus for the ontic perspective. Etymologically Adam signifies that being made of dust. The paradigm of Adam is that of man's mortality, in his physical, psychological and moral constitution, as well as a paradigm of man's vocation on earth. Through the Qur'anic discourse on creation and on responsibility and on the Trust, the purpose of creation, man/*insān*'s destiny and destination, and his relationship with the rest of creation are clarified by asserting the primacy and ultimacy of that founding devotional bond in *ʿubudiyyah*. This, as we have already seen, is confirmed as the archetype and determinant of all subsequent bonds, relationships, and allegiances in the course of man's earthly sojourn and worldly passage. It is in this context of inferring man's moral agency and conscious discrimination in a framework of

relationships that transcends the existential to the historical and the social that we next turn to another dimension of the Islamic view of moral man.

GREGARIOUSNESS AND MERIT

*The Social Implications of the Discourse on Creation*

We have addressed aspects of moral man in an essentialist ontological and vocational sense. It remains to address moral man in the context of his sociability: i.e. of his relational existence in society among others: whether in terms of the individual self/other configuration in the horizontal realm of extentionality, or whether in terms of communal solidarities and collectivities that find themselves in contiguity. In taking man for himself, and in himself – a metaphor which admittedly is hardly consistent with an Islamic worldview – man's intrinsic worth, it was argued, derived from an acknowledgement of his devotion and commitment to his Creator and Sustainer through the station of *ʿubudiyyah*. It is this station that further guarantees the externalization and diffusion, and inclusiveness of value and measure among a differentiated body of humanity. Society supposes differentiation, just as plurality assumes diversity and value postulates hierarchy. Within this framework *ʿubudiyyah* is a proclamation and affirmation of privilege, equality and bondship. In a context of diversity, differentiation and hierarchy, equality in man's ontic devotional status will be taken as the nexus for mediating other social values.

Two observations need to be made at the outset to underline the relevance of this nexus in particular, and in a more general sense to address the implications of morality being grounded in an ontology of creation. In assuming our inquiry into the view of man from the perspective of two ostensibly contradictory values we wish to draw attention to the reality of a tension in the human condition which results from the fragmentation of values and a resulting failure to see them in their proportion and their due relationship to one another. This has its consequences for shaping human personality and perceptions, as well as for the quality of a given society and for the prevailing

standards of morality and humanity in a given age or civilization. In the modern age monstrosities have been perpetuated in the name of the one and the other, with equality conducing to a leveller's strategy and privilege, by definition reserved for the few, serving as the pretext for indulging various wrongs and inequities. In an Islamic perspective these values are not necessarily incompatible, and indeed, they are related to one another at the most fundamental level in a manner that enhances human value and assures the standards of morality and humanity. This is because they are both premised on the belief in man's createdness. Equality lies in the context of their devotional status to their common Lord and Creator, in the same way as their privilege inheres in the sanctity that attends their creation in terms of a constitution and a vocation.

The other related and relevant observation concerns the basis of human morality. Again as the modern age has lost its traditional moorings and bartered them for the shifting sands of a utilitarian and pragmatic morality, the bases for moral obligation have also foundered. With the dissolution of a reliable and enduring frame of reference, it was no longer possible to justify a system of values in mutation any more than it was possible to provide for criteria of relating values to one another. From an Islamic vantage point, without the premises of man's createdness and account of his creation the modern humanistic claims to both equality and privilege remain no more than a matter of opinion with little claim on any authority to bind. In this non-system, governed at best by a situational ethic, the very shaping of the human personality in our times, which falls within the professional competence of the psychologist and the educationist, oscillates from one extreme to the other as it swings from an elusive and debasing lack of self-esteem to an ignoble and delusive overbearing presumption.

Obversely, with the premises of creation and man's createdness, these claims to value and worth become substantiable facts because they hail from a source whose authority is in principle acceded to by all. (By and large most people do not contest the idea of God, but they quibble over the conception of God. Given their sacrosanct origin and source, their violation constitutes a moral offense of the first degree.



In the event, it is not a violation of any one man's right, nor even is it the violation of an abstract humanity which is evasive of any concrete situation. Rather, such a violation constitutes an infringement of a primordial order of creation which is grounded in morality. This order is one of Truth, and its consummation calls for a decree of Justice. The obligation is to the Creator and it is binding on the conscience of each and every individual, singly and collectively, in such a way that again in principle there can be no escaping one's ultimate accountability. In contrast to an instrumental morality which underlies the oscillation and misappropriation of values, in the Islamic view the ontic basis of value assures it both measure and proportion as well as a reliable and enduring justification. Uncompromising in essence, this view of man reflects on his self-image, on his personality, and on the public order of morality. It becomes the persistent catalyst and spur for conscientious men and women to protest every situation where justice and righteousness are seen to be at stake. The view of man in his integrity and man as a social being is formed in this crucible.

In a gender-conscious age, the very terminology constructed round "man" signals an exclusiveness that is faulted to the core. In taking man as the focus of discourse, there would seem to be an absence, intended or otherwise, of the Other, in this case woman. Some omissions are implicit in the terms we use while others lie in the usage of these terms and in their accompanying intention. Thus the ostensibly humanistic discourse in the hybrid literary tradition of a Western classical paganism and its modern counterpart, turns out to be really centered around the noble Patrician in ancient Rome and the White Man's burden among its modern heirs. In the one case and the other the barriers prevail whether they persist along the lines of gender, race, ethnicity, class or any other exclusive perceptual bearing which is inspired by the logic of a false pride – the same that occasioned Iblis's fall and damnation when, as we noted earlier, he rationalized his refusal to bow to Adam, in submission of the Command of God, on grounds of a sensed superiority. "You have created me from fire and You have created him from mud!" (7:12). Henceforth this would be a rationale that could potentially infect the human species and obscure

and subvert its innate God-given endowments and faculties, the *fiṭrah*. As such the denial of equality and the abuse of privilege is a human failing, to which men and women are susceptible if they do not take heed of their Lord in *taqwā*; it only becomes a “cultural” trait which might be identified with one tradition or another at a given moment of time if it takes root collectively and finds expression and edification in the doctrines and practices of the group. (eg. slavery, feudalism, racism, colonialism).

The Qur'an, in contrast, speaks of “man”, and of the process of creation, and of the relatedness of human entities to one another, as individuals and as groups, in abstract and general terms which, at the same time, are concrete and direct enough to be easily perceptible and recognizable. It does so through recourse to accessible metaphors of kinship and above all through deploying the connotations attendant on an evocative and equally accessible etymology. It might be safely maintained that all the key concepts which shape the Islamic worldview, including the Islamic view of man, are paramountly rich and self-contained treasure troves which carry their meaning and implications within them. It is this which has made a basic linguistic proficiency the hallmark of an authentic Islamic scholarship. At its best such scholarship takes its terminological forays as its propellant and point of departure for grounding its logical, conceptual, and intellectual treatises; in its lesser moments, it is caught up in the trammels of a vacuous formalism or literalism. With this we arrive at a point of etymology that might seemingly have best been dealt with at the outset. Yet, we have chosen to reserve it for the latter part of our presentation in order to use it to throw light upon the ethical consequences that it bears.

To point out the element of inclusiveness in a discourse emphasizing generality, equality and universality, one has only to take note of the Arabic term, *insān*, which is used to denote man in his generic humanity.<sup>31</sup> *Insān* is a noun with no specific gender specifications; it shares verbal roots with two other affines: *nīsyān* as ‘forgetfulness’ and *anasa* or *i'tinās*, as ‘company /companion-seeking’. Like many significant words in the Qur'anic Arabic lexicon, *insān* is typically a self-defining term which is pregnant with its relevant and related

connotations. Setting the discourse on creation within its adequate linguistic parameters and ridding these of their obscurities is a prerequisite for fully discerning its conceptual and moral significance. Taking human equality back to its origins in *insān*'s createdness, one has only to take note of the language of the Qur'anic discourse to realize how inadequate are the modes of our contemporary expression.

This becomes even more evident as we reflect critically on other terms qualifying the processes of creation, procreation and recreation, and as we realize that they too maintain an essential gender neutrality and an elemental universality. The basic unit of address at the most intimate level within human beings remains the *nafs*, which shares the same roots with the word "breath" and to breathe. It is not however identical with the divine breath, the *ruh* ("spirit") which was breathed into the "sounding clay", the "fetid mud" or the "dark slime transmuted" to give it life (15:26). Muslim tradition has distinguished between the body, the mind, the *nafs*, the *qalb* (heart) and the *ruh*, and as with al-Ghazālī, the *nafs* occupies an intermediate stage. Without going into the intricacies of such a topic, one can add here to what was already mentioned at the outset of our exposition. If *insān* is the outward embodied integral whole, the *nafs* is the site of his affections and sensibilities as well as the site of his innate endowments and faculties. For the most part, it is even at the mercy of its own perversities and passions, unless it is embalmed in that Providential Mercy that protects it from itself. In practice '*nafs*' is translated and translatable as self, human nature, the psyche, and occasionally, as soul, and spirit – (although we have noted the distinct term for the latter: *al-ruh*). An Islamic view of man constructed in the shade of the Qur'anic ethos is not likely to dwell on hairsplitting subtleties relating to the Unseen out of deference to the injunction: "They ask thee (O Muhammad) concerning the Spirit: Say 'the Spirit pertains to the affairs of my Lord; Verily, (take heed O men and women) you have only been imparted but a modest portion of knowledge'" (17:85). Rather out of deference to the repeated injunctions to seek the signs of God in the visible and knowable universe which has been subordinated by God to man, and in pursuit of the practical knowledge that would promote vocational man in his worldly mission, it is to the presently relevant dimensions of the *nafs* that we turn.

Conversely, as the moral and social discourse in Islam is embedded in *tawhīd*, the discussion of the social implications of creation constantly refers us back and forth between the inner circle and its circumference. What could be closer to the inner circle than the *nafs*, and what could be outermost beyond *insān*, but the ummah to which he is drawn in affinity? So we pause here to further elucidate the meaning of *nafs* for the community and ultimately for the social and global relations among humanity.

When the Qur'an addresses *insān* as a reasoning and rational being, it evokes the "mind", with its core in the heart. Without perspicuity, rationality is impaired. Indeed, it is not the eyes that are blind, but it is the "hearts" that are within the breasts.<sup>32</sup> When it addresses *insān* as a discerning and feeling creature, capable of being stirred into a conscience, it addresses the "self" as *nafs*: which is the core of being and as such connotes an interiority and immortality which may be contrasted with the mortality that is associated with the flesh.<sup>33</sup> Before the mind is developed and after its term is done and its worldly lease on life expires, and as the physical body with its organic and inorganic processes degenerates and returns to its constituent dust, it is the self which we encounter as the object of the divine address.

In the pre-physical phase, it was the *nafs* which was first invoked to witness to the oneness of its Lord and Creator and to covenant for the vocation into which it would be born; and once again it is the *nafs* that is encountered at journey's end, as it too is returned to its source and origin and is reclaimed by its Lord on the eve of the departure of *insān* from his earthly abode. As the ledger is balanced, one book is closed and another opened, and it is the *nafs* that presides at the threshold of another plane in another realm. In between the two stages, the *nafs* maintains its vitality for man's life as the nodal stage and setting for the conflicting pulls and urges: as it conjoins with the heart to become the site of either purifying man's intentions or their clouding and obfuscation. And, finally, immediately relevant to a discourse on equality which emphasizes the unitary conception of humanity, it is the *nafs wāḥidah* – that singlemost entity – which becomes the locus for creation (7:189; 39:6). Out of it God created its pair, and it is of

them twain that He has spread forth a multitude of men and women down the generations, to people the earth, to inherit it, to steward it, down until that moment when by His leave, the earth and its temporary heirs-designate are all returned unto Him.<sup>34</sup> The formal dimensions of the Source for the Islamic view of man retain their enduring relevance.

Created out of the self-same entity, men and women share an identical nature which becomes the fertile ground and material for a growth and maturing and which qualifies them for morality and responsibility. Indeed, the site for this morality is the *nafs* which is the object of the divine address as well as the medium for man's immortality. The *nafs* itself is a vital and dynamic entity, which transcends gender and whatever other differences that might subsist between any two individuals, singly or collectively. Given this fact, there is one of three possible states which qualifies any given person at any one time depending on his inner state of being: or, conversely, on the disposition of his *nafs*. This depends on which impulse is in command: the *nafs ammārah*, or the *nafs lawwāmah*, or the *nafs muṭma'innah* which is also qualified by and identified with the ultimate station of fulfillment in the *nafs rāḍiyah mardīyah*.<sup>35</sup> The *nafs ammārah* may be rendered as the prodding and impetuous self. As the seat of passions it is always urging man to act where his better self might counsel him to caution. That 'better self' is stirred to protest and intervene by a roused conscience. This is the Self reckoning with itself. Only when it has restituted its wrongs and set its qualms at rest, does it arrive at its own reconciliation and balance. This is the self reassured and literally appeased, in the sense of attaining its inner peace. Indeed, not only do these states mark off one person from another psychologically, but they are a means of gauging the fluctuations which the average person goes through in the span of a lifetime. Thus human nature and human potential are the same for all created beings.

Conversely, by the same token, to relate the center to the circumference, we might infer that a society where the *nafs ammārah* is left unchecked, is likely to be degenerate and disintegrating, enslaved to the passions and subdued by various tyrannies including those of the self. If that society is seized by a crisis of conscience and goes through a

period of stock-taking, it might well continue to evince the strife and turmoil that marked it in its unchecked tirade and wallow in the side-effects of its wanton dissolution, but it will be on a return trek as it verges on reform and recovery. The same is true of a condition where the standards of public peace are high and the elements of a just order prevail, there will be a relative equilibrium, attained and attainable, between the moral and material well-being of its members and a pervasive sense of contentment; positive affections, constructive dispositions, and a general identification with the public good will reign i.e. as the individual overcomes his own alienation, so the society will overcome its own debilities as well. The Qur'anic precept that moral reform is the condition and catalyst for social reform, and that change in the condition of a people begins with a change in their consciences and through their own initiative is intimately related to the view of man and to the integrality of morality in the individual self/selves and in the moral community (8:53; 10:23; 13:11).

The case for the oneness of the human race and for an identity, or identity, which sets all its members on an equal footing, could be reinforced by further illustrations from man's createdness at the physical, or the material and evolutionary level. As indicated briefly above in introducing the discourse on the creation of man, there is an astounding fund of enlightenment in this area, such as would constitute a compelling proof on the authority and the Author of the script. But in abiding by our selectivity, we have deliberately taken our illustrations from the spiritual rather than the biological plane so as to distinguish our approach from the current humanist affirmations which plough the material evidence on man's origins and evolution and which are constrained to reduce men to monkeys in order to establish their common humanity. Notwithstanding the misconstructions in modern scientific biology and genealogy, there is no doubt that the wealth of evidence in the Qur'an testifying to man's physical creation and to the identity of his composition, significantly confirms and roots man's equality in this elementary creation.<sup>36</sup>

In the Islamic perspective, human equality is not a cosmetic additive or something which has been belatedly discovered or acquired. It is a status that was imparted with the divine breath that was breathed

into the growing foetus once it had been generated, developed, shaped and proportioned. The very sequence of the verses in this context suggests that the intrinsic value of life and that value as such with all that flows from it is contingent on this Breath. In Surah *al-Sajdah*, this reminder occurs in that characteristic frame of discourse which relates humanity to its source in God, and relates the pieces to the whole.

Such is He who knows all that is beyond the reach of a created being's perception, as well as all that can be witnessed by a creature's senses or mind: the Almighty, the Dispenser of Grace, who makes most excellent everything that He creates. Thus He begins the creation of man out of clay, then He causes him to be begotten out of the essence of humble fluid; and then He forms him in accordance with what he is meant to be, and breathes into him of His spirit: and (thus O men) He endows you with hearing, and sight, and feelings as well as minds: [yet] how seldom are you grateful. (32:6)

Again, the human equality at stake is not without its privileges and responsibilities. Obversely, the materialist humanist might have some difficulty explaining why a composite of organic and inorganic matter, a creature of fetid mud, should be endowed with equality, rights, or any claims to dignity and worth, and the naturalists among them would seem to be more consistent in following their assumptions to their logical conclusion and denuding man of all his laurels. When Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes sought to apply the principles of evolution to his understanding of what man was all about, and how, in consequence the law ought to be applied, he was speaking within the liberal American tradition which consecrates the equality of man, but equivocates about its sources:

I see no reason for attributing to man a significance different in kind from that which belongs to a baboon or a grain of sand. I believe that our personality is a cosmic ganglion, just as when certain rays meet and cross there is a white light at the meeting point; but the rays go on after the meeting as they did before, so when certain other streams of energy cross

at the meeting point, the cosmic ganglion can form a syllogism or wag its tail.<sup>37</sup>

If mankind was originally created of a single entity, and if pairing, *zawjiyyah*, which ensued from that entity was intended as the norm in creation, the question is why has it taken humanity a long and arduous course to come to terms with such fundamental claims as men and women make upon one another, and why is it that the rights of groups and collectivities and the claims they make against one another remain in jeopardy in an era that prides itself in its own humanity? And even, as we are reminded in the above quotation, when fundamental and universal values might be conceded, the humanity of mortals is far from being assured? The answer lies not so much in what we know, but in whether we believe it or not. Belief invokes will and commitment which refers us back to our bearings.

More than its embeddedness in origins, equality is essentially a relational status which derives not from relations of beings among themselves, but from a relationship with a source beyond which imparts value to beings and to their relationships. The equality of men and women as created beings, is ultimately contingent on maintaining the primordial founding and defining relationship between man and his Creator/Sustainer. Through maintaining the absolute transcendence of God, and through affirming man's exclusive devotion, all men sharing in the same station are equidistant from God and alike unto one another. Where, conversely, the lines between man and God are blurred, stations are interchangeable, and it becomes just as easy for men to lord it over one another as it would for them to misappropriate divinity for themselves. Only by affirming one's devotion to the One and Only God, does one accede to a share in the fraternity of a potentially common body of like-minded devotees. The case for equality, transcending race and gender, is thus anchored not only in the fact of man's createdness, but also in his relatedness to his Creator. The scope for privilege remains possible within this equality by striving in the way of devotion and good works to seek God's countenance. In this case the boundaries of equality overlap with those of privilege and man assumes a status earned as much as a status conferred.



The equality that emerges in the Islamic view of man is not a mathematical equation or a juxtaposition of cold and abstract isolates. Rather it is an equality that connotes a deep human compassion, an attitude of caring and sharing signified in the Qur'anic terms of *marḥamah* and *mawāddah*. It is inspired by an essential affinity of origins and destiny. "Verily, [O humankind], this your community is one, and I am your Lord and Sustainer. So worship Me alone" (21:92). This oneness and multiplicity too is contingent on the sequence of a process and an account to which it points. In addition to having been sprouted of the self-same soul, God has created out of it its mate and, of the twain, the male and the female, He has multiplied the human race (39:6). More detail reveals that implicit in a cosmic order of multiplicity is variation and diversity and the human order, in its social and cultural expression, is no exception to the rule.

And among His wonders is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your tongues and colours: for in this are signs indeed for all who are possessed of (innate) knowledge. (30:22)<sup>38</sup>

The specific mention of gender clearly occurs in this functional setting which is one of procreation. Biology is a means to an end, a science of physical life, and no anthropology is possible without taking into consideration the essence that makes for human bondedness. The principle of pairing merits some comment. Again, to take up the same approach observed above in broaching the Qur'anic discourse, we note that pairing is the norm throughout creation and that it is not confined to the human species. Pairing is a teleological duality. It exists at a number of levels: There is a pairing which suggests complementarity and affinity. There is a pairing which implies complementarity without any necessary affinity, if affinity is taken for an affective bond; then there is a pairing which suggests polarity and tension. The human pairing of the male and female belongs to the first category. The night that follows day and the negative and positive charge in an electron, or the pairing of the vegetational world might be taken as examples of the second. And the concurrence of dark and light, good and evil, or the perpetuators of corruption and tyranny and those

who fend for justice and truth, exemplifies the third category. Pairing moreover is the affirmation of the Oneness of the Creator and the signal and medium for the multiplicity, the variety and variability in creation.

When mention of differentiation occurs along biological lines, then male and female become the agents of human procreation and the joint pillars and cornerstones for perpetuating the fundamental social unit which cradles that process. Here, the equality of status does not spell an identity of roles any more than role differentiation entails a discrimination in either the functions performed or the merit of their incumbents. Rather the bond which draws male and female together is enacted at a formal level as a contract within society. It presupposes the equality and parity of the contracting partners and postulates a code of mutuality and reciprocity beyond the respective legal claims and obligations. "And among His wonders is this: He creates for you mates out of your own kind, so that you might find rest in them: And He engenders love (tenderness) and compassion between you: In this, behold, there are signs for those who ponder" (30:21). In this sense it is the spiritual bond of mutually caring and sharing which conditions the contractual status. The family thus provides a primary and necessary nexus of differentiation along gender lines which is confined to a context and a purpose and is reinforced by its web of rights and obligations. Beyond that, role differentiation in the Qur'anic worldview is not gender bound. It is the function of a given society and culture and varies according to time and circumstance.

The defining parameters start out by assuring the family nexus of relations and responsibilities and they extend outward to encompass the solidarities that bond men and women in consonance with the requisites of the *khilāfah* and of their joint trusteeship in this regard. The tone is set by the injunction that believers, men and women, are the friends and protectors of one another bidding the good and forbidding the foul and evil and jointly overseeing the conduct of their affairs (9:71). At its most general and most basic level, the relationship between men and women is subject to the same criterion as that which determines the individual merit and worth, singly and collectively. It

is the relationship in which they stand to God and their God-Consciousness and conscientiousness in striving to live up to their Pledge and biding the Way: their *dīn* (42:13). Consequently, the categories of human differentiation are generalized, among the genders as among the social aggregates and collectivities: there are the believers who fend off corruption and urge the good, there are the deniers of truth or its adulterators who spread corruption and substitute it for good, and then there are the hypocrites, who appear as one thing and act the contrary and wreak a greater havoc still.

Just as there is a code for regulating the principle of pairing in creation, there is a similar code for regulating the diversity that exists in multiplicity in the forum of a dispersed humanity. It falls under the same chapter which regulates the pairing of the male and female in the human species but, in contrast with the details that attend the consolidation of the latter in the basic kinship unit, the family, here it assumes a generality befitting the extension and mutations in the larger nexus. Beyond scope and detail, it is the organizing principle at both levels that concerns us here. The principles of equality and complementarity that order the basic pairing in the gender relationship becomes the pervasive rule for all the subsequent relationships that follow from it. If love and compassion is the rule in the one, mutuality and getting to know one another as *ta'āruḥ*, and the formalization of this process of interaction, transaction, and exchange at the institutional level is the crux of humanity. This signifies that entering into relationships which enhance the bonds of fraternity and promote the ideal of a common weal is the norm in the wider circle of a humanity that is turned to its Creator and draws on His benevolence instead of being drawn to its exclusive and narrow egocentricities. Taking the ethical discourse on man from its ontic origins thus leads to another passing comment. Biology and culture might be the generalized potential with which human history begins, but they can also be the source for the obfuscation of the meaning of that history and its distortion to the detriment of man.<sup>39</sup> It is only the awareness of the existence of that code for imparting value and of its interpretation as it is provided in the Qur'anic injunctions that pre-empts the abuse of biology and the debasement of culture.

The differentiated categories of humankind at its widest spectrum remain in the final analysis as they were from the outset, defined by the parameters enjoined on men and women as incumbents of the *khilāfah*. It is the *khilāfah* which symbolically presides over and mediates a community of human equality, fraternity, and bondship. It is the *khilāfah* that is the token of the unity of mankind in all its diversity, and the seal on the enduring sustaining overlordship of Allah, Unique and One. As the cardinal privilege and common patrimony, it is shared among men and women as groups and as individuals as a grant and honour from the Creator who is the ultimate sovereign and Judge in all human affairs. The vast multitudes of human creation might be oblivious of this meaning, but many too are they who bow with the rest of a Muslim creation, in deference of its truth (22:18; cf. 13:15; 16:49). As Muslims stand in prayer five times a day, God the Merciful, the Compassionate, comes alive as the *Mālik Yawm al-Dīn*, Lord of the Day of Reckoning, and the *Aḥkam al-Ḥākimīn*, Supreme Judge and the most just of all justices of the peace (11:45; 95:8). Belief in the Day of Judgement transforms this magisterial event in the believer's consciousness into an ever present absence, a future imperative and an imminent reality which conditions everything present. In the same manner as the Muslim contemplates the affairs of man in this world, he invokes the Lord of all power and dominion, *Mālik al-Mulk*, King of Kings and Sovereign of all Sovereigns whose will is destiny. This conception of God is particularly significant when we assess the ethical consequences of man's vocation as *khalīfah*, and how more particularly, it reflects on the Islamic view of man.

This honour signified in a divine mandate and destined vocation deserves scrutiny. It is an honour, or a sign of *takrīm* and *tafḍīl* (17:70). If this "vestment" is located in its every constituent composed of the individual members of a universal ummah that is humanity, its consummation is only properly attained in its joint practice. It is a calling in which every man and woman is potentially honoured, but its perfected disposal calls for the cooperation of men and women as groups. In this sense, it is hardly surprising that politics being the realm of organized and organizing public affairs should be assumed as a natural site for measuring up to the mandate of *khilāfah*. This possibly

unconventional interpretation is justified by the two specific contexts in which the term *khilāfah*, unconjugated into its derivatives, occurs in the Qur'an. In the one case it is mentioned in the account of creation and Adam is honoured with its vestment. In the other, it is mentioned in the context of kingship: as David is instructed to govern his people and administer justice in light of revealed guidance.<sup>40</sup>

With this we come to some closing remarks on what constitutes a key and unequivocal concept in the Islamic view of man. It has been suggested that the *khilāfah* mentioned in the Qur'an is analogous to the biblical notion of dominion.<sup>41</sup> While this no doubt confirms the affinity among all revelation in the Abrahamic tradition of *tawhīd*, it would be misleading to conflate the two terms which in practice lead to diametrically opposed orientations to the world. Dominion connotes mastery, rule, sovereignty and power. Above all it connotes autonomy. While it is true that in the Islamic view God has given man power, mastery and rulership, yet this is a conditional and relational grant. There is no question of being in possession of power and far less of any claims to its generation, just as there is no question of owning the resources of the earth and of being free to dispose of either power or wealth at will such as the sovereignty inherent in dominion would allow. Rather, in *khilāfah* the issue is one of usufruct, i.e. of an entitlement to use power and wealth on certain terms.

In contrast to autonomy, *khilāfah* entails a delegation of power from a Sovereign and Master to his "vassal".<sup>42</sup> If we disengage the latter term of its feudal connotations in medieval European history, we are left with the main ideas of a person being awarded the conditional usage of the land – the good earth – for a term in return for doing homage and pledging fealty to an overlord. Delegation of power connotes entrusting with responsibility, and implicit in this is the idea of reckoning, of accounting and judgment. The crucial point in 'deconstructing the text' is that these key ideas of delegation, power, responsibility, fealty, pledge, trust, allegiance, representation, and indeed, election and affinity, are all contained in the term *khilāfah* or, in its more precise construct, in the designation *khilāfat Allāh fī al-ard*.<sup>43</sup> In this term not only is man's autonomy discounted, but God's ubiquity is intrinsic. As the terms that relate man to God are further

spelled out in the idea of the Covenant (the *mithāq* and the *‘ahd*), the balance too between man's autonomy and dependence is definitively established. From this relationship between the relative and the Absolute it is hardly surprising that an encompassing ethic of ecology and responsibility should follow.

Two further remarks are due in order to clear up any possible ambiguities attendant on the associations and obfuscations of language. If vassalage in the human context evokes nuances of servitude blended with servility, *khilāfah* in the nexus of the *‘ubudiyyah-rubūbiyyah-ulūhiyyah* symbiosis connotes election (*iṣṭifā’*)<sup>44</sup> and *takrīm* (ennoblement) such as we have already indicated above. He who “taught man that which he knew not” and He “who taught man by the Pen” (and, He who swore by the pen) was the same bountiful Benevolence and Wellspring of all knowledge and wisdom who also taught Adam the Names and gave him thereby an advantage over the rest of creation. The imparting of that qualifying and ennobling knowledge through reason and the faculty for conceptual and abstract thought occurs in the context of that cataclysmic moment in the crowning of creation when God assigns Adam, generic man, the Trust and elects him for the *khilāfah*. The recurring theme throughout the three-tiered discourse on man we pointed out above – a discourse on creation, on the honouring and the assignment of responsibility (*taklīf*), and on guidance – is that He who creates also imparts the knowledge which makes the command possible and which renders the disposal of the bounties of creation within human reach. It was this election and ennoblement that the angels had acknowledged in obeisance and that Iblis had grudgingly conceded – and contested – in envy (17:62).

These are some of the nuances and meanings which inhere in the notion of the *khilāfah*, that station into which man is born and the vocation for which he was elected. They make it another of these self-contained Qur’anic terms, irreplaceable and unique, carrying within it all its moral implications. It also accounts for the unique place which man occupies in the Islamic view.

One could sum up the account and add to it further. Journey's end is usually a point which begets other journeys in its wake. The social being we encounter is also one who as we might recall is a forgetful creature. In this context of locating man in his vocational *khilāfah*, we might also note that his forgetfulness has its consequences for himself as well as for others. This is another instance of an injustice and folly perpetuated which starts with the self and extends to afflict a community and a history. Man is capable of falling into depravity and rising to great heights, and in his rise and fall he brings down or raises others with himself.<sup>45</sup> That again explains why in Muslim history, social and political reform have been contingent on a moral or inner reform which starts with the self and extends to englobe the community with its rewards. In drawing closer to God, the conscience is stirred from its stupor, the heart renewed, and one's sense of obligation for the well-being of the community and the sanity of one's world is quickened. Coming together to protect one another, to ward off evil and enjoy the good becomes a means of reinforcing the medium that would sanify and sanctify the individual selves. In Islamic idiom this is what is termed as raising God's Word uppermost and making the truth prevail – *‘la’ kalimāt al-Ḥaq* – in the knowledge and conviction that real honour and glory belong to God and to those who strive in righteousness, and in the certainty that ultimately truth and justice will prevail: “And say: “Truth has [now] come, Falsehood has perished, for, behold, all Falsehood is bound to wither away” (17:81).<sup>46</sup> This is the self-confident and optimistic note in the Islamic view of man. It is also a view that is oriented towards the future – without necessarily being Messianic.

Men and women are capable of ever-returning to their Creator – and in returning they bring with them their people or make amends which benefit others as they benefit themselves. *Iṣlāh* is the requisite of *tawbah*, just as *‘amal* is the verification of *imān*: an ethics of integrality makes it possible at once to speak of the individual self and ascribe to it its full integrity, and at the same time to infer from it the bonds that bind it to the community, a continuity which runs in contiguity. In

this ethic, if it is of man's folly to err, and a sign of his weakness to succumb to the promptings of the devil, or the *nafs ammārah*, it is also of his greatness and nobility to retract: to see the error of his ways, to repent and to make amends through *islāh*; the *awwāb*, is he who is ever-returning to his Lord, and the *tawbah* is that act of sincere repentance from one who has erred. In the one case and the other, the door of forgiveness and compassion is always open. God's mercy that embalms the individual self and is experienced at that level of intimacy, is one that is promised together with a bounty to a community that measures up to its joint responsibilities. This too is inferred from the content of Guidance as well as from a form of discourse which addresses men and women in their aggregate as often as it addresses man/*insān*, or the *nafs*/as self in itself.

Ultimately, man/*insān* is capable of much good and it was for this purpose that he was originally created. At the same time he is capable of great evil too through a wilful arrogance and a tendentious disputatiousness; the former blinds him to the truth, the right and the just, while the latter deludes him into rationalizing and justifying his waywardness. Because the seat for such appetites lies in a sodden heart, man is urged to purify his inner being and is shown the way to *tazkiyyah* and *tazzaki*. "To a happy state indeed shall he attain who causes this self to grow in purity, and truly lost is he who buries it in darkness" (91:9-10).<sup>47</sup> In the same way he is urged to purify his outer or material possessions, "For he shall be spared it [the torment of hell-fire] who is truly God-Conscious: Who spends [over others] of his possessions that he might grow in purity [and through thus spending it his own wealth will grow in purity]" (92:17-18).<sup>48</sup> Ultimately, moral man is the pillar and mainstay of a moral community. Addressing believers and potential believers in a young and growing community, God admonishes them: "Even as We sent unto you an apostle from amidst yourselves to convey unto you Our messages, and to cause you to grow in purity, to impart to you revelation and wisdom, to teach you that which you knew not: So remember Me and I shall remember you and be grateful unto Me and deny Me not" (2:151-152).<sup>49</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that growth in purity is admonished on men and women individually and collectively, the community in the



Islamic view is more than the aggregate of its individuals. As such it has its own objective conditions, guaranteed by its ethical-legal code, which assure it and its members the morality that attaches to the medium. The consonance is retained. Nothing is evil about man in himself, in his action or in his setting. The burden lies in the intention that accompanies the act and attends the gain. This is the world-affirming and life-affirming view of man.

Man is furthermore a creature of his needs as well as of his aspirations. Those needs range from the moral, the intellectual, and the spiritual to the physical and the material, they demand fulfillment if man is to attain his integrality. A community which meets them adequately constitutes a basic moral and integral community. An Islamic view of man takes these needs into account not only on the basis of an empirical inquiry into man, but in light of the imperatives of a revealed guidance which addresses them. In its address, Guidance does not merely validate an empirical reality, but it channels it constructively. Accordingly, the basic human needs have been provided for in that comprehensive ethical code which assures the sanity and continuity of the human species. This is the Shari‘ah. Through its radical, simple, and flexible yet sophisticated and encompassing preceptual and conceptual matrix it assures the convergence, if not the identity, of moral man and legal man. The values that are internalized are reinforced at their limits by the external sanctions of the law. The Shari‘ah has a symbolic and a concrete meaning. Essentially, it is the path which leads to a water source, and water is the source of life. Concretely, it is the formalization of that ethical code which safeguards the foundations of man’s social being and assures him the requisites for attending to his vocation: the *khilāfah*, so that settling the earth assumes the way of God and goodness.

Without an awareness of the Shari‘ah, its range and purpose, no account of the Islamic view of man is complete. At the same time, the Shari‘ah prescribes for an order of temporality in which man’s vocation unfolds. It is in the nature of this order as we have seen above to be constituted of diversity. Yet, men themselves in the midst of all their formal diversities remain essentially human beings sharing in their basic commonalities. It is around these commonalities that the

essential categories of mankind are identified, always we may recall, in accordance with the kind of standards of a moral classification which unites them across time and space and makes the divine discourse of the Qur'an to man and about man of enduring relevance. What are these categories? Is the essential divide or distinction between men acquired or inherent?

In Islam the categories that count are those which can be acquired: God is fair and He gives men and women a chance to choose to which category they want to belong, by their deeds and their intentions. The inherent variations by way of race or gender are not the subject of a moral discourse. Rather, the categories that count are set forth from the very beginning of the Qur'an as a perfected and completed legacy of prophethood bequeathed to a matured and maturing humanity.<sup>50</sup> Following the *Fātiḥah*, the Opening of all openings, which is the invocation of each and every soul singly and collectively, the Glorious Recitation opens out with its universal disclosure that is addressed to all people, whether they are believers (2:2-5), deniers or obfuscators of the truth (2:6-7), or those diseased-at-heart, who cannot make up their minds as they say one thing and mean another and claim to do the good when they fill the earth with corruption, i.e. the hypocrites (2:8-20). As to that last category it is not so much addressed to them as it is a remonstrative discourse about them wherever the subject is historical man, and the unfolding of temporality. These are the generic classes of humans, as individuals and collectivities, such that any other temporal classification falls within them. They retain their validity beyond any specific history and group, while at the same time any historical group or given individual can recognize his/her affinities within the one or the other. While these categories are essentially derived from the human response to divine guidance in the course of a *Heilsgeschichte*, the concrete effects of that response and its materialization in given situations, makes it equally integral to universal history conceived as *Weltgeschichte*; it emphasizes the unitarian perception of the world in the *tawḥīdī* episteme. The technicalities of the subject aside, the relevance of our observation on the collective categories derivable from an Islamic view of man is simply to illustrate how in that view, in addition to essential, existential man, man as *abd*

and devotee, there is also social man, accountable through time and beyond it into requitting his covenant and upholding his trust as *khalīfah*. The latter is no doubt a historical role as much as an ontological status. The essential paradigm of *‘ubudiyyah*, *ulūhiyyah* and *rubūbiyyah* is projected in the full light of history – which it subsumes and transcends – and the full meaning of history cannot be seen apart from these generic and morally laden categories.

We return to the encumbrances and obscurities of language which have weighed us down throughout the presentation. The point made explicitly earlier on was that we cannot speak about man without subsuming woman too and their essential relationship which is at the source of creation and its enduring filament. There is an added relevance and dimension to a view of this relationship which is constructed on the basis of the Qur’anic discourse and which could be further reinforced in a practical sense by the Prophet’s teachings and example. Within and beyond that relationship we see there a special position reserved for women: the double affirmative maintained in the Qur’anic discourse in this regard comes as a corrective against a universal human weakness to distort and confound, where historically the weaker elements of society are likely to become victims. Woman is honoured jointly with man as *insān*, and together they are paired of the self-same entity; she receives an additional emphasis, in her moral capacity, to assure her honour in her difference. In the same light, the process of pairing in creation and its significance for the view of man is elevated beyond a biological to a cosmic and spiritual significance. Ultimately, beyond pairing, procreation and multiplicity, there always remains the worth of the individual self and whether it elects for its station that of God-Conscious *taqwā* attaining to *imān*, *amn*, and *itmi’nān* or otherwise. In the ontic and ethical discourse, “woman” is integral to the Islamic view of “man”.

To conclude on a more general note. We have seen how the ontic and ethical discourse in the Qur’an are inexorably linked and they converge round a meaningful and coherent view of man as a moral being, in himself and within society. In him conscience and consciousness cohere to affirm a freedom with responsibility and a reason with perspicuity. In discussing the ethical implications of the

discourse on creation, the authenticity of the moral element in the Islamic view of man was ascertained. Man/*insān* is ineluctably moral first, in view of his createdness and primal allegiance to his Creator, and secondly, because of the inviolability of the moral order itself as a function of the divine Will and its Ordinance for creation in general, and pre-eminently for man as its crown and culmination. It followed that rights and obligations derive from God and that man's obligations to one another were conceived within an axiological framework of man's dues to God in which the boundaries on mortal freedom were equally ascribed to God. In this frame *ḥuqūq Allāh* and *ḥudūd Allāh* provide the defense line for human rights and human freedom and dignity, as they protect them against their own potential excesses against themselves – again invoking another Qur'anic concept of *ẓulm al-naḥs* and the freedom and dignity that is assured them owes to the boundaries against their potential excesses by their Creator and supreme legislator. This paradigm of rational-ethical legality thus continues to be structured on the *ulūhiyyah-rubūbiyyah-ʿubudiyyah* matrix.

The above can be no more than a summary account which highlights the relevance of the Islamic view of man to the modern age. It has barely scratched the surface. A view of man is in fact a view of life, society, culture, religion and the world. Only a part of this cursory adumbration has been addressed in our selective focus which took aspects of man's rationality, moral agency, and responsibility to explore in an exclusively Islamic idiom. Much of it could be developed further. In taking the Qur'an as our prime source and inspiration, we follow in a path trodden by others who have preceded us in a daunting and honorable endeavor, and we point the way to what remains an inexhaustible trove from which many more enlightening and stimulating treatises addressing the Islamic view of man could be woven.

## 5 A Synopsis Summary and Conclusion

Only in the Qur'an do we get a comprehensive and balanced account of integral man as we come to learn about his constitutional make-up from the physical, the psychological, and the spiritual aspects. Only there can we learn something about the notion of life-cycles as we encounter them in a pre-worldly and a post-worldly phase in a course that encompasses the here-and-now and transcends it to the here-after. The relationship in which these cycles stand to one another shape our understanding of the human personality and of human life as well as provide us with the meaning of man's beholdness to his Creator and of the place of *dīn* in this scheme. Beyond the metaphysics and the biology of creation, its cosmology and its eschatology, certain of the dimensions in this cognitive chart can only be properly understood in the light of elaborating key *tawhīdī* concepts relating to *fiṭrah*, *amānah*, *khilāfah*, and *dīn*, a task which is becoming increasingly the subject of a newly emerging discipline and socio-cultural discourse.

The above exposition, necessarily confined to select themes, converges on an assessment of what might essentially constitute an Islamic humanism and of how it compares with other versions of an ideal which claims to uphold the dignity of man and his integrity. Our conclusion is that if secular humanism, which is the dominant paradigm, through its various philosophies of man and its man-made philosophies may have anything to offer at all, it does so only to the extent that it produces a refutation of man's subservience to the idolatries of his own making. They might succeed insofar as they are out to 'disenchant' the world. The most such philosophies can attain is the first half of the *shahādah*, that "there is no god..." The instant they try to go beyond that they become philosophically meaningless and practically subversive and self-negating assertions. They point to the

paradox of man's ultimate dispossession in the midst of plenty. Only an Islamic humanism can hold because it draws its impulse from the core-belief in the oneness of God and because it acknowledges the limits of man's autonomy and attests to the nature and range of his indebtedness to his Creator. It attests to man's humanity in the measure to which he chooses to live up to his mandated destiny.

There is nothing essentially new about this definition of man's humanity. Muslim thinkers in the past have arrived at the same conclusion in their own way because they also drew on the same steadfast and reliable sources we draw on today. They realized then what we belatedly re-acknowledge as we recover our links with our common sources. For them as for us, man's humanity was not contingent on man's anatomy or on his external form, but it was the function of the *ruh*, that divine breath, which gave him life at the origins and of *'ahd*, that original pledge/covenant with his Creator, that assured him his destiny upon his ultimate return. Beyond that, the challenge for men and women in the here-and-now becomes a matter of maintaining the balance by walking the straight and narrow path between autonomy and dependence. The goal is to shoulder a trust, the *amānah*, and to deliver a pledge. As conscious and conscientious moral agents, men and women assume their trust in the light of the divine guidance. As they strive to fulfill their mandate in this light, they become worthy of their vicegerency of their Lord, and Creator, who is also their ultimate refuge and before Whom they will tender their final account on the Day of Judgement. The full meaning of life – and of humanity – can only be gauged in proportion to that which is fulfilled.

This is the Muslim's understanding of himself and his role in life. It is an understanding with a range of practical implications which go beyond his perceptions to his deeds and conduct, and which include his conception of himself as well as his relationship to others and to the world that is his temporary abode. The Islamic view of man is to be found in the lives of those who strive to measure up to the Criterion and to the Balance as they have been revealed with and through the beloved Prophet. As such it is a view that shines out in the efforts and sacrifice of those who strive to follow his path as their example. Only rarely does this view stray into the enclaves of philosophers and

theoreticians to become ensconced in their forays and treatises. Because it has been lucidly, consistently and coherently articulated in the sources of the faith, the Muslim who has been bred on its authentic sources has no trouble understanding it. His is not that experience of an existential anguish which has inspired much eloquence and more groping in other traditions. His challenge is to implement that understanding in a setting which has been pre-ordained for its testing. Once again the life-affirmative bias in Islam comes down on the side of an “orthopraxis”.

As far as Muslim thought goes, its task is to read and synthesize what has been elucidated in these sources and to recover and rediscover the much needed perspectives that it could share with others – with assurance and with humility. Its task is definitely not one of creation, invention, improvisation or speculation in an area where God in His infinite wisdom and knowledge, unbounded in His grace and mercy, has taken it upon Himself to instruct, to enlighten, and to guide. For it is intrinsic to the Islamic view of man that the burden of morality, which has been freely granted man and freely assumed by him, has its limits and that these limits are borne out in striving for its implementation and not for its invention. The precept is: “No soul shall have laid on it a burden greater than it can bear” (2:233), and the invocation of the believers is “Our Lord, lay not on us a burden greater than we have the strength to bear” (2:286).

## ENDNOTES

- 1 This current work was produced by the author as a separate publication, pending the addition of a foreword. The essay was also commissioned for a UNESCO Project: Foundations of Islam. A shortened revised version was eventually submitted for the required chapter 13. See, Zafar Ishaq Ansari and Ismail Ibrahim Nawwab (eds.), *The Different Aspects of Islamic Culture, v.1: Foundations of Islam*, (UNESCO Publishing, 2016), p.111-159, illus.  
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260282>.
- 2 Cf. In his *al-Iqtisād fi al-‘Itiqād* al-Ghazālī makes this comment, “The like of Reason is that of the sound, unailing vision, and the like of the Qur’an is that of a brilliant radiating sun; neither can do without the other, except for those who are fools. He who denies reason and confines himself to the light of the Qur’an, is just like one who exposes himself to the sunlight only to close his eyes. There is no difference between such and the blind. Reason in the presence of revelation is a light upon light, and whoever sees with only one eye is tethered to the yoke of vanity” (*mutadalil bi habl al-ghurūr*). The hallmark of the Muslim thought remains to this day bound by the debates proportioning and reappropriating the relationship between *al-Wahy* and *al-‘aql*. See Abdulmajid al-Najjar, “al-Khilāfah baina al-‘Aql wa al-Wahy” in *al-Insān*, vol.1,3 (1990).
- 3 See account of Adam’s creation below.
- 4 Qur’an 33:72. In affirmation of a vast corpus of tradition, Yusuf Ali in his notes to this verse rightly places it in the context of a *mithāq* or *‘ahd*, a covenant between Allah and humanity, whether at the generic, individual level as in 7:172-173, or at the historical level such as the covenant with the *bani Isrā’īl*, symbolic of a more general bonding of a community of the faith with its Lord. The fact that the Surah itself in which this verse occurs has a pledge and its attendant obligations as a general theme, confirms this link. More specifically, mention is made of the covenant with the prophets (33:7-8) and implicitly with their followers, and of a generalized category of believers, men and women (33:35) such as those who strove to live up to their trust (33:23) who are distinguished from those who betray it.
- 5 Cf. Qur’an 26:67,103; 12:103; 23:70. If we took *imān* or belief in God to be the beginning of morality, then we can see the implications of the judgement on human folly and injustice in this sense.
- 6 This is a concept developed in the attempt to articulate and reformulate the essentials of the Islamic worldview in a manner that would lend itself to the development of contemporary social theory in a direction more compatible



## ENDNOTES

- with human and social needs in modern times. It is contrasted to the prevalent ego-centric and materialist humanism which informs the dominant paradigm, which was conceived in the positivist spirit of 18th century European Enlightenment. See M.M. Abul-Fadl, "Islamization as a force of global cultural renewal", *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, December, 1988 and "Contrasting Epistemics: Tawhid, the Vocationist, and Contemporary Social Theory", *idem.*, March, 1990.
- 7 For interpretations of Western Christian history along such lines see Eric Voegelin or Karl Lowith among others.
  - 8 On the *zawjiyyah* or "pairing" as a sunnah and a characteristic trait in creation see e.g. 36:36; 43:12; 51:49; and with reference to *daf* as a repelling energy to assure aside from motion, an overall balance and equilibrium, within an overarching and ultimate perspective of truth and justice see, 2:251; 22:40; also, 21:18; 17:81. More on this below.
  - 9 A categorical article of the faith is that all power belongs exclusively to God, and that nothing in the earth or the heavens can bring man an ounce of good or evil, without God's intervention (6:17; 10:107; 16:53). This is one aspect of the momentous liberating impulse of *tawhīd* for the individual conscience and the constructive meaning of *tawakkul*, or total and exclusive reliance on God and none other.
  - 10 It is in the light of this assurance that an Islamic anthropology of religion holds to the inclusiveness and universality of guidance, and to the belief that monotheism was the original state of man: not only as the natural state of *fiṭrah*, but also historically. This is true whether the guidance comes in the form of a warner to every single community, (25:51) or whether it is made manifest in man's conscience, in nature or in revelation, as Yusuf Ali notes, or as with Muhammad Asad, the last aspect is emphasised with specific reference to the finality of prophethood and the universality and perennality of the Qur'anic revelation. The point is that trial and punishment are linked to making guidance manifest and sending warners (7:94; 26:208). *Tawhīd* teaches consonance, not dissonance, whether the subject is nature and convention, or the individual and the community, or ethnicities and diverse collectivities. For a prospectus on an Islamic Anthropology see Merryl Wyn Davies, *Knowing One Another: Shaping an Islamic Anthropology* (London: Mansell, 1988), Ch.4 and 5.
  - 11 See below.
  - 12 It is interesting to note that a venerable restored Westerner guided through the grace of God to the Right Path, attributes the lack of appreciation among Westerners for the Qur'an to two substantial factors: its rationality and its unitary conception of life, itself conceived within that rationality. His explanation deserves to be quoted at length. "It is more than probable," writes Muhammad Asad in the Foreword to his translation, "that one of the main reasons for this

lack of appreciation is to be found in that aspect of the Qur'an which differentiates it fundamentally from all other sacred scriptures: its stress on reason as a valid way to faith as well as its insistence on the inseparability of the spiritual and the physical (and therefore also social) spheres of human existence. This absence of any division of reality into 'physical' and 'spiritual' compartments makes it difficult for people brought up in the orbit of other religions, with their accent on the 'supernatural' element allegedly inherent in every true religious experience to appreciate the predominantly rational approach of the Qur'an to all religious questions." Such people have been accustomed to identifying religious experience with "a thrill of numinous awe before things hidden and beyond all intellectual comprehension." This partly accounts for Max Weber's skeptical attitude to Islam as a salvationist religion and it justifies S.N. al-Attas in his postulate that if secularism was about the "disenchantment" or de-mystification of the natural world, then Islam has accomplished this long ago. Above all, it substantiates the claims made in the the Qur'an that it comes as a message of deliverance to men and women from the bonds of tradition, superstition, and ignorance – as a Light to their hearts and their minds (*nūrun mubīn*).

- 13 Cf. 17:46; 18:57; 41:5 with hearts shrouded/veiled from the truth [*akinnah*]; and hearts that are "sealed" against the truth, 9:87; 7:100; or rusted hearts, 83:14. Commenting on Surah *al-Baqarah* 2:7 where the first reference to wilful rejection occurs, Asad observes that it is a natural law instituted by God, whereby a person who persistently adheres to false beliefs and refuses to listen to the voice of truth gradually loses the ability to perceive the truth "so that finally as it were a seal is set upon the heart" [citing al-Rāghib's *al-Mufradāt fī Ḡharīb al-Qur'ān*].
- 14 Qur'an 51:21. This *āyah* is taken as the focus of a published dissertation, "A Guide to the Self: Between the Qur'an and Modern Science" ("Dalīl al-Anfus bayna al Qur'ān al-Karīm wa al 'Ilm al-Ḥadīth") by Tawfiq M. 'Izzedin (Cairo: Dar al Salam, 1986). The trend in the contemporary scientific era is to rediscover aspects of the inimitability of the Qur'an through a reading enlightened in the scientific discoveries of the age. Although eliciting the scientific marvels of the Qur'an is a controversial subject in modern Muslim circles, the controversies are not new, and there is much to substantiate the endeavor. On this point see "La Vocation de l'Homme" in M. Talbi and M. Bucaille, *Reflexions sur le Coran* (Paris: Seghers 1989). One particular work might be cited as an example in the medical world, Maurice Bucaille's classic, *La Bible, Le Koran, et la Science* (Paris: Seghers, 1978).
- 15 Cf. 26:89 and 37:84; it is essentially a heart that sees, cf. *qulub mubšīrah* (50:37), and a 'returning heart', *qalb munīb* (50:33), and its opposite is the 'diseased heart' as is identified with the hypocrites (2:10; 24:50; 9:125; 47:20) and has its variations in hard-heartedness (5:13) and other morbidities. This Qur'anic concept of "*qalb salīm*" is behind the shaping of a legacy of Muslim thought geared to it in practical ethical contexts as well as in terms of more rational or more intuitive mystical contexts.

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- 16 See below for the response evoked in current literature on the scientific wonders of the Qur'an in general and in the biological and embryological fields in particular.
- 17 This verse invoking the very source of life occurs in a context which addresses death and resurrection as another assured dimension in human mortality.
- 18 This explains the verse which categorically dissociates man's worship of God from any 'need' by the Almighty, proclaiming God's absolute self-sufficiency and deflecting all benefit to the worshipper not the Worshipped (51:56-58): "I have not created *jinn* and *ins* (human beings) save that they should serve me: No sustenance do I require of them, nor do I require that they should feed Me. Indeed Allah is He who gives all Sustenance – His is the Command and the Power: Steadfast forever." The verse immediately preceding this admonition invokes the remembrance of God in the assurance that such remembrance profits believers.
- 19 "O Mankind! Be conscious of your Sustainer who has created you out of one living entity, and out of it created its mate, and out of the two spread abroad a multitude of men and women. And remain conscious of God in whose name you demand (your rights) from one another, and of these ties of kinship. Verily, God is ever watchful over you."
- 20 Cf. "O Man, verily thou art toiling towards thy Lord and Sustainer in painful toil. Then shalt thou meet Him" (84:6) and "Verily, We have created man into a life of struggle, toil and trial" (90:4).
- 21 Johan Bouman, *Gott und Mensch im Koran* (1977) postulates an original thesis round a coherent Islamic anthropology structured on the lines of the Qur'anic discourse and, taking *ilm al-kalām* for an example, observes how Islamic science was shaped in its light. His particular observation which reinforces our own in this context is made in an incidental, but significant, note to his text (p.183).
- 22 Qur'an, 96:1-8; Cf. 68:1 and 35:28 for the edification of knowledge, its bearers and its instruments. For the edification of reason and intellect and their processes see above.
- 23 E.g. with regard to man's ultimate return see: 2:28; 2:281; 41:21; 10:4,56; 5:48,105; as the logical sequence to death, 29:57; and attended by the resurrection, 6:36; as to his trial in this world see, 76:2; 21:35; and that this return is related to his trial, see 21:35; 23:115; 45:15; 5:105; 10:23; 24:64.
- 24 Qur'an, 27:6 and 66:3. Cf. "Should He not know He that created?..." (67:14) which occurs in the context of promising a great reward for the belief in the Unseen (67:12), and who can be truer in his promise than God: (The Truth)? (4:122). The credibility of the Source and the reliability of the channel are autonomous fields of inquiry in themselves and are not dealt with here, but they are assumed. The one is covered in addressing the Concept of God in Islam and the other that of Prophethood, and in particular in the *sīrah* of Prophet Muhammad.

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- 25 Qur'an, 17:71; 4:49. For this rendition of the term "*fatīlan*" see Muhammad Asad's footnote to the latter (n.67) in his translation. The idea is no matter how minor the action, how insignificant the utterance, nothing will go unrequited. Cf. "Whoever does an atom's weight of good shall see it and whoever does an atom's weight of evil shall see it" (99:7-8). Justice, in the Islamic view it should be stressed, occurs in an overarching frame of mercy, benevolence, and bounty (4:40; 6:160).
- 26 See above. Meaning is to truth what meaninglessness is to vanity, jest, sporting, or even foul play. Cf. Qur'an, 15:85; 44:69 and 44:38; 21:16; 38:27.
- 27 Such is the summation. See Qur'an, 2:28; 10:56; 28:70; 30:11.
- 28 See above. It should be noted that reference to God's transcendental knowledge is in fact more frequently associated with the awareness and responsiveness to the needs of His creation – Al-Samī' (the All-Hearing) and Al-Ḥakīm (the Most Judicious and Most Wise). This is to reinforce another dimension of the bondedness of men and women with their Creator who is closer to them than their jugular vein (50:16). With an eye on psycho-physiological functioning, Prof. M.A.M. Abul-Fadl ("Man: God's Honoured Creation", Milano 1988) finds that what is even closer still to the very source of human life and its very end is actually mentioned in the *ḥulqūm* (56:83-85) "the karotis". This is the artery which conveys the blood from the aorta to the head. There are two of them, one on each side of the neck, and the compression of either causes unconsciousness. Hence God is closer to us than the hub of our consciousness and the pulsating of our life. Cf. elsewhere for the relationship between the All-Hearing and His creatures: 2:186 and 34:50. The proximity of Allah (*subḥānahu wa ta'āla*) to his loving or needy devotee is one of a self-transcending responsiveness.
- 29 We take the Qur'anic expression of corruption/disruption (*fasād*) on the earth attributed to the denial of the Oneness of God as also the consequence of the multiplication of deities and to a corresponding multiplicity and confusion of measures of truth. This is substantiated by another reference which attributes *fasād* to the dominance of *ahwā'* [sing. *hawā'*], i.e. to the prevalence of human passions and whims. The fact that mistaking man as the measure constitutes the epitome of a self-deification identified with the rule of *hawā'* is suggested by the use of this term in another verse (25:43; 45:23).
- 30 Again these terms draw on a rich semantic field and on their interconnections. Thus "confidence" and its affines are used to convey an array of qualities associated with the *mu'min*: e.g. *wafa'*, *izzah*, *imān*, *azmah*, *thabāt*, *rushd*, *muthābarah*, and similarly, "arrogance" and excess evoke connotations of *kibr/istikbār*, *ghurūr*, *baghyī*, *tughyān*. The example for the one is found in the conduct of the prophets in so far as they fall in the category of the *ulū al-azm*; while the negative traits are afflictions which come from Iblis. One is susceptible to the machinations of the devil, or to his "summons", through forgetfulness and the neglect of *tazkiyat al-*

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*nafs* and consequently the veil of *taqwā* drops and he is exposed to whatever vanities might gnaw at his heart (cf. the notion of the “evil whisperer”).

- 31 This is a point which is generally lost in translating the meaning of the Qur’an. In every case the term “*insān*” is used, it is rendered in English or French as “man” or “homme”, and despite the fact that these are terms conventionally used to denote universality, their gendered bias remains inherent to the detriment of their universality. Thus every time the Qur’anic universal address to “*nās*” (plural of *insān*) is rendered as “O Men” the essential universality of that address is at stake, just as the generic human being is lost in rendering “*insān*” as man. The irony is that when these terms are translated back into Arabic they carry this distortion. The translation of Jules La Beaume’s Concordance from the French into the Arabic, *Tafṣīl Āyāt al-Qur’ān al-Ḥakīm* is a typical illustration of this. There the term “*rajuḥ*”, for man as contrasted with woman, is unwittingly substituted for *insān* in rendering the title of the section on “L’Homme”. Consequently, all the verses addressing universal and generic beings come to be classified under an explicitly gendered male being, and the original Qur’anic term is lost.
- 32 Cf. 7:179. For hearts that are sealed and with locks upon them see above.
- 33 The Qur’anic view of man is essentially unitary not binary or dichotomous. Etymologically, the term “*bashar*” (“*bashariyyah*”) connotes a surface, skin, complexion, flesh. However its Qur’anic usage conveys an aspect of integrality as well as mortality, and does not denote a split or antinomy between an intentionality and an extensionality in man’s being as is the custom in human philosophical and theosophical thought. Keeping the Qur’anic perspective in view is a check against indulgences promoted by binary thought structures which frequently surface within certain strands of Muslim tradition.
- 34 This notion of course refers to the act of *istikhlāf*, and the use of the term *khalā’if* (6:165; 10:73; 35:39) and *khulafā’* (7:69; 7:74; 27:62) are all related to the vocational conception of man as *khalīfah*.
- 35 Cf. 12:53; 75:2; 89:27.
- 36 This is where a survey of the specialist literature is recommended. In light of the advances in modern biology and embryology and genetic research in general, a new range of Qur’anic scholarship has developed in the past two decades. Ahmad Zaki and Kamal al-Ghamrawi in Egypt probably pioneered this field in the forties, and it gained momentum with the publication of M. Bucaille’s work in the seventies, and the attention it evoked at subsequent Islamic Medical Conferences. While reading the relevant verses on human development in the Qur’an in light of the knowledge of the times is in keeping with the spirit of its injunctions and in line with a tradition of exegesis, it has not gone without controversy. See above note to this effect.

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- 37 O. W. Holmes, *The Essential Holmes: Selections from the Letters, Speeches, Judicial Opinions and other Writings of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr*, ed. Richard A. Posner, Chicago, Ill., University of Chicago Press, 1996, p.108.
- 38 Cf. 35:27-28. Other mention of variation and diversity as signs of mercy in creation and as portents of benefit to man recur, e.g. 2:164; 3:190.
- 39 Knowing One Another op.cit., p.92. Davies elaborates this theme in her work on the meaning and implications of an Islamic Anthropology as she draws on the Qur’anic discourse on creation to construct a conceptual framework for her discipline.
- 40 Qur’an 38:26. “[And We said] ‘O David! Behold, We have made thee (Our) vicegerent on earth: judge, then, between people with justice and do not follow vain desire, lest it lead thee astray from the path of God’: verily, for those who go astray from the path of God there is suffering severe in store for having forgotten the Day of Reckoning!”
- 41 Cf. Kenneth Cragg, *The Privilege of Man: A Theme in Judaism, Islam and Christianity*, The Jordan Lectures, 1967.
- 42 Other more conventional renderings of deputyship are vicegerency, vice-regency, vicarage, each emphasizing different dimensions of rulership and appointment by another to a delegated authority. We prefer to use vassalage in this context to emphasize dimensions of allegiance and overlordship, although vicegerency conveys more strictly the divine command to appoint man for his designated vocation. Muhammad Asad chooses to translate the *khalīfah fī al-ard* (2:30) as “one who shall inherit the earth”, in line with other occurrences of the term and its derivatives (*khalā’if*: successors and inheritors). However, in view of our interpretation of the *amānah* or the trust, and in the presence of the persistent theme of a *mithāq* or a *‘ahd*, we express some reservations about equating *khilāfah* with being given possession of the earth. Our understanding of the semantic field of related concepts of *‘ubudiyyah*, *ulūhiyyah*, and *rubūbiyyah*, further confirms us in our qualification.
- 43 Note too that in contrast with dominion, the *khilāfah* is exercised “within”, or possibly “on/upon” in the sense of acting within a given realm or setting. It is not exercised over and above or against anyone or anything. This again is a nuance which is frequently missed in translations of the Qur’an.
- 44 This favoring through electing occurs in the context of angels, prophets and messengers as well as any of the chosen of God’s servants. Cf. 3:33; 22:75; 38:47; 35:32. Favoring man through religion, i.e. through revealed guidance of the Way is one of God’s paramount mercies, and pre-eminent of man’s privileges (2:133).
- 45 The only time we encounter man alone is at the beginning of time and its end in the beyond (6:94). Other than that, man-*insān* is a being in time who is tested in his resolve as he acts with and amidst a species of his kind.

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- 46 In rendering into English the Meaning of the Qur'an, the various translations contribute to conveying something of the original substance and 'flavour'. At the outset of this essay this verse was rendered using Pickthall's wording, which we find more resonant with the exuberance in the Qur'anic rhythm, but which might be more 'archaic' in terms of current English idiom. My rendering of the verse here draws more on Asad and Yusuf Ali.
- 47 This brief Makkan Surah, *al-Shams* (The Sun), verses 1-10 may be invoked here at the close of our treatise as a reminder and epitome of the observations made about the characteristics of the discourse on the creation of man: in terms of the wholistic perspectives it engenders, its integrative overtones, and its practical directives.
- 48 Cf. in an analogous sense 9:103. Significantly, the third of the "five pillars" of the faith is *zakāt*, the poor-dues, it etymologically comes from the same root signifying to grow and to purify. The command to observe that mandatory spending of *zakāt* (apart from the pervasive urging to maintain charitable spending as a commendable practice, *ṣadaqah*) occurs throughout the Qur'an in the context of the twin command to observe the prayer/ *ṣalāt* in all steadfastness, providing thereby the most persistent reminder of the integrality of man: body and soul, material and moral, as well as the rigorous ground for training for it. e.g. 2:43; 2:83; 2:177; 4:162; 5:55; 19:31; 22:41.
- 49 Cf. in the same sense 2:129; 3:164; 62:2.
- 50 This refers to the *tawqīfī* arrangement of the Qur'an in the order in which it has been handed down in its Othmani recension. As it is known, the *āyāhs* and surahs were revealed to the Prophet over a protracted period of over 22 years; in this sense there was a chronological sequence to the revelation which attended the historical growth and development of the *da'wah*. At the same time, we know that there was another ordering of the Revelation, about which Gibrīl instructed the Prophet. So that as it was revealed *āyah* by *āyah* in time it was also given a sequential ordering which transcended its temporality. Upon the completion of the revelation (5:3 and 2:281) and shortly before his death, the Qur'an was recited whole in its ordained sequence which became the norm for all subsequent recensions. For a contemporary intellectual and aesthetic appreciation of the subject see the late Abdallah Draz's work, *al-Naba' al-ʿAzīm* and *Madkhal ila al-Qur'ān*. For a brief, accurate, and useful summary of the basic account according to its primary Arabic sources see M. Bucaille, *The Bible, the Qur'an, and Science* (trans., Indianapolis: ATP edition, 1979), pp.126-131. The historical and philosophical background of the arrangement of the Qur'an is a separate topic which cannot be gone into here. We raise it simply to show that there is more to it than the facile allegations by some Orientalists who see in it an arbitrary and quantitative editorial sensibility which became fixed and acquired the sanctity of tradition.

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## MONA ABUL - FADL

Mona Abul-Fadl (1945-2008) was an Egyptian scholar of contemporary Western thought and women's studies. Her research interests included political theory, comparative politics, Islam and the Middle East, epistemology, and feminist scholarship. She gained her doctorate from the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London in 1975 and went on to become a full professor at Cairo University, as well as an exchange scholar at the Center for Research and Study of Mediterranean Societies (CRESM) in Aix-en-Provence, France. In 1986 she joined the IIIT engaged by the eminent Professor Ismail al Faruqi impressed by the quality of her scholarship. Here she supervised the Institute's Western Thought Project, continuing the work following his assassination. In 1996, she was appointed Professor of Political Science and Civilizational Studies at the University of Islamic and Social Sciences in Virginia.

As well as her literary output, Abul-Fadl contributed to the establishment of a number of scientific centers, programs and chairs, the most important of which are the establishment of the Zahira Abdin Chair for Women and Gender Studies at Cordoba University, Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences (GSISS) in Virginia in 1998, and the Association for Studying Women in Civilization (ASWIC) which she founded in 1999, a Cairo non-profit organization aiming to raise awareness about the position, role, and status of Muslim women throughout history by conducting historical research, promoting academic scholarship, and organizing seminars and training programs.

Modernity or modernism as a system of thought purporting to be enlightened and universal, has brought with it a crisis of values and a secular perspective that has undermined its own foundations and is provoking a universalized state of existential angst or anomie and moral anarchy.

This treatise provides a reading of the Qur'anic view of man as *insan* against a background of the preoccupations of modernity. The author critiques the rapid devolution of society divorced from spiritual tradition in the modern context. The emphasis is on rationality, freedom, and morality and the goal is the reintegration of man and the recovery of community through a reconciliation of self and the rediscovery of the essential meaning of divine guidance in so far as it relates to human life in this world. Taking the Qur'an as a divine discourse of many tiers and depths, the work singles out aspects of the discourse on creation and takes it as a pivot for developing a view of moral man and moral community, with the focus remaining on the former. The main message is one of relevance, urgency, and opportunity. The urgency and the opportunity lie with man, and the relevance shines through the light of the eternal message and comes from God.

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