

Chapter Two

On Knowledge and Knowing

Scholars have not failed to notice that the emphasis on the acquisition of various branches of knowledge was a characteristic feature of the Islamic civilization.¹ Even in the early modern times several Muslim thinkers and leaders realized the importance of education in the progress of the Muslim community particularly, from their point of view, in strengthening the community against the socio-economic and cultural hegemony of the West. The Ottomans' lifting of their unsuccessful siege of Vienna in 1683, marked a fateful decline in their long standing military superiority—and with it their civilizational pride and confidence. This condition was further exacerbated by the treaties of Carlowitz in 1699 and Passarowitz in 1718. For the equally proud and powerful Moghul Dynasty in India, the defeat of Nawāb Sirāj al-Dawlah's forces by the English East India Company at the battle of Plassey in 1757 gave unmistakable signal of the same condition. The Treaty of Kutruch Quinarji between the Ottomans and the Russians in 1774 further underlined the decline of the military power and civilizational-psychological edge of the Ottomans *vis-à-vis* Europe which, with rare and isolated exceptions, persist till this day. The Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798 merely underlined the military weaknesses of the Muslims. Thus it seems quite natural that the Muslim political leaders from Sultan Selīm III (1789–1807), Sultan Maḥmūd II (1807–1839) to Pasha Muḥammad 'Alī in Egypt (1803–1849) considered that the best way to reverse the decline was to embark on major educational reforms emphasizing the military and

¹ See, for example, A. L. Tibawi, "Philosophy of Muslim Education," *Islamic Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 2, July 1957, pp. 82.; Gustave von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam: A Vital Study of Islam at its Zenith*, 2nd edition (Chicago: Phoenix Books/Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962), pp. 234–250; Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970); Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Concept of Knowledge in Islam and its Implications for Education in a Developing Country* (London & New York: Mansell, 1989), chap. 3; hereafter cited as *The Concept of Knowledge*.

technical sciences, followed later by the other sciences.²

Later Muslim reformers clearly accepted the underlying premise that the primary reason for Muslim downfall was scientific and technological, resulting from an erroneous interpretation of what they considered true Islam. They, such as Sayyid Ahmad Khān of India and Muḥammad 'Abduh of Egypt, two of the most famous and influential reformers, not only promoted education as the primary panacea for the stagnation and backwardness of the Ummah but also attempted to provide intellectual reinterpretation of Islam to accommodate the new developments in the West. The magic word was 'modernization' which in one way or the other means westernization which presupposed nationalism, a sense of innovation, of enterprise and of spontaneity together with some kind of national revival, and a sort of revolution which displaces the old status-quo towards a national solidarity.³ The trend continues into the mid-twentieth century when most Muslim nations gained political independence from Western colonialists, whence all of them pointed to education as the means for national rebuilding and prosperity and their enthusiastic attempt to participate in the modern age.

Al-Attas observed in *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin (Message to the Muslims)* which he completed in early 1973 that many Muslim leaders only looked at the obvious external causes that led to the deplorable condition of the Muslim Community. These leaders, being influenced by Western ideas and values, then sought to revitalize the Community by employing the wrong means either by westernizing Islam through the system of education, or as in the extreme case of Kemal Atatürk, to do away with Islam altogether.⁴ That is why, al-Attas wrote later in the same year in response to a questionnaire on the problems of the contemporary Muslim world sent by the Islamic Secretariat then based in Jeddah

² Bernard Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 2nd edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), chaps. 3 and 4; Ghulam Nabi Saqib, *Modernization of Muslim Education in Egypt, Pakistan, and Turkey: A Comparative Study* (Lahore: Islamic Urdu Service, 1983), pp. 79–80.

³ Marshall S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 3 vols. (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 3: 246.

⁴ *Risalah*, para. 16, pp. 58–59. Cf. *Aims and Objectives*, p. 1.

In most Muslim countries today many Muslims think that their problems stem from economic or scientific and technological inadequacy. Although it seems that at first glance this is true, and yet, however, the real crux of the problem, from which stems all other problems, is the problem of knowledge (*al-'ilm*). Except for myself and perhaps one or two other Muslim philosophers no Muslim scholar in my opinion has considered the problem of knowledge to be a basic one for the Muslim today.⁵

For al-Attas the problem of knowledge in education is paramount. Education is not merely a means to socio-economic ends, but primarily for the spiritual ends of man. The socio-economic and political aspects are by no means insignificant, but they are subservient and instrumental to the spiritual ones. Knowledge then needs to be defined in relation to the spiritual reality of man. The proper revival of the Muslims should start not just with greater emphasis on education, which seems natural, but with greater emphasis on the right conception of knowledge, starting from the university level all the way down to the secondary and primary levels. In the same letter he also suggested that the Islamic Secretariat hold a gathering of Muslim scholars "to carry out a concentrated and detailed research on the Islamic conception of knowledge with a view to establish an Islamic University in which and through which such a conception of knowledge will be disseminated."⁶ An elaborate discussion of his conception and practical development of the Islamic university shall be provided in the next chapter.

In a very important paper, entitled *Islam: the Concept of Religion and the Foundation of Ethics and Morality*, delivered in the hall of the Royal Commonwealth Society London to the International Islamic Conference, on 5 April 1976, al-Attas again underlined that "the greatest challenge" that has surreptitiously arisen in our age is the challenge of knowledge. Unlike earlier as well as many contemporary

⁵ Letter to the Islamic Secretariat dated 15 May 1973. The writer wishes to thank Prof. al-Attas for letting him use this document.

⁶ *Ibid*.

thinkers and reformers, al-Attas does not merely posit knowledge against ignorance—which can be easily corrected by adopting any successful and popular educational program—but against knowledge as conceived and disseminated by Western civilization which is far more intellectual and challenging in nature. As far as this writer knows, al-Attas is the first among contemporary Muslim scholars to recognize that knowledge, and not merely education, is *not* neutral. In 1973 he wrote in *Risalah* warning the Muslims:

We should know, and earnestly realize that knowledge is not truly neutral (*sebenarnya tidak bersifat neutral*); that different cultures have their own conceptions about knowledge, even though there are similarities. There exist such profound and absolute differences between Islam and Western culture such that they cannot be reconciled.⁷

Thus knowledge is indeed infused with the worldview, the religious and cultural elements and experiences of a particular person, and by extension, his culture and civilization. In addition, matters of opinion and conjectures which reflect these personal, religious and cultural elements, more often than not masquerade as knowledge.⁸ Human knowledge is not neutral because it is an attribute (*sifat*) of a living human being. What exists outside of the human mind is not knowledge; they are things, facts and information which are the objects of knowledge. The arrangement of numbers, $2 + 2 = 4$ on a piece of paper in front of a child for example, is meaningless to him, and therefore is not knowledge to him. Similarly, the Holy Qur'an is nothing to unbelievers, but it is the most important source of knowledge and guidance to Muslims. We shall deal with this matter in some detail in the context of the Islamization of contemporary knowledge in chapter 6.

⁷ *Risalah*, para. 17, p. 61.

⁸ As stated in the first chapter, this monograph, hereafter will be cited as IFOEM, was published independently by Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia in 1976, and a large part of it is later incorporated as chapter 3 in *Islam and Secularism*. The monograph has been reprinted by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Kuala Lumpur, 1992; cf. IFOEM, pp. 44–45.

In the *Risalah*, al-Attas considers the introduction of a system of education and the dissemination of knowledge by the West, particularly to the Muslims, as new and more subtle forms of the age-old attempts by the West to force her ideas and worldview, when direct confrontation and Christianization have failed. In fact Christianity has not been able to fundamentally transform even the Western man; on the contrary, it is Christianity that has been Hellenized and Westernized. Therefore, when Christianity was brought to the Muslim lands with colonial armies, it was nothing but a strategic instrument to distract (*alat pengacah*) Muslims. The ultimate cultural purpose of western colonialism is not to disseminate the Christian religion but the secular. Western worldview with its conception of knowledge and other related matters.⁹ This fundamental challenge of knowledge cannot be taken up successfully by Muslims who are confused concerning the real problems and their roots. Most regard corrupt political and other forms of leadership as their real problems and seek to acquire the political power in their respective communities and nations. Although these have been realized, and the Colonial masters have been forced to return to their respective homelands, the problems of the Community have not been fundamentally alleviated. Al-Attas argues that the problems of leadership are merely the superficial ones manifesting a more fundamental cause. To the question "What is corrupt about the leadership?" al-Attas himself answers that it is the confusion and error in knowledge of these leaders that are the primary causes for corrupt leadership at all levels, to emerge and to perpetuate a vicious circle enabling their continuous grip on the minds of a confused Community. At the crucial levels of societal organizations, such leadership would ensure the implementation of an educational system that will not truly enlighten the souls and minds of the Community, but rather to busy them with the pursuit of the physical and psychological pleasures and goals. Ethics and religion will no doubt be emphasised; but they are interpreted in such a manner as to ensure the further attainment of the physical and psychological goals carefully set for the Community. For a successful realization of such a scheme, morally weak and intellectually confused individuals are nurtured and appointed as leaders in the religious,

⁹ *Risalah*, para. 17, pp. 60–62.

educational, political, bureaucratic and economic spheres whose new authority is based mostly on economic and military power, manipulation of democratic processes aided by a controlled media. This state of perpetual confusion at all levels of societal leadership is ingeniously termed by al-Attas as the loss of *adab*.¹⁰ This can be describe as follows:

1. Confusion and error in knowledge; creating the condition for:
2. The loss of *adab* within the Community. The condition arising out of (1) and (2) is:
3. The rise of leaders who are not qualified for valid leadership of the Muslim Community, who do not possess the high moral, intellectual and spiritual standards required for Islamic leadership, who perpetuate the condition in (1) above and ensure the continued control of the affairs of the Community by leaders like them who dominate all fields.¹¹

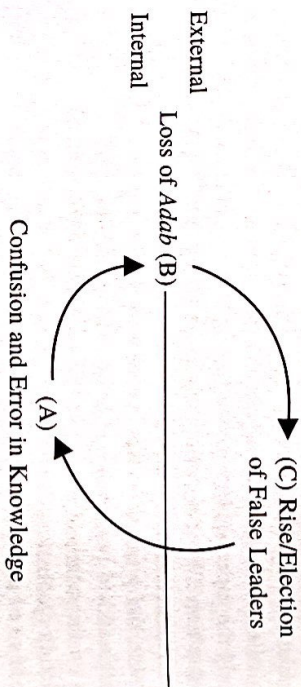


Figure 1

As he explains in *Risalah*, the confusion and error in knowledge is the primary cause of the vicious circle represented in Figure 1 but the first step that must be taken is not at level A. The

¹⁰ *IS*, pp. 99 ff.; CEII, pp. 34-35; *Risalah*, para. 53, pp. 179-181.
¹¹ *Risalah*, para. 53, p. 180; *IS*, p. 100; *Aims and Objectives*, pp. 2-3.

vicious circle can only be effectively cut and the proper development of the Muslim Community be achieved if effective and sustained efforts to solve the problems at point B, are carried out. This is because knowledge cannot be taught and inculcated in the soul of an individual unless he, as the future seeker and bearer of knowledge, first fulfils the requirements of *adab*. The Qur'an, which is the source of true knowledge, cannot even be touched without prior fulfillment of the requirement of *adab*, i.e., by the taking of ablution.¹² That *adab* is prior to knowledge can also be easily seen: any student must have initial trust and confidence in the teacher without which no true education can proceed. This is not only most clearly evident in the lower stages of education, but also in the highest stages particularly in the case of post-graduate work. The institution of supervision at this level presupposes the existence of prior trust based on the recognition and acknowledgement of the supervisor's authority by the student which, as shall be shown in this chapter, are primary ingredients of *adab*. Therefore, for the entirety of his academic life, al-Attas has been struggling for the restatement and revivification of the traditional Islamic conception of *adab* and knowledge and the related epistemological processes, starting at the highest level of education and systematically moving down to the lowest. By discovering the pervasive loss of *adab*, rooted in the confusion and error in knowledge, and giving the former a new definition while remaining within boundaries of original meanings embedded in its roots, al-Attas had in fact discovered what Fazlur Rahman called "a master idea" with which he analysed important aspects of ontological and cosmological realities and connected them to other key terms which are fundamental elements of the Islamic worldview. As for the emphasis on higher education, we have seen earlier reformers who saw the same light, such as 'Abdullah who dedicated much of his life to reforming al-Azhar, and Ahmad Khān who established Aligarh Muslim College. In fact 'Abdullah has been quoted as saying, "Reforming it [al-Azhar] amounts to reforming the Muslim world."¹³ Fazlur Rahman too, in the epilogue to the second edition of his *Islam*,

¹² *Risalah*, para. 53, p. 181.
¹³ Jamal Mohammed Ahmed, *The Intellectual Origins of Egyptian Nationalism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 37.

stresses the need to articulate the worldview of Islam, based on a systematic study of the Qur'ān. There he also suggested that any Islamic reform now must begin with education, particularly higher education.¹⁴ However, much earlier than Fazlur Rahman, al-Attas did not merely stress the importance of higher education and its reforms, but as shall be seen in chapter 4, he also proposed a philosophical and systematic interpretation of an Islamic university, as well as developed its concrete manifestation, placing it as the target and model of all levels of education below it.

KNOWLEDGE AND THE ISLAMIC CREED

It is rather obvious now that there are profound implications, both at the theoretical and practical levels, of al-Attas' metaphysics on education. Al-Attas' educational philosophy and methods are basically traditional: affirming, synthesizing, clarifying, restating, and where necessary, improving or modifying the thoughts and practices of eminent scholars and spiritual leaders of the past. His emphasis on the importance of knowledge, not as a socio-economic commodity but as an invaluable means of man's spiritual fulfillment and happiness is a direct inspiration from Islam and the Islamic religious and

intellectual tradition. Al-Attas explains that happiness in Islam is neither merely a concept nor a constantly elusive goal nor still a temporarily experienced physical pleasure or state of mind. Rather, it is a spiritual quality permanently and consciously experienced here in this world and more so in the hereafter. As stated in the previous chapter, man's happiness is certainty (*yaqīn*) on the ultimate matters concerning the nature of reality, his identity and destiny in the hereafter. Further, happiness involves conformity through knowing submission and willing obedience to the teachings of God and His Holy Prophet. Both these conditions of certainty and conformity are the bases of Islamic virtues (*faḍā'il*, sing. *faḍīlah*), both external and internal, which include the performance of all the religious duties and spiritual exercises, the abstinence from all religious prohibitions as well as the proper exercise of wisdom, temperance, courage and justice. All of these virtues presuppose prior knowledge,¹⁵ which underlines the role of knowledge as the fundamental element in the creed of Islam (*'aḳīdah*). The possibility of attaining knowledge and the subsequent obligation for every Muslim to seek it are part and parcel of the Islamic creed. Although knowledge is different from virtue, yet it is the fundamental ground of all virtues. Conversely and in the same manner, even though most people are not evil by nature, they somehow commit evil actions and injustices due to ignorance,¹⁶ Al-Attas, following the Islamic conception of ignorance (*jahl*) as explained by Ibn Manzūr in *Lisān al-'Arab*, states that ignorance (*jahl*) is of two kinds: the simple which means lack of knowledge of what should be known; and the compound, which means decisive belief not agreeable with the fact or reality; the believing a thing to be different from what it is, the doing of a thing in a manner different

¹⁴ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, 2nd edition (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 256, 260. Fazlur Rahman's interest in a coherent Islamic framework and its application to certain problems related to the education of the Muslims particularly in Pakistan, can be seen in his early articles "The Qur'anic Concept of God, Universe and Man," *Islamic Studies* 6 (March 1967): 1-20; and "The Qur'anic Solutions of Pakistan's Educational Problems," *Islamic Studies* 6 (April 1967): 315-326. Many ideas in the former article are elaborated further in a later book, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān* (Minneapolis and Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980). It is quite clear that in the first edition of his *Islam* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966) p. 253, Fazlur Rahman talks about the problems of the Muslims and stresses that the real remedy "lies in the basic reform of the modern educational system and in imparting genuine Islamic values in schools and colleges". The stress on higher education especially the university, does not appear in Fazlur Rahman's earlier writings on education, except in the *Epilogue* of the second edition of *Islam* which he wrote after his book, *Islam and Modernity* was already completed and in the process of publication. See *Islam*, p. 273, note 1.

¹⁵ Al-Attas, *Happiness*, pp. 1-12, 17-24.
¹⁶ Private discussion at his office, ISTAC, 28 January 1993. This position, with minor variations in the formulation, is accepted by all Muslim scholars including of course Ibn Ḥazm. See for example, Anwar Chejne, *Ibn Ḥazm* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1982), pp. 56. Ibn Ḥazm says in his *al-aḥḳāq wa'l-siyar* that "knowledge has a great deal to do with every virtue, and that ignorance has a share in every vice....no one will ever achieve virtue without learning the sciences except (the Prophets)". Cited from Chejne, *ibid.*, p. 66.

from that in which it ought to be done.¹⁷ It is clear that ignorance (*jahil*) understood at both levels of meanings is the primary cause of human vices. While the simple type of ignorance can be easily remedied through normal instruction or education, the compound type, as shall be elaborated below in this chapter, is more dangerous to the proper development of truly knowledgeable, religious and moral individuals and society because this type of ignorance is grounded in a spiritual defect which is a stubborn refusal to accept the truth. It is instructive that among the educated and philosophically minded circles in the West, ignorance is recognized only at the first level. It is defined as

the absence of knowledge in a subject capable of possessing such knowledge. Ignorance is *privative*, if the knowledge ought to be possessed, e.g., a judge's ignorance of law; otherwise the ignorance is *negative*, e.g., a laborer's ignorance of calculus. Ignorance is *invincible*, when it can in no way be removed; *vincible*, when it can be removed.¹⁸

In his introduction in *The Oldest Known Malay Manuscript* which deals with the Malay translation of the Islamic creed as formulated by Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar al-Nasafī (d. 1142), al-Attas says in opposing the Sophists and affirming the possibility, objectivity and causes of knowledge of realities:

Beginning the creed [by al-Nasafī] on definite statements about knowledge is most significant, for Islam is a religion based upon knowledge, and a denial of the possibility and objectivity of knowledge would involve the destruction of the fundamental basis upon which not only the religion, but all the sciences are rooted.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Commentary*, p. 200. For a detailed discussion and references, see also our work, *The Concept of Knowledge in Islam*, pp. 78-79.

¹⁸ Walter F. Cunningham, *Notes on Epistemology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1958), p. 3.

¹⁹ *The Oldest Known Malay Manuscript: A 16th Century Malay Translation of the 'Aqā'id of al-Nasafī* (Kuala Lumpur: Dept. of Publications, The University of Malaya, 1988), p. 47, hereafter cited as *The Oldest Malay Manuscript*.

Al-Attas consistently rejects the allegations by some Orientalists that the creed of Islam underwent some kind of historically conditioned development. In many cases it is clear that these writers are interested in creating parallelism between the development of Christian theology or Western thought and practices and those of Islam, perhaps to calm down their own long-standing doubts and in some cases to universalize their experiences. The Western man is inclined, according to al-Attas, to regard his own experience and consciousness as those representative of the most 'evolved' of the species and all others are expected to later realize the same experience and consciousness.²⁰ In this vein, Watt, for example, has suggested that "a basic intellectual reconstruction of the Islamic world-view is necessary, if it is to get rid of false and erroneous elements and achieve a truer image of the place of Islam in the contemporary world".²¹ The parallelisms with the history of Christianity and of Western thought are abundantly drawn. For example, he stresses that the methods of historical and literary criticism as well as the results and methods of science must be accepted, and lead in the end to deeper understanding, even if some unessential and secondary points of traditional belief have to be abandoned. He mentions examples "of what Western historical criticism can only regard as palpable errors" such as the Qur'ānic usage of Maryam which, according to him, is confused with Miriam the sister of Aaron (*Maryam* (19): 28) and Mary the mother of Jesus. Another more serious historical error, according to him, is the Qur'ānic denial that Jesus was crucified and died on the cross (*al-Nisā'* (4): 157) when "the death of Jesus through crucifixion is one of the most certain facts of all ancient history."²² Watt also could not accept the Muslims' refusal to accept certain modern scientific "facts" such as the evolutionary nature of the world and of human origin and development "when Christian theologians now mostly accept evolution as a fact, and hold that God creates the world through the evolutionary process."²³

²⁰ *IS*, pp. 22-23.

²¹ William Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 88.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 83, 88.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 49. He betrays his intolerance in the same place: "...these Muslims

A few decades earlier, Wensinck, while discussing the *hadiiths* of the Holy Prophet on the pillars of faith (*imān*) and religion (*islām*), concludes that "These traditions go back to a type that may be regarded as characteristic of the earliest phases of religions such as Christianity and Islam". His main position is to prove that such *hadiiths* "must be regarded as the outcome of the theological labour carried out by the generation of the Companions". To al-Attas, the usage of the phrase "must be regarded.." by Wensinck betrays "a strong belief" implying that the latter does not have sufficient evidence to prove his point.²⁴ This position of Wensinck follows his earlier statement that "We must not seek to find it in Muḥammad. Neither his nature, nor the course of his life, can justify us in expecting a creed from him."²⁵ Another example deals with a tradition in which the Holy Prophet, in answer to a question posed by a Bedouin concerning the way to enter heaven and to avoid hellfire, said that he should serve Allah without associating anything with Him, should perform the five daily obligatory prayers, pay the compulsory alms (*ṣakāḥ*), and keep the sacred bonds of relationship. Wensinck declared that the parallelism between this tradition and that of the New Testament is obvious, and requires no comment. He added that the way to Paradise is a way of service. Faith is not directly stated, only implied.²⁶ Such a conclusion is unjustified because faith in God and in

fail to realize that what scientists are disputing is a *theory* of how evolution came about, not the *fact* that *homo sapiens* has evolved from lower forms of life. It is somewhat pathetic to see Muslim traditionalists thus clutching at straws."

²⁴ One of al-Attas' incisive criticisms of Professor A. Teeuw's arguments on the origins of the Malay *shā'ir* is based on the latter's usage of the phrase "there must have been...." See al-Attas, *The Origins of the Malay Shā'ir* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka, 1968), p. 9. The same strong belief can be seen in Watt's assertion that "Muhammad must have shared in the un-Islamic beliefs of his fellow Meccans when he was a young man" (italics added). Watt, *Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity*, p. 86.

²⁵ A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development*, 1932 (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1979), pp. 19-20.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 20. Watt seems to share this characteristically Christian "either-or" perspective, when he says that Muslims are more concerned with right conduct or orthopraxy than with right belief, hence their giving precedence

the Holy Prophet, for example, are not merely implied, they are prior necessities in the case of Islam without which the prayers, compulsory alms, and the keeping of sacred bonds can never be properly actualized. Furthermore, such a tradition merely elaborates and complements the teachings of the Holy Qur'ān. The same cannot be said of the New Testament because the role of God often takes a back seat to that of Jesus. Moreover, the language, content and form of prayers of Jesus, his disciples and the earliest Christians are not known; all these as well as other religious duties developed historically. Conveniently ignoring the obvious fundamental credal statements that are numerous found in the Holy Qur'ān, and which have been utilised by all Muslim theologians, Wensinck comments that

the Kur'an does not proclaim a compendium of faith that could serve as a characteristic description of Islam, either in contrast with other religions, or as a means of distinction from the peculiar doctrines of the sects. In the same way the creeds of the Christian church could not be directly taken from the New Testament. Nevertheless, the Kur'an contains the elements of the *Shahada*.²⁷

Comparing theological 'developments' in Islam with similar developments in Christianity is not justified. Christianity, according to al-Attas, and affirmed by its own authorities, has experienced hundreds of years of development by borrowing from many different cultural and religious sources of ancient Greece, Rome, Egypt, Persia, the Jewish nation, and the European tribes, and by submitting to the demands of historical changes.²⁸ Al-Attas clarifies that

In the beginning Christians did not even know the nature of their religion, for the Cross was not then used. Other

to jurisprudence rather than theology. W. M. Watt, *Islamic Creeds: A Selection*, gen. ed. C. Hillenbrand, Islamic Survey (Edinburgh: EUP, 1994), pp. 3-4.

²⁷ Wensinck, *Islamic Creeds*, p. 5.

²⁸ *Risālah*, para. 30, p. 108.

symbols were used instead. The term "Christian" was given by their enemies.... Ways of worship and other religious rituals and duties cannot be claimed to have been derived from the *Sumnah* of Jesus, for all of them were derived from a mixture of their own cultural tradition. The creeds too are the product of creative efforts, additions and compromises [*hasil penggabungan dan tokok-tambah dan tolak ansur*] and are further embellished and refined producing their present characteristic features.²⁹

Al-Attas explains that on the other hand, Islam as the only truly revealed religion was already complete, fully developed and perfected during the lifetime of the last Prophet as confirmed by God Almighty in *al-Mā'idah* (5): 3: "This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed my favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion". Al-Attas argues further that the name of the religion of Islam and its adherents as Muslims as well as its form and substance were clearly given in the Holy Qur'ān and not by their enemies nor by historical development. In addition, the language and forms of worship and other religious rituals and duties were known and established in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet.³⁰ Generations of Muslim scholars and sages did not and could not conceive any article of Islamic creed independent of the Holy Qur'ān and the Traditions; what they all did and shall continue to do with regard to the Islamic

²⁹ Ibid., para 30, p. 109. The statements by S. J. McCarthy, at the end of his introduction to his useful translations of Al-Ash'ari's *Kitāb al-Luma'* and *Risalah Ishtihān al-Khawāḍi' fī 'Ilm al-Kalām*, in the light of our present discussions seem quite true. He writes, "Naturally I believe myself to be of my Muslim friends" (my emphasis). "Wider and deeper" because it covers all the cultural traditions and influences mentioned by al-Attas earlier. See Richard J. McCarthy, S. J. *The Theology of Ash'ari* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1953) p. xv.

³⁰ *Risalah*, para. 30, pp. 110–111; idem, "The Muslim Encounter with Modern Western Civilization: Secularization and the Crisis of Identity", paper presented to the Royal Academy of Jordan at *The 10th General Conference of the Royal Academy Jordan*, 5–7 July 1995, Amman, p. 26. Hereafter cited as "The Muslim Encounter."

creed, are only to interpret, comment and systematise what are already stipulated and indicated in the two sources. While they may add certain articles to, or remove from the previous formulations, or reformulate them in a more philosophical language, the contents are derived from the Qur'ān and the Traditions. Otherwise their formulations would be rejected by a knowing Community. Some of the profound religious debates, the intellectual and political developments that must have been known to the respective formulator(s) were naturally reflected in their formulations.

Therefore the statement of al-Nasafi on the possibility of having certain knowledge of the realities of things (*laqā'iq al-ashyā'* *thābitah wa 'l-'ilm bihā mutalāqiq*) as the third article in his '*Aqā'id*³¹ is not a development of the creed of Islam, for the emphasis on knowledge has been overwhelming and definite in the Qur'ān and the Traditions of the Prophet, a subject which we have treated in some detail elsewhere.³² It suffices here to state that the most oft-repeated word in the Holy Qur'ān, after the names of God, is knowledge and its various synonyms.³³ The Holy Qur'ān's very first revelation to the Holy Prophet (*al-'Alaq* (96): 1–5) characterised God as the Creator Who teaches man what he knows not. The story of the creation of Man and of his role on Earth are integrally connected with his ability to know, which is of various degrees of certainty, namely through cognition, perception and experience.³⁴ Because of such a position on the possibility of knowledge, not only of the world of sense and sensible experience but also of the spiritual realities, the Qur'ān states categorically in *Fātir* (35): 28, that only those with knowledge ('*ulamā'*) can truly be fearful of God. It is therefore natural that the earliest formulation of the Islamic creed such as the *Fiqh Akbar I*, already assumes such a position in the second article ("We enjoin what is just and prohibit what is evil"). Consequently, the attacks against sophistical positions were already seen in the eighth, ninth and tenth articles, i.e., against those who say that they do not know of the prophethood of Moses or Jesus, of God's location in a particular place,

³¹ *The Oldest Malay Manuscript*, p. 101.

³² Wan Daud, *The Concept of Knowledge in Islam*, chaps. 3 and 4.

³³ See also Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 20.

³⁴ *Al-Takathur* (102): 3–7, and *al-Haqqah* (69): 51.

and of the existence of punishment in the grave.³⁵

Following the Qur'ānic position and that of prominent scholars of the past such as al-Baghdādī (d. 1037/8), al-Nasafī (d. 1142), al-Taftāzānī (d. 1387/8) and Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānī (d. 1658) and others on the possibility of knowledge and their rejection of those who deny it, who are technically known as the Sophists, al-Attas classifies them into three major groups. The first is the *al-lā adriyyah* or the agnostics, who claim that they do not know (*lā adri*, "I do not know") or doubt whether a thing has real existence, and therefore deny that knowledge of anything is possible. Consequently, they would also have to doubt their own doubt. Next is *al-'indiyyah*, the epistemological subjectivists who, unlike the first, do not deny the possibility of knowledge and truth but only their objective nature. They regard knowledge and truth as only subjectively real ('*indi*, "according to me or in my opinion"), depending on one's opinion. The third group is the *al-'inādiyyah* or the obstinate who deny the realities of things (*haqā'iq al-ashyā'*) and regard them as mere fancies (*awhām*) and figments of the imagination (*khayālāt*). In a way they are related to the second group.³⁶ The Sophists do not, and cannot establish their own positions; their only forte is, in contemporary parlance, to deconstruct.³⁷ The Sophists are clearly outside the pale of Islam because even the philosophers in Islam such as al-Fārābī place the attainment of certainty as an end of learning.³⁸

The Greek Sophists were the classic examples of those who deny knowledge and certainty about anything from simple experience to the ultimate spiritual realities. Xenophanes (fl. ca. 550 B.C.) one of the earliest of the unofficial Sophists, while challenging the popular Greek religious superstitions, expresses this position that no man has or will ever see certain truth about the gods, and even if anybody could say that it is true, he could not be conscious of it. His younger contemporary, who many Sophists regarded as their mentor,

³⁵ Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, pp. 104–105.

³⁶ *Commentary*, pp. 206–207; also al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, pp. 15–18.

³⁷ James L. Jarrett, *The Educational Theories of the Sophists*, *Classics in Education* 39 (New York: Teachers College Press Columbia University, 1969), p. 67.

³⁸ Fuad Said Haddad, "An Early Arab Theory of Instruction", *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* no. 5 (1975), p. 243.

Heracitus, justifies his conception of relative knowledge on simple experience: sea, water is a source of food for fish, destruction for man.³⁹ Later, Protagoras, the first and the greatest of the Greek Sophists, as reported by Plato, proclaimed one of the most influential statements of philosophical relativism: "About the gods, I am not able to know whether they exist or not, nor what they are like in form; for the factors preventing knowledge are many: the obscurity of the subject, and the shortness of human life."⁴⁰ This moderate skepticism in spiritual matters is radicalized by Giorgias who declares that "Nothing exists; if anything exists, it is incomprehensible. If it is comprehensible, it is incommunicable."⁴¹

Different forms of sophism continue to be influential throughout history to this day. Al-Attas regards many of the present philosophical and religious problems as not substantially different from those confronted by the prophets and scholars of the past; only that the magnitude of the present ones far supersedes those of the past. On many of these problems, past Muslim scholars and thinkers have already provided cogent and correct responses, therefore he suggests that knowing their responses would economise our thinking in confronting the fundamentally similar problems today. For example, the various trends of biological and historical evolutionism are merely newer versions of the idea of the eternity of the world that al-Ghazālī used to confront in the 11th century.⁴² This is particularly so in the areas of philosophy and education when many modern scholars regard the Sophists as forerunners of educational theorizing in the West. According to Jarrett, the Sophists radicalized education by popularizing intellectual inquiry, placing great value on oratory and extending formal education well into young adulthood.⁴³ They would employ logic, rhetorics, language science and history to impress and win arguments and finally to lead a good secular life. They

brought the whole spirit of argumentation, polemic, and general contentiousness out from the councils of war

³⁹ James L. Jarrett, *The Educational Theories of the Sophists*, pp. 6–8.

⁴⁰ Quoted from *ibid.*, p. 50.

⁴¹ Quoted from *ibid.*, p. 68.

⁴² Personal discussion with al-Attas at ISTAC, 28 January 1993.

⁴³ Jarrett, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

and diplomatic maneuverings of heads of state into the everyday life of the (Greek) citizenry....to learn to challenge others' opinions, to lay verbal traps for one's opponents, to inveigh against authority, to orate with eloquence: These are instruments of influence and ambitions.⁴⁴

A modern influential philosopher, Richard Rorty proclaims the new sophistical principle on knowledge, that the nature of knowledge is to have no nature, and therefore there can be no theories of knowledge. Little can be said on the nature of truth, of man, and of God, etc. He proposes what he calls "edifying philosophy" which, like the sophists of old, can only be reactive, offering only optional descriptions. The role of edifying philosophy is to prevent man from deluding himself with the notion that he can know himself or anything else. What is hoped for is only conversation between humans, looking for some common ground, common interests.⁴⁵ Al-Attas mentions his experience with the *lā adriyyah* type of sophism, the neo-Murji'ah, among the many modern educated secular Muslims as well as among other religious communities. They tend to reduce religion (*dīn*) to faith (*īmān*) without work ('*amal*'). They believe that faith (*īmān*) is in the heart, therefore religion is a personal matter. No authority can judge the validity of the faith of another person. The position of the generality of the Muslim scholars is that religion (*dīn*) is a unity of both *īmān* and *islām*. They affirm that knowledge and good works are integral parts of faith, which is of various degrees. To illustrate this,

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 16.

⁴⁵ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 89, 378 ff. A very good analysis of the book is done by Anders Tolland, *Epistemological Relativism and Relativistic Epistemology: Richard Rorty and the Possibility of a Philosophical Theory of Knowledge* (Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1991). In an interview almost one and a half decades later, Rorty explains his philosophical journey and his position on the role of philosophy and philosophers. Affirming that ideas did and will continue to have social consequences, he cautions against the intolerance and finitude that result from having a synoptic vision of reality. See "There's No Big Picture", *Chicago Magazine*, vol. 86, no. 4, April 1994, p. 23.

al-Attas sometimes gives the analogy of light: there are various degrees and qualities of brightness, yet they are all called "light". The light of the sun is the brightest: the light of the moon, and the reflection of moonlight on the wall are different degrees and qualities of the same light. The Holy Prophet also has been reported to have said that if one sees an evil act, one must correct that with the hand; if not, with the tongue; if not, by the heart, and that is the weakest of *īmān* (*ad'ūf al-īmān*).⁴⁶ Therefore the first article in *Wasīyah Abi Ḥanīfah*, the eleventh in the *Fiqh Akbar 11*, the eleventh in the *Creed* of al-Taḥāwī, saying that faith (*īmān*) consists of assent in the heart and knowledge in the mind,⁴⁷ can be interpreted, as was done by al-Baghḍādī, as only of the first, or weakest level. The definition by al-Baghḍādī⁴⁸ and affirmed by the fifteenth article of the '*Aqā'id* of al-Nasafī that true faith (*īmān*) is to assent (*tasdiq*) to the truth of what is brought by the Prophet Muḥammad and to confess (*iqrār*).⁴⁹ Therefore, a scholars also affirmed the unity of *īmān* and *islām*.⁴⁹ Therefore, a person's faith can be known adequately by his words and deeds, thereby making religious education possible.

Many modern Western thinkers and religionists are infected with tragic doubts on fundamental matters. For example, a study of 112 Protestant and Catholic professors of theology in the United States in 1981 showed, interestingly, that 1% did not believe in the existence of God, that 88% believed in an immortal life and 50% believed in the doctrine of hell.⁵⁰ A further corroboration of this phenomenon is

⁴⁶ This *ḥadīth* is found in the corpus of Muslim, Abu Dawūd, al-Tirmidhī, an-Nasā'ī, Ibn Mājah and Ahmad ibn Hanbal. See A. J. Wensinck, *Concordance et Indices de la Tradition Musulmane*, 7 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1936), 1: 110.

⁴⁷ Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, pp. 125 and 194.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 134.

⁴⁹ *The Oldest Malay Manuscript*, Malay trans. pp. 58-59; English trans. pp. 70-71; '*Aqā'id* Arabic Text p. 122; Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, pp. 132 ff. *Islām* here refers to the well-accepted definition as consisting of five pillars: proclaiming the Oneness of God and the Prophethood of Muḥammad, performance of five daily prayers, payment of *zakaāt*, fasting in Ramaḍān, and performance of pilgrimage at least once in a lifetime.

⁵⁰ Michael Harrington, *Politics Besides God's Funeral: The Spiritual Crisis of Western Civilization*, p. 165.

provided by an incident involving the Church of England. Understandably enough, dismissed a vicar for writing a book declaring that "There is nothing out there—or if there is, we can have no knowledge of it." But what is most instructive is that the dismissal received angry protests from 65 of his fellow clergymen who said that the order "reverses a long Church of England tradition that tolerates and values a wide range of views."⁵¹ Sophism has actually pervaded many levels of modern life, especially in the West, leading to moral relativism, cynicism and a weakening moral resolve in all levels of personal, social and political experiences.⁵² One glaring example of the result of this fatal relativism and moral uncertainty is the policy of neutrality of the United Nations Organization in the issue of Bosnia-Herzegovina which has led to the massacres, rapes and tortures of the worst kind in modern history since the Second World War. Al-Attas has been arguing, for the past three decades, based on the Islamic conception, that justice is not impartiality or neutrality, but partiality to the truth. But how can one be partial to the truth when its very existence is doubted?

Postmodernism and the theory of the transcendent unity of religions, which are founded on the plurality of equally valid truths, are newer but different versions of the 'indiyah' type of sophism. Postmodernism is more inclined to anti-religious or non-religious relativism and nihilism,⁵³ while the transcendentalists, if one may call them so, are espousing a more subtle form of relativism, in the

⁵¹ *International Herald Tribune* (Singapore), 29 July 1994. *The Tribune* is a combination of *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* newspapers.

⁵² Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), pp. 1-4.

⁵³ A useful summary of postmodernism as it relates to some sociological aspects of contemporary Muslim life is given by Akbar S. Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), especially chap. 1. For one of the most poignant criticisms of postmodern rejection of the possibility of religious worldviews, see Huston Smith, "Postmodernism and the World's Religions," in *Islam and the Challenge of Modernity: Proceedings of the Inaugural Symposium on Islam and the Challenge of Modernity—Historical and Contemporary Contexts*, Kuala Lumpur, August 1-5, 1994, ed. Sharifah Shifa al-Attas (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1996), pp. 485-508.

external aspects of religions.⁵⁴ The transcendentalist trend propagated the notion that all religions are ultimately, at the transcendent level, the same. Doctrinal and ritualistic differences are only at the lower level of our experience and therefore secondary to the unity that exists at the higher, transcendent level. Fritjof Schuon, in *Gnosis—Divine Wisdom* (1959), for example, argues that

We observe the existence, on earth, of diverse races, whose differences are 'valid' since there are no 'false' as opposed to 'true' races;...the existence of multiple languages, and no one thinks of contesting their legitimacy; the same holds good for the sciences and the arts. Now it would be astonishing if this diversity did not occur also on the religious plane, that is to say if the diversity of human receptacles did not involve diversity of the divine contents, from the point of view of form, of the essence....so each religion is of necessity on its own plane 'religion', without any comparison or relative connotation which, in view of the end to be attained, would be meaningless; to say 'religion' is to say 'unique religion'; explicitly to practise one religion, is implicitly to practice them all.⁵⁵

It is quite incredulous that a scholar of Schuon's ability does not perceive that the natural differences between races such as the colour of their skin and languages cannot be properly compared to differences between religions which are not natural. There are obvious fundamental differences even among human individuals of similar

⁵⁴ The most ardent and sophisticated proponent of this trend, as far as the Muslims are concerned, is provided by Fritjof Schuon and his Muslim followers, one of the most influential of whom is Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Nasr however denies that Schuon's notion of transcendent unity of religions is analogous to relativism. However, it is clear that the relativism they are denying is the type that is based on secular-humanism. S. H. Nasr, ed., *The Essential Writings of Fritjof Schuon* (New York: Amity House, 1986), p. 15. Huston Smith, who upholds many possible and valid religious worldviews, also rejects relativism of the postmodernists. Smith, "Postmodernism and the World's Religions", pp. 501-508.

⁵⁵ Cited from Nasr, ed., *The Essential Writings of Fritjof Schuon*, p. 152.

ethnic and linguistic background, say, between the Holy Prophet and Abū Jahl, his arch-enemy: even though there are inherently essential similarities, there are indeed profound qualitative, and inherent differences between the two! Even in the natural world, for example in the genus of horses, the differences between the Arabian thoroughbreds and the Dartmoor and Shetland ponies are significant despite certain essential similarities. Further, Schuon's position is not tenable because it cannot explain how people from similar racial and linguistic groups choose to adhere to different religions. The Jews and the Arabs, for example, were from the same racial and linguistic groups when they 'changed' their religion from Judaism to Christianity and from idolatry to Islam respectively. Similarly in our times, the Bosnian Muslims are ethnically and linguistically the same as the Christian Serbs and Croats, yet they are religiously different. Further, Schuon seems to ignore the distinction that admitting the existence of plurality of ethical and religious systems does not entail attributing to each one of them a similar degree of validity either in form or in essence. Similarly not admitting equal validity of truths in different religions does not necessarily mean upholding an attitude of intolerance towards other religions.

intolerance towards other religions.

Schönun, in addition, claims that the ethnic diversity of humanity and the geographical extent of the earth make the idea of one unique religion for all men "highly unlikely", and that the idea of a single religion is a contradiction.⁵⁶ It is true that the idea of one unique religion for all mankind is highly unlikely and that a plurality of religions is thereby logically possible and historically proven, but it is not logically or historically true that the different religions are of equal validity, despite having certain similarities. Although he has convincingly argued that the plurality of religions does not mean equal validity of all religious truths, al-Atlas affirms the possibility that certain individuals from different religions—and not the collectivity—who reject the doctrinal and ritualistic errors in their religions, believe in the One God, and live ethically, and thus could attain spiritual salvation.⁵⁷ On the intellectual background of the notion of the

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 153.

⁵⁷ Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995), pp. 7–12.

transcendent unity of religions, al-Attas explains that

The notion of a plurality of truths of equal validity in the plurality and diversity of religions is perhaps aligned to the statements and general conclusions of modern philosophy and science arising from the discovery of a plurality and diversity of laws governing the universe having equal validity each in its own cosmological system. The trend to align modern scientific discovery concerning the systems of the universe with corresponding statements applied to human society, cultural conditions, and values is one of the characteristic features of modernity.⁵⁸

In order to support their claim that all religions are of equal validity, some individuals from the 'indiyah group of sophists have conjectured that the founders of all the major religions and moral philosophies in the world could have been prophets who are not named by the Holy Qur'ān and the Prophet Muhammad. The Holy Qur'ān in *Ghāfir* (40): 78 says that "Of some among them [i.e., the Prophets] We have related them to you their stories (O, Muhammad) and of others among them We have not related to you their stories." Therefore the '*aqidah* of the Muslims clearly discourages fruitless speculation on those that are not named because "there is no security in the mention of their number against there being entered among them those who are not of them, or there being taken out from among them those who are of them."⁵⁹

Perhaps one of the most influential modern expositions of the 'indiyah' type of modern sophism, at the societal level, is developed by the Marxists through their analysis and application of a socio-economic struggle between the dominant and dominated classes which determine the interpretations, contents and practices of religion, culture, civilization, and education. Lately, and strongly influenced by the Marxist analysis, feminists, particularly in the West, have been arguing in general that historically, religions and civilizations and all

58 Ibid., pp. 8-9.

⁵⁹ Al-Attas, 'Aqā'id of al-Nasafī, art. xvi, pp. 71-72.

that goes on within them both have been dominated by the masculine perspective. In the specific area of epistemology, for example, feminists have argued that theoretical frameworks and the problems to be investigated reflected only male experience of the world and the structure of masculine gender-identity; that explanations constructed served the interests of men as a group, legitimating their subordination of women; that the whole articulation of knowledge privileged the male; and that there is a need to allow female subjectivity to make its mark on knowledge production.⁶⁰ Another influential 'indiyah' type of sophism can be discerned in the thought of sociologists who regard religions and thereby religious laws as products of socio-economic cultural environment. They further influence those Muslims who argue that the harsh Qur'anic laws (*hudiid*) are reflections of the socio-economic conditions of the seventh century (C.E.) Arabia which was at the lower level of civilizational development. Since modern civilization is regarded as more civilized than that of the Prophet and his generation, it is incumbent for modern Muslims to reinterpret Islam and the laws of the Qur'ān to suit the changing modern conditions. To these positions al-Attas would counter that the experiences of culture religions could not be generalized to Islam, which is revealed. Furthermore, whatever similarities in theology, ethics, and law that Islam has with other religions and cultures are due to the fact that all of these latter entities were also ultimately derived from Divine Revelation, and not products of human creativity. The apparent superiority of the present civilization to that of the Prophet, is limited only to the technological and quantitative aspects. In the case of present Muslim civilization, it is highly doubtful if Muslims have been able to surpass the achievements of their forefathers even in these two areas. It is also a form of sophism if islamization is interpreted as indigenization (*pribumisasi*, in Malay or Indonesian)⁶¹ where Islamic

⁶⁰ See for example Kathleen Lennon and Margaret Whitford, eds., *Knowing the Difference: Feminist Perspective in Epistemology* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 1-3. On this influence on feminists from Muslim culture, see for example, Azizah al-Hibri, ed., *Women and Islam* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982).

⁶¹ See for example Syed Farid Alatas, "Agama dan Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial" (Religion and the Social Sciences), *Jurnal Uloom Qur'ān* (Journal of the Sciences of the Qur'ān), vol. 5, no. 2, 1994.

principles and norms are supposed to be interpreted and implemented in concrete historical conditions giving rise to such terms as local Islams, Malaysian Islam, Turkish Islam, and American Islam, so popularly employed by sociologists and political scientists.

At the individual level, the 'indiyah' type of sophism is reflected in a popular statement, when confronted with issues that cannot be refuted: "Oh well, that's what you think; that's your opinion". There is, however, another popular version of the 'indiyah' type of sophism, which is practiced by people who either truly believe in the relativity of values according to societal realities or clamour for popular support from an audience. They would declare and defend the importance of religion and of spiritual values when speaking to religious scholars or during religious occasions; they would exult with equal emphasis the primary role of economic growth when addressing economists and businessmen; they would put on a pedestal entertainers and literati when in their midst. Educationally, this attitude is reflected in the organization of courses of study where all disciplines and subjects of study are regarded as equal. The study of Islamic theology or religion is regarded as equal in importance to computer science or business studies, for example. From al-Attas' metaphysical perspective, all these matters should not be given equal emphasis, for that is injustice; rather, each one of them should be emphasized according to its respective position in the Islamic hierarchy of importance and priority. Another manifestation of this trend is the emergence of so-called scientific or academic journals which claim that they do not subscribe to any school of thought or ideology; rather, they seek articles from all viewpoints. This attitude appears, *prima facie*, tolerant, noble and useful, but upon close scrutiny, will reveal that it is upheld not so much as to understand differences in interpretations as the lack of conviction in their own positions.

The third type of sophism, the 'indiyah', consists of both of the above groups which refuse to admit to reasonable arguments and proofs. Therefore, this last group, which is indicative of the second and worst degree of *jāhiliyyah*, is the most dangerous to religion, the development of the sciences and of an ethical-moral society. Al-Attas would agree with al-Rānī that the *mu'āwīdīn* are really intellectually, ethically, and spiritually related to the *muta'assibīn*. Analysing the usages of included in the larger category of the *sufahā'*. Analysing the usages of the term *sufahā'* and its various relations in the *Lisān al-'Arab* and the Holy Qur'ān, al-Attas concludes that the term *sufahā'* refers to those

who are not simply guilty of the simple kind of ignorance, but are, rather, those guilty of *willful* and *deliberate* rejection of what is real, right and true. It is instructive that the *muta'assibin* are extremists or fanatics who group together and defend vehemently attempts at correction of their erroneous beliefs and practices. They are also *zindiqs* who wickedly endeavour to set up what is in reality false, including erroneous religions. Another characteristic of the *mu'awidin* is that they like to dispute with others without knowledge of the truth and falsity of their own arguments and of the arguments of their opponents. The inherent elements of contention and obstinacy are of the type that abuse logic and rhetoric, which at a higher level of application, would be confused with wisdom, and thus would mislead the generality of people.⁶² There is a growing trend in many Muslim communities where there exist ignorant and stubborn individuals who claim to be Muslims, but refuse to accept the established principles of Islam. For example, they reject the *hadiths* of the Holy Prophet, arrogantly proclaiming their adherence only to the Holy Qur'an and to those *hadiths* that do not contradict the Holy Qur'an, when they are not able to properly understand both! Unfortunately, and reflecting the intellectual impotence of those who are placed in positions of authority to deal with such matters, these *mu'awidin* are regarded as people who are sincerely seeking the truth. Al-Attas, like all conscientious Muslim scholars of the past such as al-Raniri, thinks that the best way to deal with the *mu'awidin*, is by the instrument of political-legal force.⁶³

Unfortunately, though, there are few Muslim scholars in modern times who possess the insight and intellectual ability to deal with these problems as effectively as the earlier scholars, hence the

⁶² Al-Attas, *Comments on the Re-examination of al-Raniri's Hujjat al-Siddiq: A Refutation* (Kuala Lumpur: National Museum, 1975), pp. 31-37; *Commentary*, pp. 200-206.

⁶³ Al-Raniri relates in *Tibyan fi Ma'rifat al-Adyan* that Sultan Iskandar Thani and scholars in the middle of 17th century Aceh regarded people following the *Wujudiyah* sect, a group of the *mu'awidin* type of Sophism, as apostates who should be banished or executed. Cited in al-Attas, *Commentary*, pp. 8-9; idem, *MHF*, chap. 11, and *Raniri and the Wujudiyah of 17th Century Aceh*, monographs of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, no. 3, (Singapore: MBRAS, 1966), pp. 15-16.

urgency to study the latter's position and arguments. Similarly, all the above philosophical trends and their modern siblings among the rationalists and secularists, in one way or another, elevate doubt as an epistemological method by means of which they believe that their conception of "truth" can be reached.⁶⁴ Al-Attas stresses that all these views are "directly opposed to Islam", and are obstructions to a proper development of the sciences, which can bring about destructive consequences to human society.⁶⁵ He refutes this position by saying that there is no proof that it is in fact doubt and not something else such as guidance, that in reality enables one to arrive at truth. He says further that doubt (*shakk*) is a wavering between two opposites without the one preponderating over the other; and if one inclines more toward the one and not toward the other while yet not rejecting the other, it is conjecture (*zann*); if he affirms the one and rejects the other, then he has attained certainty (*yaqin*). Doubt can lead either to conjecture or to further doubt, but it can never lead to truth.⁶⁶ Al-Attas observes that even though true knowledge is found at the base of Western thought, it is opinion (*zann*) and subjective desire (*hawā*) and conclusion developed in a contentious manner (*mirā*, *jādal*) to deny the truth of a thing resulting thereby in doubt (*shakk*) that are more understood and propagated as knowledge, all of which are regarded as antonyms of knowledge and truth by the Qur'an.⁶⁷ Muslim scholars are unanimous in their agreement that ignorance (simple and compound), doubt, conjecture and baseless speculation—*naẓar*, which is an extension of subjective desire (*hawā*), and could develop into a contentious activity (*mirā*)—together with negligence, forgetfulness, sleep and death are opposites of knowledge.⁶⁸ Besides these, al-Attas adds one further observation to this important issue: that knowledge not only has its share of opposites, but also its corruptors. Based on a saying of the Holy Prophet that

this knowledge [of religion] will be inherited by later people who are upright who will reject from it the

⁶⁴ *IPS*, p. 8.

⁶⁵ *The Oldest Known Malay Manuscript*, pp. 48-49.

⁶⁶ *IPS*, p. 8; cf. also al-Attas, *Terengganu Inscription*, p. 7.

⁶⁷ *Risalah*, para. 17, pp. 62; also *IS*, p. 148.

⁶⁸ Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 218, 228.

interpretation of the ignorants [*ta'wil al-jāhiliyyin*], the plagiarism of the falsifiers [*imihāl al-mubtilin*] and the distorted interpretation of the extremists [*tahrif al-ghāliyyin*].⁶⁹

Al-Attas explains that the ignorants destroy knowledge by perpetuating guesswork, conjectures and baseless opinions, and because of their profound ignorance, they are unable to recognize and correct their errors. The extremists corrupt knowledge by either falling short of, or exceeding the right understanding of the objects or purpose of knowledge. The plagiarists are falsifiers who may be quite knowledgeable at least in recognizing the potential importance of ideas, but they are envious and insincere: they suppress the true and right original sources in order to derive worldly benefits for themselves. Falsifiers (and suppressors) by virtue of their spiritual deformity and intellectual parasitism, are naturally not able to positively develop and defend the new ideas which will, after some time, be misunderstood, misapplied, vulgarized or rejected. Because of the vehement Islamic opposition to these destroyers and corruptors of knowledge, al-Attas has vigorously exposed and criticized some modern versions of sophistical attitudes which knowingly or unknowingly, undermine knowledge and truth in different fields, ranging from the highest theological and literary matters to historical facts and interpretations particularly those dealing with Islam and Islamic history in the Malay world.⁷⁰ Because some of his major ideas have been plagiarized and thereby distorted, al-Attas has also been in the forefront to make Muslim scholars recognize and acknowledge true authorities in

⁶⁹ Abū Bakr Ahmad al-Bayhaqī, *Kitāb al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, 10 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, n.d.), 10: 209.
⁷⁰ Refer, as examples, to al-Attas, *The Origin of the Malay Shā'ir* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1968); *Preliminary Statement on a General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1969); *Concluding Postscript to the Origin of the Malay Shā'ir* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1971); *The Correct Date of the Terengganu Inscription* (Kuala Lumpur: National Museum, 1970); and idem, *Comments on the Re-examination of al-Fārīdī's Hujjat al-Siddiq: A Refutation* (Kuala Lumpur: National Museum, 1975).

knowledge and religion. He writes that

The purpose of acknowledging the source of an important idea is—apart from the moral obligation to do so—to point those who pursue the subject for the sake of the Community to the right direction; so that they might not be misled concerning the value and validity of that idea, and its further development and clarification along logical lines which only the original source is justly capable of doing. But if Muslim writers...are in the habit of either pointing to themselves or to others in respect of significant ideas not really originated by them, then they obliterate thereby the real source and deprive the Community of knowledge of the right direction.⁷¹

We shall provide some of these examples when we discuss his educational method in chapter six below.

DEFINITIONS OF KNOWLEDGE

To define (*tahdīd*) something or an object of knowledge is to be involved in a precise intellectual effort which is greatly appreciated in Islam by all schools of thought with very rare exceptions among individual scholars. Even in these exceptional cases, the opposition has been not on the importance of defining terms and concepts as such, but more on the over-emphasis on logic as the only discipline for such a purpose.⁷² Al-Attas has pointed out that one of the key indications of the bankrupt state of modernist Muslim intellectualism, due to their blatant undermining of the great intellectual and spiritual works of the past, is the loss of the science of proper definition, which was a major

⁷¹ CEI, p. vii.
⁷² Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 46. For a good preliminary discussion on the position of definition among some prominent Muslim scholars such as al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, al-Fārīdī and Ibn Taymiyyah, see Zainal Abidin, *The Problem of Definition in Islamic Logic: A Study of Abū al-Mu'īd al-Fārīdī's Kasr al-Manīq in Comparison with Ibn Taimiyyah's Kitāb al-Radd 'alā al-Manīqiyīn*, ISTAC Master's Theses Series Vol. 1 (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1997).

characteristic and achievement of the Islamic intellectual tradition.⁷³ Al-Attas gives an example of Muḥammad 'Abduh who tried to define *wahy* in a manner that opens the possibility, theoretically at least, that other individuals after the holy Prophet Muḥammad may be receiving it. 'Abduh argues from common usage that the verb "to reveal", from which the verbal noun *al-wahy* is derived, means to speak to someone about something which the speaker kept hidden from others. He admits that the dominant meaning of 'revelation' is the message that God addressed to His Prophets. Then 'Abduh proposes his definition: "For our purposes we define it as the knowledge a man finds within himself with the utter assurance that it has come from God, by or without an intermediary. The former may be by a voice identifiable by hearing, or without a voice."⁷⁴ 'Abduh explains that revelation is bestowed to those individuals of such pure quality of soul and inward disposition whom God particularly chooses such as the Prophets, and that the message and mission of prophethood are closed and sealed with the death of the Prophet Muḥammad.⁷⁵ Despite these qualifications, the definition proposed above is still confusing and misleading. It is confusing because, in the case of the Prophet Muḥammad at least, such a definition does not distinguish between the Holy Qur'an and the *ḥadīth qudsī*. It is misleading because many individuals have made claims that they are utterly assured that the knowledge that they have is from God Almighty. Al-Attas dispenses with the need for a definition because Revelation is the special prerogative of the Prophets; only they could accurately define its nature. However, al-Attas denies any similarity between the Prophetic Revelation and sudden visions of great poets and artists, or the apostolic inspiration of biblical authors, or the illuminative intuition of the sages and saints. He suggests a descriptive definition that revelation is

the speech of God...communicated to His chosen Prophet and Messenger, not by sound or letter, yet

⁷³ CEIL, pp. 1-13.

⁷⁴ Muḥammad 'Abduh, *Risālat al-Tawḥīd*. Translated by Iṣḥāq Muṣṭafā and Kenneth Cragg, *The Theology of Unity* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966), p. 94.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.

comprising all that He has represented in words, then conveyed by the Prophet to mankind in a linguistic form *new in nature yet comprehensible, without confusion with the Prophet's own subjectivity and cognitive imagination*. This Revelation is final, and it not only confirms the truth of preceding revelations in their original forms, but includes their substance, separating the truth from cultural creations and ethnic inventions.⁷⁶

One independent proof of the veracity of al-Attas' observation that modern Muslims, including the Arabs, have lost the ability to properly define concepts, is exemplified in the confusion in modern Arabic usage of the term *thaqāfah* (culture). In early Arabic lexica, the roots of the term (*ṭhā'-qaf-ḥā'*) means, as summarized by Tibawi, intelligence, prudence, sagacity, skill, exactitude, lightness, nimbleness, vigilance, acquisition of knowledge, straightening of the crooked, and overcoming the enemy in combat. In the early part of this century, the term *thaqāfah* has been variably used to refer to *tarbiyah*, *ta'lim*, *ta'dīb*, and *tahdhīb*.⁷⁷ Recognizing the intellectual problems of the Muslims as rooted in the confusion of the meanings of key terms in the worldview and history of Islam—such as that of the worldview itself, of religion, God, knowledge, education, happiness, justice, wisdom, university, development and numerous others—al-Attas has consistently been involved in defining and clarifying some of them. Knowing that the confusion which is deeply rooted and widely spread covering various levels and aspects of intellectual, religious, and socio-cultural lives of the Muslims requires continuous work of generations of scholars and thinkers, al-Attas has made the task of analysing, clarifying, elaborating and defining the key terms "relevant to the cultural, educational, scientific and epistemological problems encountered by Muslims in the present age" as the first objective of

⁷⁶ *Prolegomena*, p. 6.

⁷⁷ A. I. Tibawi, *Arabic and Islamic Themes: Historical, Educational and Literary Studies* (London: Luzac & Co, 1976), chapter 8, "The Meaning of *ath-Thaqāfah* in Contemporary Arabic", pp. 286-292. This chapter was first presented at the 23rd International Congress of Orientalists, Cambridge, England, 27 August 1954.

the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC).⁷⁸ In almost all of his works he unfailingly defines the key terms in the subject that he treated, and acting as the director of ISTAC, al-Atlas has recently commissioned several scholars to translate the comprehensive and voluminous work of Muhammad 'Ali al-Tahāwī (d. 1777), *Kashshāf Istīlāḥāt al-Funūn* and the concise, yet important work of al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 1413), *Kitāb al-Ta'rīfāt*. Since the 1970s he has been preparing a lexicon of the Malay philosophical terms that have been employed by the greatest thinkers in the Malay world in order to authenticate their meaning and exemplify their proper and authoritative usage. The proper meaning and authoritative usage of many key terms and concepts that project the Islamic vision of reality and truth have been lost due to confusion and secularization. He has compiled an initial list of key terms and has provided brief explanation.⁷⁹ He is also convinced that the basic solution to the debilitating disunity of the Muslims can be first resolved when there is a unity of understanding among Muslim scholars in fundamental ideas and concepts pertaining to the religion and civilization derived from it.⁸⁰

Definition is regarded as a universal (*kullīy*), seeking to capture the essence of the object of knowledge. Following Ibn Ḥazm, al-Ghazālī and the generality of scholars of the past, al-Atlas accepts two categories of definition: the first is called *ḥadd* which seeks to give a concise specification of the distinctive characteristic (*differentia*) of the object defined, such as, "Man is a rational animal (*ḥayawān nāṭiq*).⁸¹ The faculty of speech (*nāṭiq*) which is the visible manifestation of the rational faculty is what distinctively separates man from all the other species in the genus of the animal kingdom. The other definition is called *rasm* that is applied to objects that cannot be so conveyed but

⁷⁸ Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Beacon on the Crest of a Hill: A Brief History and Philosophy of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1991), pp. 38–39; cf. *Program of Graduate Studies ISTAC 1991–1993*, p. 4.
⁷⁹ See MHF, pp. 527–542; *Commentary*, Index III, "Glossary of Technical Terms in Arabic, Malay, Latin and Greek", pp. 485–504, and *The Oldest Malay Manuscript*, "List of Technical Terms", pp. 87–96.
⁸⁰ Al-Atlas "The Corruption of Knowledge." A lecture given in Istanbul in 1985, pp. 1–3; hereafter cited as *Corruption*.

whose salient characteristics can be described, such as "Man is a laughing animal".⁸¹ The first definition definitively separates man from all other animals, while the second merely describes an aspect of being human.

Now, Muslims realize that it is not possible to define knowledge by *ḥadd*. This is because, as al-Atlas explains, knowledge is limitless and by nature defies the sort of limitation that defines categories within the divisions of genus and specific difference.⁸² Moreover, the understanding of the term '*ilm*' is naturally apprehended by man's knowledge of knowledge and what it is already clear to him, for every sane and mature person knows of his own existence. Since knowledge is one of man's most important attributes, al-Atlas argues, this characteristic dispenses with the need to describe the specific nature of knowledge.⁸³ Furthermore, every definition of knowledge contains elements which presuppose prior knowledge or contains aspects of knowledge or are more vague than the term intended to be defined which make such definitions a tautology or an absurdity.⁸⁴ Linguistically, '*ilm*' is constituted of the roots '*ʿayn-lām-mīm*' which are derived from '*alāmah*', meaning "a mark, sign, or token, by which a thing or person is known; a cognizance, or a badge; a characteristic; an indication; a symptom". Hence, '*ma'lām*' (plural: '*ma'ālim*') which means "sign of the way" or "that by which one guides oneself or by which oneself is guided". Similarly, '*ʿalam*' also signifies "a way mark for guidance".⁸⁵ It is not without significance that Qur'anic use of the term *āyah* (plural: *āyat*) which literally means "a sign" denotes both the verses of the Holy Qur'an and the phenomena of Divine creation. It is for this reason that Muslims throughout the ages have regarded knowledge, '*ilm*', to mean the Holy Qur'an, the Revealed Law (*Sharī'ah*); the *Sunnah*; *Islām*; Faith (*īmān*); Spiritual Knowledge ('*ilm al-lāḍunnīyy*'), Wisdom (*ḥikmah*), and Gnosis

⁸¹ *IS*, p. 137, note 120; also *CEIL*, pp. 16–17.

⁸² *IPS*, p. 16.

⁸³ *IS*, pp. 137–138; cf. *CEIL*, p. 16; and *IPS*, p. 16.

⁸⁴ See Rosenthal's excellent summary of the definitions proposed by all important Muslim writers prior to the 18th century, in *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 52–69.

⁸⁵ E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, s.v. '*ilm*'.

(*ma'rifah*), also generally referred to as Light (*nūr*); Thought (*fikrah*); Science (specifically *'ilm*, to which the plural *'ulūm* is applied) and Education—all of which collectively encompass the nature of knowledge.⁸⁶

However, Muslims have attempted to provide the *rasmī* definition of knowledge. The critiques of Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 1233) do not negate the fact that each of them provides one or more characteristic(s) of the *rasm* aspects of knowledge. Al-Āmidī, in his *Abkār al-Afkar* criticizes al-Baḡiḡi's definition that "Knowledge is the cognition (*ma'rifah*) of the object known (*ma'lūm*) as it is" on two grounds. Firstly it is not inclusive because it does not cover God's knowledge, and God cannot be called *'arif*. Secondly it is a tautology because the object known (*ma'lūm*) is derived from, and more vague than, knowledge (*'ilm*).⁸⁷ Al-Āmidī's first point that God's knowledge is not *ma'rifah*, is well-known to all educated Muslims; and a scholar of al-Baḡiḡi's prominence certainly did not mean to include God's knowledge in his definition. Every sane and mature Muslim knows that God's knowledge is infinite, for He is Himself Infinite. Therefore, it is impossible to define or to limit (*tahdīd*) the infinite knowledge of God, the Infinite. For that matter all definitions that refer to human attributes such as Life, Hearing, Sight, Will, and others cannot have any similarity to those of God except in nomenclature. As for al-Āmidī's second objection, the tautology is only in logic but not in ontology because the *object* of knowledge is ontologically somewhat separated from, and independent of knowledge. The problem of vagueness is relative to the choice of the definer terms that are used to describe knowledge at the level of *rasm*. Al-Āmidī next criticizes the definition of Abū Bakr b. Fūrak who says that "knowledge is that through whose existence he in whom it subsists is enabled to act in an orderly fashion and to act well." Al-Āmidī's criticism that this definition consists of power (*qudrat*) which assumes prior knowledge is of course justified,⁸⁸ if the definition is intended in the manner of

hadd, which it is not. Ibn Fūrak's attempt is merely purposeful, reflecting the *rasm* aspect of a definition. Furthermore, al-Āmidī is not quite correct to deny the possibility that knowledge of ourselves, of God and of the impossible will enable us to act in an orderly fashion towards all of these. The Holy Qur'ān commands us to be just to ourselves⁸⁹ and to sincerely worship God,⁹⁰ which are orderly and proper ways of acting towards ourselves and God respectively. Similarly, our ways of dealing with the impossibles in our minds are our action towards these matters in an orderly and proper fashion, such as to reject or not to believe in the existence of partners (*shurakā'*) of God. Al-Āmidī insists that knowledge can be defined by *hadd*, and proposes that:

Knowledge stands for an attribute through which the soul of him who possesses this attribute attains the discernment of some reality not perceivable by the senses in the soul, thus guarding himself against the sensibilia, at which he arrives in a way that does not leave open the possibility that it could be different from the manner in which it has arrived.⁹¹

Following al-Āmidī's example we can trace the faults of this definition at the level of *hadd*. Firstly, to discern something (*tamyīz al-ashyā'*) is to discriminate, to distinguish, to separate it from other things which makes discernment not only more vague than knowledge, but also presupposes prior knowledge.⁹² Secondly this definition, while it rightly emphasises the ultimate spiritual nature of knowledge, it categorically excludes the sensibiles from the realm of knowledge. Knowledge of the sensibiles are particular in nature. By extension, God's knowledge, which is presumed to be comprehended

⁸⁶ *Is*, pp. 136–137; cf. *Risalah*, para. 17, pp. 64–65. For an introductory examination of the salient features of knowledge in the Qur'ān and *hadith*, see my *Concept of Knowledge*, pp. 62–91.

⁸⁷ Translated by Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 222.

⁸⁸ Cited in Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 222–223.

⁸⁹ This message is clearly evident in the Holy Qur'ān when God talks about man being unjust to himself, as in *Yūnus* (10): 44; and in *Āl 'Imrān* (3): 117.

⁹⁰ God says in the Holy Qur'ān *'at-A'rāf* (7): 29: "Say: 'My Lord hath commanded Justice (*bi'l-qist*), and that ye set your whole selves (to Him) at every time and place of prayer, and call upon Him, making your devotion sincere such as He created you in the beginning, so shall ye return.'"

⁹¹ Cited in Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 226.

⁹² Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, s.v. "maiz".

by this definition, will be devoid of particulars, a position which is against Islam.

Realizing the impossibility of the definition by *ḥadd*, al-ʿAttas forwarded his own descriptive (*rasmi*) definition of knowledge which is basically epistemological. It reflects the Divine origin of knowledge and the active nature of the human soul. In other words, knowledge is a dual process. Starting from the fact that God is its Original Source, knowledge is defined as the arrival (*ḥuṣūl*) of the meaning (*maʿnā*) of a thing or an object of knowledge in the soul of the subject; and simultaneously, from the fact that the subject or the seeker of knowledge is an active agent, knowledge is the soul's arrival (*wuṣūl*) at the meaning of that thing or the object of knowledge.⁹³ The first part of his definition—with the exception of the term form (*ṣūrah*) in the place of meaning (*maʿnā*)—resembles the one quoted by al-Suhrawardī al-Maḥṭūl (d. 1191) and some philosophers, while the second part of it resembles that of ʿAlī Ḥalebi Qinalizādeh (d. 1572).⁹⁴ Qinalizādeh, however, rejected the definition quoted by al-Suhrawardī, "because knowledge is an attribute of the knower, whereas the arrival of the form of a thing is an attribute of the form, which is not the same thing."⁹⁵ This objection of Qinalizādeh is not quite valid in the case of al-ʿAttas' definition because the arrival of the meaning of a thing is not an attribute of the thing *per se*; rather it is also the effect of the attribute of God. The emphasis of the first part is therefore on God as the Origin or Source of all knowledge. Moreover, the concern of Qinalizādeh that the knower is not emphasised, is already answered by al-ʿAttas's second part of his definition. Al-ʿAttas' dual-aspect definition is characteristic of the Islamic metaphysical structure that he consistently upholds. Al-ʿAttas' synthesis of the two separate definitions is based on his acquaintance with them as described in al-Tahānawī's *Kashshaf* and al-Jurjānī's *Kitāb al-Taʾrīfāt*, which he gratefully acknowledges.⁹⁶ It is certain that al-ʿAttas

has no knowledge of the work or existence of Qinalizādeh. Even Rosenthal knew of it only "from a marginal note in the Bursa Ms. Haraci 1378, fol. 5a, of al-Kaṭīyājī's commentary on al-Taḥṣīn's *Tahdīb fī ʿl-Manīq wa ʿl-Kalām*."⁹⁷

Al-ʿAttas stresses the difference between form (*ṣūrah*) and meaning (*maʿnā*) in the acquisition of knowledge. A form of a thing is a representation of the external reality which is abstracted by the external and internal senses of the perceiver. The understanding of the form by al-ʿAttas is different from that of al-ʿAmīdī who thinks that the form of an object is something that can be experienced by the subject. For al-ʿAmīdī, having the form of 'heat' or 'cold' in the mind necessarily means that one will be feeling hot or cold!⁹⁸ A meaning is a representation of the realities that is imprinted in the soul after its accidental attachments that are foreign to its essence such as quantity, quality, space and position are abstracted from it by the internal senses. This process of perception by the internal senses with regard to meaning occurs without its having been previously perceived by the external senses.⁹⁹ The meaning (*maʿnā*) as is obvious from the definition of al-ʿAttas, already exists independent of the subject. Another key concept in the definition and in al-ʿAttas' overall epistemology and philosophy of education is the *arrival*, a process requiring active mental and spiritual preparation on the part of the seeker, and the pleasure and grace of God as the Giver. This definition of knowledge by al-ʿAttas indicates that the acquisition of knowledge and thinking, which he defines as a process of the soul's movement towards meaning, are all spiritual processes.¹⁰⁰ The independent reality of meaning further entails that the pursuit is not merely of facts, skills and personal attitudes which are currently in vogue in educational circles, although it may include any or a combination of the three. He accepts the prevailing description that knowledge is true belief, but the true beliefs are not just propositional in nature. Rather, from the Islamic perspective, it is also intuitional, an aspect of the spiritual capacity of the human intellect. Knowledge of God, for example, is

⁹³ CELL, p. 17, cf. also PAT, p. 5 and *Commentary*, pp. 134–135; *Risalah*, para. 48, pp. 159. For a comparison with al-Fārābī's concept of *maʿnā* in education, see Haddad, "Theory of Instruction", p. 249.

⁹⁴ Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 61, note 4.
⁹⁵ Quoted from Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 61, note 4.

⁹⁶ *IS*, pp. 143–144, note 119 and CELL, p. 17, note 15.

⁹⁷ Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 61, note 4.

⁹⁸ Cited by Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 224.

⁹⁹ *IPS*, pp. 9–10.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

not limited to true propositions, symbolized in linguistic forms describing His Names and Attributes, but at the highest level, it is an experienced unity with the Reality, which is the most profound meaning of that knowledge. Such meaning however cannot be justly communicated by language. Furthermore, true belief is denoted in Islam by the Arabic *imān* which consists of not only declarative acceptance of propositions, but also involves spiritual or internal affirmation and bodily confirmation. In addition to this, knowledge is truth which is denoted by the term *ḥaqq* signifying both the propositional and the ontological.¹⁰¹

Because knowledge at the level of ordinary reason and experience involves the *meaning* of an object which arrives in the soul and at which the soul arrives, it is thus a union between the knower with the *meaning*, and *not with the thing* known. The elements of meaning are constructed by the soul from the objects of sense perception when the soul receives illumination from God, for they are not found in the objects themselves.¹⁰² This definition enables man to have knowledge of the sensibles and the intelligibles. It also implies that while it necessarily requires efforts on the part of the knower, knowledge in the sense of meaning, is a gift from God Almighty to whomsoever He deems deserving, implying further that the potential knower must make the necessary intellectual and spiritual preparations to be worthy to receive this Divine gift.¹⁰³ Al-Attas further defines meaning as "the recognition of the proper place of anything in a system, which occurs when the relation a thing has with others in the system becomes clarified and understood."¹⁰⁴ The stress on the two aspects, i.e., arrival and meaning, signifies that al-Attas' conception of knowledge is neither correspondent nor coherent, but both. This unifying method which he regards as characteristic of the Islamic intellectual tradition, is what he himself calls "the *tawhīd* method".¹⁰⁵ The meaning of a thing or matter is a mental image denoted by a word or expression, which when it becomes an idea or notion in the mind

¹⁰¹ *Commentary*, pp. 130-131; IPS, pp. 17-25.

¹⁰² *IE*, pp. 8-9, note. 9.

¹⁰³ Personal discussion at ISTAC, 28 January 1993.

¹⁰⁴ PAT, p. 5; also IPS, p. 15.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Attas, "The Muslim Encounter", a paper delivered in Jordan. See bibliography, p. 25.

(*al-'aql*) is called the understood (*maʿfūm*). It means that the meaning of a thing understood is captured by the right and proper word or expression. In this context the mind, which is denoted by the term *al-'aql* (literally the verb '*'aqala*' means 'to bind'), captures in right and proper words the meaning of a thing or matter or any object of knowledge so that it will not escape or be lost. When the mind abstracts the essential or universal attributes of the object of knowledge understood, answering the question "what is it?", the understood becomes "essence" (*māhiyyah*). The object of knowledge is not a figment of human imagination; it exists objectively and independently of our minds and is called "reality" (*ḥaqīqah*) if regarded in a general sense; an individual existence (*huwīyyah*) if regarded in a specific sense.¹⁰⁶ Since meaning is relational and depends on a particular conceptual system, it entails that for a thing to have the right Islamic meaning it must cohere with other units of meanings and key-concepts in the Qur'anic conceptual system, thereby forming ideas, concepts, conceptions and judgements.¹⁰⁷ By "proper place" al-Attas means not merely the man-made and generally unjust socio-economic place, but the various real levels of human existence encompassing the ontological, cosmological and psychological domains. He arranges the various levels of existence corresponding to the various spheres of operations of the external and internal senses, as follows:¹⁰⁸

1. real existence (*ḥaqīqī*) which exists at the objective level such as the sensible and external world;
2. sensible (*ḥusī*) existence which includes dreams, visions, illusions, etc;
3. imaginary (*khayālī*) existence, which is limited to objects of the sensible world, exists in the imagination when they are absent from perception;
4. intellectual ('*aqlī*) existence which consists of abstract concepts in the human mind;
5. analogous (*shibhī*) existence which consists of things that do not really exist in any of the levels above but which do

¹⁰⁶ *CELL*, pp. 14-15; also PAT, p. 5, and IPS, p. 15.

¹⁰⁷ IPS, p. 16; and *CELL*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁸ IPS, pp. 16-17.

- exist as something else resembling the things in certain aspects. This level may correspond to the sphere of operation of the discursive or cogitative faculty (*fikr*) of the soul;
6. suprarational or transcendental level of existence, where things are perceived as they really are, and experienced by prophets and saints and people of discernment who are deeply rooted in knowledge.

However, as stated above, there is a level higher than that of the ordinary reason and experience, namely the suprarational or transcendental level. At this level, the 'union' between the knower and the known means, according to al-Attas, the identity of thought and being or existence. And since Existence, which is an Aspect of God, has different degrees, 'union' at this higher level refers to the union with the aspect of the Truth which is other than Himself, in the form of one of His Names and Attributes.¹⁰⁹ After considering the levels of existence above, knowledge as "consisting of units of meaning"¹¹⁰ is more specifically defined as "the recognition of the proper places of things in the order of creation, such that it leads to the recognition of the proper place of God in the order of being and existence."¹¹¹ The term *recognition* is important because it conveys the meaning that the proper places of objects have been previously known to some extent, hence *re-cognize*. This conception of al-Attas is rooted in the Qur'anic verse that God has taught Adam the names of all things and in another which underlines that fact that all mankind has recognized and testified to the Lordship of God.¹¹² These two elements are essential parts of the human nature, his *firrah*. And so education, being concerned primarily with the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge thus defined, is the

recognition and acknowledgement, progressively instilled into man, of the proper places of things in the

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9, note 9.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹¹¹ *CEIL*, p. 19.

¹¹² *Al-Baqarah* (2): 31 and *al-A'raf* (7): 172.

order of creation, such that it leads to the recognition and acknowledgement of the proper place of God in the order of being and existence.¹¹³

It is already apparent that there are important educational and other related implications in the definition of knowledge by *rasm* as shown above. The greatest among them, according to al-Attas, pertains to its effects on our vision of reality and truth and methodology of research, as well as our conceptual and practical considerations of 'development'.¹¹⁴

From what has been discussed above it can be inferred that al-Attas would agree with Fazlur Rahman who regarded the notion of education as the "acquisition of knowledge" understood and practiced in the past few centuries, in many traditional Islamic institutions, as "learning more or less a body of facts" as being not creative.¹¹⁵ However, al-Attas would differ with Fazlur Rahman when the latter attributes creativity as "essentially a characteristic of modern theories of knowledge".¹¹⁶ From al-Attas' point of view, the prevalence of blind memorization of facts in many traditional learning institutions has little to do with the concept of education elaborated herein. In fact, memorization without the required understanding has been regarded as inferior even by traditional scholars themselves, who distinguished between a mere memorizer or relator of information (*rāwī*) and the one who understands (*faqīh*).¹¹⁷ Hence, Fazlur Rahman's critique of the "acquisition of knowledge" in the above-mentioned sense as a non-creative aspect of Muslim education is not quite relevant because

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 22. Already in the *Risalah*, para 55, pp. 186–187, al-Attas briefly defines *adab* as "recognition (*pengertian*) and acknowledgement (*pengakuan diri*) of the existence of degrees and levels in creation" and relate it to wisdom (*hikmah*) and justice (*keadilan*).

¹¹⁴ *CEIL*, p. 17.

¹¹⁵ *Islam and Modernity*, pp. 102–103. See also William Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 13–14.

¹¹⁶ *Islam and Modernity*, p. 39.

¹¹⁷ George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), pp. 99–105; also my *The Concept of Knowledge*, pp. 90–91.

knowledge is far more than mere facts! Moreover, the acquisition of the true information pertaining to Revelation (i.e., the Holy Qur'ān) and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet as knowledge is positively good and necessary. What is negative is to limit the interpretations of the contents of these two sources to those given by authoritative interpreters on matters that are not *muhkamāt*. The interpretations of the *mutashābihāt* should be open to further and deeper horizons (*ta'wīl*) without negating the basic and original meanings.¹¹⁸ Indeed, modern Western theories of knowledge have been creative, but al-Attas sees their creativity — because they are devoid of certainty as the foundation of knowledge based on prophetic revelation—as a reflection of the inherently tragic spirit of the Western religious and civilizational experience. When a new theory or conception is propounded to displace the heretofore established theories, it will then be refined, tested and applied to religious, intellectual, cultural and socioeconomic domains for some years, decades or even centuries. Then inevitably, it will be discovered that this new theory has many fundamental flaws which cannot be corrected except by a newer theory. The constant shift in intellectual paradigms pertaining to basic questions of human existence is a process of continual searching without ever finding. It is a permanent thirst that is continuously attempted to be quenched by drinking salty water! It is, as al-Attas says, akin to the tragic Sisyphus pushing the stone up the hill only to have it roll down again.¹¹⁹

GENERAL TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE

The infinite nature of knowledge, the awesome responsibility to pursue it and the finitude of human life are three realities that Muslims learnt from the Holy Qur'ān which naturally motivated Muslim scholars throughout the ages to divide and classify or categorize knowledge. The need for precision and order was characteristic of the Islamic intellectual tradition, as it was for the Greeks, particularly Aristotle, who greatly influenced the former. But unlike the Greeks

¹¹⁸ For an explanation of *ta'wīl*, see al-Attas, PAT, pp. 7–14; CEII, pp. 5–6; *Prolegomena*, pp. 135–138.

¹¹⁹ ISDSKM, p. 54; IS, pp. 130–131; private discussion at ISTAC, 20 July 1992.

who did not have the tradition of revealed knowledge and therefore could not necessarily include God's knowledge and those sciences that are derived from revelation, the Muslims naturally were more comprehensive in their categorization by including both types, albeit the latter was elaborated much more than the former. Accordingly, and with minor variations, Muslim scholars throughout the ages have generally divided knowledge into two categories: eternal (*qadīm*) and new¹²⁰ or originated (*hādith*). The eternal knowledge is established by the Essence of God (*bi-dhātihī Ta'ālā*) which is not the same with the knowledge that is produced by man. The new knowledge is of three categories, namely the self-evident (*badhih*), necessary (*ḍarūrī*) and demonstrative (*istidlālī*).¹²⁰ Al-Baghdādī's classification, for example, is quite similar. Knowledge is of two kinds: a) Divine knowledge, which is absolute, and b) animal knowledge which consists of natural, primary (*ḍarūrī*), and acquired, secondary (*mukasab*). Natural knowledge can be further divided into the direct and the sensual. The former is of two types: positive, such as self-consciousness and consciousness of feelings of pain, delight, hunger, etc.; and negative, such as that the absurd is absurd, that one thing cannot be eternal and temporal, that one person cannot be dead and alive at the same time. Sensual knowledge is that which is acquired by the senses.¹²¹

Al-Attas stresses that all knowledge comes from God and accepts the classification of the earlier philosophers, scholars¹²² and sages, particularly the Sūfīs.¹²³ However, al-Attas is most concerned

¹²⁰ Al-Sharīf 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb al-Ta'wīl* (n.p.: n.p., n.d.), p. 155, s.v. *'ilm*.

¹²¹ Summarized by Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, pp. 252–253. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr's (d. 1037/8) classification and explanation is very similar to those of al-Baḡdādī and al-Baḡdādī with the exception that the former does not use terms like "animal" or "natural". Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Jamī' al-'Ilm* 2: 36–37. For a summary of al-Baḡdādī's classification, see Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 216–217. For a good summary and discussion on Muslim classification of sciences in early Muslim Spain and the central Islamic world until the time of Ibn Khaldūn, see Chejne, *Ibn Ḥazm*, chaps. 4 & 5.

¹²² In CEII, p. 44, note 47, al-Attas mentions approvingly the classifications of philosophers such as al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, of sages such as Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī and other scholars such as Ibn Ruṣūd and Ibn Khaldūn.

¹²³ IS, p. 138; CEII, p. 17; in PAT, p. 5, he says "According to the Sūfīs in

with the unitary, albeit hierarchical, nature of all the sciences in relation to the education of the Muslim. Some aspects will be discussed in this chapter, while other aspects will be treated in chapters 4 and 5 in the context of the Islamic university and of al-Attas' educational content and method, respectively. Based on the inherent natures of different kinds of human knowledge and their methods of attainment, al-Attas categorizes knowledge into two, namely illuminative knowledge (*ma'rifah* or sometimes written *ilmu penguahuan* in Malay).¹²⁴ The categorization of knowledge is an attempt to do justice both to knowledge as the object, and to the human self as the subject.¹²⁵ Illuminative knowledge can only occur between living beings. It involves both the knower and the known, through words or other means that can be clearly understood, after long mutual acquaintance and trust, and a willingness to be understood by the self that wishes to give away its inner secrets and conditions. This necessitates that the knower, if he truly wishes to be close to the object of his knowledge, recognize and acknowledge the latter in the most proper and acceptable manner, befitting the latter's personality and rank. Al-Attas likes to give an analogy of a man and his neighbour to illustrate this distinction. The man can know his neighbour just by observing the latter's habits and actions and by acquiring necessary information about him from others. This is knowledge of the first level. In reality the man cannot truly claim to know his neighbour at the deeper second level which can occur only after a certain period of direct interaction involving mutual experience and trust. Only then may the neighbour reveal some of his true feelings concerning matters that are dear to him and his other secrets.¹²⁶ Similarly, man's knowledge of God at the level of *ma'rifah* is attained as a gift from Him to His servants who have lived a life of sincere worship based on knowledge.¹²⁷

particular, and to all Muslims in general, all knowledge comes from God, but the Sufis know that the manner of its arrival, and the faculties and senses that receive and interpret it, are distinctly not the same."

¹²⁴ *Risalah*, para. 18, pp. 70-71.

¹²⁵ *IS*, pp. 140-141.

¹²⁶ *IS*, pp. 75-76.

¹²⁷ *Risalah*, para. 17, pp. 65-68.

Illuminative knowledge (*ma'rifah*) is the food for the soul of man, which God directly vouchsafed in the form of the Qur'ān to the Prophet who interpreted and practiced it as *Sunnah*, both of which are manifested legally in the *Shari'ah*, and spiritually as *'ilm laduni* and *hikmah*. Hence, this illuminative knowledge of the Holy Prophet is of a higher order and should always guide and direct the formulation of all other sciences and activities of Muslims.¹²⁸ In another place, al-Attas considers *hikmah* as a combination of the two types of knowledge, i.e., illuminative knowledge and science.¹²⁹ This is perhaps because the Qur'ān, *Sunnah* and the *Shari'ah* are sole prerogatives of the Prophet, which naturally were completed and finalised by his death, while illuminative knowledge and science are relatively open for further development, and can be attained by all sincere and qualified men and women.¹³⁰ Wisdom or *hikmah*, is endowed to man by God through spiritual unveiling (*kashf*) or intuition (*ilhām*) or spiritual tasting (*dhawq*) to enable its possessor to know the practical boundary (*batas kegunaan*) and meaningful limit (*had maknawi*) of matters and specialized knowledge, and thereby act justly.¹³¹ Knowledge of God is a religious virtue which is also derived from wisdom. Wisdom itself, whether theoretical or practical, is a gift from God, and likewise a religious virtue, which cannot be acquired by reason unaided by revelation.¹³² Al-Attas, like all true Sufis, theologians and 'ulamā', would reject that unaided reason can know realities of the highest things, as upheld by the Mu'tazilites and philosophers such as Sayyid Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Tufayl, and Muslim modernists such as Sayyid Ahmad Khān and Ismā'īl al-Fārūqī.¹³³ The story of Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān who is made to discover ethical and religious truths by his reason and experience independent of Prophetic revelation is indeed fictional. That these Muslims could conceive of the possibility of unaided reason to know God and other realities is precisely because they were already Muslims and were unconsciously influenced by their Islamic

¹²⁸ *IS*, pp. 138-139; cf. *Risalah*, para. 17, p. 68.

¹²⁹ *Risalah*, para. 17, p. 65.

¹³⁰ *IS*, p. 139.

¹³¹ *Risalah*, para. 17, p. 68; para. 18, pp. 70-71; also *IS*, p. 139; and

¹³² *Commentary*, pp. 134-135.

¹³³ *Happiness*, p. 9.

¹³⁴ Al-Fārūqī, "Science and Traditional Values", pp. 18-19.

environment! Moreover, the example of the Prophet Ibrāhīm's spiritual journey in search of the true God, cited in the Qur'ān, is a very decisive proof that unaided reason will be significantly hampered:

So also did We show Ibrāhīm the power and the laws of the heavens and the earth, that he might have certitude. When the night covered him over, he saw a star, he said, "This is my Lord." But when it set, he said: "I love not those that set." When he saw the moon rising in splendour, he said: "This is my Lord." But when the moon set, he said: "Unless my Lord guide me, I shall surely be among those who go astray."¹³⁴

However, al-Attas clarifies that there are degrees of wisdom, ranging from the highest level of the theoretical to the lowest of the practical domains. God grants wisdom to whomsoever He wishes, Muslim or otherwise. Hence, certain non-Muslim sages from among the Greek philosophers, Chinese or Hindu sages and others have been given wisdom pertaining to the natural universe; yet without the aid of Prophetic revelation, the result of their contemplation concerning ethical and spiritual realities and virtues is neither complete nor certain. Some of the universal ethical and spiritual truths articulated by some of these philosophers and sages, according to al-Attas, could not have been derived purely from their reason, but from the currents of Prophetic revelation that have been "floating in the air" of the Ancient world.¹³⁵ The knowledge of the first category, i.e., the illuminative (*ma'rifaḥ*) can, and must be, learned by all Muslims, which al-Attas categorizes as *farḍ 'ayn* knowledge.

The second category of knowledge pertains to the body and related objects which can be acquired through the use of intellectual and bodily faculties. It is discursive and incremental in its attainment. Knowledge—being an attribute of God the Infinite—is unlimited; but an individual's nature, capacity, lifespan and needs are limited, he therefore must limit his personal acquisition of knowledge. It is neither desirable nor possible for an individual to acquire all the

sciences. But the Muslim community should organize its educational system such that all the sciences that are necessary to uphold and spread religious virtues and ideals as well as to strengthen its interests and dominance in the world, be studied, expanded and applied. It is for this reason that the attainment of this category of knowledge is deemed as *farḍ kifāyah*; meaning that it is obligatory upon only some individuals in the Community. The relationship between the first and second categories is very clear: the first unveils the mystery of Being and Existence and correctly explains the true relationship between man's self and his Lord as well as the true purpose of knowing and living. It follows that the first should guide the second, without which it (i.e., the second category) would confuse man by falling into the continuous and tragic search for *doubtful purpose* and *false meaning*. Those who voluntarily choose to seek a particular branch of the second category of knowledge for self-improvement must be guided by the true knowledge of the first category.¹³⁶ As will be elaborated in the section below, this natural *modus operandi* is now called the "*Islāmization of present-day knowledge*", a term and concept first defined and clarified by al-Attas himself.

CHANNELS OF KNOWING

Following and synthesizing the positions of Muslim philosophers, theologians and Sūfis such as Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī, al-Nasafī, al-Taftāzānī and al-Rānīrī, al-Attas demonstrates that there are different channels for the arrival of knowledge, namely the five sound senses (*al-ḥawāss al-khamsah*), sound reason (*al-'aql al-salīm*), true report (*al-khabar al-sādiq*), and intuition (*ilhām*).¹³⁷ This position is a reflection and a just acknowledgement of the various levels of realities

¹³⁶ *IS*, pp. 140–141.

¹³⁷ *Commentary*, p. 31; *The Oldest Malay Manuscript*, p. 53; *IPS*, p. 5. Al-Taftāzānī gives a detailed explanation of these elements, to which al-Attas agrees. See Mas'ūd 'Umar al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafiyyah*, English trans. and intro. by E. E. Elder, *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam*, 1950 (New York: Book for Libraries, 1980), chap. 2; for a comparison with al-Baghādādī's explanation on these channels or 'roots' of knowledge, see Wensinck's summary in *The Muslim Creed*, pp. 255–263. For a good exposition of Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī's analysis of the senses, intellect, heart and imagination and their respective role in epistemology,

¹³⁴ *Al-An'ām* (6): 75–77.

¹³⁵ Cf. *Happiness*, p. 9; and private discussion on the 20 July 1992.

mentioned above. Al-Attas, in this sense would agree with Iqbal, that Islam does not disparage the role of sense-perception which is very instrumental in the process of acquiring knowledge of sensory and empirical realities.¹³⁸ In fact, as indicated at the end of the previous section above, al-Attas—as al-Ghazālī did more than 800 years ago—regards the bodily senses as vital instruments of the soul in knowing certain aspects of God's attributes and knowledge.¹³⁹ Al-Attas made a penetrating observation that *experience*, which in the Malay language is called *pengalaman*, is derived from the Arabic '*ʿālam* meaning world, and '*ʿim* meaning knowledge, directly implying that experiencing the world means having knowledge of the world (*pengalaman*). This is because, he argues, Muslims understand that Islam regards experience as one of the valid channels of knowledge.¹⁴⁰

Sound reason, too, as an aspect of the human intellect, is an important channel by which knowledge of the intelligibles, i.e., matters that can be understood and grasped by the mind, and of the sensibiles is attained. The human mind would arrange and find proper relations within each domain of knowledge and between one another. Al-Attas qualifies reason with the adjective 'sound' not only because human thinking on certain matters are often not correct, or are based on wrong premises, or on wrong conclusions even from right premises, but also because human reasoning prompted by the estimation and the imagination, can be erroneous when it denies the capacity to understand spiritual realities through that other faculty of the human intellect, intuition. Reason (*al-'aql*) is not simply *ratio*, a mental faculty which systematizes and interprets empirical facts in a logical

see Mohd Zaidi Ismail, "The Sources of Knowledge in al-Ghazālī: A Psychological Framework of Epistemology" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), August 1995).

¹³⁸ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, esp. chap 3, "The Spirit of Muslim Culture"; cf. also Ishaq Hasan Enver, *Metaphysics of Iqbal*, reprint of revised edition of 1955 (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1973), pp. 2-4.

¹³⁹ Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *Kimīya-e-Sa'ādah*. Trans. from the Hindustani by Claud Field, *The Alchemy of Happiness* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, n.d.), p. 30.

¹⁴⁰ *Risalah*, para. 48, pp. 158-159; On the role of the bodily senses in helping the human soul to attain the knowledge of particulars, see al-Attas, NMPHS, pp. 28-29; and private discussion on 28 January 1993.

order, making the experience thereby understandable. Reason is more than that. It is one of the aspects of the intellect, and functions in conformity with it. The intellect is a spiritual entity inherent in the seat of intuition, the heart (*al-qalb*). Intellect is therefore the mediacy through which the Sūfīs in particular connect reason with intuition.¹⁴¹ Anyone who restricts reason to the rational and sensible aspects of its functions, is therefore depriving it of its true quality, thereby making his reason unsound. It must be noted that the heart referred to as the seat of intuition is not the physical heart but a reality belonging to the world of spirits, which uses all other faculties of the body as its instruments and servants.¹⁴²

True report is another valid channel of knowledge, and it is of two kinds. The first is that which is established in a continuous sequence by people whose ethical integrity is well-known that our reason cannot imagine they would concoct and spread falsehood. The *mutawātir* traditions are excellent examples of this kind of report. The general agreement of experts, scientists and scholars are regarded as reports of this kind, which are authoritative but can be questioned by rational and empirical methods, such as is the case with many historical, geographical and scientific reports. The second kind brought by the Prophet, which is based on revelation, is absolute. Ultimately, all authority with respect to creative knowledge rests on intuitive experience.¹⁴³

It is quite interesting that of all modern Muslim thinkers, Iqbal and al-Attas are among the very few who have seriously advocated the role of intuition as one of the fundamental elements in the epistemological process. Iqbal, clearly influenced by the higher Sūfīs, regards intuition as a unique experience, higher than perception and thought, that yields a higher form of knowledge. Although the intuitive experience itself cannot be communicated, the interpretation of its content, or the knowledge derived from it, according to al-Attas, can be transmitted. There are different kinds and levels of intuition, the lowest being that which is experienced by scientists and scholars in their creative discoveries, while the highest being that experienced by

¹⁴¹ *Commentary*, pp. 31-32; IPS, p. 10.

¹⁴² Al-Ghazālī, *Alchemy*, p. 21.

¹⁴³ IPS, pp. 12-13.

Prophets. All knowledge, in the sense defined by al-Attas above, and as first perceived by the perceptor, is arrived at by intuition.¹⁴⁴ According to Iqbāl, from the intuition that man has of himself, he can progress to intuition of the external world and finally to experience intuition of God, which al-Attas would not object to because it accords with the famous Tradition "he who knows his self knows his Lord."¹⁴⁵

According to al-Attas, the Qur'ān, the *Sunnah* and the sacred person of the Prophet Muhammad not only communicate, but also constitute the truth, in the sense that their authority lies not only in the message but in the forms in which their messages are conveyed. This is because the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* are established upon the highest level of cognition and spiritual experience and cannot be simply reduced to the normal rational and empirical levels.¹⁴⁶ The true interpretations of what are intended by the Qur'ān and the Holy Prophet are not only conveyed through the meanings embedded in the terms used, but also in the forms or the ways in which the terms are used and arranged. For example, since God Almighty knows Himself as He really is, the words that Muslims use to address Him are those that He has approved which have been exemplified by His Prophet. Therefore, Muslims address God using His Most Beautiful Names and glorify Him with the proper epithets.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, even though the physical aspects of the Holy Qur'ān and the Prophet belong to this world of constant change, their message and spirits are eternal and sacred. It is for this very reason that conscientious Muslims, for example, express their love and respect not only by observing the teachings of the Qur'ān and the example of the Prophet, but also by devising

proper ways in addressing and dealing with them.¹⁴⁸ Muslims from the earliest times understood that the Prophet's authority is not limited only to what he communicated but includes his very physical being and behaviour which were attentively heard, keenly observed, recorded, transmitted, interpreted and followed as examples. He is the model not only for adult men but for all Muslims, men and women, adult and youth, abolishing thereby gender crisis and generation gaps, which are now evident in the Muslim Community that has lost the significance of this principle.¹⁴⁹

It is very clear from the foregoing discussion that the allegations thrown upon the Ṣūfīs by Muslim modernists, among many others, that the Ṣūfīs disparage learning and intellectual thought as "positively harmful" and that they "poured contempt on rationality" because they regard authority and intuition as valid ways of arriving at certain types of knowledge¹⁵⁰ could be misleading and unfair. In fact, the qualification made by Rahman that "a number of important post-twelfth-century philosophers" such as al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191) and Mullā Ṣadrā, "and others, advocated and claimed for themselves the ability to combine rationality with intuitive experience"¹⁵¹ would logically contradict and falsify all such allegations. Furthermore, Rahman's categorization of al-Suhrawardī, Mullā Ṣadrā and "others" as philosophers is illustrative of the fact that people have had fixed preconceived opinions against the Ṣūfīs regardless of what the facts are. Moreover, just like there exist false jurists (*fuqahā'*) and false philosophers (*ḥaylasīf*), there are surely false Ṣūfīs against whom many true Ṣūfīs have amply warned.¹⁵² Even among the true jurists, philosophers and Ṣūfīs, there are obviously many different levels of distinction.

¹⁴⁴ IE, p. 1, citing Ibn Sīnā's *Kiṭāb al-Najāt*.

¹⁴⁵ Iqbāl, *Reconstruction*, pp. 18–27; Enver, *Metaphysics*, pp. 5–9, 19–35; Saiyidain, *Iqbāl's Educational Philosophy*, chap. VI; and al-Attas, *Commentary*, p. 32. It must be cautioned that the self that is referred to above does not mean the physical self, rather it refers to the spiritual self that had already known and acknowledged God as his Lord, as in *al-A'raf* (7): 172.

¹⁴⁶ IPS, p. 13.

¹⁴⁷ Some of the common epithets that all Muslims use throughout history everywhere are *subhānallāh* (All glory be to Allāh), *alḥamdulillāh* (All praise is due to Allāh), *Allāhu Akbar* (Allāh is the Greatest), *lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata illā billāh* (There is no might nor power except in Allāh).

¹⁴⁸ For example, knowledgeable and conscientious Muslims would never address the Prophet as "Ya Muḥammad!" but with respectful appellations, and they would never touch the Qur'ān without ablution, and would always place it at a place of honour and distinction.

¹⁴⁹ *Risalah*, para. 63, pp. 227–233; *IS*, pp. 121–124.

¹⁵⁰ Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 39.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*.

¹⁵² See for example, Al-Hujwiri, *Kashf*, pp. 30–31 and 35; Muḥammad 'Umariddīn, *The Ethical Philosophy of al-Chazzālī*, reprint of 1962 (Lahore: Sh. Muḥammad Ashraf, 1970), pp. 205–207.