

# Reading *Al-Attas*' Analysis on God's Revelation as Scientific Metaphysics

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**Abstract.** The distinctive feature of al-Attas's definition of God compared with Western's definition is based on the Islamization process upon the Arabic language occurred during Quranic revelation. Al-Attas affirmed that Quranic revelation was a scientific-metaphysical work altering Arabic key meanings and crucial concepts through its semantic structure without shifting its literal form. Such a process was regarded later as an improved theological system constructing Islamic Worldview carrying out new concepts of God, truth, reality, science, etc. Rather than reconstructing its literal form, Quranic revelation developed fresh key meanings and crucial concepts embedded in Arabic Word and institutionalized it as a standard language of Islamic World further. This research found that al-Attas affirmed Islamic Revelation as a scientific-metaphysical process manifested in a transformation of the semantic meaning of *Jahiliyya* Arabic then standardized as the language used by major Muslim. This process also guaranteed several fundamental differences owned by Western Worldview regarding the definition of God and concepts exposed from it, including 'Theistic Science'.

**Keywords:** revelation; scientific metaphysics; Islamic worldview; Islamization

## 1 Introduction

Al-Attas's thoughts about God are actually interesting. Al-Attas has defined God in Islam as not the other 'God'. Not the God of scientists and philosophers in the West, neither traditional nor mystical God [1]. For al-Attas, in the present, the West has never been able to finally define God. Moreover, later it will switch to other religious and metaphysical questions.

If a definition also presupposes the use of language structure as a medium; al-Attas was well versed in the philosophy of language that encouraged him to make critical arguments related to metaphysical matters, both reality, and truth. The author examines in various works, that al-Attas often provides an analysis of various things, starting with linguistic studies. Among them is the use of English in calling metaphysical terms in Islam such as God (*ilah*), religion (*dyn*), and knowledge (*'ilm*), also being (*wujud*) and revelation (*wahy*) [2]. Al-Attas precisely redefined all these things while at the same time 'filling them in' and compared them to key concepts in Islam.

Al-Attas asserts that Islam is both a religion and a civilization. One of the characteristics of civilization is of course based on a worldview that integrated into a framework of thinking, ethic, value, social order, also science and technological research programs [3]. Historically, Islam has become a great civilization whose development is based on its worldview. The formation of a worldview begins from reasoning linguistic human reason to reality. On this basis, al-Attas called the Islamic worldview as *ru'yatu al-Islam lil wujud* [4][5]. Which, human reasoning for reality is always guided by a framework of thinking that comes from God's guidance.

## **2 Methods**

The object of this research is al-Attas' thought that developed in his magnum opus *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*. The data sources of this study are: first, texts and written from al-Attas' works; second, his successors commentary which founded as texts and written. The research data was collected by a literature study, survey, and review. The data analysis technique of this research uses content analysis thorough second sources and comparing it with a commentary of his thought. The content analysis technique is used in line with Islamic Based Research Methodology in Social Sciences [3], [6]. This analysis is used to discuss the content review and to describe it afterward descriptively.

## **3 Result and Discussion**

### **3.1 Critique on Speculative Aspects of Western Metaphysics**

In the West, although God is also considered a reality, the concept of 'reality' in the Western worldview is dwelling on reality (both physical and non-physical) which is never have a final concept of truth; including any concepts that are constantly changing and developing. The philosophers from Descartes to Kant 'have developed' the concept of God without stopping because indeed there is no 'permanent' epistemological basis like the revelation in Islam.

This is because 'change' and 'development' are 'permanent' key concepts of reality; that the real reality is human and nature which always experiences a process of change and endless and dialectical development; from 'small' to 'adult'. From mythical and (Christian) religious tutelage to the positive stage [7]. Things that are considered as progress and modernity by the West are limited to the physical level. Whereas metaphysically, especially in terms of life views and science, if it is applied to other civilizations, it leaves many problems. This metaphysical study certainly focuses on the notions and concepts of reality and truth in Islam and the West, and their relation to facts. Al-Attas argues that the West only views reality rationally-empirically, and rejects revelation as a source of knowledge about actual reality. As a result, studies of human reality, soul, and reason are limited to the factual level observed [8]. Here we understand that Western conception of God was merely philosophical speculative of reason as Western views about reality and truth.

The impact that we can see axiologically, Western speculative metaphysics gave birth to a view of life that produces secular science in the 'modern' era and has damaged parts of nature: both humans, animals and plants and minerals. This, because science is considered not related to God who has created rules and natural laws [9]. Truth is only considered a fact that corresponds rationally and empirically which continues to develop and change throughout the ages without having or pointing to any meaning [10]. Truth is only based on the methodology of modern science that is upheld and declared neutral [11]. This is indeed the real influence of secularization whose elements are clearly explained by Harvey Cox, who is said to be taught

by the Bible: Creation as the Disenchantment of Nature, The Exodus as the Declaration of Politics, and The Sinai Covenant as the Deconsecration of Values [12] [13]

We can summarize that Western metaphysics is limited to talking and arguing about the primacy of ratios or senses in achieving human knowledge. This rapid development was especially experienced by the post-Renaissance West, which was said to have triggered the dominance of the Church [14], [15]. The Renaissance changed the social and political atmosphere of European society at the time; in particular their increased trust in the ability of the mind to determine fate without the Church's (religious) 'guidance'. Starting from Italian Humanism (Vespasiano) to Machiavelli's political thinking and Christian Humanism (Desiderius Erasmus); continued into Protestant reform by Martin Luther. The scientific revolution began to be marked by the Royal Society, after being initiated by Sir Walter Raleigh with his philosophy of history [16], [17].

Indeed, there has been a recent awareness that the human ratios and senses are in fact limited; Kant then gave a solution with his criticism; although later it split into a post-positivism and idealism school. The description above can be easily found in Islam and Secularism belonging to al-Attas [18]. The West is still developing, we know the typical terms of post-modern epistemology such as the shifting paradigm of Kuhn to the scientific revolution in a Lakatosian research program. These are the aspects of western metaphysics sometimes can be found in contemporary Islamic intellectual traditions and other cultural studies [19]. From here, al-Attas is insisted on the importance of understanding correctly about the concept of revelation in Islamic Tradition.

### **3.2 Islamic 'Scientific' Metaphysics**

Unlike the history of Islamic metaphysics; long before the West, there had been a massive revolution in Arabia. The former inhabitants were only bad and often involved in the war because of tribal fanatics; little by little change. They even united to form a social order to turn into a great civilization. God's revelation in the form of the Qur'an and the example of Muhammad's messenger of Allah have succeeded in increasing the ability of the Arabs at that time, both mentally, morally, and especially the scientific tradition. Conceptually, this event is called Islamization. That is, the Arabs of *Jahiliyah* have been Islamized through revelation which came down to Muhammad; the messenger of God as the catalyst. In the future, there was an anthropological development which became the basic elements such as views, concepts, philosophy, and reasoning power. In fact, other regions visited by Islamic da'wah helped use this rational Arabic language [20], [21].

Because of the universality of the Islamic worldview, the teachings of Islam are easily accepted by the traditional Arabic *jahiliyyah*. The concept of polytheism and mystical monotheism is easily defeated by the concept of *tawhid* in Islam; moreover the concept of 'caste' or differentiation of levels, concepts of leadership, law and social status of non-Islamic societies, are certainly easily defeated by 'equality' (*musawaat*) of humans with their level of devotion [22] and various concepts of legal equality in Islam such as *amanah* (trusteeship) [23], *'adl* (justice) [24], *haqq* (true-real) [25], and *hikmah* (wisdom) [26]. All these key concepts are derived from the Qur'an, which later became the basis of the development of the 'Islamic vision of the reality and truth' that al-Attas commonly called *ru'yatul Islam lil wujud*.

## **4. Al-Attas on Revelation as Islamic basis of Scientific Metaphysics**

### **4.1 Islamic Revelation Concept on Religion**

Al-Attas argumentation about the *ru'yatul Islam lil wujud* based on his opinion that Islam as a 'true' religion is not merely a dichotomy of subjective truths as Greek philosophy;

neither 'personal religion' nor 'individual' or religious privatization as understood in 'secular religion' or 'modern rational religion'; nor is it 'natural religion' which considers all religions to be part of God. This is because "religion" (*Islam*) is not separate from belief (*iman*); although both contain different meanings. Faith in Islam is not merely a belief and self-confidence, but also manifested in spoken confession and expressed in actions guided by God's instructions (*huda*) revealed even without secular rational and logical limited proportions. This is because revelation shows that humans had sealed the covenant with God in their pre-existence conditions [27].

This view is indeed easy for us to understand through the key concepts offered by al-Attas such as *din*, *tamaddun*, *dayn*, and *madinah*. All of them are inherent in the *ru'yatul Islam lil wujud* (Islamic worldview) and affirm the human covenant (*mithaq*) with God in an agreement above; because of that, humans who do not pay debts to God other than with themselves (*Islam* and *iman*), then he will lose (*khusr*). The association presupposes the cosmopolis aspect of *madinah*; which is God as 'owner' (*rabb*) and man as 'His servant' (*'abd*). In terms of '*dayn*' and '*dayyan*' approve a 'payment' scheme of debt which must adjust the order (*amr*) and regulation (*hukm*) in the form of 'worship as revealed and taught through His messenger (*shariat*) by not making allies (*shirk*) for God. The main thing, namely the recognition of God as the owner (*rabb*) and *ilah*; because of the devil, even though he acknowledges God as *rabb*, but does not recognize it as an *ilah* [28].

Recognition of God's divinity is usually preceded by the true knowledge of Him. At this point, al-Attas recalls that in pre-existence, humans have acknowledged and testified that God is their *rabb*. The testimony presupposes that humans have been able to 'know' their *rabb* even though they have not been physically manifested. This is where al-Attas reiterated that at that time, humans had had 'knowledge' (*ma'rifat*) of God with their spiritual faculties (*qalb*). Furthermore, it is relevant to discuss that human existence in the world is a 'loan' from God which will later return to Him; and this is relevant to the concept of *din* above. For this reason, the theorem of 'knowing' (*'arafa*) and the concept of science as its relation to reason becomes primary in Islam [2], [29]; because without it, a person cannot become a Muslim and qualify for devotion (*'ibadah*).

Furthermore, the emphasis on 'iqra' as the first revelation comes down and various verses that end with diction 'don't you think (*tatafakkarun*)?' Or other terms such as 'taking lessons' (*tatazakkurun*) and 'using reason' (*ta'qilun*) make it clear that Islam affirms humans to use reason in its proportion as the restriction of 'faith' which is strongly related to 'science' so that Islam is called rational religion. According to Wan Daud, 'science culture' is one of the hallmarks of Islamization [30], [31]. Furthermore, al-Attas cites the hadith that among the purposes of creation 'nature is as 'a sign' (*ayat*) of the manifestation of God, so that humans 'need' to 'know' nature, that is in the sense of studying it.

#### 4.2 Scientific Aspects of Islamic Revelation

In al-Attas' perspective, Islamic revelation has a scientific aspect. It called scientific, because its ability to projecting both visions of unity between reality and truth (*haqq*); without objective-subjective dichotomy; individual-communal, and another aspect of dualism. This revelation was transmitted among generation through an epistemological channel called *khobar shadiq* which authorized its transmission within *mutawatir* form; and interpreted the meaning carefully because it has a firm root structure and semantic field that doesn't change. In fact, the Arabic language used in the Qur'an is clear Arabic and not 'crookedness' (*ghayra*

*dzi' iwajin*) with the discussion in it being orderly and orderly (*kitabun fussilat ayatuhu*) and clear (*mubin*) and by itself proving (*bayyinah*) the truth [32].

In detail, Islamic Arabic has several different aspects with Arabic *jahiliy*. Although fellow Arabic, the Arabic ignorance still projects the *jahiliyah's* worldview dominated by superstition (*takhayul*) and *khurafat* because of the sociological and psychological influence of those who still worship various things such as *jinn*, ghosts, angels, even animism and dynamism. When the Qur'an revealed, and the explanation was also conveyed through His messenger, a process took place gradually shifting the view of life of the Arabs (who converted to Islam) to the Islamic worldview with the Qur'an and hadith as its basis. Even though sociologically still uses Arabic, the meaning shifts; for example the word '*karim*' in Arab *jahiliy* identified with the number of offspring and assets; when he was Islam, the meaning of '*karim*' was tied to '*taqwa*' which clearly projected the Islamic vision of the *dunya* and the *akhirat* [7]

The Al-Qur'an also has a valid transmission method so that it can reach us today. As with the hadith, the Qur'an is also called *khobar*. The difference is that the Qur'an as a revelation is conveyed through the rules of prayer in the main level of validity [33]. In fact, what is referred to as the Qur'an is not limited to writing (*rasm*) the collected *mushaf* are then assumed to have been lost or distorted by Usman bin Affan; as the Orientalist claims of Theodor Nöldeke or Arthur Jeffery [34]. The Orientalist presumption is proven wrong and has been academically refuted by scholars such as Mustafa Azami [35] and Ajjaj al-Khatib because of its nature, the Qur'an is clearly not a historical text that can be approached by methods of textual criticism such as successful hermeneutics used against the Bible [36].

More clearly, in fact, the scientific nature of Islamic language is also preserved because of such scientific transmission systems. Al-Attas pointed out that the Muslim scholars are the first community in history who pay attention to the Islamic language, then record their semantic and linguistic meanings; lexicologically, all the meanings of the interpretation of the Qur'an and hadith are then recorded into various dictionaries, encyclopedias, and other writings. This process lasted for thousands of years, which began from the interpretation of the Qur'an and the evaluation of the scientific method by Ibn Abbas by comparing it with the *jahiliy* and Arabic *syi'r*. From the comparison, it was found several *jahiliyah's* words whose meaning was displaced by the Arabic language of the Qur'an, so that it was not even used again by the Islamic community. It was Islamic element that infiltrated into a key concept that projected Islamic identity and its vision of reality and truth which made it different from non-Islamic worldview [29]

#### **4.3 From the Islamic Revelation to Islamic Epistemology**

After understanding al-Attas' description of the scientific aspects of the revelation, we will go to the next discussion about the consequences of the scientific aspects of the Qur'an, namely the emergence of the Islamic epistemology. Al-Attas's explanation of the Islamic epistemology begins with his study about the subjects and objects of knowledge in Islam. The study become clear when we trace al-Attas' definition of knowledge as "The arrival of meaning in the soul, and the soul's arrival at meaning "; which the 'soul' not separated from the self (*nafs*) is the same reality of *qalb* (heart), '*aql* (intellect), and *ruh* (spirit). And such a 'natural' (*rasm*) definition of science presupposes the position of God as the cause for the arrival of knowledge to man through his spiritual faculty, namely the soul (*nafs*). Likewise, the spiritual faculties can then be juxtaposed with the physical faculties of the five human senses, so that by means of that humans carry out the intellection process (*ta'qqul*) on empirical facts which are then abstracted by reason (*'aql*) and then managed and can be conveyed again through oral language (*nutq*) [37]. The theorem clarifies human definition as '*hayawan natiq*';

namely animals that able to articulating linguistic symbol using his speak (*nutq*), which is managing words through grammar and logic.

Linear with the guidance of Islam about using human reason, al-Attas talked about the theory of meaning (*ma'na*) and wisdom (*hikmah*). Both terms are related to the achievement of human knowledge; through the guidance of God (*huda*) and human effort (*kasb*). Not to dichotomy, but the division is based on the levels of existence (degree of existence) that exist in this world. There are things that are 'known' through the five senses (empirical), and the other levels are rational. In fact, al-Attas further affirmed that Islam has a conception of metaphysical matters that have not been reached by human reason such as Here After (*akhirat*), spirit, and God itself [38].

For this reason, al-Attas specifically discussed the epistemological term of intuition. Al-Attas touched on this lot because it specifically deals with Islamic metaphysics which affirms the existence of the Islamic ontology system. The Islamic system of ontology does not a dichotomy between reality and truth; between subjective and objective, and essence and existence; because it has a special term that is true-real (*haqq*) which is the implication of tawhid. Ontology Islam is coherent with the object of science in Islam; even God can also be 'known' through this intuition theorem. Intuition is also multilevel, from ordinary people to the prophets of God's messenger [39]. That is, some of the intuition of Muslims who have attained *ihsan* in worship can bring it closer to Allah and get a vision (*kasyf*) in the form of wisdom; some of its meaning means the ability to recognize the place/position of everything in the world in its proper place. Practically, getting lessons can be like getting an idea about the discovery of scientific methods, systems, or things that are good for humans.

#### **4.4 From Islamic Epistemology to Philosophy of Islamic Sciences**

Talking about the scientific aspects of Islam means agreeing with the existence of Islamic Science. "Theistic Science" (*Sains Teistik*) - as Mohammad Muslih mentions - is a new trend in the study of epistemology. Of course, often the realm of challenges is the issue of definitions to research programs that are 'birth'. The urgency, of course, is to avoid the Bucaillian pseudo-science or the justification of Harun Yahya-ism. That is, definitions and research programs are important in order to affirm the 'Islamic' science which can also be born through research that can be technically agreed upon by the scientific community that has a widely recognized scientific procedure [40], [41]. In al-Attas's thought, the emergence of Islamic science must be preceded at the metaphysical level through the process of de-westernization and Islamization; which includes Islamic concepts that project the Islamic view of reality and truth. While at the physical level, the existence of technology and research facilities that do not conflict with Islam can be adopted; because it is presumed to be in a place that is 'right' and coherent with the concept of *adab* and '*adl*' metaphysically [42].

The possibility of Islamic Science seems to refute the assumptions of most Western or Westernized scientists and assert that science is neutral; value-free, so the talk of Islamic Science is a utopia. However, it is noted that several scholars such as Habermas [43], Jan Burgers [44], Noam Chomsky [45], to Alparslan Acikgenc [46] concluded that there is a lack of neutrality in science; even science is 'full of value' (*value-laden*). Simply put, a research program or human activity is certainly based on its worldview; obviously this is not neutral. Of course the conclusions support the thesis of Hossein Nasr [47] and Paul Lettinck which confirms that Islamic Science was existed and had been realized [48], [49]; even that reinforces the arguments of scientists such as George Saliba [50], George Sarton [51], and Ziauddin Sardar [52], who claim that Islamic science has contributed to the Western renaissance.

In this contemporary era, the journey to Islamic Science is certainly still long. Many things still need to be formulated to just give birth. The embryo has been seen and can be identified, but so that it can be 'born' normally and not epistemologically contradictory, it needs a methodical foundation as mentioned above. This seems to have been a little touched by al-Attas about what is called the 'philosophy of Islamic science'. There are two terms offered, namely *tafsir* and *ta'wil* [53]; both are inherent in the Islamic scientific tradition that has taken root from the beginning, as explained earlier. Methodically, interpretations and regional regulations may not be used carelessly; both have certain terms and conditions so that the results of both can be declared valid and do not conflict with Islamic epistemology. From that aspect, we know the birth of *tafsir 'ilmiy* [54].

Particularly, al-Attas called 'Islamic Science' as 'allegorical interpretation of objects that consist the nature'. Interpretation presupposes methods to a set of research programs that can validly give birth to 'Islamic science' itself. Scientific methods and research programs will certainly continue to evolve because the objects of science are not limited. This follows al-Attas's opinion that although the object of knowledge is not limited, there is a limit to the truth from it. That is, the true knowledge (*haqq*) is the knowledge of the limits of the truth of the object of knowledge; that is, the place that is 'right' which corresponds to '*adl* and wisdom [42], [55]. In this section, we can see that Islamic science is identical to the Islamic worldview called al-Attas as *ru'yatul Islam lil wujud* (Islamic vision of reality and truth); Wan Daud also added that any science can be called Islamic as long as it does not conflict with Islamic *aqeedah*, shari'a, and morals; Islamic science can be adopted from any civilization, because such science does not violate Allah's law (*sunnatullah*) [56].

#### 4 Conclusion

We can find out the fact why Islamic civilization in the past was able to adopt science and technology from non-Islamic civilizations, but also able to eliminate aspects that are contrary to the essence of Islam; because revelation-based Islamic worldview is inherent in the framework of thinking, acting, and giving place to research methods and programs. The aspect of scientific metaphysics in Islam can actually be traced from the concept of Islamic revelation itself. Revelation has brought along scientific language and has been transmitted to us today scientifically as well via *khabar shadiq*. The scientific language of the Qur'an has shaped the Islamic view that projects the metaphysics of Islam itself. Furthermore, the worldview of Islam also encourages the development of human efforts in knowing God through knowing himself and nature; especially in carrying out the mandate as caliph (*khalifah*) on earth.

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