

Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas on Human Origin

Fiqih Risallah*

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur
Email: fqrisalah@gmail.com

Tatiana Denisova*

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur
Email: tatiana@utm.my

Abstract

This paper aims to reflect on al-Attas' conception of human creation. It argues that human creation model in Islamic perspective differs from evolutionary and positivist model. The issue centers upon a question as to when Adam was initially present on earth. Al-Attas asserts that human knowledge of his origin is limited in such a way that only through revelation it is truly revealed. Divine information is crucial without which knowledge of his origin would be a matter of purely speculative presumption. By employing a *tanhîd* approach, al-Attas managed to establish the time frame of Adam first appearance with a view to clarifying that his arrival along with his wife was in approximately between 7000 and 8000 years ago, not in terms of hundreds of thousands of years ago. This estimative calculation can only be done when the definition of human being is clearly justified. *Al-Ḥayawân al-Nâfiq* is more than a mere *rational animal*, conceived as having a connection with prior organism. Al-Attas defines it *a living being that speaks* signifying his given power to apprehend what knowledge communicates and to communicate what it apprehends. This paper found that human being is a special and a new creation, and Adam is the Father of mankind nothing to do with biological evolutionary theory. This creation is a recent event in the history of time. Hence, human was created with purpose justifying that his existence on earth is a grace and his life historically is purposeful.

Keywords: al-Attas, Human Being, Human Origin, Missing Link, Prophet Adam.

* Centre for Advanced Studies on Islam, Science and Civilisation (CASIS), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), Jalan Sultan Yahya Petra, Kampung Datuk Keramat, 54000 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Phone: (+603)26154338.

Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk merefleksikan konsepsi al-Attas tentang penciptaan manusia. Menyatakan bahwa model penciptaan manusia dari perspektif Islam bertentangan dengan model dari kelompok evolusionis dan positivis. Permasalahan utamanya berkaitan dengan pertanyaan kapan Adam hadir di bumi pertama kali. Al-Attas menegaskan bahwa pengetahuan manusia tentang asal-usulnya sangat terbatas sehingga hanya melalui perantaraan wahyu hal itu bisa terungkap. Informasi ilahi sangat krusial yang dengan tanpanya, pengetahuan manusia terhadap asal-usulnya akan menjadi anggapan yang bersifat spekulatif. Dengan menerapkan pendekatan *tawhîd*, al-Attas berhasil menetapkan jangkaan waktu keberadaan Adam pertama kali di bumi yang bertujuan untuk mengklarifikasi bahwa kedatangannya bersama istrinya adalah berkisar antara 7000 sampai 8000 tahun yang lalu; bukan ratusan ribu tahun yang lalu. Kalkulasi ini hanya dapat dilakukan jika definisi tentang manusia telah diformulasikan dengan benar dan tepat. *Al-Ḥayawân al-Nâtîq* tidak hanya sekedar bermaksud ‘hewan rasional’ yang dianggap memiliki keterkaitan dengan organisme sebelumnya. Al-Attas mendefinisikannya sebagai *makhluk hidup yang bertutur-kata* yang menunjukkan akan kekuatan yang dimilikinya untuk mampu memahami apa yang dikomunikasikan sebagai pengetahuan dan mampu mengkomunikasikan apa yang ditangkapi. Artikel ini menemukan bahwa asal-usul manusia adalah sebagai ciptaan khusus dan baru, dan Adam merupakan bapak umat manusia yang tidak ada hubungannya dengan teori evolusi biologis. Penciptaannya termasuk dalam kategori peristiwa baru dalam sejarah waktu. Karenanya, manusia diciptakan dengan tujuan yang bermaksud bahwa keberadaannya di muka bumi adalah sebuah rahmat dan secara historis kehidupannya memiliki tujuan.

Kata Kunci: al-Attas, Manusia, Asal-Usul Manusia, *Missing Link*, Nabi Adam.

Introduction

The notion of evolutionary theory¹ particularly related to humankind as “*Homo* from a common ancestor among the various species of anthropoids”² still remains in effect in our

¹ See Charles Darwin’s most celebrated work on the theory of descent with modification through natural living selection, *On the Origin of Species By Means of Natural Selection or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, (London: ElecBook, 1997), 1-421. This edition is based on the text of the first edition by John Murray: London, 1859.

² Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *On Justice and the Nature of Man*, (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM & Akademi Kenegaraan, 2015), 41-42. For the review of this book, see Fiqih Risallah, “Keadilan dan Fitrah Manusia,” in *Islamia*, Vol. X, No. II, (August, 2016), 120-121.

mostly educational system. It has been unfortunately a century-old debate that eventually invokes not only scientists of natural disciplines but also of other disciplines including religious scholars and philosophers to shed light on this delicate but crucial issue.³ The issue apparently becomes more sophisticated since it “has been elevated to the rank of scientific truth by its exponents and accepted as such by the general public through sheer intellectual dictatorship.”⁴ A Muslim thinker, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, in this case has emphasized a solid idea, derived from the revelation, that “man is a new and a special creation intended by God to be His vicegerent on earth.”⁵ He convincingly unravels the problem by proving that Adam who was later designated as a Prophet, is the first human being created by God and the father of all mankind.⁶ The *tawhîd* approach he applied is attendant particularly when he utilized *a priori* as well as *posteriori* reasoning to penetrate informative evidence as revealed in religious scriptures and to also expose scientific findings provided by history and archeology.

Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas is an outstanding Muslim scholar and thinker in contemporary time. He was born September 5, 1931 in Bogor, West Java. During his formative years he moved to Johor and resided in Peninsula thereafter that made him later known as a Muslim philosopher from Malaysia. The much we know about him comes mostly from the authority of his foremost companion, Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud whose works already rendered al-Attas life and scholarly accounts in a practically scrupulous way.⁷ Al-

³ The criticism of evolutionary theory ranging from metaphysical, scientific, religious to philosophical domains has been well discussed in Osman Bakar, “The Nature and Extent of Criticism of Evolutionary Theory,” in *Critique of Evolutionary Theory A Collection of Essays*, ed. by Osman Bakar, (Kuala Lumpur: The Islamic Academy of Science and Nurin Enterprise, 1987), 113-136.

⁴ Osman Bakar, “Introduction,” in *Critique of Evolutionary Theory A Collection of Essays*, ed. by Osman Bakar, (Kuala Lumpur: The Islamic Academy of Science and Nurin Enterprise, 1987), 1.

⁵ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *On Justice...*, 41. Refer to QS. al-Mu’minun. [23]: 14. Hereinafter the English renditions of the Qur’an refer to the authority of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Quran*, with an introduction by Sayyid Abul A’la Mawdudi, (Kuala Lumpur: A.S. Noordeen, n.y.), except stated otherwise.

⁶ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *On Justice...*, 33.

⁷ Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud, *The Commemorative Volume on the Conferment of the al-Ghazzali Chair of Islamic Thought*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1994), 1-14. *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1998), 1-21. “Al-Attas: A Real Reformer and Thinker,” in *Knowledge, Language, Thought and The Civilization of Islam: Essays in Honor of*

Attas has received local as well as international acknowledgments and recognitions for his creative and scholarly contributions to the contemporary Muslim world. By virtue of his seminal ideas, the Cranlana Programme of Australia, for instance, in search of powerful ideas that have influenced in shaping good societies has recorded him “the first scholar in contemporary times to formulate a comprehensive concept of the Islamic university.”⁸ While from the Muslim world, The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre of Jordan in its 10th Anniversary Edition has acknowledged him with due honor as “a giant of scholarship in the Muslim world” and included him among *The World’s 500 Most Influential Muslims*.⁹ Besides being creative, he is likewise more than an ordinary scholar but integrated and multifaceted thinker “of genius and profound insight, the closest thing to a polymath that modern Islam had produced.”¹⁰

In this paper, we will deliberately discuss one of his significant contributions to human knowledge by focusing on his idea pertinent to an estimated timeframe of the Prophet Adam’s first appearance on earth that will debunk the evolutionist and positivist model of human origin. For it likely answers the far-fetched issue of missing link in evolutionary theory since according to al-Attas there is no such a link between human and other previous creatures.¹¹ We will then reflect on his justification that from Islamic perspective human life through the course of history is purposeful since his initial creation.

What is the so-Called Human?

The main problem of modern knowledge related to human origin lies within the issue of a missing link between human existence and

Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, ed. by Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud and Muhammad Zainiy Uthman, (Skudai: Penerbit Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 2010), 13-57.

⁸ See in *Powerful Ideas: Perspectives on the Good Society*, ed. by Jennifer M. Webb, Vol. 1, (Melbourne: The Cranlana Program, 2002), 229. In this two-volumes book, al-Attas is astonishingly the only Muslim philosopher included. Cf. Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud’s *Al-Attas: A Real...*, 38.

⁹ See *The 10th Anniversary Edition, The World’s 500 Most Influential Muslims*, (Amman: The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, 2018), 149.

¹⁰ Ali A. Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 96.

¹¹ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *On Justice...*, 27. Factuality of this ‘missing link’ then a ‘transition’ into civilized beings argues al-Attas is rooted in the belief that the origination of species, including human species is brought about by a process of natural selection in biological development from earlier forms; not by a special and a new creation.

what existed before. The issue is metaphysical in nature, according to al-Attas, as a result of a gradual process of secularization in the experience and consciousness of Western dualistic conception of soul and body pertaining to the nature of man. That is so-called human "is only the physical nature of man as body not as soul" as it is obvious to their perception.¹² As long as man is defined as 'rational animal' who falls into *animal* genus, the missing link will always prevail. Al-Attas insists man does not belong to Animal Kingdom. Derived from the revelation he resolutely defines man as *the living being that speaks*,¹³ because after man creation God Himself taught him names and grant him ability to speak.¹⁴ In this definition, he reverts to the original meaning of Arabic term, *al-ḥayawân al-nâṭiq*, which was commonly translated as rational animal. Rational faculty as implied in *al-nâṭiq* is the keyword in his definition because it signifies man's ability to speak, derived from *nuṭq*. In order to differentiate the vital spirit blown to human and to animal from a grave misunderstanding, al-Attas refers the term *al-ḥayawân* back to its correct meaning that is a living being, not a contemptuous animal.¹⁵ Despite the fact that human has characteristics animal possesses, yet human is not animal, let alone animal understood as beast.

The given definition is connected to the essence of man referring to his non-material composition that is his spirit or soul. This is what differs man from other worldly creatures. Even though animal has vital spirit, but it is the animate one. By observing how man behaves and his intelligence, al-Attas argues that we can understand a general idea as to the nature of the spirit of man. And by studying the activities that proceed from man, the nature of man's soul (his psychology) will appropriately be understood. Unlike the animals, al-Attas continues

¹² Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *On Justice...*, 26. Cf. Osman Bakar, *Criticism...*, 119. He asserts that "the idea of evolution originally belonged to metaphysics. But in the nineteenth-century West, metaphysical ideas including the idea of evolution, have all been emptied of their true metaphysical content through a long process of secularization." While the reality of species must be a metaphysical being. See in Cemil Akdogan, "The Theory of Species," in his *Science in Islam and the West*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC-IIUM, 2008), 169-179.

¹³ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *On Justice...*, 31. See also his *The Religion of Islam: Course Lectures*, transcripts prepared by Wan Mohd. Shukri, (Kuala Lumpur: n.p., 1998), 123-130.

¹⁴ QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 31, which reads: "and He taught Adam the names of all things then He placed the before the angels, and said "tell me the names of these if ye are right." See Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *On Justice...*, 28.

¹⁵ See the Latin meaning in Sir William Smith and Sir John Lockwood, *Chambers Murray Latin-English Dictionary*, (Edinburgh: Chambers, 2000), reprinted edition, 47.

that human senses are all coordinated and eventually governed by the intelligence namely the practical and theoretical reason, which are only found in human beings.¹⁶ Thus, man in reality is noble. It can be analyzed that al-Attas a priori knowledge rendered from the revelation leads him to formulate that man was initially created with descent nobility. Through such nobility, man is equipped with particular qualities distinguishing from other creatures especially from the genus of animal. It is the power of speech that makes human special creation among other creatures because he “possesses power to apprehend what knowledge communicates and to communicate what it apprehends.”¹⁷ This very comprehension is indeed in a stark contrast to what had been assumed by the evolutionary theory that human is the result of natural biological process of selections, not different from other species origin. As Charles Darwin confidently believed, “in considering the origin of species, it is quite conceivable that a naturalist, reflecting on the mutual affinities of organic beings, on their embryological relations, their geographical distribution, geological succession, and other such facts, might come to the conclusion that each species had not been independently created, but had descended, like varieties, from other species.”¹⁸

Epistemology of the First Human on Earth

Human knowledge of his origin is limited in such a way that only through revelation it is truly revealed. Without such divine information, human would never know his origin and would end up within uncertain and speculative presumption instead, as attempted by modern secular science.¹⁹ It is revealed that man is created with a purpose and becomes the primary creature of God’s creation. It is because the result of his creation is in the best moulds but without true

¹⁶ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Religion...*, 130.

¹⁷ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *On Justice...*, 31.

¹⁸ Charles Darwin, *On The Origin...*, 17.

¹⁹ Marcus Chown, a cosmology consultant, attempted to analyse the endless mystery of human existence in search for the origin of life to the extent of atomic level, but eventually surrendered, without satisfying answer, to admit man’s composition as ‘the atoms of curiosity’ arisen after millions upon millions of centuries that was subjected to natural selection. In fact, his inquiry was still incapable of defying the evolutionist model of creation. See his *The Magic Furnace: The Search for the Origins of Atoms*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999). See also Bill Bryson, *A Short History of Nearly Everything*, (New York: Broadway Books, 2003).

faith and good works he is worse than the lowly beasts.²⁰ Al-Attas' conception of human creation does expose man having a noble position in the midst of other creations for man is 'the epitome of Creation that in the ring of universal life, man is the superscription and the seal.'²¹ Such nobility points to rationality which is his very essence that serves to connect him with reality.²²

Al-Attas' stance on the debate of this issue is quite clear that evolutionary theory of human origin is against the foundation of human creation in Islam. He has attempted to debunk a meretricious problem of the theory that claims human undergo biological process of evolution from other organism. The claim prevails because those who agree with this theory believe that process of searching the missing link in human origin is an unending scientific activity. Al-Attas however asserts that this issue forever eludes their gaze.²³ While Muslims believing in the finality of revelation, true knowledge provided by the revelation cannot be surreptitiously overlooked and squandered in any historical quest particularly concerning the origin of man. By denying the deductive truth of the revelation and preponderating solely on inductive approach, such attempt will lead to various forms of discrepancy between a finding result and the reality of itself.

The only record of man's origin is indeed found in revelation books.²⁴ Human reason and intellect is therefore capable of attaining true knowledge of his origin with certainty in the light of that revelation.²⁵ Even though there is no empirical remnant with regard to

²⁰ QS. al-Tin [95]: 4-5. See in Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Nature of Man and the Psychology of the Human Soul*, (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1990), 5.

²¹ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Preliminary Statement on a General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago*, (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1969), 5-6.

²² *Ibid.*, 5-6. This nobility is epitomized by the Prophet Muḥammad's status among mankind as "a mercy for all creatures" and his presence on earth and the other Prophets before him was to convey God's message to mankind pertaining to his nobility as was denied in pre-Islamic times. Cf. Trude Ehlert, "Muḥammad," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, eds. C.E. Bosworth et al., Vol VII, (Leiden-New York: E.J. Brill, 1993), 360. For a connection between Prophet Adam and Prophet Muḥammad, see J. Pedersen, "Adam," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, eds. by H.A.R. Gibb et al., Vol. I, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 178.

²³ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *On Justice...*, 48.

²⁴ The Old and New Testament also mentioned the same thing as is in the Qur'an. See for instance in Genesis 1: 27; 2: 7; 2: 21-22. On this subject, see Torsten Löfstedt, "The Creation and Fall of Adam: A Comparison of the Qur'anic and Biblical Accounts," in *Swedish Missiological Themes*, 93, 4 (2005). 453-477.

²⁵ See footnote no. 40 below. Even though al-Attas shared the same conclusion with

the beginning of Adam's first presence on earth, it does not necessarily mean for human mind to have speculated about it and to go further to endlessly dig out for archaeological and anthropological quest at the expense of Revealed guidance. Without clear and established worldview and unaided by revelation, man will never accomplish such expected goal, which is in fact not meant to be discovered.

What al-Attas has pointed out is essential in view of the fact that man had been wrongly conceived as a mere organism originated from natural living selections as the result of the working of natural laws. Sound explanation regarding scientific stages of man's creation is thus necessary. Within such stages the dissenting point distinguishing man from the genus animal is emergent and the process of creation according to al-Attas, "is not something due to the workings of nature". As a consequence, it must affirm that "at every stage it is God's act of creation setting the created thing in conformity with its constitution in the womb."²⁶ In other words, man is noble and is far from being of such mean birth. For that man must be elevated to his proper status as God's vicegerent on earth having deliberately entrusted with moral objectives. Man is the seal of God's creation. This very point highlights a clear position of al-Attas' objection against the view of naturalism. Would other creatures after man, assumed to be the continual consequence of evolutionary existence, be present then the biological theory of evolution might find its real case; but it will not.

Islam has affirmed that Adam was the first man created by God who was later appointed as His first vicegerent on earth. In several occasions, the Qur'an elicits facts, not merely theoretical statements, of human creation contrary to the theory of human evolution as a process of origin from earlier creatures, let alone other biological organisms.²⁷ Such revealed knowledge bears truth and reality in

Fazale Rana and Hugh Ross did in their research saying that Adam appearance on earth is a recent event, yet from their finding of calculation there prevails different theoretical inference. The former's estimation of Adam first appearance on earth around 7000 years, implies a kind of reasonable investigation as contrast to the latter which likely speculated the calculation by 150.000 years ago. Such difference is due likely to the denial of Qur'an as the final revelation in which all important events prior to Abraham are significantly told for a chronological significance. To this point, a Bible scholar, Wayne Grudem admitted that "prior to Abraham, the setting dates is very uncertain." Refer to his *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Bible Doctrine*: (Leicester & Michigan: Inter-Varsity Press & Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 290-291.

²⁶ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *On Justice...*, 35.

²⁷ QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 30; QS. al-Dzariyat [51]: 56. Wan Mohd Nor noted that at least

itself. Yet, knowledge about this truth in al-Attas' conception needs empirical inquiries for scientific justification, undertaken generation after generation, for man to generate his understanding of its process and later to realize his purpose of creation and life direction in order to attain his bright destiny.²⁸ While there are various endeavors involving inter-disciplines trying to find any possible empirical evidence of the existence of Adam, this should not however deter man from conceiving the nature of true knowledge about it. What has deterred man from understanding the truth of objectivity of Adam's origin, in al-Attas words, signifies the crisis of truth that likely engenders the idea that pursuing true knowledge is an endless search.²⁹

The problem of knowing the factual origin of man, then compounded by the prevalence of evolutionary theory of human development, causes more confusions pertaining to the nature of truth of man's origin. It is as though this truth supposedly operates in parallel with passing ages in that one ought to always find another possible truth by following inquiries within a scientific-experimental scheme. There are two levels of man's origin, namely the level of spiritual process which occurred in primordial time and of natural biological process. Only the second level is man actually able to know his origin through experience and science as well. While the truth of his origin at the first level as al-Attas has indicated that that is not meant to be something that can be eventually discovered by any future generations, albeit human acquisition of knowledge has somehow advanced. It is only possible through Revealed knowledge that the Creator Himself has informed about it to us.³⁰ *"The truth is precisely itself, and nothing*

there are four reasons as to why God imperatively stated in the Qur'an the creation of Adam, *first* is to refute the Christians' attribution of divinity to Jesus, son of Marry, through his unique birth, because Adam was also created from dust as stated in QS. Ali Imran [3]: 59-60; *second* is to inform man of his uniqueness and purpose of creation and duties as in QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 30-33; *third* is to affirm the fact that God, who first created man *ex nihilo* certainly can, and shall, raise him again for accountability as in QS. al-Hajj [22]: 5; and *fourth* is to develop a higher sense of God-consciousness (*taqwā*) as in QS. al-An'am [6]: 2 and related to it humility as in QS. al-Nisa [4]: 1. See further the discussion on the concept of Man in his *The Concept of Knowledge in Islam and its Implications for Education in A Developing Country*, (London and New York: Mansell, 1989), 15-20.

²⁸ QS. al-Balad [90]: 8-10; QS. al-Ahqaf [46]: 26; QS. al-Nahl [16]: 78; QS. al-Sajadah [32]: 9; QS. al-Mulk [67]: 23; QS. al-Mu'minin [23]: 78. See Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Nature of Man...*, 3.

²⁹ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, "The Worldview of Islam," in *Islam and the Challenge of Modernity*, ed. by Sharifah Shifa al-Attas, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1996), 44.

³⁰ Cf. Wan Mohd Nor, *Concept of Knowledge.....*, 15.

more or less. For every truth there is a limit that is true to that truth; the knowledge of that limit is wisdom."³¹

Al-Attas' statement really gives credence to our epistemology of historical understanding that our knowledge about human's origin is therefore limited. Nevertheless, the true knowledge about it was revealed to us through His Prophets and Messengers, setting up a priori knowledge. In other words, the truth about man creation is precisely itself, self-evident. Other than this, scientific activities will likely be pulled off speculatively open-ended, never accomplished a conclusive thus satisfactory inquiry of its objective. This solid foundation is the fundamental notion al-Attas holds in view of human acquisition of knowledge concerning his origin and nature. It must be necessarily grounded upon this basis, instead of the evolutionary and positivist conception characterizing materialistic and the Judeo-Christian tragic view pertaining to the banishment of first human from heaven.³²

To give a sound comprehension of Adam as the progenitor of humankind, al-Attas has laid the basis of his historical estimation of the origin of man in the light of Qur'anic revelation.³³ The prevalence of evolutionary theory of human existence meets its objective due perhaps to an issue of what is assumed as a missing link between human being and living beings prior to him.³⁴ Since the modern secular

³¹ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2001), 15; 134-135; 44. This principle is derived from the Qur'an, QS. Yunus [10]: 32, which reads "so after the truth, what else can there be, save error?"

³² See the Preface of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas' *On Justice...*, v-vi, in which he deliberated to outcast the fallacies of evolutionary theory of the true identity of man that had been wrongly conceived as a fact by schools and universities in the world. In addition, al-Attas through this book actually deliberated to respond these two unresolved problems besetting Western men that surreptitiously affect likewise other individuals and societies including Muslims. The first problem is surrounding the notion of man's evolution claiming that man was evolved and originated from the ape primate, which is still commonly held as a fact albeit many discoveries have convincingly nullified it. The other problem that seemed to be opposite is the notion concerning the religious doctrine that man's progenitor expelling from the Heaven and then being banished to this world, carries tragedy and misery of life for his offspring.

³³ QS. al-Mukminun [23]: 12-14. On the authority of al-Attas' rendition the verses translate, "We created man out of the extract of clay. Then We made from it sperm and lodged it in a stable swelling. Then We created the sperm to become a clot, and of the clot We created a lump, We Created bones and clad the bones with flesh. Then of it We originated another creature. So blessed be God, the Best of creators." See Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *On Justice...*, 33.

³⁴ Martin Lings cited an admission by one of those who were evolutionists but eventually rejected the theory, Douglas Dewar writes, "it is high time that biologists and geologists came into line with astronomers, physicists and chemists and admitted that the

science has proved that everything on earth is made of atoms, human being thus might have a direct natural connection or link with certain pre-existing creatures by way of the atoms of which human bodies are composed.³⁵ The background issue is clearly centered upon man's first appearance on earth, which according to al-Attas is impossible and unlikely meant to be known accurately. Yet, he insists that it can be approximated however with reliance upon what is already known and established in human history by expounding "the corroboration from history and archeology."³⁶

Past experiences are not completely expurgated from human consciousness particularly when they offer the meaningful ones. Human consciousness of the past is traceable in our present and future experience by means of time connection. As Iqbal said, "pure time, then, as revealed by a deeper analysis of our conscious experience, is not a string of separate, reversible instants; it is an organic whole in which the past is not left behind, but is moving along with, and operating in, the present."³⁷ The revelation has indicated such working principle by stating, "for the scum disappears like froth cast out, while that which is for good of mankind remains on the earth."³⁸ The interpretation or the study and explanation of the obscure and ambiguous aspects of the things of the empirical world must be grounded upon what is already known and established.³⁹ On this principle, al-Attas ventured a hypothesis that the time frame of Adam's first appearance of on earth can be estimated historically.

world and the universe are utterly mysterious and all attempts to explain them [by scientific research] have been baffled; and having divided evolutionists into ten main groups (with some subdivisions) according to their various opinions as to what animal formed the last link in the chain of man's supposedly "pre-human" ancestry, opinions which are all purely conjectural and mutually contradictory." Douglas Dewar, *The Transformist Illusion*, (Tennessee: Dehoff Publication, 1965). See in Martin Lings, "Science Knows Nothing About the Origin of Man", an extract article of chapter 1 of Martin Lings' book entitled *Ancient Beliefs and Modern Superstitions*, in *Critique of Evolutionary Theory A Collection of Essays*, ed. by Osman Bakar. (Kuala Lumpur: The Islamic Academy of Science and Nurin Enterprise, 1987), 50-51.

³⁵ See for example in Marcus Chown, *The Magic Furnace...*, 1-7; 213-218.

³⁶ In his special treatment of this subject, al-Attas has attempted to give rational explanation and interpretation of man's progenitor in the light of latent truths pointed out in the Qur'anic verses and substantiated them with empirical proofs available. Refer to Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *On Justice...*, 45.

³⁷ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, edited and annotated by M. Saeed Sheikh, (New Delhi: Adam Publishers & Distributors, 2005), 39-40.

³⁸ QS. al-Ra'd [13]: 17. The translation of the cited verse belongs to al-Attas. See in his *Historical Fact and Fiction*, (Johor Bahru: UTM Press, 2011), 153.

³⁹ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Worldview of Islam...*, 45.

An Estimation of Initial Presence

We can underline here that al-Attas would not have ventured his calculation save he initially drew a dissenting line that unravels the problem of missing link. Despite many historians and scholars of religious disciplines have theoretically delivered to disclose fallacies of the evolutionary theory and to prove that man does not evolve from apes-like, it seemed for al-Attas that they do not give a satisfactory explanation on the special nature of human and further demonstrate rational estimation about the time frame of Adam's initial existence on earth based on empirical evidence available. It is likely to be unexplained and floated in vagueness as to its complexity and sophistication.⁴⁰ To him, it is significantly adequate though limited for human knowledge to know the approximate time frame

⁴⁰ Fazale Rana, an American biochemist, and Hugh Ross, a Canadian astrophysicist, in 2005 have ventured their estimation of Adam's origin around 150,000 years ago. They seemed to try to solve a delicate conflict between Old-Earth Creationism and Young-Earth Creationism. It proceeded based on the creationist model for the origin of human from the perspective of the historical Christian view of human origin. Since the majority of experts of Old-Testament genealogies held a consensus regarding dates and chronology from the time of Abraham which is 6,000 years from now, there is little available Biblical or historical information on which to build a solid chronology prior to Abraham. According to Wayne Grudem, this is in fact that raises a sense of "open-uncertainty" concerning the setting of dates or timeframe back to Adam. Despite such polemical stance prevalent among Christian apologists, Jon W. Greene likely approached correct assumption by asserting that, "the genealogies themselves provide a rational for human origins dating earlier than six to ten thousand years ago." Instead, due to the nature of that uncertainty, Fazale Rana and Hugh Ross in their attempt of reconciling modern science and Biblical account of human origin, estimated empirical human existence from naturalism insights of bio-molecular organism, albeit still being trapped within a 'theistic' evolutionary paradigm. Rather than speculating uncertainly that primitive bio-molecular organism had direct connection with human origin, what Norman admitted concerning the unknowability of when did human begin to live on earth is safer as far as the so-called apologetic view is concerned. He boldly asserted that, "this is all the more necessary when we see that the teachings of the Bible and the Church give practical guidance and motivation for acting morally in relation to life issues rather than answer explicitly in philosophical terms the question of when a human individual begins." See in Fazale Rana and Hugh Ross, *Who Was Adam? A Creation Model Approach to the Origin of Man* (Colorado, CO: NavPress, 2005). For its summary, refer to an article by him, "Who Was Adam? An Old-Earth Creation Model for the Origin of Humanity," retrieved from <http://www.reasons.org/articles/who-was-adam-an-old-earth-creation-model-for-the-origin-of-humanity>; Norman M. Ford, *When Did I begin: Conception of Human Individual in History, Philosophy and Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 64; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*; Jon W. Greene, "A Biblical Case for Old-Earth Creationism," an article in pdf form, 7, retrieved from http://godandscience.org/youngearth/old_earth_creationism.html; Mark Pretorius, "The Creation and the Fall of Adam and Eve: Literal, Symbolic, or Myth?" in *Conspectus*, Vol. 12, (South African Theological Seminary, 2011), 161-184.

of Adam's first living presence historically and empirically. Realizing the impossibility of knowing as exact as it is and necessitating only its pertinent approximation are in fact indicative to recognizing human limitation, without which man would speculate about it endlessly. Within this endless riddle, save God Himself knows precisely when Adam stepped on earth for the first time, al-Attas has attempted to venture his historical insight on it in his special book "On Justice and The Nature of Man".⁴¹

Al-Attas has demonstrated a unique calculation by means of referring to the historical presence of Prophets and great kings recorded in human history, employing a genealogical approach. He compellingly argues that our historical knowledge, supported by the revelation, has provided us information pertaining to ancient cultures and civilizations that gave evidence of the presence of Muslim Prophets during the times of historical kings, rulers and chiefs. It is because as al-Attas justifies from the worldview of Islam,

The Prophets were sent to the people of those kings, rulers and chiefs who occupied major cities in recorded earlier civilizations. The Prophets were delegated to them with the mission to enjoin the worship of one true God alone, without partner, rival or like, and to condemn paganism and the worship of false gods, denounce injustice and tyranny, distinguish truth from falsehood and right from wrong. Therefore, the Prophets accordingly must come into confrontation and disputation with the kings, rulers and chiefs.⁴²

From this point of departure, it enables al-Attas to know the estimated dates of their reign leading to approximating the dated of the Prophets who were their contemporaries. As a result, by necessarily knowing the periods to which the Prophets belonged, it is possible for the sake of human knowledge to trace back in time to the period of Adam.⁴³

As contrary to the interpretation of the ark of the Prophet Noah and the deluge of the Biblical version,⁴⁴ al-Attas calculation is far from

⁴¹ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *On Justice...*, 41-42. For the review of this book, see Fiqih Risallah, "Keadilan dan Fitrah...", 120-121.

⁴² Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *On Justice...*, 49.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

⁴⁴ Influenced by Parmenidean correspondence theory of truth that holds thought and being are identical, the story of Noah's ark and the deluge is seen having no historical basis, let alone physical reality. Alvin Boyd Kuhn argued that almost any legendary and mythical presentations in Christian Bible are admittedly allegorical and symbolic, including

a mere speculative imagination, for every period given is evidently historical. Empirical evidences collected by scientists of historical backgrounds are consulted, particularly about the discovery of evidence of infant Moses who was rescued from the Nile in 1527 B.C. and about the Babylonian account of the deluge during the time of Prophet Noah.⁴⁵ In short, his calculation was conducted by identifying the interval periods of the important Prophets sent before the time of the Prophet Jesus, and trace them back in time to the time of the Prophet Noah. From the Prophet Noah al-Attas continued the calculation finally to the period of the Prophet Adam. The calculation results into Adam's arrival along with his wife in approximately between 7000 and 8000 years ago, to be precise 7165 years ago, counted from the year 2015.⁴⁶ This is substantiated by the estimative calculation of Sami bin 'Abdillah al-Maghluth, a contemporary Arab historian, who recorded the life period of the first human being Prophet Adam was around 5872-4942 BC.⁴⁷

the figure of the ark and the deluge. Since *being* is necessary in the Greek worldview, he viewed "that the legend of the ark and flood could never have reference to a physical vessel bearing living animals and humans on the breast of a world-ocean raise to the mountain tops." Thus, according to Kuhn, such story was fanciful and it featured impossibility and absurdity in accepting the account as objective or literal history. See Alvin Boyd Kuhn, *The Lost Light: An Interpretation of Ancient Scriptures*, (Eastford: Martino Publishing, 2015), 422-440. Cf. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993), 8.

⁴⁵ Al-Attas mentioned two primary sources for his calculation: *first* was from the authority of Professor John Garstang who led the Marston Expedition of the University of Liverpool in 1930-1931, about the discovery of evidence excavated from the royal tombs of Jericho that the infants Moses was rescued from the Nile by the Egyptian princess Hatshepsut in 1527 B.C. The discoveries were reported in the New York Times. 20th January 1932; United Press Dispatch from London, 25th January 1932. The reports were later summarized in Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, (New York: Our Oriental Heritage, 1935), renewed 1936, 3 vols., vol. 2, 300-302; *second* was from the authority of Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Babylonian Story of the Deluge and the Epic of Gilgamesh with an Account of the Royal Libraries of Nineveh*, (UK: Department of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities, British Museum, July 24th 1920), about the Babylonian account of the flood as told by Assyrian cuneiform tablets discovered in the Royal Libraries of Nineveh. Refer to Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *On Justice...*, vi-ix.

⁴⁶ For detail calculation, refer to Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *On Justice...*, 47-57.

⁴⁷ Sami bin 'Abdillah al-Maghluth, *Aḥṣā al-Tārīkh al-Anbiyā' wa al-Rusul*, (Riyādh: Maktabah al-'Abikān, 1998), 50. This work is based on the authority of earlier classical works such as *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk* of Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310 AH), ('Amman: Bayt al-Afkār al-Dauliyyah, n.y.), 42-62; and *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah* of Abu al-Fida' bin Kathir (d. 774 AH), (Bayrut: Maktabah al-Ma'ārif, 1990), 68-97, which reported the presence of Adam on earth was around 5000 years B.C.

The idea of that calculation is not haphazard and arbitrary, but is founded on a sound clarification of the name of Adam that is given to the first man, not as a general name standing for humankind as a whole. The issue whether Adam is a proper name or a form of his kind, was a grave mistake paving the way, in al-Attas' view, to confusion that could hinder intelligent minds to know the historical origin of man.⁴⁸ Adam is a proper name for the first man God Himself created. By referring to a proper name, indicating Adam an individual person specially created to be God's vicegerent on earth, the initial point of beginning when mankind first began to appear on earth is possible for rational imagination to mark his beginning. To quote al-Attas here at some lengths highlighting the specialty of man's creation,

"Adam is the first *insân* and the progenitor of all *insân*. He is created with rational soul endowed with wisdom and a sense of justice, taught knowledge of the nature of all things, given the power of articulated speech, and a body complete with motive and perspective powers. He is certainly not a caveman, he is not *anthropus*, nor is he *homo*; he is not the result of an evolution involving a process of natural selection in biological development from a common ancestor; he is not a genus, nor a species; he is not *homo sapiens*. *Homo sapiens* is the term used by anthropologists to denote modern man as a species according to their theory of evolution that denies the truth of a special creation. [And] our claim that the history of mankind is quite recent with the arrival of Adam and his wife about 7000 or 8000 years ago, must seem incredibly too recent to the modern mind."⁴⁹

Conclusion

Al-Attas' statement that man is the epitome of God's creation reflects the Islamic cosmology affirming that human is created specially, not in vain. Thus human sending down, about 7000 or 8000 years ago, on earth is purposefully and cannot be rendered as "a fall from heaven bearing original sin". Certain purpose within man creation is

⁴⁸ Al-Attas pertained to such confusion referring to the idea spawned by some modernist commentators on Adam. Rashid Rida in his *Tafsîr* for example mentions the name of Adam as a general name standing for mankind as a whole, or a name representing a prototype of man (*al-naw' al-âdami kulluh*), see in al-Sayyid Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Tafsîr al-Manâr*, Vol. 1, (al-Qâhirah: Dâr al-Manâr, 1947), 263. Cf. J. Pedersen, "Adam," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, eds. by H.A.R. Gibb et al., Vol. I, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 176-178.

⁴⁹ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *On Justice...*, 47.

an important point for al-Attas' conception of human origin that man is a special creature different either in genus or species from animal. Instead of belonging to animal kingdom, man has his own kingdom. It is the kingdom of man only which he is entrusted with a special faculty of experience besides common sensibility. In this regard, al-Attas clarifies that the correct conception of man creation as projected by the worldview of Islam will lead the "man of Islam" to a clear projection of his development and destiny as God's vicegerent on earth.

Last but not least, what we can conclude from al-Attas' conception on the origin of human creation is that he highlights a scheme of understanding related to human course of existence which is purposeful since his initial creation. The course is initiated by his creation before merging with the body and followed by having primordial covenant with his Creator. Then it proceeds to be a new creature as human who, having a dual nature of body and soul, is composed of forgetfulness carrying the name of *insân* (the Arabic for man) that means to *forget*. By already forgetting his true origin, God sent a religion for him to remember himself including his purpose of being existed, in order for him to prepare the best way possible in returning later to his Lord.[]

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