



*Article History*

*Submitted:*

06-07-2024

*Reviewed:*

24-12-2024

*Aproved:*

24-04-2025



## Practicing Philosophy Part of Living Quran: An Initial Survey on Prophet Muhammad as the “Philosopher King”

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### Abstract

*This article illustrates the subtle relationship between philosophy as a culture and practice and its timelessness relationship with the Quran as per the Islamic faith. Since the notion of the Quran itself is inseparable from Prophet Muhammad, we propose, that in the world of philosophy, either correct or incorrect, Prophet Muhammad is the “philosopher-king” whom the philosophers, from ancient Greece to modern days, were and are seeking; whether or not they were aware of this reality. Generally in contemporary Muslim experience, philosophy is taken as a subject separate from the Quran. They have disregarded that the source of philosophy, minus the doctrines, is wisdom, and such wisdom, theoretically, could not be separated from the Quran constituting the source of wisdom itself. In this article, we articulate how (i) pre-Islamic Arabia was exposed to different ideas including Hellenistic ones, and how all these human experiences prepare humans to accept the coming of the Last Prophet constituting the Walking Quran. Following the Prophet, his heirs, the scholars of Islam who are the Saints, walk among us; and (ii) studying philosophy helps us recognize them, as they are the wisest amongst us who understood contemporary challenges and provided the intellectual and spiritual leadership for the ‘ummah. If we successfully articulate these two points, we will see that studying philosophy is part of the Quranic spirit. Therefore, we are courageous enough to say that the philosophy world, including its anti-theistic aspects, is not separated from the reality of the Quran (i.e. the Quran recognizes them, and deny them). The qualitative method used in this article started with the proposition that the purpose of studying philosophy is to recognize the “philosopher king” – a proposition we found to be unique. We found the proposition fits the pattern of philosophy development in world history, and we found its pinnacle answer in Prophet Muhammad. This method contributes to the science of qualitative analysis related to the importance of abstract reasoning with empirical facts to formulate a new understanding or narrative. In contemporary Quranic studies, this paper is a reminder that the Quran is not a separate (physical) document from the spiritual realities of every individual, regardless they were Muslims or not,. Therefore, it must not be viewed as merely an external manual to the Muslims, as if, it must be subjected to scrutiny in the interpretations, implying that Quran has to be flexible in order to be timeless. The Quran is the statement of our reality. It is not flexible as determined by factors in time and space. Its timelessness is proven in itself by being not contradictory to human reason, regardless in what society and period they are in. Our proposal is an improvement in the current understanding of “Living Quran” as accepted by contemporary academics.*

**Keywords:** *Philosophy, Islamic Thought, Idea Development*

URL: <http://e-journal.uingusdur.ac.id/index.php/Religia/article/view/8554>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.28918/religia.v28i1.8554>

## INTRODUCTION

In the tradition of Islam, the Prophet is known as the walking Quran, and the Quran itself, according to the Quran, would crush the Mountain if it was sent down onto it (Quran (59): 21). Therefore, before the Last Prophet appeared on earth, many prophets were sent by God to prepare the world to receive this noblest of creatures as how the Quran itself was revealed part by part. Even the previous revelations, such as the Gospel, Torah, Psalm, and other Holy Scrolls given to the other prophets, are said to be summarized and completed in the Quran itself (Kati, 2020: 69-70).

We discovered an interesting insight through our independent commentary on a reflection given by George Santayana (1910). From his reflection, we can understand that the purpose of the ancient Greek philosophers in practicing philosophy was to discover who could be the “philosopher king”. We propose, unbeknown to them, that the “philosopher king” would be none other than Prophet Muhammad. Philosophy, we can understand it as the product of wisdoms given by God to the prophets and *ḥanif* metaphysicians of the past. With these propositions, we can safely conclude that the practice of philosophy in ancient times was the intellectual preparation for the coming of the Walking Quran amongst mankind, as we know, the land of Arabia in pre-Islamic times was not free from the influences coming from the Hellenistic soil due to its nature as a cosmopolitan geographical area. This novel realization will set a sense of understanding of what, and how, one should study philosophy in the context of Islam. This also will shed new light on our appreciation of figures like al-Farabi and Ibn Sina as well as a better context in understanding al-Ghazzali’s criticism of philosophy. Philosophy, either right or wrong, prepares the intellectual ground for a fresh articulation of Islam that is required from time to time according to contemporary challenges.

This article is composed under the theme of “Living Qur’an”, defined by Rafiq (2021) as “socio-cultural phenomena in which society perceives and interacts with the Qur’an” (p. 480). Abdullah Saeed (2006) explained the “Living Qur’an” as the Muslim experiences in

understanding and practicing the teachings of the Qur'an, contextually. The context eluded in the concept of "Living Qur'an" is socially and culturally oriented, as suggested by Nico Kaptein, A. Qodri Azizy, and Azyumardi Azra; and Mohammad Arkoun. However, we have to be clear that, the correct Muslims' understanding of Qur'an is not influenced by social and cultural phenomenon. Instead, the Qur'an, through the Hadiths of the Prophet and wisdoms of the *'ulamā* (i.e. scholars), provides the starting point of "Islamization" (Al-Attas, 1995) of the knowledge posed and formed by the social and cultural phenomenon of surroundings. Our understanding of "Living Quran" in this paper in relation to "philosophy" can be surmised as follow: Alien philosophies (outside of Islam) are continuously created from the infusions of different cultures as the world is continuously integrated and technologies support wild human imaginations. Nonetheless, a practicing Muslim (i.e. *mukallaf*) is expected to have a good reasoning power (i.e. *'aql*) to develop a systematic rational judgment (i.e. *ḥukum 'aqli*) which is already a "minimal" (or the *starting point*) of the Islamic beliefs (i.e. *uṣūl al-dīn*). Therefore, when the Muslims are confronted with an alien philosophy, they will be able to distinguish the wisdom of that philosophy from its doctrine that is contrary to Islam, and apply that wisdom accordingly for the good of himself and his community (i.e. *ḥasanah*). This intellectual endeavor itself is part of the reality of the Quran itself, which is *timeless* and *universal* across the world – a statement emphasizing that Prophet Muhammad indeed is the *mercy of the world* (i.e. *rahmat lil'ālamīn*).

In the field of contemporary Quranic study, many attempts were made by academicians in analyzing the Quran by looking into its material implications to answer today's problems. For example, after the 2008's worldwide economic crisis happened, many pointed out how the Quran's disapproval of usury is a proof of its miracles. We do not disagree with that. However, we do lament its lack of depth, because the solutions of (current) Islamic finance do not protect the people from the woe of Capitalism. A clear example of this is what happened to the economy of Türkiye, as per in recent years. The Turkish central bank reduced interest rates nearing 0% to avoid *ribā*. However, such decision lead the Turkish lira to weaken against the US dollar and impacted the Turkish citizens with high living costs. Financial experts, including Turkish bankers, already warned that with a lower interest, the value of Turkish Lira drops according to the norm of the economic system that Türkiye itself is in (Koç, 2023, Jun 18). It appears, according to the insights given by Turkish economists, that Türkiye decided to abandon usury without

exiting the system that strives on usury. From a sociological point of view, this is “lack of sound planning” (Alatas, 2007, p. 88). From the viewpoint of *maqāṣid shari‘ah*, such decision did not help protect the properties of the Muslims. Therefore, it does not comply with *shari‘ah* although it appears to do so. Philosophically, such error happened due to the violation of *ḥukum ‘aqlī* by the policy makers striving to be Islamic.

Another problem in contemporary Quranic studies is the eagerness of some Muslim scholars, or preachers, to use scientism to prove the *truth* of the Quran. In a popular debate, viewed by the millions on Youtube, a young well articulate Muslim preacher debated against an older but respected atheist physicist (iERA, 2013, Mar 29). The young preacher continuously pointed out all the scientific theories established by great scientists such as Einstein and Hawking, proved the miracle of the Quran which was revealed centuries before these theories were formulated. The best example of such claim is the verse in the Quran arguing that the universe is continuously expanding (Quran, 51:(47)). Einstein’s theory of relativity supports such claim – as such claim now is a standard knowledge in the study of physics. The older scientist in the debate would find such statement as appalling. This is because how can an inductive scientific reasoning confirm the *truth* that is claimed by the Quran to be ultimate *true*? He viewed that the Muslims established *truth* based on secular scientists’ inductive theories and hypothetical assertions. In other words, he viewed that the Muslims are not critical thinkers that can build their faiths on.

We are not claiming to be modernists or liberals, but we do sympathise with the atheist scientist’s criticism. The young preacher ignored the importance of *ḥukum ‘aqlī* although he claimed to follow the logical attitude of Ibn Tammiyah. In short, he placed *ja‘īz nazarī* (i.e. inductive reasoning based on possibility; note: this is the level of reasoning applied by modern scientists via the Humean-fork theory. Please see “Humean fork”) at the same level with *wājib nazarī* (i.e. philosophical reflections based on revealed Islamic doctrines) to formulate his (own unintended) modernist theological argument, or *kalām*. Therefore, contemporary Quranic studies must not ignore the rules of reasoning as provided in *ḥukum ‘aqlī*.

The examples above also show that, serious Muslims thinkers must not suppose that studying Marx, Hume and others are waste of time, should they wish to be effective intellectual leaders within the *‘ummah*.

## DISCUSSION

### The Quran and Philosophy

A late Italian scholar of the history and philosophy of Islam, Massimo Campanini (2018), states that there is a need for a new understanding of how the Quran should be read, hence interpreted and understood. He proposed ‘philosophical Quranology’ based on the idea that we should treat the Quran as a philosophical book – in the sense that, we extract the philosophical propositions of the Quran and use it as the guide for today’s geographical and sociological context. Campanini suggested an approach by which we ought to maintain the Quran as a medium in which God is an ever-present author. To limit the Quran literally to how it is revealed accordingly in the space and time of Prophet Muhammad is akin to limiting God to that period and location only – as if God is mute as for today, in America, for example.

Campanini (2018) also criticizes the thematic approach because of the lack of consistency in the proposed methods. He criticizes the method by Mohammed al-Ghazali, an Egyptian jurist and scholar, reducing a chapter of the Quran into a theme while disregarding the many overlapping aspects of a certain theme throughout the Quran (Campanini, 2018: 4). He, however, sympathizes with Fazlur Rahman whose thematic method was closer to how he would envision it. Rahman, according to Campanini, made a case that the Quran is revealed for humans, more than as a revelation about God (Campanini, 2018: 6). Therefore, Rahman approached the Quran with themes that are more social-centered – an approach that Campanini agrees.

In short, Campanini (2018) looked at the Quran as a complete system without exterior extensions shaping its structure, as such a system would be constrained to God’s words beyond time and space. The Quran should be viewed from the human experience itself, engaging with God through this physical book. As he was about to close his text, Campanini states that “I have tried to point out the clear interrelation existing between the structure, language, and meaning of the sacred text. This methodological suggestion ought to be applied systematically to the study of the Qur’an. In this way a philosophical Qur’anology could emerge, an approach grounded in Edmund Husserl’s stress on the intentional character of humans in *looking at* things. Intentionality is fundamental because a philosophical Qur’anology must orient to the meaning of the text. Following Gadamer, the crux is not only to activate the circle between the interpreter and the interpreted, but also to

‘produce’ meaning” (Campanini, 2018: 14)

In this paper, our understanding of the relation of the Quran with philosophy is different than Campanini however, in the sense that the Quran is not merely a physical book. We agree with Campanini that philosophy is a tool, but the Quran as a philosophical work is not reducible as a tool. Therefore, the Quran, although it is philosophical, is not like any other philosophical book, in the sense that the Quran is not reducible into philosophical propositions for philosophers to use and investigate nature, instead, we strongly believe that the Quran serves more as a confirmation than as a tool. This is in line with what the Quran says about itself: “When it is said to them, ‘Believe in God’s revelations,’ they reply, ‘We believe in what was revealed to us,’ but they do not believe in what came afterwards, though *it is the truth confirming what they already have*” (Quran (2):91) [emphasis added]. In this verse it shows that God’s revelation was not used as a tool to discover something else, but it serves as a confirmation of a discovery prior to the confirmation.

Our departure from Campanini is based on Islamic theological doctrines itself. In *‘ilm al-kalām*, there are laws of reasoning (i.e. *ḥukūm ‘aqlī*) (see Kati, 2020: 19-21) serving as the perfect guidance in our understanding of the relationship between philosophy and the Quran. We will not go into details here, however, it suffices to say, according to *ḥukūm ‘aqlī*, religion is not contrary to reason. Hence anything that is rational is already part of the Islamic creed. However, there are limits to reason – thus we have inductive reasoning (i.e. *naẓarī*) that differentiates itself from deductive reasoning (i.e. *ḍarūrī*) – and to reach a systematical worldview, the Quran serves to confirm its truthfulness (i.e. *wājib*), including the possibilities (i.e. *ḵāṣṣ*) and its falseness (i.e. *muṣṭahīl*). Therefore, a Muslim scientist can investigate a question through the scientific method, but its philosophical conclusion (e.g. Darwinism, Marxism etc.), or some aspects of it, is to be confirmed or denied by the Quran. The Quran will not deny logical reasoning in science (i.e. *ḍarūrī*) but it would confirm or deny the speculative aspect of science (i.e. *naẓarī*).

Another reason we depart from Campanini is that we also come from a position that, the Quran, being God’s words, is uncreated except that the physical manifestation (i.e. the Quran) is what is relayed to us by Prophet Muhammad in the created Arabic tongue, with the Arabic linguistic system comprising but not limited to, the root-word system, science of letters (*ḥarf*) and science of numbers (*abjad*). In Islam, we believe that God’s actions are in complete unity without one being in contrary or in disharmony with another. For example, it is wrong to think that God’s Speech or Hearing is contrary to His Knowledge, or His Will is contrary to His Sight. Since God is Eternal and Everlasting, His Speech is eternal and everlasting too. Therefore, the Quran is eternal and everlasting too. Hence the Muslims believe in the Quran as uncreated. The physical book of the Quran is only its physical manifestation, but its reality is beyond. Since the Quran is the fountain of wisdom (Quran,

36: 2, 3:12, 10:1) and wisdom comes from God Who is *al-Hakīm* (Quran, 2: 269), we can conclude that the wisdom granted by God to Plato, Aristotle, Buddha, even the wisdom granted to you and me right now are not separated from the Quran. If these wisdoms are separated, their essences (*dhāt*) will be different from one to another, and this will lead to *shirk* (i.e. polytheism). Even the errors in our thinking are not separated from the reality of the Quran as the Quran confirms our errors by pointing our attention toward our blinded heart (Quran, 22: 46). For example, Darwin was granted wisdom when he established the scientific statement on how the environment influences biological developments, but his heart is blinded when he ignores the limits of categorization to establish his evolution theory – a problem persisted in the philosophy of biology as the evolution theory blurred the lines separating a genus from one another.

From here, we have shown that we are different from Campanini in the sense that Campanini envisioned that we ought to apply philosophical methods to the Quran to bring out the best interpretation for its meanings in our current context. We, however, have shown that humans are blessed with reason and gifted with wisdom. Therefore, they can be philosophically independent. But it is the Quran that affirms or denies their final statement.

In this essay, we will explore this aspect of the reality of Quran further. In gist, the relationship of philosophy and the Quran can be illustrated as follows: Plato was granted wisdom by God but he was not guided according to the *shari'ah*. Muslim philosophers, from al-Farabi to Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali, and now, to al-Attas, confirm the philosophical methods of Plato and apply them in their own writings and philosophical investigations, but they reject the doctrines of Plato that are contrary to the Quran. Likewise, contemporary Muslims are exposed to multiple philosophies from the East and the West. They can learn and apply the wisdoms in their studies but reject the (philosophical) doctrines that are against the religion.

Before we continue, there are two keywords that we wish to illustrate its relation so the rest of this essay as per below is understood correctly (as best as possible) under the theme of *Living Quran* as espoused by the *journal* currently under your critical view. The concept of “Living Quran” is already briefly explained in the earlier part of this article. However, it is noteworthy that, in Islamic tradition as practiced in generations, the term “Walking Quran” is used in reference to the Holy Prophet, whose character according to the *mother of believers*, Aisha, when she was asked about the Prophet’s character, she simply answered that his character is the Quran itself. Now, it is important for us to understand that, despite the concept of Living Quran is social-cultural oriented, we have to ask ourselves, should the concept of “Living Quran” contradicts or be in contrary to the concept of the “Walking Quran”? The answer must be firm “no”. This is because, it is the religious obligation for the Muslims to follow the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, as best as they could, and they must not go contrary to his ways (i.e. *Sunnah*). The ways of the Prophet are not defined by him being a Quraysh Arab from Mecca who was raised in the Bedouin culture, although these facts are important in the personality of the Prophet – socially (in the context of ethics) and metaphysically. His ways (*Sunnah*) were derived from his attributes

(*ṣifāh*) including *ṣidq*, *amānah*, *tablīgh*, and *faṭānah* as per the religion of Islam. Therefore, a Muslim in New Zealand practicing the “Living Quran” must not dress as a 7<sup>th</sup> century Arab man; but instead, he ought to practice Islam in the ways of the Prophet as best as his could within the context of his community and the social environment which he is in, e.g: (i) to be truthful towards the local authority; (ii) carrying the trusts given to him by the society; (iii) deliver his responsibilities towards his community; and (iv) carry his judgment as a responsible citizen without compromising his moral virtue and sense of justice. These four characteristics that we suggested here reflect in order the prophetic attributes: *ṣidq*, *amānah*, *tablīgh*, and *faṭānah*. Therefore, we have to understand that, the concept of “Living Quran” must never escape from the shadow of the “Walking Quran”.

### Prophet Muhammad as the ‘Philosopher-King’

We first learn the idea of the philosopher king from Plato. The idea of the philosopher king is about one condition in which a city should be ideal if it is led by a single (or if more than one, agreeable) leader(s) who is wise and morally upright. Such a leader is a lover of knowledge and a seeker of truth (Fakhry, 2014: Ch. 8). In Islamic civilization, al-Farabi took the idea and further developed it that the ideal leader is not merely a philosopher but is also equipped with the prophetic tradition. A title to be carried by such a leader (*raʿīs*) is *imām*. On this note, Prophet Muhammad is the perfect model of the “philosopher-king” as per al-Farabi.

But the concept of the “philosopher-king” remains vague in Platonism and in al-Farabi’s thought, because its discussion was more on social governing that fulfills Muslims’ duties toward God. Putting aside al-Farabi’s Muslim orientation, critics of the “philosopher-king” may argue that the individuals who hold such a title vary according to specific traditions or beliefs. Therefore, the idea of “philosopher-king” is relativized according to different worldviews. Leaders, such as Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Ashoka, Suleiman the Magnificent, Frederick the Great, Abu Ya’qub Yusuf, and Lee Kuan Yew, are cited as ‘philosopher kings’ (Wikipedia.org).

However in Islam, although there are other Muslim leaders earning the recognition as the “philosopher-king”; a special meaning of the term when it is assigned to Prophet Muhammad must be considered. “Philosophy” – the literal term – is often translated as “the love for wisdom”. Thus, a philosopher technically is a lover of wisdom. The Quran is the source of wisdom, meaning, as the Quran was revealed to Prophet Muhammad, and according to the fact that he is the Walking Quran, we can come to an understanding that the Prophet himself is a source of wisdom – or living wisdom. He is also the greatest lover of God, Whose one of many Names is the Wisest (*al-Ḥakīm*). Therefore in Islam, the greatest philosopher (i.e. as the lover of wisdom) is Prophet Muhammad. As a statesman, he was the perfect leader who ruled over the perfect city (i.e. *Madīnah al-Munawwarah*). The Prophet’s rule over such a virtuous city was what Plato was seeking to conceptualize through his philosophical dialogues, but fell short and compensated it with utopian speculations that even his characters agreed (e.g. see *Lam*).

Politics in Islam, according to al-Farabi, reflects its cosmology, so, as the First Cause (i.e. God) is the principle for all movements, the philosopher-king (i.e. *ra'is*) is the principle of the virtuous city (Fakhry, 2014: Ch. 8). The citizens of the virtuous city are people who are virtuous, people who know themselves and their roles and places in society. Even the fool among them is wise enough not to seek power and position. The citizens of such society are wise. As the Prophet is the perfect role model of the philosopher-king, the citizens of *Madīnah al-Munawwarah* under the Prophet were the perfect role models of the perfect citizens. That is why in Islam, when it comes to the authority of knowledge, after the Prophet, authority rest on the Companions (*al-ṣaḥābah*); next on the Followers (*al-tābi'īn*) and after, the Followers of the Followers (*tābi'ū al-tābi'īn*). No other 'philosopher-king' figures have successfully created a virtuous and qualified society as authoritative in knowledge, accordingly in order. There are no other 'philosopher-king' figures whose rules and subjects become an epistemic standard in a theological doctrine, like how the Prophet and the citizens of *Madīnah al-Munawwarah* under his rule have on the Muslims. Therefore, it is not a bias for us in this paper to claim that the real 'philosopher-king' is Prophet Muhammad. Indeed, there are no other people entitled to claim their main historical leaders as the 'philosopher-king', more than the Muslims to claim Prophet Muhammad as the 'philosopher-king'.

## METHODOLOGY

First of all, let's clarify the subtitle of this paper regarding what is meant by "*an initial survey*". We believe that the idea presented in this paper is novel and therefore a detailed study might be required, either by us or other researchers. As for now, it is merely an 'eagle view'. In scholarship, researchers would often repeat what has been said by the predecessors, or build their argument on top of it as a continuation of a narration. Such practice would be a habit in the sense that the idea or knowledge becomes a part of "common sense". However, literary criticism, especially with the adaptation of multidisciplinary, teaches us not to take common sense for granted (Culler 2000: 4). This approach unnecessarily means to refute established knowledge or works of scholars. It is also meant to be a means for us to provide a new narrative to the established knowledge given by our predecessors. We do not define the word "new" as a matter of choice in knowledge interpretation to legitimize, or to make valid, relativism. Rather, in the light of discoveries by others which is valid and justifiable within our worldview, what is meant here is that we are looking at how we would adapt or contextualize the discovery into the fabric of our current knowledge. This is what we mean by a *new* narrative further enriching our knowledge.

The inspiration for this paper started with the discovery of an idea, indirectly given by George Santayana (1910) through our independent commentary on what he had written on

the practice of philosophy that the motive of practicing philosophy in Ancient Greece was about the discourse of finding who the “philosopher king” could be. In Islam, the answer to this is none other than Prophet Muhammad. The idea of seeking the “philosopher king” is also not strange within Islam as the coming of the Last Prophet was anticipated by the previous prophets – meaning, in the essential teachings of the previous prophets, the people of ancient times, and in the pre-Islamic era, the believers that would make up part of the population were told of the coming of the Final Messenger. As the prophets of God received revelations from God, the wisdom coming from their mouths was not a result of speculations but was revealed wisdom or divinely inspired wisdom. It is with such divine wisdom that travels from place to place that the practice of philosophy is possible from the time of Ancient Greece to this contemporary world.

Some remarks on what we mean by *philosophy*. If *logic* is in the mind, according to Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *ontology* would be external to the mind (1995: 224-225)<sup>1</sup>. Thus – “*logic reflects ontology*”. With this definition, philosophy as a system of ontology can be analyzed in the analogy of the science of logic. “Logic”, at least as practiced in the West, can be divided into two: one is *formal* and the other is *material* (Sullivan 2006: 22). Both are related and inseparable as a body of knowledge, but as a subject of analysis, the former can be independent from the latter whereas the latter is necessarily dependable on the former. An example of a *formal* statement: a part is smaller than the whole. An example of a *material* statement: a classroom is smaller than a school. We can debate if a part is smaller than the whole by contextualizing it to some possible conditions that can be satisfied by our imagination. However, if we are to debate whether a school is possible to be smaller than a classroom, we must be able to provide an abstract and hence formal theory of such a claim<sup>2</sup>. We argue then, by not being utopian however with good opinions, when the early Muslims studied philosophies by Plato and Aristotle and others during the translation period after the contact of the Muslim empire Umayyad with Syria where Greek philosophy books were already available in Syriac translations, it was not the *material* that they absorb into their thinking, but rather, the *formal* – albeit, confusion on these two would often happen from time to time among different individuals. The *material* for them was already in Islam as stated in the Quran and the Hadith. Therefore, when we (as Muslims) ought to study philosophy, even in today’s world, we must cleverly distinguish these two aspects of philosophy. For example, Aristotle’s conception of the ‘Unmoved Mover’ is often ultimately interpreted as God. If we ought to understand ‘Unmoved Mover’ *materially*, we will come to the conclusion that God is not active anymore after He initiated creations. This belief is contrary to the Quran which explicitly states that God is always in the act of creating (Quran (2):225). If we ought to understand ‘Unmoved Mover’ *formally*, we will allow ourselves to interpret the Quranic saying that God is the First (*al-Awwal*) and the Last (*al-Akhir*) in the context that He is not affected by His creations showing that He is eternal (*baqā*). Philosophy, then, as a *formal* structure provides the Muslim philosophers, especially

the theologians (*mutakallimūn*), the articulation to narrate the meaning of the Quran as a response to the needs of the intellectual environment of that time (Goichon, 2021: 40)<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, the science of *kalām* is not an innovation (*bida'ah*) – but rather it is the rhetoric (*balaghah*) to the intellectual needs and challenges of the environment.

But the Quran itself is a form of God's rhetoric (i.e. *kalām Allah*). It was sent down in Arabic so it would be contemplated (Quran (43):3). It means that the Quran, the reality of which is uncreated, is expressed by the Prophet in the created Arab tongue, supplemented by the Prophet's interpretation (i.e. *Hadith*) as a response to the intellectual needs and challenges of the environment of that time and place (i.e. legacies of pre-Islamic Arabia). Those intellectual challenges must not come from nothing but from *something*. That *something* is then to be understood as part of the intellectual preparation on the ground that prepared the people, intellectually and spiritually, for the coming of the revealed religion which is Islam. Prophet Muhammad is known as the 'Walking Quran'. If the Quran could crumble the mountain should it descend onto the mountain (Quran (59):21), the presence of the Prophet would destroy humanity if they were to be "dumb as rocks". Therefore, pre-Islamic society must consist of people who were intelligent and wise enough to interact with the Prophet and to be receptive to Islam. Otherwise, how they would recognize al-Amin as a legitimate Prophet and Islam as truly the revealed religion? On this note, Syed Hussein Alatas (2007) was right when he proposed the socio-historical method of studying Islam. The method does not suggest that Islam came out of socio-historical factors denying the origin of the *mīthāq* (the covenant with Allah). Rather, the method helps us appreciate what Rumi said that things are known through their opposites (in this case, intellectual reactionary), but at the level of the empirical world (*'alam shahadah*) corresponding in manifestation to the invisible world (*'alam ghayb*). The method used in this paper is influenced by and owes its origin to Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas' theory of *Islamization of knowledge* (1993: 162-163)<sup>4</sup> and Syed Hussein Alatas' *socio-historical method* (2007: 96)<sup>5</sup>.

The method used in this paper is plotting a narration. Therefore, the narrative in this paper will be presented in the following thematic order:

- (i) The cosmopolitan of pre-Islamic Arabia
- (ii) The argument for the presence of Hellenistic philosophy in pre-Islamic Arabia including its purpose was to seek the "philosopher king"
- (iii) Why study philosophy after our knowledge of Prophet Muhammad?  
All these will accumulate into:
- (iv) Practicing philosophy is part of the "living Quran" – the theme being the focus of of this *journal*.

### Further Clarifications on the Method Employed

It is a bit unusual for a rational philosophy paper to refer to empirical data or statistic data for evidence, as the subject matter in the research is subjective in nature. Nonetheless, the scientific spirit requires an act of creativity to achieve some objective points of view. There is no actual survey done to count how many percents of Muslims do believe that studying philosophy is compatible with Islam or not. The reason is, first of all, such question is not meant for the general public, because the question on Islam and philosophy presupposes a level of understanding on the these intricate subjects. On the other hand, to count how many scholars of Islam did favor or unfavor the study of philosophy is impractical too. An opinion of a well-trained scholar may outweigh many times the opinion of a mediocre scholar. Therefore, we decided to look for an online forum that discussed the question on Islam and the practice of philosophy, and we analyze our findings qualitatively.

In an online forum sponsored by *Philosophy Now*, a topic was posted on the issue of “Critical Thinking and Islam” (<https://forum.philosophynow.org/viewtopic.php?t=31358>). The discussion started with a comment by a user on how having faith is the anti-thesis of having ‘critical thinking’. The claim was challenged by another user that having faith is akin having an art in critical thinking. The myths in religion are used as symbols in the articulations of thought to make sense of the world. However this claim was further challenged by another user arguing that faith does not qualify to be “truth” unless it passed the rigidity of scientific procedure. The forum user further argued that a faith regarding cosmology is only valid if it is based on scientific discoveries like Newtonian cosmology. However, one of the earlier forum users argued back that “truth” must be self-conviction, otherwise, through the scientific method the “truth” must be conditioned to the approval of the scientific community. One forum user simply argued that Islam and critical thinking is simply an “oxymoron”.

From the simple observation on the discussions in the forum, it is clear to us that the concept of faith is anti-reason according to the forum participants. From our perspective, we disagree with this “dualism”. In this paper, we want to show that, the activity of critical thinking, which is the essence of practicing philosophy, is the exercise of wisdom given by God to each individuals with their own blessed capacity, which is necessarily part of the Quranic spirit (i.e. Living Quran, as understood in the scope of this journal). “Faith” in Islam is not “blind belief”. Faith (*īmān*) is the result of gnosis (i.e. *maʿrifat*) which is defined by the Sufis as the ability to distinguish the created (*muh̄dath*) from the permanence (*baqā*). Such awareness can only be possessed by a remarkable intelligent person rather than the ignorant one defined as *jāhil murakkab*.

The term “Living Quran”, as far as we can observe, is uniquely used in the Indonesian academia world. Outside of Indonesia, such term is not used, although the basic

idea in the term “Living Quran” is well understood by those who are acquainted with the Islamic faith. What is understood by “Living Quran” simply means as the living in the spirit as espoused in the teachings of al-Quran. In this paper, we presented that:

- (i) Philosophy in its *formal* (not *material*) sense is part of wisdom in Islam allowing the Muslim philosophers and theologians to articulate the doctrines of Islam intellectually as demanded by current intellectual challenges.
- (ii) The essence of philosophy itself is wisdom, i.e. *ḥikmah*, and such “wisdom” (i.e. *dhāt*) essentially must not be contradictory to the Quran itself. That is the “Wisdom” as known by God, albeit humans may misuse the wisdoms awarded to them by God to formulate doctrines in contrary to the *Shari‘ah*.
- (iii) In Islam, Prophet Muhammad is known as the “Walking Quran” (not “Living Quran” as understood in this journal or as per the Indonesian academic point of view). Aisha, the wife of the Prophet, when she was asked of the Prophet’s character, replied “his character is the al-Quran”.

From the three points above, we can see that Muhammad is a Prophet, but a Prophet is not a non-critical thinker. He was a guided thinker and a thinker who was preserved from errors by God. A thinker who is preserved from errors by God is a possessor of great wisdom given by God. If we say Prophet Muhammad is the *real* “philosopher king”, we understand it so in that context. This is not a claim of innovation (*bida‘ah*). If it is so, then it is *bida‘ah ḥasanah*.

The “theory of Islamization of knowledge” by Al-Attas and the “socio-historical method” by Alatas are sufficed on their own to achieve our target here. Theories such as “symbolic interactionism”, Gadamer’s “philosophical hermeneutical theory”, and “religious pluralism theory”, are almost meaningless and impractical to achieve our aim, for the following reasons:

- (i) Symbolic interactionism theory suggests that society develops their reality through the interpretation of symbols when they interact with each other. Symbols such as language, signs, genders and cultures. One important symbol is self-image. Proponents of symbolic interactionism believe that we form our sense of self by putting ourselves on others’ shoes and view ourselves from that perspective. We learn to behave accordingly from a perspective (Nickerson, March 3, 2025). This theory is completely irrelevant in the study of Islam. Islam is neither a symbol that is interpreted socially nor the context of “philosophy” in our current discussion categorized as “wisdom” or *ḥikmah* is a social construct. Both “wisdoms” and Islam are given by God. They are not developed through social interactions. We argue that philosophies found in pre-Islamic Arabia prepared the intellectual ground for the acceptance of Islam. Islam is not a social result. It is a revealed religion. Likewise, to Muslims as per the Islamic faith, self-image is not based on the others’ projections. Self-image in Islam is constructed on the realization of

the Lordship of God that annihilates the preconception of our own existence. To apply the symbolic interactionism theory in the study of Islam is a grave error and an act of disbelieving in the God of Islam.

- (ii) Another theory that is erroneous to be applied in Islamic studies is Gadamer's hermeneutic theory. Our understanding of the world is, according to Gadamer, shaped by our past and our present. Our understanding of any text is based on our experience – meaning, our interpretation of a text, or the language we use in our dialogue, is shaped by cultural and historical experiences. Therefore, there is no objective truth, but truth itself is relative to the meanings in our language. Science then, in this context, does not monopolize the truth, but arts and literatures also embody the truth in its various creative forms (PhilosophiesOfLife.org). If Gadamer's theory is used to test our hypothesis, we will be guilty to misrepresent Islam as the product of Hellenistic philosophies, paganism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Judaism through the cosmopolitan interaction of pre-Islamic Arabia. Instead, in this paper, we are arguing that the present of these philosophies and ideas in pre-Islamic Arabia prepare the intellectual grounds for Islam to manifest its own brilliancy that unite a group of fractioned people under the banner of being the *'ummah* of the Last Prophet.
- (iii) We are not promoters of religious pluralism. We do not adapt an external philosophy to place Islam within a system that will harmonize its existence with other religions. Such system has no use in the Islamic faith. It is what the Muslims call "*taḥṣīlu al-ḥāṣil*", meaning unnecessary intellectual burden. In Islam, the place for non-Muslims is clear. God is the Most Just, Most Merciful and Most Forgiving. Their fates are not for the Muslims to debate. Even within a Muslim's ethical consciousness, the concern of their own fate; either they will end up in heaven and hell, is not primary. But what is primary is the state of being in presence (*ḥuḍūr*) with God, through the ways of Muhammad who is the starting point of all creations. Therefore, our hypothesis in this paper is within Islam itself not an adaptation of a foreign or external system to Islam.

The thesis we are discussing here also is not categorized into the philosophy of religion as commonly understood in standard academia world. Zarepour (2021) argued that in the world of contemporary philosophy, the discourses are heavily Christianity-oriented. This is a problem for Zarepour because he believes that other religions should also contribute to the field of philosophy of religion. There are, as highlighted by Zarepour, similar doctrinal features found in different religions, such as the doctrine of "existence of God". In the debates within the field of philosophy of religion, the arguments were formulated from the experiences of Christianity. Zarepour envisioned that, Islam should also be able to contribute in the discussion. In this way, he believes that, it can "significantly contribute to providing the theoretical infrastructure of a more diverse and more tolerant world" (2021: p. 4). To achieve that, among others, Zarepour went to collect papers on Islam from the eminent journal *Religious Studies*. The criteria to his selection constitute either one

of these points: “(1) It philosophically engages with a problem that is exclusively related to (or raised by) Islamic beliefs. (2) It relies on either Islamic beliefs or at least theoretical perspectives developed in the Islamic tradition to philosophically engage with a problem about religious beliefs, regardless of whether or not that problem is exclusively Islamic” (2021: p. 2). In his research, he found that “there are only about twenty articles published in *Religious Studies*, during its almost 65-year history, meeting either of the proposed two criteria. This means that only less than two percent of the articles in one of the most prominent philosophy of religion journals have discussed about the second most followed religion in the world” (i.e. Islam). (2021: p. 4-5).

We wish to express how we view philosophy and its relation with Islam in contrast to Zarepour’s concern. We sympathize with Zarepour’s criteria of what philosophy in Islam is and how it should contribute to the discussions within the field of philosophy of religion. However, we want to go deeper than what Zarepour had envisioned. We argue that, studying philosophy, any philosophy at all, is not contrary to Islam. The purpose of a Muslim in studying philosophy is not to contribute discussions to the philosophy of religion molded from the Christendom, but to articulate the brilliancy of Islam in any situation. For example, in the Scottish philosopher David Hume’s famous *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, the Scottish thinker offered arguments that many believe would disprove the relevancy of religion. Since Hume is a secularist within the Judeo-Christian world, Zarepour would envision (we suppose) that a Muslim philosopher may offer a blow to Hume’s anti-theistic arguments and thus save the Christian world from the relentless attacks by Hume and his modern followers among the New-Atheism movement. Although this is not wrong and we do not completely disagree with, we would emphasize that this is not the Muslims’ primary purpose of studying philosophy. First of all, Hume’s criticism is the result of the Christian experiences. Christian as a philosophy itself is already different from Islam. Although Zarepour may argue that “the general problems of religious philosophy which do not exclusively belong to a specific religion can be addressed from perspectives of non-Christian religious traditions and/or by employing philosophical tools and theories developed in such traditions” (2021: p. 4), we see that such statement needs further clarification in order to be align with our own understanding. The conception of God in Islam and Christianity is different. The 20 Attributes of God in Islam necessarily negate the Trinity of Christianity, and the idea of Jesus as the earthly embodiment of God. Therefore, when a Humean Atheist attacks a Christian due to his faith, a Muslim comes to his defend intellectually, is not defending the doctrine of Jesus as the Son of God but rather the idea of a God that is personal to that individual’s belief that is free from the Christian doctrines. Thus, when a Muslim studies philosophy, he does not do so to be liberal and a danger to Islam. He studies philosophy to understand the underneath substance of the arguments surrounding him so when he can judge them accordingly to his wisdom, he can have intelligent dialogues with friends and enemies leading to nothing but goodness (i.e. *ḥasanah*).

He follows the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, expressed in the Quran: “[Prophet], call [people] to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good teaching. Argue with them in the most courteous way, for your Lord knows best who has strayed from His way and who is rightly guided” (Quran, 16: 125).

### **The Cosmopolitan of Pre-Islamic Arabia**

In ancient historical Roman records, Arabia was known as ‘Arabia Felix’ (“History of Arabia”). What are now known Yemen, Oman, and Saudi Arabia, pre-Islamic Arabia were a very lively geographical area on earth. Although the Arabs did not establish a single empire as their neighbors did, i.e. the Romans, the Persians, and the Ethiopians (Leal, n.d.), as multi-tribes (with some having established their own kingdoms) they managed to make Arabia an important place and route for trade (“History of Arabia”). At the crossroads of great empires like the Romans and the Persians, Arabia was a geographical area where people of different religions interacted. They were primarily, apart from the pagans, Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians (“7.7: Culture and Religion in Pre-Islamic Arabia”).

Within the Roman and the Persian empires, despite they were at war with each other, the rulers of each empire saw the foreign influence on their local religions as threats and this led to political grips on Christianity in Rome and Zoroastrian in Persia (Well 1922: Ch. 41). The stress in each empire necessarily would impact the middle region of Arabia. We can speculate it is possible, that Arabia would be ground where Christians, Zoroastrians, along with Jews and pagans exchange influences on each other’s religions – a form of threatening soft power as we understand it in modern political science. Such a phenomenon explains religious intellectualism to us and theological debates were already embedded in the Arabian culture by the time the Prophet was born in Mecca. The rhetoric of the Quran was revealed for this kind of society, but the wisdom is timeless. Therefore, the scholars - the truly ‘Ulamā’ - who are the heirs to the Prophet and who inherits his wisdom in various degrees to their merits, would rearticulate the application of the Quran accordingly to the ever-changing contextualization brought by the ever-changing intellectual challenges in society and environment. That is why the revelation of Islam came later after the previous revelations. Supposedly the Quran was to be revealed, along with the earthly existence of the Prophet when humans were in small tribes with simple theological doctrines amid them, how would mankind justly apprehend the Final and the Complete Religion? It is in this idea that we see intellectual developments in pre-Islamic Arabia as the intellectual preparation for the revelation of the Quran and the coming of Prophet Muhammad. Santayana’s reflection that the practice of philosophy in ancient Greece was to look for the “philosopher king” fits with our theoretical framework.

## Hellenistic Philosophy in Pre-Islamic Arabia

Some scholars strongly suggested that Platonism already reached Arabia hundreds of years even before the translation movement after the Ummayyad Empire made contact with Syria (Bosra n.d.a; Holbrook 2021). Those who hold the more generally accepted view, i.e. that Hellenistic philosophy enters the Islamic world through conquest, would believe that the role of the Muslim philosophers was to reconcile the revealed religion, i.e. Islam, with Hellenistic philosophy (e.g. Fakhry 2011: Ch. 1). It is even seen that al-Kindi's conception of God was that of Platonism (Holbrook 2021: 43). Such an understanding is only possible if philosophy is seen so alien to Islam that incorporating them together as a body of knowledge was a novel intellectual activity that is outside of the original fabric of Islamic beliefs, creeds, and thoughts (see Glassè 2002: 355). On the other hand, those holding the view that Platonism already reached Arabia in the earlier period, according to recent literatures, indicate the following beliefs: (i) Prophet Muhammad borrowed the Hellenistic ideas from wherever he heard – as Arabia then we already presented was metropolitan – and incorporated the ideas into his composition of the Quran (see Palmateer 2024, Jan 4), and (ii) the presence of Platonism in the Quran was too ridiculous to be pure coincidental yet mysterious on the merit of not denying the originality of the Quran (e.g. Holbrook 2021). While we acknowledge the contributions of these scholars to breaking the common narrative that ancient Greek thoughts were stranger to Islam until the conquest of Syria, gives a degree of legitimacy to our thesis, we respectfully, on epistemic ground, depart from their worldviews and their understandings on the nature of Hellenistic philosophy with Islam.

“Wisdom is the lost properties of the believers,” said Prophet Muhammad, and it is their duty “to collect it anywhere they find”<sup>6a</sup>. Supplementing to the Prophetic insight is the *ḥadīth* that “seek knowledge even to China”<sup>6b</sup>. The Proof of Islam, al-Ghazali already stated, is the standard epistemic barrier in studying philosophy: “the contact of truth with falsehood does not change truth into falsehood, anymore than it changes falsehood into truth” (1909: 40). This should be clear to us that Islam's attitude toward knowledge or ideas, found in other cultures and civilizations is not fatalistic in the sense that any truthfulness found in the others, i.e. wisdom, is to be rejected. Therefore, this maxim must not be contrary to the *Shari'ah*, nay, it is part of the *Shari'ah*. Accordingly, it is not contrary to reason that the revelation of the Quran also carries this epistemic standard with it. In other words, it is not contrary to reason, if the Quran which is a revelation from God and acknowledges the truthfulness and wisdom found in other cultures and civilizations – in this case, Hellenistic philosophy.

In Holbrook's paper entitled *Plato, Fetters around the neck, and the Quran* (2021), the esteemed academic and translator argued that the use of the word “fetters” that “lock the neck so one could not turn”, both in Greek and Arabic, especially in epistemological *Practicing Philosophy Part of ... 99-132 (Mohamed Eusuff Md Amin, et al)*

context, was found only once in each culture during the time of antiquity, and that is, in Plato's *Republic* and the Holy Quran (i.e. in *Sūrah Yā-Sīn*). This indicates a strong link. In Plato's *Republic*, the famous "cave" allegory depicts men who were chained in the cave and unable to turn behind to see the external lights that give birth to the shadows on the wall in front of them. In *Sūrah Yā-Sīn*, the deniers of the Prophet were depicted to be chained on the neck and they were unable to turn to see, on top of being covered by walls surrounding them. Both stories depict the spiritual state (metaphorically) of those who deny the truth. Holbrook challenged us in her paper with this inquiry: "Further inquiry may help solve the mystery of how Platonic thought entered Islamic history—why very early Islamic texts exhibit such remarkable familiarity with Plato's characteristic themes; how, as Adamson remarked, "God seems to function like a Platonic form" according to al-Kindi (Holbrook 2021: 43). The thesis presented in this paper then, somehow, will provide a rough pathway for understanding such a query.

As we already remarked earlier, the ancient Greeks' motivation of studying philosophy by was to seek the philosopher king. We derived this conclusion from George Santayana's reflection on philosophy. While commenting on Ancient Greek philosophy in general, the Spanish philosopher stated that "In philosophy itself investigation and reasoning are only preparatory and servile parts, means to an end. They terminate in insight, or what in the noblest sense of the word may be called theory, θεωρία,—*a steady contemplation of all things in their order and worth* [emphasis added]. Such contemplation is imaginative. No one will reach it if he has not enlarged his mind and tamed his heart" (1910: Ch. 1). Furthermore, as he continued down the pages, "All living things pursued the greatest happiness they could see their way to; but they were marvelously short-sighted; and the business of the philosopher was to foresee and pursue the greatest happiness that was really possible" (1910: Ch. 2). This means that the purpose of a philosopher then is to guide the people to recognize the order of beings according to their excellence, implying that, the order of the society must be in a way that it is led by the most excellent of them. Santayana further commented on the following chapter of the same book:

"Having become Socratic, the thinking part of mankind devoted all its energies henceforward to defining good and evil in all their grades, and in their ultimate essence; a task which Dante brings to a perfect conclusion. They speculated about moral distinctions so earnestly and exclusively that they saw them in almost visible shapes, as Plato had seen his ideas. They materialized the terms of their moral philosophy into existing objects and powers. The highest good—in Plato still chiefly a political ideal, the aim of policy and art—became God, the creator of the world. The various stages or elements of perfection became persons in the Godhead, or angelic intelligences, or aerial demons, or lower types of the animal soul." (1910: Ch. 3)

Anyone familiar with Plato's philosophy is aware of the idea of the "philosopher

king” from his *Republic*. As an entry to *Britannica*, the “philosopher king” is defined as an “idea according to which the best form of government is that in which philosophers rule” (Lane 2024, Feb 5), by bringing the reflections by Santayana together in the context of the “philosopher king”, as follows:

- (i) Philosophy is the art of recognizing things according to their nobility;
- (ii) The purpose of philosophy is to enable one to reach happiness, hence the role of philosophers is to make this possible;
- (iii) Moral ideals is the measure of philosophical and political ends;
- (iv) The ideal state is a state ruled by a philosopher – the noblest of professions according to Plato.

From here, it is fair to say that, the character of the Hellenistic philosophy that was already present in pre-Islamic Arabia must bear the four characteristics we mention above. It means that the nature of Hellenistic philosophy on Arabian soil was the intellectual exercise of finding the “philosopher king”. We, respectfully, do not agree with the idea that Alexander the Great was the “philosopher king” (Bosra n. d.b) – maybe in other contexts is acceptable, but not in our current context. This is because Alexander was made a king by birthright with the fortune of having Aristotle as his tutor. He was a king who studied philosophy. He was not found by the citizens, but the citizens or subjects were lucky to have him philosophically trained by the best philosopher, Aristotle. The context of our “philosopher king” is, he was being sought. The people who were trained in philosophy were seeking him – regardless of purposely or unconsciously – for when they were studying philosophy, they were seeking the right order of everything, and this includes who could be the ultimate leader that leads the ideal city. Therefore, we must not be surprised if such a spirit (i.e. to look for the “philosopher king”) was floating in the land of Arabia prior to the birth of the Prophet. This was part of the intellectual preparation among mankind before the coming of the Prophet himself. If this idea was not floating around, how could the blame on the deniers of the Prophet be justified? It is with the consciousness that obeying the Prophet becomes a moral obligation for those who recognize him as who he was in their midst.

However, it must be noted and stressed that it was not because of the presence of Hellenistic philosophy that obedience to the Prophet becomes a moral obligation but because the idea of searching the “philosopher king” making up a portion of our conscience. Nay, our obligation to the Prophet and our conscience to seek him, and find him, is part of the natural inclination of mankind as ordained by God – in other words, it is humankind’s *fitrah* from all time to seek Prophet Muhammad and obey him. Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas (2023) reminded us in his latest book entitled *Islam: The Covenant Fulfilled* that the covenant sealed by the previous prophets with God was to acknowledge and prepare the ground for the coming of Prophet Muhammad (Quran

(3):81). The presence of the Hellenistic philosophy on Arabian soil was just a part of the worldly condition for the manifestation of this universal acknowledgment (of Prophet Muhammad). You may be right to argue that such conscience can be aroused without the aid of the presence of Hellenistic philosophy in Arabia. But history as willed by God shows that Greek influence was not absent in pre-Islamic Arabia. To us, hypothesizing that the floating of Hellenistic ideas in Arabia prepared the ground for the reception of Prophet Muhammad, and thus Islam as well, does not deny or negate the originality of Islam as its own mode of thought and as a worldview in itself. However, with the inclusion of Hellenistic philosophy into part of its preparation for worldly manifestation, we recognize a universal attribute in Islam, in which we can say Hellenistic philosophy was not free from the influence of Islam coming from the future. Such recognition, in our estimation, is more noble and dignified than the belief alone that Islam would develop independently without contact with other civilizations that predate its worldly manifestation. What we have discussed here so far provides a brief answer to Holbrook's inquiry.

### **Why Is Studying Philosophy After the Prophet Known?**

One may challenge our proposition then, what is the purpose of studying philosophy after the “king philosopher” is already made known? Here our answer has to be objective – in the sense that, our theorization on the purpose of philosophy must not be limited as a matter of subjective only. We answer, if we argued that the purpose of studying philosophy is to seek the “philosopher king”, the continuation of studying philosophy would be still about seeking that “philosopher king”. In other words, by *fitrah*, mankind is still searching for the Prophet even long after of his passing. Some were born Muslims, but it is not necessarily they are Muslims in their deepest personal beliefs. Some Muslims consider Islam only as their cultural identity. Yet, they are still on their *journey* to Allah, either consciously or not (Md Amin, 2023). *Īmān* did not come “just like that” to anyone professing Muslims, but it was a process by which God guides them in their journey to spiritual maturity, where proper *faith* is to be established. Those guided are aware that their journey to certainty (i.e. *īmān*) comes from God alone, by God, and for Him alone (i.e. *minallāh, billāh, lillāh*). Therefore, it is natural for those Muslims (and non-Muslims), who are on their journey to God to study philosophy in order to seek Prophet Muhammad – as who he really is, more than a historical figure.

We also propose a second answer to the same question above. It is a continuation and inseparable answer from the first as given earlier. We already know that the “scholars are

the heirs” to the Prophet (Sunan Abi Dawud, 3641). We also know the *ḥadīth* about every time after a century, God will send a revivalist to the religion (Sunan Abi Dawud, 4291). In the Sufis’ belief system, in every generation, there is a “pillar” (or *qutub*) that will succeed one another throughout time (Manerī 1867: 21-22) – a pillar in which, if it is absent, the world will crumble. The End of Days (*qiyāmat*) ought to happen when the “pillar” (i.e. the universal man, *al-insān al-kāmil*) is not there anymore, according to Jami in his commentary of one of Ibn Arabi’s works (Chittick 1982). Whether or not one may accept the Sufis’ belief system, we cannot deny the authenticity of the “scholars being the heirs to the Prophet”. Therefore, scholars are the next “philosopher kings”, and studying philosophy then is to identify them among us. This is in line with what has been said by al-Ghazzali: “realizing piousness of people is one thing that confirm the beliefs of believers” (2011: 26).

Now, we will illustrate, with some examples, how learning philosophy, either *right* or *wrong*, will lead to the recognition of the “philosopher king”. Illustrating the whole body of philosophy would be beyond any ‘man-made’ corpus, but as Rumi said, “by little things we may come to understand those great matters” (n.d.: 122). The illustration below hopefully will show, why contemplation is so emphasized in the Quran.

Supposedly you were studying philosophy in the *wrong* way. You follow the thought of Daniel Dennett and you agree that the human consciousness is the result of billions of neurons acting individually in a collective manner. The ever-increasing sophistication of Artificial Intelligence further strengthens your worldview that the world is nothing but a complex mechanical entity (*materialism*). You scoff at the ideas of metaphysics, mysticism, and religious experiences. You would agree with Marx that religion is “just opium” to the poor amid class war. In this worldview, there is no “philosopher king” – because the material world is void of metaphysical order to justify such a “king”. If the idea of the “philosopher king” is insisted, you will predict that its existence would be the result of Darwinian violence. Therefore, when you see billions of Muslims obey the rules ordained by Prophet Muhammad, you would feel *hatred* for their “philosopher king”. In this context, due to the error of philosophy, you would still recognize the “philosopher king” nonetheless, but through contempt.

Now, supposedly, you expand your horizons in studying philosophy. You start to read Chomsky. You learn that actually the mechanical worldview of the world was invalidated by Newton when he proved that the working of gravity is beyond mechanical

means. Therefore, Descartes' dualism of mind and body ought to be an unjustified philosophical question, from this point of view. Newton, according to his critics, was a Platonist because of this "radical" conclusion. Like many Platonists (in the *formal* sense), Chomsky regards human nature as endowed (biologically) with innate capabilities, not only for "language", but also for the sense of justice and the innate moral compass. These are the root of anarchism in Chomsky's political thought. Anarchism in this context is the dismantling of illegitimate authority – not any authority, as the popular opinions often alluding to Anarchism (Chomsky 2015). In this Platonian dimension of political thought, there is a shadow of the "philosopher king", although it ought to remain abstract and conceptual. Responding to recent news of Chomsky's illness at the twilight of his age, we would like to dedicate some appreciation to the activist and intellectual. When false news of his death was made, many outpoured their emotion on how influential was he in shaping their moral standing in this ever-deceiving world where political narratives could obscure basic moral concepts. The chief example is the ongoing onslaughts of the Israeli government towards the Palestinians. As Muslim authors, we are grateful to his relentless intellectual superiority and sincerity, as to a certain degree, has restored the dignity of the oppressed Muslims, and any of the oppressed, after false accusations and narratives were made against the oppressed to legitimize the oppressors' actions. Although he is not a Muslim as far as we know, his legacy matches what Islam would define as the sign of a good man, and he is a man who is beloved by many, especially by the oppressed. As much as Rumi honored Plato in his *Mathnawī*, to honor Chomsky would not be a less Islamic thing to do.

Moving on. As you are already familiar with the dimension of Platonian thought after breaking from the narrow worldview of *materialism*, you start to seek a concrete example of the "philosopher king" – even if it ought to be just a shadow. Having considered examples of many great leaders and kings, like Alexander the Great or Sallahuddin Ayub the Conqueror of Jerusalem, you come across al-Farabi's thesis that the "philosopher-king" actually must be a prophet of God. Only Prophet Muhammad satisfies the criteria of a "philosopher/prophet-king" concretely, as defined by Plato and al-Farabi. He was the wisest of all men (i.e. *faṭānah*), most honorable in his actions (i.e. *amānah*), sincere in his objectives (i.e. *ṣidq*), and delivered the trusts given upon him (i.e. *tabliḡh*). He not only led but also created, the most virtuous city that ought to be the archetype of an Islamic city,

which was the City of the Prophet, Madīnah al-Munawwarah. With this realization, your origin of contempt for the Prophet changed to the acknowledgment of his place in history and eventually your submission to him as a Muslim. As you are living in today's world, you would seek a teacher, or a scholar, either living or through their books, that bear the traits of the Prophet.

The intellectual journey aforementioned reflects, or sketches, the intellectual experience (subsequently, spiritual experience too) of a philosophy student – who may have started with the *wrong* step. His *submission* to the Prophet, in our estimation, is more sincere than anyone professing to be a believer in the Prophet, simply because their parents or teachers say so. The sketch also shows that studying philosophy is actually an act of seeking the “philosopher king”. This reiterates our position that the practice of philosophy, or studying philosophy, is an act of intellectual preparation for the acceptance of the Prophet. Therefore, we do not find it strange if Hellenistic philosophies were already in the Arabian soil before Islam was revealed by God. We can accept the presence of Hellenistic philosophy in pre-Islamic Arabia as part of God's ordains and plans as He wills, to the greater wisdom that is only known to Him. We also can see that a student of philosophy carries the commands of the Quran. The intellectual journey as sketched above indicated that the student:

- (i) Reads
- (ii) Contemplate
- (iii) Is able to apply analogous thinking
- (iv) Understands human psychology
- (v) Understands what is science
- (vi) Understands history
- (vii) Solving problem sincerely by relying on God for guidance
- (viii) In addition, a philosophy student ought to resist dangerous temptations.

The eight criteria above are respectively as ordained by the Quranic instructions below<sup>7</sup>:

- (i) “Read! [...]” (96:1 and 3)
- (ii) “The blind and the sighted are not equal, just as those who believe and do good works and those who do evil are not equal: how seldom you reflect!” (40:58)

- (iii) “Tell the parable [...]” (18:32); “[...] We offer people such illustrations so that they may reflect” (59:21)
- (iv) “We shall show them Our signs [...] in themselves...” (41:53) “Man should reflect on what he was created from.” (85:5)
- (v) “He has subjected all that is in the heavens and the earth for your benefit, as a gift from Him. There truly are signs in this for those who reflect.” (45:13)
- (vi) “[...]and their example has gone down in history” (43:8)
- (vii) “Such is God’s guidance, with which He guides whichever of His servants He will [...] (6:88); “Why do they not turn to God and ask His forgiveness, when God is most forgiving, most merciful?” (5:74)
- (viii) “[...]Who goes astray further than the one following his own desires with no guidance from God? [...]” (28:50)

From the illustration above, it should be clear to us that studying philosophy is not contrary to the spirit of the Quran. One should not fear if one may be misled by philosophy, for as we have shown, even those who started with the ‘wrong’ philosophy, with God’s guidance, can acquire a greater depth of understanding of the Truth. To contextualize, let’s review al-Ghazzali’s criticism of philosophy.

There are three teachings in (Hellenistic) philosophy, according to al-Ghazzali, that have misled the students of philosophy away from the religion. They are (as explained by al-Ghazzali):

- (i) “Bodies do not rise again; spirits alone will be rewarded or punished; future punishments will be therefore spiritual rather than not physical. They are right in admitting spiritual punishments, for there will be such; but they are wrong in rejecting physical punishments, and in this manner contradicting the assertions of the Divine Law.”
- (ii) “God takes cognisance of universals, not of specials.” This is manifestly irreligious. The Quran asserts truly, “Not an atom’s weight in heaven or earth can escape His knowledge” (x. 62).”
- (iii) “They maintain that the universe exists from all eternity and will never end.” (1909: 33)

Recall our distinction between *formal* and *material* aspects of philosophy. The errors as noted by al-Ghazali above, in our estimation, are the *materialization* of the *formal* from itself

but not from the Quran. If they had *materialized* the *formals* according to the Qur'an, the following lines of thoughts might have gone through in their minds (respectively in correspond to the three points above):

(i) Plato established the immortality of the soul in his *Phadeo* by making the distinction between the corruptible body and the incorruptible nature of knowledge residing in the soul, thus this shows that the soul, as opposed to the body, is incorruptible, and the rewards of virtues and the punishments of vices, which are intelligible in nature, are to be experienced by the soul, while the body only experiencing the sensuous. The *formality* of this idea indicates that anything that is not of the divine perishes, while anything that is divine persists in the realms of existence. Had they *materialized* this based on the Quran, they would understand that the human body, even if the soul is not attached to it (e.g. the body of a dead man) would still be in the state of praising God – “Everything that is in the heavens and earth glorifies God” (Quran (64):1). In that respect, the human body does not totally perished in the realm of existence even if it is burned to ashes as dispersed by the wind, as it is divinely always praising God. What perish are only falsehoods, that were created by the imaginative faculties attached to the human body, and that is why, the limbs of the human body could not lie when questioned by God – “On that Day We shall seal up their mouths, but their hands will speak to Us, and their feet bear witness to everything they have done.” (Quran (36):65); “on the Day when their own tongues, hands, and feet will testify against them about what they have done.” (Quran (24):24).

(ii) According to Aristotle, the reason we “can know” is because our intellect is influenced directly by the Active Intellect, which is divinely moved by the Unmoved Mover; or, the Active Intellect itself is the Unmoved Mover, ultimately. The Unmoved Mover by definition is not the same as the other movers which are moved by others<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, the state of the Active Intellect would be different than the individual intellects themselves. The *formality* of this idea is that the Whole is different than the parts. Had the philosophy students *materialized* this concept based on the Quran, they would understand that God knows what we know, but God's knowledge of what we know is never the same as our experience of our own knowledge, for God knows what we would never know. “He knows what is in the heavens and earth; He knows what you conceal and what you reveal; God knows very well the secrets of every heart.” (Quran (64):4); “You argue about some things

of which you have some knowledge, but why do you argue about things of which you know nothing? God knows and you do not.” (Quran (3):66).

(iii) In Aristotle’s Ten Categories, “Substance” is considered as the primary and necessity whereas other categories like “position”, “time” and “quantity”, are predicates to the “substance”. The purpose of the categories was to provide definitions of what a *thing* is (Sullivan 2006: 91). Therefore, a father is a man (substance) who was born earlier (time) than his son (position). Being a “man” is the most important of what to be defined as a father, whereas “time”, for him being born before his son, and “position”, for he is the parent to his son, are considered attributes. The father will cease to exist, if he was not a man, however, remains so to exist (and has the potential to be a father) if the son had not existed instead (meaning, the attributes of “time” and “position” are not applicable). In the physical realm, since something could not come from nothing, Aristotle concluded that the “primary matter” (i.e. fire, water, air and earth) as the ultimate “substance” making up the world must be eternal<sup>10</sup>. In the metaphysical realm, this is translated as the prime matter along with the Unmoved Mover are eternal entities. The *formality* of this idea is that creations are not separated from the Creator, yet creations are not the Creator. If the philosophy students were to *materialize* this concept according to the Quran, they would refer it to the verse (*Āyah*) “[...] Everything will perish except His (i.e. God’s) Face [...]” (Quran (28):88) and “It is to God that everything in the heavens and earth belongs [...]” (Quran (4):126). It was the powerful mind of Ibn Sina that changed “substance” from Aristotle’s Categories with “existence”, making “existence” itself the “primary matter” (Goichon 2021: 132)<sup>11</sup>, and therefore, God’s essence would be identical to God’s existence, meaning, God is the Real Existence, whereas others are only “predicates” to His existence – meaning, the existences of others than God are only “predicates” to God’s own existence, and therefore, creations will never come to a moment which they independently exist from God. From a perspective, we can see that nothing is Real but God alone, and the creations are in constant perish (*fanā*), and like shadows, “Everything in the heavens and earth belongs to God; it is to Him that all things return.” (Quran (3):109).

Here, our commentaries support al-Ghazzali’s criticism of philosophy, but we did not dismiss the usefulness of philosophy. In fact, we showed how philosophy prepared the intellectual ground of articulation to convey the messages of the Quran. However, we must be humble, although al-Ghazzali was critical of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, we are not in a

position to dismiss them, and in fact, we also have shown how actually Ibn Sina had prepared the ground for the metaphysical articulation heavily used by the figures like al-Ghazzali himself and Ibn Arabi (i.e. the primacy of existence over attributes). If our feeble minds could provide these commentaries, what is more to come from the far superior and greater minds of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina? Therefore, we are obliged to contextualize the criticisms of al-Ghazzali towards the Muslim philosophers. For current purposes only, we could only postulate that since each of these thinkers was from different generations of different eras, there must be some differences also in the syntaxes and semantics of their languages. Students, if not careful, may misunderstand the intent of the authors they read, especially if the author's way of syntaxes are slightly different from than their common ways as this may affect the semantics of a rigid perspective. Students who study the old writing style of their own language can testify to this truth. Therefore, as humility itself is a method in scholarship (Alatas, 2021: 5)<sup>12</sup>, we are obliged to contextualize al-Ghazzali's criticism of the philosophers in the context that he was critical of the misrepresentations of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina instead.

Some additional remark on studying philosophy. We do not expect everyone to be at the same level of learning. The degree of error due to foolishness in studying philosophy can be "destructive", according to al-Ghazzali, commenting on those who do not have sharp minds:

"[R]eading of philosophic writings so full of vain and delusive utopias should be forbidden, just as the slippery banks of a river are forbidden to one who knows not how to swim. The perusal of these false teachings must be prevented just as one prevents children from touching serpents. A snake-charmer himself will abstain from touching snakes in the presence of his young child, because he knows that the child, believing himself as clever as his father, will not fail to imitate him [...]" (1909: 39-40).

However, with respect to the possible degree of intelligence in everyone, the 'forbidden' above must be in contrast to the morality of knowledge. Al-Ghazzali continues:

"But the snake-charmer, after having taken the serpent and separated the venom from the antidote, having put the latter on one side and destroyed the venom, ought not to withhold the antidote from those who need it. In the same way the skilled coin-assayer, after having put his hand in the bag of the false coiner, taken out

the good coins and thrown away the bad ones, ought not to refuse the good to those who need and ask for it. Such should be the conduct of the learned man. If the patient feels a certain dislike of the antidote because he knows that it is taken from a snake whose body is the receptacle of poison, he should be disabused of his fallacy. If a beggar hesitates to take a piece of gold which he knows comes from the purse of a false coiner, he should be told that his hesitation is a pure mistake which would deprive him of the advantage which he seeks. It should be proved to him that the contact of the good coins with the bad does not injure the former and does not improve the latter. In the same way, the contact of truth with falsehood does not change truth into falsehood, any more than it changes falsehood into truth” (1909: 40).

## CONCLUSION

The Quran is known as Words by God, and the world is created and willed by God. God’s attributes such as His knowledge, speech, will, and power, under the principle of unity, are not separate as if they will oppose each other. Therefore, as the Quran is the speech from God, and the world we live in is willed by God, by default then, the Quran and the world we live in are in complete unity and harmony. This is the meaning behind the statement that Nature as an Open Book is to be ‘identical’ to the Quran. Therefore, the Quran is not something that is separated from us, even though we may not have the physical Quran in our possession or in our memory. Our lives itself is part of the Quran. Furthermore, it is impossible to speak of the Quran without we speak of Prophet Muhammad. Therefore, as it is impossible to separate our lives from the Quran, it is impossible to separate our lives from the Prophet, although we may not acknowledge him.

“If We had sent this Quran down to a mountain, you [Prophet] would have seen it humbled and split apart in its awe of God: We offer people such illustrations so that they may reflect.” (Quran (59):21)

Indeed in this paper, we brought our own reflection of the Quranic verse above. We observed that Hellenistic philosophy was already in pre-Islamic Arabia and we also established that the purpose of studying philosophy is to seek, or recognize, the “philosopher king”. Therefore, as indicated in the Quranic verse above, we see that the presence of Hellenistic philosophy on Arabian soil before the advent of Islam was to

prepare the intellectual ground for the acceptance of the Prophet. The acceptance of the Prophet by his society means the articulation of the Quran was intelligible to his society. Therefore, it is by God's will, that philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, toiled in their intellectual creativity, to provide a body of ideas that prepare the intellectual grounds for the acceptance of the Prophet and the Quran.

We also have shown that the studying of philosophy is also beneficial. Although there is a danger to it, in the sense of misapplication of the *formal* and the *material*, we should be optimistic that guidance is from God. With such intellectual labor, we argued that the study of philosophy itself also helps us identify the proper scholars who were the *heirs* to the Prophet. According to the Prophet, "Allah will raise for this community at the end of every hundred years the one who will renovate its religion for it" (Sunnan Abi Daud, 4291)<sup>13</sup>. This means, the meaning of the Quran will also be rearticulated accordingly to contemporary intellectual challenges in the time of the *mujaddid*. Therefore, how can the study of philosophy, even the erroneous ones, be ignored? How can we justify that a scholar indeed is the heir of the Prophet if he himself could not identify contemporary intellectual challenges harm Islam and misrepresenting the Quran? This also shows that the Quran is 'dynamic' and able to resist many forms of intellectual challenges, provided the scholars able to execute their duty in preserving the dignity of the Quran.

The conclusion above must be ingrained in contemporary Quranic studies. An academician studying the Quran must not be a mediocre scholar. They must be well trained in Islamic thought and other philosophies too especially those coming from the Western world and experiences that have major influence on this contemporary globalizing world, should they wish to solve contemporary problems via the Quran. They must not apply any theories to their studies without any knowledge of the philosophical foundation of such theories. Otherwise, their works are in vain, if the philosophical foundation of the theory they used is against the reality as projected by Islam, through the Quran and Hadith. Therefore, studying philosophy itself is part of the "Living Quran", and a requirement in contemporary Quranic studies.

## END NOTES

1. According to Al-Attas: "For quiddity in the particular, logical sense is merely a

mental entity belonging to a class of secondary intelligibles to which nothing in the external world corresponds; whereas the theologians were concerned primarily not with mental entities, but with extramental realities such as immediately perceived as at the stage of the primary notion of things. Thus they defined reality (*ḥaqīqah*) as something realized externally (*tahāqquqa*), and the combination of reality and quiddity in the particular, logical sense becomes the equivalent of quiddity in general, ontological sense, which refers to real essence having as its referent or correspondent a concrete, external object, an existent (*maḥjūd*), a thing (*shay*). They meant by this in combination, therefore, to indicate a concept directly signifying an extramental reality, and belonging to the class of primary intelligibles.” (1995: 224-225)

2. Sullivan gave clearer definitions: “Material logic is concerned with content of arguments, while formal logic is concerned with the way in which the contents are arranged.” (2006: 22)

3. According to Goichon: “Among Hasan al-Basri’s disciples some specially adopted his method of argumentation, the *Kalam*, in which reason predominates. They were called the *Mutakallimun*. It was they who adopted Greek methods and ideas most ardently in the third century of the Hijra.” (2021: 40)

4. According to Al-Attas, after the process of Dewesternization of knowledge, the process of Islamization of knowledge is: “[...] elements and key concepts are mainly prevalent in that branch of knowledge pertaining to the human sciences, although it is noteworthy that even in the natural, physical and applied sciences, particularly where they deal with *interpretation of facts* and *formulation of theories*, the same process of isolation of the elements and key concepts should be applied; for the interpretations and formulations indeed belong to the sphere of the human sciences. The ‘islamization’ of present-day knowledge means precisely that, *after* the isolation process referred to, the knowledge free of the elements and key concepts isolated are *then* infused with Islamic elements and key concepts which, in view of their fundamental nature as defining the *fitrah*, in fact imbue the knowledge with the quality of its natural function and purpose and thus makes it *true knowledge*.” (1993: 162-163)

5. Alatas defines the historical-sociological method as: “[...] the understanding that every belief, idea of man or major phenomenon should be seen as a fact possessing an absolute unity with time, place, culture, group and environment, in which such beliefs, ideas of phenomena originate. Thus, to know and understand a particular phenomenon, 5 (five) questions should be asked: (1) When did the phenomenon originate? (2) Where? (3) In which culture? (4) Which group is associated with the phenomenon? (5) In what environment does the phenomenon occur? [...] it is necessary to point out that the word ‘phenomenon’ is used in the widest sense, including also the emergence of a belief or idea.” (2007, 96)

6a&b. These sayings attributed to the Prophet are well-known within the Islamic tradition.

7. The verses from the Quran cited in this essay are the English translation from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem as per Quran.com.

8. See Aristotle's *De Anima* and his *Metaphysics* as well.

9. Actually, there are two types of 'substance': *primary* and *secondary*. A specific person, says Paul McCartney, is a 'primary substance', but the more generic 'man' is what is known as a 'secondary substance'. In this respect, 'primary substance' could never be a predicate, whereas 'secondary substance' can be a predicate. We can say "Paul McCartney is a man", but we cannot say "A man is Paul McCartney". For more detail, see (Sullivan 2006: 56). The reason we did not include these two types of 'substances' as explanations in our text is that we do not want to overcomplicate an example that is already too brief for any reader to understand it is not enough to study or learn about Aristotle's Categories. It is also not misleading nonetheless, as we did not say directly that a 'substance' could never be a predicate. Furthermore, the simplicity of our explanation will be easy on novice readers during the transition to Ibn Sina's ideas in the coming argument.

10. See Aristotle's *Physics*.

11. Actually, Goichon did not directly say this. In his essay entitled *Avicenna: The Philosopher of Being*, he discussed about the 'Necessary Being'. When Aristotle ontologized his logical "substance" he arrived at the conclusion of the permanent world, as nothing can come from nothing. However, for Ibn Sina, since 'substance' must come from something, then 'substance' must not be the foundation of everything, as 'substance' itself is liable to be a genus (i.e. even the most basic atom is part of a genus – in other words, it is not unique). Therefore, the foundation of everything must be something that could not be reduced to a genus or anything – it ought to be "Pure Being" (or "Simple Being"). Since "existence" qualifies any predicates to be ontological, by default, the "Pure Being" must be nothing but the "Existence" itself (p.s. Also, "Existence" could not be a part of a genus, as it is always unique, for the idea of multiple "Existences" itself is self-contradictory, and if even it be so, the whole idea collapses into a single "Existence" nonetheless). This is what we mean, when we say that Ibn Sina downgraded Aristotle's "substance" and replaced it with "Existence" – a move that is harmonized with the Quran. On this matter, Goichon wrote: "[...] insisting on the ontological basis of these distinctions: 'Necessary Being has nothing in common with the quiddity of anything, because every quiddity belonging to what is not itself, postulates the possibility of being... Therefore, Necessary Being does not share a generic or a specific idea with any other being; hence it does not need to be distinguished by an idea of a difference, specific or accidental. On the contrary, it is separated by essence.' Why is this? Because 'necessary existence belongs to it as quiddity belongs to other beings.'" (2021: 132)

12. As Alatas aptly put it: “What makes a scholar humble, considerate, thorough, painstaking, judicious, fair and objective in his/her research, leading to a sound conclusion, is his/her character structure. It is this character structure fused with accumulated knowledge that brings about the final intellectual creation.” (2021: 5)

13. This translation of the *ḥadīth* was taken from Sunnah.com.

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