An Islamic Worldview from Turkey

Religion in a Modern, Secular and Democratic State

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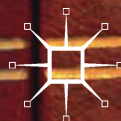
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FOREWORD

An Islamic Worldview from Turkey: Religion in a Modern, Secular and Democratic State, written by John Valk, Halis Albayrak and Mualla Selçuk, is a unique book. In a very readable manner, the authors from Canada and Turkey address the interrelationship between religion and democratic, secular states from the perspective of a particular Islamic worldview.

The book has grown out of a structured dialogue between a Christian and two committed Muslims. So, it combines an outside as well as an inside perspective to really understand and to make understandable for a wide audience what the essence of Islam as a 1500-year old religious tradition is all about. Questions from the outside, thus from a Christian perspective, are sometimes tough, but so are the questions coming from inside, from Muslims themselves. All are presented in a spirit of deep respect, benevolence and curiosity. The authors share a strong commitment for the sake of religion in its personal as well societal and public aspects.

Instead of presenting mere facts about Islam, or dealing with prejudices on Islam broadly speaking, the book is not presenting fixed and static answers or descriptions on issues in respect to Islam. On the contrary, it is a hermeneutical journey in which Islam is uncovered, and it provides the reader with an understanding of Islam in its dynamic and vital strength.

The context is present day Turkey, and the focus is on religion or worldview in a modern, democratic and secular state. A state that, in contrast to most Western secular states where religion has often been

banned to the private domain, is socially and in the public square still strongly impregnated by Islam. What does this context mean for the thoughts, beliefs and values of Muslims when they try to combine the freedom persons and groups have in a liberal-democratic and secular state with the freedom of believing, the freedom of faith?

This book deals with the big existential and ultimate questions in life. So, it deals with a worldview as a vision of life and a way of life from an Islamic point of view by means of an elaborated conceptual framework pointing to cultural dimensions, ultimate or existential questions, ontological and epistemological questions, and universal/particular beliefs/ values/principles.

The core question is: What does the meaning *of* life of the tradition of Islam look like and in what way do individuals experience their own meaning *in* life? In what way could the Qur'an, as the revealed words of the Eternal, be understood and interpreted today in order that a believing Muslim's concrete and daily life with its experiences and problems can be sustained by these words?

This book is a must for theologians, religious studies scholars and (religious) educators, but also for a broader audience of policymakers, administrators as well as persons who really want to learn more about this particular Islamic worldview.

Due to the authors' sophisticated and deep knowledge, insights, experiences and wisdom in the field of theology, religious and worldview studies and Islam, the book guarantees for high and professional quality as well as relevance. Strongly recommended!

July 2017   Siebren Miedema

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Preface

This book is not about Islam. That is, it is not about the Five Pillars of Islam, or its doctrines, or its rituals, or Islamic fundamentalists, or Islam's attitudes towards women. These one can freely read about in books that fill bookshops shelves or textbooks that are required reading for those studying Islam. This is not yet another such book about Islam.

Yet, this book *is* about Islam. It is a journey into Islam—into the heart of Islam, into the essence of a world religion. It is a journey by means of dialogue. That journey and that dialogue begin with questions and end with even more questions. It is not definitive about Islam, nor is it prescriptive. It does not seek to judge Islam, nor explain it. Rather, it explores Islam—from the inside and the outside.

This book explores Islam from the outside, by a Christian linked to the academy. It does not seek to compare two traditions, Christianity and Islam, searching for similarities and/or differences. It is not a lexicon or a dictionary, intended to reveal doctrines, creeds or even strengths or weaknesses in the two. Rather, from an outside perspective, it asks questions—and at times tough questions—not to undermine, provoke or incite Islam. It does this to *challenge* Islam, but with the best of intentions—to mine the depths of a 1500-year tradition that impacts the lives of billions of people around the world and that includes within its ranks some of the world's best and brightest theologians, philosophers, poets and writers, past and present. A voice from the outside, perhaps representative of numerous voices worldwide but especially from the Western world, seeks to understand Islam in a new way, for Islam is now a fact

of the Western world. The approach taken in this book—an approach of understanding—tries to create a respectful path, for those from different religious, secular and cultural traditions, to find new ways to live together in harmony and peace.

This book explores Islam from the inside, by committed Muslims: a group of younger and older scholars linked to the academy. It includes insights and perceptions from seasoned academics with expertise in areas such as Qur'an Studies, Religious Studies, Women's Studies and Cultural Studies. It includes intuitions and queries from graduate students, research assistants and religious instructors early into their academic careers. Rare were readily prescribed answers given to questions posed. Rather, time was taken to carefully consider, think and reflect on responses, for the questions frequently took group members into areas previously unexplored. In turn, group members uncovered a dynamic Islam; one quite capable of enlivening them, meeting new challenges of the present, countering the harshest of criticisms and breathing new life into teachings that at times are considered static, definitive and prescriptive.

This book explores teachings and rituals of Islam, not to describe them but to reflect on the meaning behind them. It explores questions that might have given rise to them and reflects on new questions that may result from them, so greater understandings are achieved. It seeks to generate new insight into a rich tradition so it does not ossify with the onslaught of secularism.

This book is about Islam in Turkey: about religion in a modern, democratic and secular state. Islam has many faces and presents itself in many forms. Some clash with Western values and lifestyles, causing grief and consternation for both insiders and outsiders. This book looks at Islam from the perspective of a modern, democratic and secular state, and its challenge to Muslims: their thoughts, beliefs and values. In much of Western secular society, religion has been marginalized, its influence waning in social and cultural mores. Turkey is increasingly modern, constitutionally democratic and guardedly secular, yet it is also culturally and traditionally overwhelmingly Islamic. This book looks at Islam from the perspective of those who embrace freedoms brought by a modern, democratic and secular society, yet strive to live out and give expression to their Islamic beliefs and values in light of those freedoms. It is about uncovering the spirit revealed in an ancient text and discovering how to apply that spirit in a modern context, recognizing full well that penetrating questions confront not only an ancient text but also a modern context.

This book is about a framework that assists in raising the questions while at the same time discovering new ones. The framework serves as a tool, a heuristic device, a means not only to ask probing questions to stimulate new thoughts and ideas about Islam, but also to ask the same probing questions of the secular believer and the non-Muslim religious devotee, for all are people of faith, all have faith of some kind and in something.

This book is about big questions. It is about ultimate or existential questions, such as the meaning or purpose of life, discerning right from wrong, our obligations and responsibilities, a higher power, force or being, or about life after this life. It is about questions concerning the stories that influence us, the metanarratives that embrace our thinking and being, the teachings that guide and direction to our lives, the symbols and rituals that define us, and the emotional experiences that captivate us. It is about ontological questions regarding the nature of the human, about our physical and metaphysical natures. It is about epistemological questions that challenge our knowledge, the extent of our knowledge and the sources of our knowledge. Lastly, it is about responses to universal beliefs and values that we embrace, which become expressed in particular ways in particular situations and contexts, questions regarding the dignity of the human, the sacredness of life, diversity and equality, and concern for the environment.

This book is about worldviews that take shape from such questions. It is about the visions of life and ways of life that vary in scope and latitude, in breadth and depth, as they are shaped by responses to such questions. It is about questions put forth by different worldviews (religious and secular), each posed from the constraints of their own perspectives, strengths and limitations.

But mostly, this book is about *an* Islamic worldview. It is not about *the* Islamic worldview, if such indeed exists anywhere. It does not pretend to speak *for* Islam, only *about* Islam, and then only from a particular perspective in time and place. It may not sit well with those seeking definitive answers, or those troubled by uncertainties, fearful of change or uncomfortable with ambiguities. It may not sit well with those frightened by the probing questions of various academic disciplines. But for those seeking to embrace or understand a dynamic Islam that may guide and direct new thoughts and ideas as the crosswinds of change blow consistent and strong across a constantly changing secular landscape, this Islamic worldview might breathe new life into old familiar teachings and practices. If so, then this book is for you.

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This book had its genesis at a chance breakfast encounter at a conference in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada in late July of 2010. Two strangers—one a Canadian (John Valk) and one a visitor to Canada (Mualla Selçuk)—took a risk that sharing a morning meal together might be more welcoming and rewarding than eating in solitude. That summer morning, in a small cafeteria at St. Paul's University and with few others present, initial icebreakers led to warm and engaging conversations. Before the conference concluded, some strategizing had begun to see what might unfold when people from different nations, language backgrounds, religious beliefs and cultural traditions dare to venture into some uncharted territory, exploring some big questions of a religious, spiritual and existential nature, with a willingness, initially cautiously exercised, to be open and even vulnerable in probing some deep-seated beliefs and values. So began a journey that soon developed into one of deep respect, friendship and collaboration, demonstrating yet again that when trust is established between people of different beliefs and traditions, the dialogue can be rich, deep, mutually beneficial and heartwarming. This book is the culmination of that wonderful journey.

This book arises out of material gathered from five workshops conducted over a span of four years and held at Ankara University in its Faculty of Divinity. Each workshop lasted three to four days, with participants numbering between seven and seventeen. The workshops included younger and older scholars—full professors, assistant professors, research assistants, religious instructors and graduate students—with expertise in areas such as Qur'an Studies, Religious Studies, Women's Studies, Worldview Studies and Cultural Studies.

In each workshop, a particular worldview framework served to guide the discussions. It was set in a particular context of a number of different worldview traditions from which questions were posed to members of the group. Group members joined in an intense discussion with each other regarding the questions posed, raising further questions, testing deeply held assumptions, probing Qur'anic texts, confronting traditional understanding, discerning between textual mandates and cultural dictates, and more. Notes were taken that recorded and encapsulated these passionate discussions. The discussion notes were later expanded and translated into English, and they serve as the basis of this book. First drafts of chapters were circulated to all group members for further input and then refined and polished by the three authors of this book.

This book contains insights from a group of academics younger and older in Turkey bent on giving new expression to an age-old religious tradition, a tradition often perceived as clashing with the spirit of modernity. They explored questions that arose for them, in their various capacities and roles, as they sought to give meaning to a faith constantly under pressure to confine itself to private spaces. This book garners insights from multiple perspectives that include the theological, philosophical, historical, cultural, sociological and more. It dares to ask hard, critical questions, venturing into the uncharted and difficult territory. It incorporates insights from experts long into the journey and intuitions from those beginning the journey. It arises from innumerable conversations, workshops, discussions and dialogues. It seeks not to judge or prescribe, but to explore and probe. Its goal is to enliven, raise new questions and gain new understandings into a religious tradition whose influence will be felt globally in a heightened manner in the twenty-first century.

This book regards the Qur'an as a sacred text, as the revealed Word of God for Muslims. As such, for them, it has ultimate authority. But its insights are unveiled best by approaches from different angles, from multiple perspectives. The Qur'an was revealed in a particular time and place. How to interpret its message is a complicated business, over which much ink has been spilled. But the historical-critical method has been invaluable in discerning messages that are directed to the original hearers of a specific time and place and those that are intended for general audiences of every time and place. It recognizes that language used in a particular time and place needs interpretation, for language and its meanings evolve over time and context. Understanding the message of the Qur'an is also assisted by insights gained from new knowledges that unfold with the dynamic unfolding of time and history, and from civilizations and peoples in different cultural, demographic, political and social contexts.

This book is intended for a wide audience. It is intended for those inside Islam who seek a deeper understanding of their faith that goes beyond prescriptive teachings, ritual practices and scriptural quotes. It is intended for those outside Islam who seek to understand Islam in a way that goes beyond the fundamentalist portrayals offered up by the media or that which has been hijacked by Islamic fundamentalists themselves. It is intended for students of Islam, whether inside or outside the faith who seek a broader and more dynamic approach to understanding an ancient tradition which continues to instil deep faith in countless millions. It is intended for scholars who recognize that secularism has not delivered on

many of its promissory notes, and that the world's religious traditions have new opportunity to invigorate the hearts and minds of adherents. It is intended for a general but inquisitive audience dissatisfied with superficial renderings of Islam and who seek nothing more than to develop a better understanding of the neighbours with whom they work, share neighbourhoods and yearn to shape a common future.

Fredericton, Canada   John Valk
June 2017

Our Approach to the Qur'an as Primary Source

The Qur'an is the first source that comes to mind when one speaks about Islam. It has always played a key role in the formation of religious thought for Muslims far and wide: Its epistemological value is beyond dispute. In past Islamic science and thought, the Qur'an has been the primary source of information. In present Muslim scholarship and philosophy, it plays a similar role. Muslims, past and present, concern themselves with how the information contained in the Qur'an can most benefit people.

Muslim theology (*kelam*), a major area in Islamic thought, considers the Qur'an as *the* foremost source of knowledge. Muslim jurisprudence *(fiqh)* gives top priority to the Qur'an in determining appropriate attitudes and behaviours in Islam.

The Qur'an is central in the formation of an Islamic worldview, for Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the Word of God. The indisputable informational value of the Qur'an is grounded in the existential difference between Allah and humans. Allah's knowledge is infinite and reliable, and as such, the Qur'an, which flows from Allah's knowledge, must have an exclusive role in the Muslim tradition. Without a doubt, this perspective is grounded in a central epistemological starting point; it is the main approach in traditional Islamic epistemology. Even though there are multiple interpretations of the Qur'an, there is a consensus regarding the place and value of the Qur'an as *the* primary source of religious information.

The main difference between various theological approaches in Islam does not stem from the Qur'an as a source of knowledge. It stems from how best to benefit from or communicate with it. Theological schools such as the Maturidite School, and especially the Mutazilite School, place great importance on human reason as a vital source in making theological inferences. The Asharite School, on the other hand, puts less emphasis on human reason. Furthermore, Muslim philosophers throughout Islamic history approached the Qur'an in radically different ways from their theological counterparts.

This book affirms that the Qur'an is the Word of God, but a particular approach to the Qur'an and how one should communicate with it undergirds it. Our views regarding the true nature of the Qur'an influence the thoughts contained in this book. Our approach is based on the historical formation of the Qur'an.

The Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Muhammad beginning in AD 610 and continued until his death in AD 632. The verses of the Qur'an that were revealed were directly related to the experiences he had with his community. Verses were sent to him following each event or problem he encountered at that time. The issues he confronted concerned real events in that specific period of time. The main purpose of the revelations was to revive messages that had been sent previously to other prophets, but this time was directed to an Arab community context. Many verses highlight that the main purpose of the Qur'an was to inform people in that time and place that there is only one God (Allah) and that Allah alone should be worshipped.

The Qur'an mentions books that had been revealed to other prophets and indicates that they contain light and guidance. As such, the Qur'an establishes a link with previous revelations. This means that Allah intends the same basic principles for all of humankind. What we understand from this is that the Qur'an has a strong bond to the universal principles revealed through its own historical context.

The revelations made to Prophet Muhammad target the first addressees of the Qur'an: their perceptions, knowledge, experiences, needs, problems, ethical values, religious beliefs and cultural codes. In short, it addresses every aspect of their existence. This evaluation is based on what is known about the people's experiences and encounters with the Qur'an and their relationship to the verses of the Qur'an.

In the Muslim tradition, there is strong evidence suggesting that the verses of the Qur'an were formed as a result of a mutual relationship—a

communication—between the Qur'an and its addressees. This evidence surfaces in the sources of the biography of the prophet and the Qur'anic commentaries where one can follow the formation of the Qur'an almost step by step. With the aid of these sources, one can make inferences concerning the context in which the verses of the Qur'an were revealed. Exegesis, which focuses on interpreting the Qur'an and the biographies of the prophet, makes valuable contributions in this area. In analysing these sources, one can detect that the Word of God is coded through the real-life experiences of the people of that time period. From this, we can conclude that the Qur'an bases itself on historical phenomena.

Some examples bear mentioning to clarify this point. One of the first revealed *suras* of the Qur'an addresses Muhammad directly: "O thou enveloped in thy cloak, arise and warn!" (*Muddaththir* 74/1). Right after experiencing his first revelation, Prophet Muhammad goes home and asks his wife Khadija to cover him. He was shaken by the first revelation and found relief in isolation. However, Allah expects Muhammad to internalize his new mission and responsibility, and tells him to revive his strength and get down to business. This piece of information is found in sources other than the Qur'an. They explain the meaning of "O thou enveloped in thy cloak" and give information about when, why, to whom and for what reason it is said. Further, the verse begins with a calling, indicating that the Qur'an uses a verbal language. The tone of the Qur'anic verses is verbal; they are revealed in response to some existential questions or concerns. A verbal Qur'anic linguistic style affirms its formation through communication with the members of the Arab community.

In the first years of Muhammad's prophethood, the notables of Mecca were concerned about the influence of the revealed message and made an offer to him. In the first year, they said Muhammad's God would be worshipped, but in the second year, worship would revert back to Mecca's idols. The Qur'an responds to this offer as follows:

Say: O disbelievers! I worship not that which ye worship. Nor worship ye that which I worship. And I shall not worship that which ye worship. Nor will ye worship that which I worship. Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion (*Kafirun* 109/1–6).

In this surah, the words have verbal quality and they respond to an offer made by real people. The specific word "say" can be noticed

in many verses of the Qur'an, and it responds to a question, situation, phenomenon or attitude. There are numerous phrases such as "They will ask thee concerning the Spirit. Say: …"; "They question thee about strong drink (*khamr*) and games of chance. Say: …"; "They ask thee, (O Muhammad), of new moons, Say: …": "they ask thee, (O Muhammad), what they shall spend. Say: …"; and "They ask thee (O Muhammad) of the spoils of war. Say: …". Such questions are the first questions asked by the first addressees to Muhammad. Such expressions and historical data about the issues show that the direct questions of people were answered, and their circumstance and context were taken into consideration.

Epistemologically, the contextual foundation of revelation lies in the culture of the Arab community. The content of the revelation was formed in parallel with the first addressees' knowledge and experience. Allah made use of this context to promote religious and moral values and create radical change in people's perspective by directing them to a monotheist worldview. Revelation reminded them of previous divine messages. It tried to offer solutions to their socio-economic and socio-political problems by raising their moral awareness. In brief, Allah tries to motivate people to have a peaceful and positive relationship with themselves, their Creator and the world, and that revelation ideally has such an objective.

To that end, appropriate strategies were developed and a discourse was created premised on this realistic approach. As each step unfolded, the level of education and the thoughts and ideas of the people of that time period were taken into account. Reading the Qur'an chronologically bears this out. In fact, verses inspired in the Mecca period play a significant role in attaining this objective. The main Qur'anic objective came to life particularly in the Mecca period.

When it was no longer possible for Muhammad to stay in Mecca, immigration to Medina (*hegira*) became an obligation. The sociopolitical situation in Medina placed a new responsibility on Muhammad, alongside his prophetic responsibilities. Now, he was both a prophet and the head of the Medina city-state.

The population structure and culture of Medina differed from Mecca. The followers of Muhammad made contact with different religious and social groups of people. There was a transition from trade to agriculture. Such changes undoubtedly made a difference in the tone and content of the revelation—problems and relationships in Medina were not the same as in Mecca.

The method of revelation continued in the same fashion in Medina as in Mecca, with similar attention paid to the circumstances and the dynamics of this new society. There was contact with the Jewish and Christian communities in Medina. The relationship with the Jewish community soured, however, after an initial period of peace. As a result, revelation changed from a peaceful and inclusive tone to a more argumentative and adverse one. The tone of revelation regarding Christians, on the other hand, was much softer and positive for there was no actual sociopolitical conflict with them.

Muhammad was the head of the Medina city-state, and as such, political and legal matters became his responsibility. At that point, both the content and the tone of the revelation changed. Wars with the polytheists in Mecca, attitudes of hypocrites in those wars and peace agreements were all addressed in the revelation. Revelation supported Muhammad in social, economic and political matters. At times, decisions on war or peace were made according to the revelation. In other words, revelation focused on the actual experiences of the community at that time. The theoretical and informative discourse of the Qur'an could easily become an educational, authoritative, argumentative, peaceful, polemicist, political or legal one, depending on the circumstance. In short, it dealt directly with particular experiences in history. Rather than a book of principles, the Qur'an emerged as a discourse based on particular historical phenomena and particular cases. This indicates that the Qur'an established a strong bond with a certain people in a certain time period.

In the Mecca period, the focus was largely on immoral attitudes or indiscretions and was addressed in moral language. Verses that speak about homicide, for example, regard it as immoral and unlawful (*Isra* 17/33). In *Furqan* 25/68, those who do not commit murder are praised. After Muhammad became the head of the Medina city-state, it was necessary for revelation to include both moral and legal language. We can clearly notice the difference in tone between the Mecca and Medina periods. Focus shifted and legal as well as moral issues were addressed. We detect changes as evidenced by the following phrases: "O ye who believe! Retaliation is prescribed for you in the matter of the murdered …" (*Baqara* 2/178); "And there is life for you in retaliation …" (*Baqara* 2/179). The following verse refers to Torah: "And We prescribed for them therein: The life for the life, and the eye for the eye, and the nose for the nose, and the ear for the ear, and the tooth for the tooth, and for wounds retaliation…" (*Ma'ida* 5/45). Since

committing murder is now seen as a crime that disturbs the order, there must be a punishment for it. These examples also show that revelation supported and assisted Muhammad in governing the city. They indicate that revelation focused on solving various problems faced by the Medina community.

A further example showing that the Qur'an focused on circumstances specific to that community relates to verses about religious traditions and members of various religious communities in Medina at that time. It refers to polytheists, Jews, Christians, Magi (*Mecusi*) and Sabians. Magis (*Mecusi*) and Sabians are mentioned only briefly because the new Muslim community had little contact with them and were not in conflict with them. There is considerable attention focused on Christians and Jews, however, and how to communicate with them. The Qur'an criticizes those in these religious communities who hold extreme views, using polemical language in some cases.

Throughout Muhammad's prophecy, there were many religions in the world, yet they are not mentioned. Buddhism and Hinduism are neither mentioned nor criticized. This suggests that the Qur'an does not show interest in affairs that are not specific to the Muslim community at that time. In other words, rather than offering general theories on a variety of issues, it focuses on direct practical advice for problems faced by individuals in specific circumstances.

All these examples indicate that revelation is for each and every individual in their particular historical context. Accordingly, revelations do not address the human "as a concept" but as real individuals in history. The Qur'an seeks a mutual, live, sincere, direct and close relationship/communication with them. Therefore, addressees listen to a God who is intimately concerned with their problems, issues and their life in general. They also feel that they are valued. This means of communication helps them internalize the messages sent through revelation, and they realize that their spiritual journey is also an educational one. To imagine a God and a prophet who pay special attention to them impacts them and gives shape to their world. On the one hand, revelation speaks to their inner nature; on the other hand, it speaks to their moral and social circumstances.

Revelation addresses humans in a specific time, place and situation. It addresses their experiences and problems. To gain most from it, one must have a proper relationship with it, and this involves acknowledging and understanding that humans are a basic component of revelation. In it, humans encounter God.

One of the most important aspects of communication is language, and language always emerges from a culture. The Qur'an contains Arabic cultural content because it was revealed in that culture. This is understandable, natural and necessary for communication, especially because the Qur'an's chosen method of communication is with humans in history. There is a mutual communication with "humans as a concrete, historical existence". The human component of this communication may appear passive but it is far from it. Revelation takes place because of people's needs, expectations and demands, which is not always directly obvious in the Qur'an. Yet, a mutual relationship can be detected in its tone and wording, and from an awareness of its context.

Though numerous examples can be found in the historical and exegetical sources, the following three will suffice to show how the tone of the Qur'an reveals a mutual relationship and communication with actual historical circumstances. A lot of information can also be gleaned concerning the context in which the Qur'an was revealed.

1. During the first years of Muhammad's prophecy, polytheists claimed that he got all his information from *djinns* (evil spirits). They also claimed that he was possessed by *djinns*, or that he was a wizard, poet or oracle, which indicate that all of these elements were prominent in that period of time. Verses referring to this episode insist that the Qur'an was revealed and *djinns* were not involved in the process.
2. In the Medina period, a woman named Khawla asked for help regarding the ill treatment she received from her husband. As a response to her persistent request, some verses were sent to solve that specific problem (*Mujadilah* 58/1–4).
3. Some Jewish people mocked the Qur'an. Verses referring to this incident advised them to also spend money for the sake of Allah, as a metaphor. These verses contain their specific quotes and then criticize them (*Imran* 3/181).

Such verses, sent to Muhammad and based on real communication with people, should be regarded as the key point in the relationship between Islam and humans. Revelation supported Muhammad in transforming an individual's worldview. It takes the spiritual and real world of the addressees as a basis and communicates with them accordingly. This historical reality—Islam meeting with people—took a different form,

however, after the death of Muhammad. A closer look reveals a transformation from revelation as word to revelation as text. The text begins to overshadow an earlier process where the transformation of the individual took place through real-life experiences. After the death of Muhammad, the revelation as text becomes stronger and binding.

The flexible form of revelation in a real context was not sufficiently taken into consideration after textualization. This process results from the existential and functional difference between the word and the text. When we speak about the word, there is a direct relationship with the meaning. In the text, however, the meaning becomes more general and universal in a new context, in a new mind. The text does not guide each and every individual separately in each case, but it addresses all humanity. Language produces meaning but the relationship between word and context is eclipsed. The leading and guiding quality of revelation gains or develops a new character: It determines and limits. In the time of the revelation, words about the context played a guiding role and now turned into a source after textualization. Rather than being a one-to-one guide for the individual, it has become a source to be interpreted within the parameters of language. A real, mutual relationship now becomes open to interpretations of language, augmented by scientific analysis.

The power of the text as a binding and determining source offers general and universal guidance, direction and instruction to new believers. The historical quality of revelation turns into a universal source. General and universal inferences now emerge from interpretation.

In Islamic thought, two major scholarly areas have come to the fore in terms of interpretation: *kelam* and *fiqh*. An Islamic system of belief developed through *kelam*, a theological approach to the Qur'an that emerged in the ninth century. Another Islamic system of belief developed through *fiqh*, an understanding or knowledge of the Qur'an gained through jurisprudence resulting in a body of Islamic law, focusing on interpreting the attitudes and behaviours of people in every sphere of life.

Kelam and *fiqh* use the Qur'an as a source and regard it as a text, and both approaches attempt to reach conclusions from it. The conclusions are general and universal, and target humans as rational, reflective and mindful creatures ("humans in their mind"). They do not address separate individuals and their experiences.

The revelational discourse of the Qur'an now becomes a fixed, determinant text. Addressees are now fixed, and it is a book composed of universal messages. In other words, revelation differs from theology

(*kelam*). Revelation (the Qur'an) takes the historical context as a basis and communicates with people in a real historical context. Theology (*kelam*), on the other hand, takes the text as a basis, and its interpretations exceed the historical context. Therefore, it does not address "individuals in history" but "humans in their mind".

It is difficult to say whether theology (*kelam*) gives sufficient attention to the historical context of the revelation. Theological interpretations tend to have a more authoritative and superior tone. When addressees are not individuals, historically real people lose their importance. The context-free text is now in the hands of theological interpretations and imaginations.

Theological interpretations address "humans in their mind" which have no relation to any specific historical context. The basic principle of communication is lost at this stage. In fact, the initial target audience ceases to exist. It exists only in the mind; it is a mental construct or concept. Concepts are very important in scientific and philosophical approaches, and it is easy to explain things through concepts. However, "existence in the mind" is not the same nor is it an alternative to historical existence. For example, when we want to treat an infection in a tree, we need to find and treat that specific tree. We cannot access a concept of the tree in our mind and treat it. Further, assuming that the concept of the tree in our mind represents each and every tree, we cannot treat all trees. It is the same in human communication. Since every human being has his/her own priorities, responsibilities and roles, we cannot expect each of them to act and behave in the same fixed, standard manner.

As such, we are convinced that the interpretations made by many Muslim theologians in the past are insufficient in terms of their method. Theological interpretations made in previous centuries seem to have little relation to humans in history. We, as a group, believe that religion can connect with "humans in history" through the prophetic experience.

The main benefit of the method we follow is its ability to consider individual needs, expectations and problems in their own authentic environment. Our method does not, however, ignore or refute the main principles or premises of Muslim theology. We do not question the oneness of Allah, the Creator of the universe, or that messages were sent to humans. We do, however, think theologians should address the questions and challenges people face in their context or situation. Furthermore, we do not think theological interpretations should be imposed on every individual as the only possible interpretations. At this point, we are of the

view that new theological interpretations should centre on the individual. In other words, we adopt a "theology for the individual" approach. We get inspiration for this way of thinking and this approach from prophetic experiences. Revelations received by prophets always involve messages that concern real and specific cases in their communities. Communities that declare loyalty to their prophets should follow the same way and method.

Allah addressed "humans in history": people in a specific historical context. Contemporary theologians and philosophers should assist humans to understand how they should be addressed in today's historical context. Believers will communicate with the Word of God through their own worldview perspective; a perspective shaped and influenced by the world in which they live. In history, there has always been communication concerning prophetic experience. Today, it is necessary to find new means of communicating with revelation and the prophetical experience. Theological interpretations should offer new means of communication and be open to revising them.

From this perspective as a starting point, we as a group have tried to express our Islamic worldview by means of this method. The views, opinions and approaches that are put forward in this book are a product of our own history. The ideas put forth do not claim to represent all of Islam, nor do they claim to speak for Islam. This is one of the outcomes of our method. We acknowledge that there might be different theological approaches for every case in history. That is why we prefer not to make theological generalizations about Islam. In this book, our group tried to produce ideas based on main sources—primarily the Qur'an—with a focus on the needs of individuals living in a modern, secular and democratic society of the twenty-first century.

June 2017   Halis Albayrak
                                                                                                  Mualla Selçuk

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CONTENTS

Introduction

Religion

Religion is many things. It is individual and very personal, on the one hand, assisting people in making sense of and giving purpose to their lives. On the other hand, some also have institutional and organizational structures, drawing individuals into community and giving them a sense of belonging to something greater than themselves. Religion is notoriously challenging to define. Its origins are difficult to determine. It has a chequered history. Its contributions to society and the individual are highly criticized by those who have denounced it. Yet, it is valued highly by billions of people who have embraced it throughout the ages for the meaning it gives them. Sociologists of religion in the latter part of the twentieth century anticipated its demise, predicting that it would fade away as the secular city increased in dominance (Cox 1965). Philosophers of religion in the early part of the twenty-first century, on the other hand, recognized that it is here to stay and rightly warrants a voice in the public square (Berger 1999; Habermas 2010).

Religion is controversial and problematic. It is also resilient and dynamic. It has to do with beliefs and values regarding the nature of human life and how to live it. It defines what is sacred and special and what is profane and ordinary (Eliade 2001). It involves communal worship and the performance of rituals. It is about solitary feelings and reflections, and corporate worship and prayer. It strives to build community and solidarity among disparate peoples. It instructs and teaches the

faithful regarding life and its various aspects. It involves symbols and language that act in powerful ways to give order and meaning to the lives of many. It offers hope and comfort to the stricken. It responds to some of life's ultimate or existential questions: why we are here, the meaning and purpose of life, our responsibilities and obligations. It gives expression to some of humankind's greatest fears and concerns. In these ways and more, religions are quite similar.

Yet, they are also markedly different. There are extreme versions that incite hatred and violence. There are exclusive versions that pursue and minister only to a select kind. There are conservative versions that scorn and rebuff change. There are moderate versions that strive for peace and understanding. There are liberal versions that seek and embrace the new. There are judicious versions that advocate careful and thoughtful reflection on societal challenges. In this way, there are as many faces of religion as there are adherents—many of whom ask questions and seek answers.

Religion, in the minds of many, is about providing a way through life's difficult and often turbulent journey. Theologies attempt to furnish coherent answers to life's big questions: Why does life bring evil and suffering alongside joy and laughter; where do we find redemption and healing; can we find mercy and forgiveness from God; and what happens when we die? Institutional religion tends to be prescriptive and systematic in its teachings so adherents feel grounded or comforted amidst a sea of perplexing responses to complex issues.

But responses to dynamic questions require openness and can invariably lead to other questions, for the inquisitive mind is never easily appeased; simple or pedestrian answers seldom satisfy for long. Organized religions often find probing questions menacing. Some find them intimidating, even threatening and consciously avoid them. But asking profound questions is a key to furnishing principled answers. It is paramount to growth and understanding, leading to new thoughts, ideas and insights into the complexities of life. Unique among all other living creatures, humankind's restless yearnings and creative spirit necessitate a constant adapting to new situations and circumstances. Life does not stand still. To remain relevant, religion must conserve the best of the past, but be sufficiently dynamic to confront if not change the worst of the present. Religion is most alive when it stands fearlessly amidst the challenges of daily living, fashioned, on the one hand, with celebrations and joys, and wrought with sorrows and burdens on the other hand.

Religion is humankind's response to living in the here and now, even as it senses that there are "rumours" of something beyond (Berger 1969).

Religion touches all of life. Its many rituals serve as rites of passage and celebrations of historic and momentous dates and events. Its social endeavours establish communities of the faithful and the caring. Its teachings influence moral and ethical decision-making. Its philosophies constitute the wisdom of the ages. Its public declarations impact public policy. Religion engages individuals and society, and invariably, it engages politics and the state but how it does so, or whether it should, remains controversial and problematic, both by those who embrace religion and those who reject it.

RELIGION AND THE SECULAR STATE

There is a saying that one should not speak about religion and politics in polite society: both are too controversial. This may indeed be wise counsel but a discussion of these two subject areas can hardly be avoided, their contentiousness aside. Religion and politics impact our lives in a myriad of complex ways and at a variety of different levels. Both are integral to our lives.

Some feel strongly that religion and politics should not mix. Theocracies are part of the history of the Western world, but are no longer entertained as viable options for democratic states. National constitutions within the Western world make it quite clear that church and state should remain separate. One of the great accomplishments of the modern era is the dismantling of religious institutions from the operations of the state. But that dismantling has not resulted in the suppression or elimination of religion. Today, Western nations uphold two essential freedoms—freedom of religion and freedom of expression—as hallmarks of a modern, democratic and secular state.

Yet modern, democratic and secular nations understand the concept of the "secular" in different ways. All too often it connotes neutrality. Most Western nations pride themselves in being secular, that is, religiously neutral; not favouring or promoting one religious perspective over another. Other countries actively promote Secularism as official state policy. They feel that Secularism is the best way to create a cohesive state where freedom *of* religion is balanced with freedom *from* religion.

The USA, for example, is a nation that seeks to guarantee freedom of conscience by promoting religious neutrality. Its Constitution states that

Congress shall not make laws "establishing religion" nor "prohibiting its free exercise". While the majority of citizens in the USA may consider themselves Christian, and with the USA perceived as such by many, it is officially not a Christian nation. Everyone is free to believe as they wish but the state remains officially neutral on matters of religion. As such, the USA promotes freedom *of* religion.

France, on the other hand, seeks to guarantee freedom of conscience by promoting Secularism. Often referred to as *laïcité*, it is France's way of creating a modern, ethnically diverse society open to a variety of beliefs, religious or secular, for it is a nation with a long history of religious animosities and the tensions these created. Antagonisms have increased of late, however, with the influx of a significant number of Muslims from North Africa into a country that is still predominantly Catholic. But some feel that *laïcité* erases diversity, does not promote integration and shows little regard for freedom of religion. Some now regard Secularism as the official "religion" of France, promoted largely by leftists. France promotes more so a freedom *from* religion, even as it continues to give state support to private Catholic schools.

Turkey is a modern, democratic and secular Western nation. It officially became a secular state in 1937, though the process began in 1923. Though it has been guardedly secular since that date, it remains a country where the overwhelming majority of people self-identify as Muslim. Its state Secularism does not, however, promote freedom *from* religion for its Presidency of Religious Affairs deems religious awareness essential. Rather, it seeks freedom *of* religion and freedom of expression as other modern nations. Yet, a perception by most Western nations is that Turkey is Islamic and that a thin veneer separates secular politics from religious Islam.

The separation of religion from politics is problematic. While there is a great desire for Western nations to keep each in its own realm, it does not appear that religion or politics can so easily be relegated to separate spheres. Numerous national flags continue to incorporate religious symbols. Yet, as problematic as religion's role in the public sphere may be, more problematic is a deeper understanding of religion itself. Religion cannot simply be reduced to ritual activity or individual belief, and it is also far too comprehensive to be relegated to the private sphere. Religion provides a particular perspective on life and a way to live that life. It presents a particular *worldview*: a *view of life* and a *way of life*. That view and way of life differs in greater or lesser degrees from non-religious or

secular perspectives. Secular perspectives have been on the increase and have in part been the driving force behind the movement towards modern, democratic and secular states.

Charles Taylor noted an important shift that began to occur in the nineteenth century (Taylor 2007). Prior to this period, a religious worldview held sway. In the Christian West, few perceived their world without resorting to the Christian faith. In the nineteenth century, a secular worldview began to take hold and became a preferred option for some, particularly among those of the educated ranks. Slowly but steadily a growing number of people began to perceive their world in exclusively secular terms. A secular age had dawned, and with it secularization processes that saw the slow but steady decline of religious control of various institutions in society: the state, education, hospitals and more. Secularization theories predicted the demise of religion, and some even predicted its disappearance (Martin 1978).

The prediction of the disappearance and even the demise of religion was, however, quite premature. What has become abundantly clear is not the collapse of religion but the collapse of the secularization theory: religion will not fade anytime soon (Berger 1999). Some still seek its end by means of vociferous attacks claiming that religion remains delusory and poisons everything (Dawkins 2006; Hitchens 2007; Harris 2004). Others, however, are less strident and realize that much can be learned from religion even if they are reluctant to embrace it (De Botton 2012).

While a state should always guard itself against radical and eccentric elements, religious as well as secular, much can be gained from the insights religious viewpoints contribute to the public dialogue. This entails not only a more inclusive approach but also a way in which the best of religious perspectives can become better known in the public realm. This requires a public square where multiple voices can be heard, realizing that worldview neutrality is virtually impossible. Adopting Secularism as state policy appears to do little more than trade one worldview for another: a religious worldview for a secular worldview. Whether a secular public square best allows for multiple voices to come to the fore depends on how one views the concept of the secular, and such discussions are now increasing, as they must (Calhoun et al. 2011; Butler 2011). While much media attention tends to concentrate on the more radical and negative elements of religion, education must find a way to counter such portrayals to bring a more balanced perspective to the fore.

Most important is that more reasoned voices prevail to recognize and mine the contributions of religion (Klassen 2014).

Habermas is one such voice. In a shift from a previous position, he speaks today of including the religious voice again in the secular public square, noting that it has much value to add to public discussions. He does, however, add three preconditions. First, religion must accept the authority of secular reason in areas such as science. Second, it must respect a worldwide equality in law and morality. Third, secular reason must avoid judging the truths of religion (Habermas 2010). A common ground of understanding—a faith and reason détente of sorts—is desperately required to advance the discussion of religion's place in a secular society.

That discussion continues to be prominent in regions of Europe where Christianity is still the dominant religion. In order for Europeans to come to grips with their present situation and gain a fuller understanding of their future, an in-depth understanding of their identity is needed. This may entail looking back much further in their history than the recent secular present. Christianity still influences European culture and values in more ways than many might like to admit and certainly more than any secular worldview. Yet others may argue that Europe is founded on three civilizations—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Throughout its history, Europe has been home to countless Jewish people, and Islam heavily influenced it during the Middle Ages, and no less through the discovery of Greek Philosophy by Muslim scholars.

Europe's multicultural immigration policies of the last half-century changed its religious landscape. The influx especially of Muslims from various parts of the world has resulted in numerous changes, from traditional cultural practices to current public policies, some of which have been more accommodating than others. These changes have posed a number of new challenges for Europe, most especially the European Union member states.

One challenge that these changes have posed is that of understanding. It may well be correct that Europeans need to come to terms with their identity—*knowing self* is crucial for moving forward into the future. But Europe today consists of numerous traditions—religious and secular—and hence *knowing self* cannot be accomplished in isolation for, as the German philologist Max Muller stated, "he who knows but one knows none". There is a need for *knowing others*. Europe is increasingly a mixture of people from many different places, cultures, traditions and

worldview perspectives. Ignorance of the other breeds fear, creates stereotypes and leads to contempt and violence, as all too many European cities have witnessed. Finding ways to accommodate the other requires recognition and knowledge of the self but also of the other. Martin Buber clearly recognized the need to incorporate the other, as does Desmond Tutu in his understanding of the African *ubuntu* concept (Buber 1970; Battle 2009).

The second challenge these changes pose is how to incorporate a religious worldview into what is clearly a modern, democratic and secular European Union. This has been the huge challenge of the past century or more, and the discussions alluded to above are a testimony to this. The secularization theory has not held sway, even if Europe is deemed to be an exceptional case (Martin 2005; Davie 2002). Today, each European Union country, as well as England, has different policies regarding the separation of church/religion and state. Germany has no state church but the state collects church taxes from church members and these taxes are returned to the churches for their purposes. In addition, the German State funds both state and non-state (church and non-church) schools and universities. France has a strict ban on the public display of religious symbolism yet maintains religious buildings and funds certain religious services and even schools. England maintains a state church and funds religious education in the schools. The Netherlands funds three distinct school systems: one that is secular and the other two Christian (Catholic and Protestant).

The third challenge these changes pose is how to accommodate a new member state within the European Union, especially one that has an entirely different religious worldview tradition than its current member states. The admission of Turkey into the European Union has lingered for some time, with many contentious issues arising. One of those is accommodating a country with a Muslim majority into the European Union that still exhibits a Christian majority, however loosely Christian or multicultural Europe claims to be.

While there are those who will stoke xenophobic fires, most Europeans as well as North Americans today are sufficiently open and inclusive of multicultural and multireligious perspectives. That does not mean, however, that there is a sufficient understanding or knowledge of Islam on the part of European Union members and North Americans, just as the understanding and knowledge of religion, in general, appears to be declining (Prothero 2007). An uneasy fear exists and can be

witnessed in public policy debates surrounding acceptable religious dress and symbols by public servants in particular and in the public in general. Furthermore, negative stereotypes result in narrowing and reducing the wealth, depth and breadth of any religious worldview, and no less than that of Islam. To overcome the current dilemma, continued emphasis must be placed on increasing one's knowledge of the religious other. As the global reach increases and as countries increase their intake of immigrants with different religious perspectives, the onus on gaining awareness, knowledge and understanding of those religious perspectives also increases. As such, knowledge of Islam as a worldview becomes paramount.

Islam and Turkey

Modern Turkey emerged from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire was one of the most powerful states in the world at the height of its glory during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. With Constantinople as its capital, it controlled vast lands around the Mediterranean basin, with a reach extending from Southeast Europe to Western Asia to North Africa. The empire bridged the Eastern and Western worlds for many centuries but collapsed at the end of World War I.

The Ottoman Empire defended and extended the practice of Islam, whose presence in the region is long-standing. Muslims retained political power over non-Muslim communities throughout the history of the empire yet granted state recognition and protection to them. Today, Islam is the main religion in Turkey with the overwhelming majority of the country's population self-identifying as Muslim.

The Ottoman Empire dissolved in the aftermath of World War I. With its collapse, a new political regime emerged in Turkey that changed a way of life anchored in centuries of tradition: the fall of the Ottoman Empire marked the secularization of Turkey. Strong movements towards a modern secular state had begun in the Tanzimat era of the nineteenth century and continued under the Young Turks who, at the dawn of the twentieth century, sought to emulate Western models of government and support the Central Powers during World War I (Cleveland and Bunton 2009). But an initial Turco-German alliance proved fatal and Turkey found itself at the mercy of Allied Powers at the end of the war. By 1920, Italy, France, Britain and Greece were prepared to carve out

and occupy much of Turkey. The threat of subjugation left Turkish political leaders with a very little choice: surrender or convince others that a sovereign Turkey could become a formidable Middle East ally and a model for other Islamic nations. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his supporters, beginning in 1923, made sweeping changes that transitioned Turkey into what is now a modern, democratic and secular state.

During the twentieth century, Turkey's relationship with Western nations took a dramatic shift, one from combating empires to one of forging strategic allies. The changes resulting from such a strategy became immediately apparent as the country stripped away the traditional political structure established over 400 years of Ottoman rule (Cleveland and Bunton 2009). It was replaced with a secular republic modelled after its Western counterparts.

Atatürk (1881–1938) became the first President of Turkey and initiated this most prominent and most controversial social and political change. Under his reforms, the caliphate—the supreme politico-religious office of Islam, and symbol of the sultan's claim to world leadership of all Muslims—was abolished. The secular power of religious authorities and functionaries was reduced and eventually eliminated. Religious foundations were nationalized, and religious education was restricted and even for a time prohibited. The influential and popular mystical orders of the dervish brotherhoods (Tariqa) also were suppressed.

Though these and other reforms were resisted by Islamic traditionalists and at certain points also by elected officials, the principles of Kemalism remained an integral and accepted part of the nation's constitution long after Mustafa Kemal, who was granted the surname Atatürk (Father of the Turks), died in 1938. Yet, further progressions were added, including the formation of a multiparty government. This created the possibility for some political challenges and reversions but the ever-watchful eye of a military takeover has kept reversals in check. While military takeover always threatens a republican state, Turkish armed forces have consistently returned power to the people's representatives once they were certain Atatürk's secular legacy would be preserved (Cleveland and Bunton 2009).

Kemalist reforms created a new secular national identity for Turkey by separating religious powers from public and political structures. Some changes were openly welcomed, but others met with some resistance, such as the abolishment of the sultanate and caliphate and the closing of madrasas (Islamic Schools) (Pope and Pope 2012). The transition

to Secularism resulted less from imposed restrictions, however, and more from gradual but clear educational and linguistic reforms. A secular, primary-level education became mandatory for all citizens, creating a more literate and informed public. The written language was transformed from Arabic to a phonetic equivalent Latin script. As such, a new generation of Turks gained a sense of national identity and pride, creating distance from their religious and linguistic heritage and their Arab neighbours and placing them more in line with European ideals (Cleveland and Bunton 2009).

Although Turkey was secularized at the official level, religion remains a strong force at the popular level. After 1950, some political leaders tried to benefit from popular attachment to religion by espousing support for programmes and policies that appealed to the religiously inclined. Such efforts were opposed by most of the state elite, who believed that Secularism was an essential principle of Kemalist ideology. This disinclination to appreciate religious values and beliefs gradually led to a polarization of society. The polarization became especially evident in the 1980s as a new generation of educated but religiously motivated local leaders emerged to challenge the dominance of the secularized political elite. These new leaders have been assertively proud of Turkey's Islamic heritage and generally have been successful at adapting familiar religious idioms to describe dissatisfaction with various government policies. By their own example of piety, prayer and political activism, they have helped to spark a revival of Islamic observance in Turkey. By 1994, slogans promising that a return to Islam would cure economic ills and solve the problems of bureaucratic inefficiencies had enough general appeal to enable avowed religious candidates to win mayoral elections in Istanbul and Ankara, the country's two largest cities.

Although intellectual debates on the role of Islam attracted widespread interest, they did not provoke the kind of controversy that erupted over the issue of appropriate attire for Muslim women. During the early 1980s, female college students who were determined to demonstrate their commitment to Islam began to cover their heads and necks with scarves and wear long, shape-concealing overcoats. The appearance of these women in the citadels of Turkish Secularism shocked those men and women who tended to perceive such attire as a symbol of the Islamic traditionalism they rejected. The Higher Education Council issued a regulation in 1982 forbidding female university students to cover their heads in class. Protests by thousands of religious students and

some university professors forced several universities to waive enforcement of the dress code. The issue continued to be seriously divisive in the last decade of the twentieth century. Throughout the first half of the 1990s, highly educated, articulate, but religiously pious women appeared in public dressed in Islamic attire that concealed all but their faces and hands. Other women, especially in Ankara, Istanbul and İzmir, demonstrated against such attire by wearing revealing fashions and Atatürk badges. The issue was discussed and debated in almost every type of forum—artistic, commercial, cultural, economic, political and religious. For many citizens of Turkey today, women's dress has become the issue that defines whether a Muslim is secularist or religious. In 2010, the Turkish Higher Educational Council lifted the ban on headscarves at the universities. Moreover, in 2012, the government removed the Official Dress Code in the schools that would permit students to dress as they wished.

There have been occasions in the past number of decades when Islamic parties have attained political power. Concern quickly arose that restoration of some Islamic traditions would occur. The Welfare Party attempted this, for example, but after only a year in power, it was pressured by the military to step down. The Justice and Development Party, in power since 2002, continues to push at the boundaries, creating concern for both the military and some European Union member states.

It is here that the particular situation of Turkey becomes apparent. While embracing a secular political system, a very large majority of people of Turkey embrace at the same time the principles of their religion. They desire a secular, modern and democratic state, but one that is not adverse to or perhaps even grounded in the beliefs and values of Islam (Cleveland and Bunton 2009). It seems that this is a challenge that not only Turkey faces. A number of European countries face similar challenges. The only difference is that the majority religion in Turkey is Islam. Europe faces the possibility of admitting within its membership a nation where the dominant religion is Islam. This has become disconcerting for many Europeans.

A Worldview Approach

The idea of a secular nation grounded in Islamic beliefs and values may then be quite alarming for an increasing number of modern Western thinkers. Perhaps it is deemed as impossible and a contradiction.

Religion, and particularly Islam, is deemed as inferior to reason and science as a source of truth and reliability from the perspective of modernism. It is also regarded by all too many as conservative, confining, paternalistic, misogynous and even violent. It would then be best to relegate it to the periphery of society and the private lives of individuals, and tolerated at best.

As such, the idea of a modern secular state embracing Islamic beliefs and values makes some Western nations rather nervous. But that nervousness may also result from a fear of the other, especially a fear based on rather negative stereotypes. Images of Islam portrayed in Western media are particularly damaging, if not offensive. Sometimes they are purposefully provocative, even inflammatory, as were the Danish cartoon portrayals of the Prophet Muhammad as a purveyor of violence.

Such portrayals are not helpful of course and tend to inflame intolerance while at the same time feigning openness. They lead to great distortions with religion becoming all too narrowly defined on a popular level. The tendency to confine religion to ritual attendance at church, mosque or synagogue, or to reduce religion to a narrow set of doctrines, ignores its breadth and depth and diminishes its nature and scope. To insist that religion should and can remain strictly private and individual underestimates the power of religion and the affects it has had on the public lives of numerous people throughout history. It ignores what Gandhi was fond of saying: "those who say religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion is". Furthermore, to assume that only religious people have faith and beliefs or that only they are intolerant and violent fails to understand the nature of the human. More beneficial is to examine religion and particularly specific religions in a balanced and in-depth manner that leads not only to greater understanding but also places it on a more level playing field with other philosophical perspectives, political philosophies and secular belief systems.

It is at this juncture that the term religion may become problematic, and perhaps even unhelpful (Valk 2009a). A new or different term or concept may be more beneficial. The term worldview may be much better suited to explore the essence of Islam, or even that of Christianity, aboriginal spirituality and more (Valk 2009b, 2010, 2012). These can then be compared and contrasted to secular beliefs systems to explore similarities and differences. This approach levels the playing field keeping in mind that all people have beliefs and values, reflected in particular existential, cultural, ontological and epistemological views and understandings.

Worldviews are those larger pictures or frameworks that inform and in turn form our perceptions of reality (Sire 2004; Naugle 2002; Peterson 2001). Worldviews are *visions of life* as well as *ways of life*. They are individual and personal in nature, yet become communal and public in scope and structure when particular visions bind adherents together in communities of belief, thought and action (Olthuis 1985). Worldviews encompass religious and spiritual traditions, yet also include secular perspectives such as Humanism, Scientism, Capitalism and Consumerism (Cox 1999; Loy 2003). Worldviews, like traditional religions, come to historical, social, economic and cultural expression in a variety of ways (Badley 1996).

The term worldview is inclusive of a multiplicity of beliefs and values that inform both private and public thoughts and actions. It recognizes secular perspectives with functional and structural similarities to traditional religions (De Botton 2012). It also resists restricting matters of faith exclusively to traditional religions or to those of religious/spiritual persuasion or affiliation.

Worldviews impact all areas of life guiding, determining and shaping what is considered meaningful, what is worth doing and which causes may require sacrifice. Individuals and groups of individuals often determine what is important and why in their economic, communal, political and educational decision-making according to larger metanarratives or outlooks (Putnam and Campbell 2010; Glenn 2012; Nelson 2001). Worldviews can exercise conservative influence and progress but they can also stimulate individuals and groups to become agents of social change, healing and redemption.

There are similarities and differences between worldviews as much as there are within them (Prothero 2010). It is not unusual for traditional religions to agree or disagree sharply with each other on certain fundamental beliefs. At times, some may even find themselves in closer proximity with those who embrace non-religious or secular visions of life. All worldviews embrace certain basic or universal principles such as freedom, justice and equality, yet find greater or lesser degrees of convergence or divergence with others in the manner in which these basic principles are expressed in particular ways of life. Further, how particular beliefs become translated into specific actions in the public square depends on local, regional or national contexts where worldview differences play themselves out. Cox (1999), Nelson (2001), Robinson (2013) and Sinclair-Faulkner (1997) all give vivid examples and insight

into the impact worldviews, religious or otherwise, have in shaping individual thoughts and actions, and how these in turn shape the society and culture to which they belong.

Understanding and encapsulating a worldview in its various elements is not an easy task. Describing a particular worldview poses huge challenges because of the wide diversity that exists within each worldview. Doing so also comes with risks of being definitive or prescriptive. Yet heuristically, such a process does serve to illuminate and demarcate particular beliefs, values, principles and at times even behaviours. It may also be more helpful in a Western world beset with post-Christian, postmodern or even post-secular sentiments, yet filled with religious and secular beliefs of various kinds that hold sway today in the public realm.

There are a number of frameworks or models that assist in enhancing our understanding of worldviews. Tillich (1957) and others focused on worldviews as responses to life's larger concerns or questions that in turn become the foundation of beliefs and actions (Sire 2004; Olthuis 1985). McKenzie developed a model that incorporates questions of ultimate meaning but adds to these penultimate concerns that "shape the currents of ordinary life" and immediate personal concerns which arise from "the context of life goals, life activities, and interpersonal relationships" (McKenzie 1991, p. 13). Smart (1983) articulated a six-dimension model helpful in identifying and describing aspects and rituals common to both religious and non-religious worldviews. Wright (1992) and others focus on stories or narratives that define human reality, are often expressed in powerful symbols and come to include a praxis or way of being in the world.

Worldviews then consist of a number of different elements or components. A worldview is shaped or influenced by a person's characteristics, abilities, culture, social context, economic circumstance, educational level and more. They incorporate a variety of religious or non-religious beliefs, values and teachings. They deal with ultimate questions such as the meaning of life, the purpose and responsibilities of the human, a sense of right and wrong, the existence of a higher power and the question of life after this life. They can be individual but also communal in scope, and incorporate various narratives, stories, sacred texts, symbols and rituals. They deal with ontological questions—how we understand the nature of being. They deal with epistemological issues—how do we know what we know and what are our sources of knowledge. They deal with beliefs and values we all hold in common yet express in specific ways dependant on particular circumstances.

An investigation of worldviews will reveal numerous structural similarities between individuals and groups of individuals. They may also reveal similar notions and ideas about life—*visions of life*—and even similar approaches to living out those notions and ideas—*ways of life*. Yet, they may also reveal quite different visions of life and ways of life. Similar *visions of life* may well lead to different *ways of life*, even as similarities in *ways of life* may stem from different *visions of life*. Individuals or groups of individuals may lock arms on similar causes, yet do so for entirely different (worldview) reasons.

Recognition of these matters will assist in breaking through stereotypes, drawing hasty conclusions about individuals or groups of individuals, or even leading to misinterpretations because of a lack of knowledge and understanding. This indeed may be the situation with Islam and Turkey. As such, it might be of great interest to explore Islam from a much wider and more comprehensive approach, to see if it might yield greater understandings. Such an approach would focus not merely on the beliefs, teachings and rituals of Islam, as is the case with many standard approaches, but will also explore existential questions, ontological and epistemological issues, and universal beliefs expressed in particular social, cultural and political settings.

Islam from a Worldview Perspective

It is very difficult to describe or encapsulate a worldview, whether it is Islam, Christianity or any worldview religious or secular, in all its breadth and depth. While certain basic beliefs and principles are unique to every belief system or perspective, there are also many variations. There are many faces of Islam, with each expression dependent on numerous factors. Each will reflect an Islam with slight yet important variations. Each will be impacted by its environment. Religion is as much impacted by the environment in which it finds itself as it impacts that same environment. Islam shapes and influences its environment as much as the environment shapes and influences any particular expression of Islam. There is a reciprocal relationship between any particular belief system and the environment in which it finds itself.

While it is important to know the central elements of any particular belief system religious or secular, perhaps more important is to understand how its central elements impact the thoughts and actions of adherents in any given situation. It is individuals or groups of individuals who

give expressions to their *visions of life* through their *ways of life*—through their thoughts and actions. As such, geographical regions, cultural settings, socio-economic conditions, educational levels, historical developments and more effect each expression of Islam. In fact, focusing on how adherents think their faith and/or live out their faith in the context in which they find themselves will reveal unique insights into both adherents and the belief system itself. A more specific focus on a particular group of individuals in a particular setting reflecting on the meaning of their beliefs and how they impact their thinking and their way of life may yield an even more in-depth understanding of Islam. Those embracing other religious or secular worldviews may find they have certain affinities with Muslims where they assumed that there were only differences.

This book seeks to describe Islam as a *vision of life* and a *way of life* from the perspective of a specific group of uniquely placed individuals. It will not be a prescriptive or all-encompassing view of Islam. Instead, it will be a comprehensive view of Islam, an uncovering of beliefs, values, principles and practices, from the perspective of individuals who embrace Islam and who live in a modern, secular and democratic country. This perspective of Islam is not intended to be representative of Islam in Turkey or even beyond but it will reveal how a group of individuals uniquely associated with each other understand Islam from their particular life situation. It will shed light on how they reflect on issues common to many people in many places, yet unique from their particular perspective. It will reveal how they are influenced by a modern, democratic and secular society, yet reflect also how their religious perspective shapes and influences how they think and act within that particular society and the issues they confront living in that society. It will also reveal that just as their Islamic faith assisted in furnishing answers to numerous questions, it also served to raise further questions on which to reflect. Issues and questions that arise in the course of living in a modern, democratic and secular society challenge its adherents. This book will reveal that a worldview such as Islam is as dynamic in expression as any other worldview religious or secular.

The description of Islam that will be developed in this book comes from a particular group of individuals from a variety of disciplines at the University of Ankara. Those disciplines include Religious Studies, Islamic Studies, Women's Studies, African Studies, Education and Sociology. The group consists of highly educated individuals: professors, instructors and graduate students. They come from different regions in Turkey.

Association through the Faculty of Divinity at Ankara University, however, links them all together. The group, consisting of up to twenty members, range in ages from 25 to 60 and consist of a gender balance of men and women. They met over the span of a three-year period to participate in a project to describe Islam from their particular personal and professional perspective.

The project was unfolded in a series of six workshops, each 3–5 days in length. The workshops were discussion oriented and focused on particular questions stemming from the use of a theoretical worldview framework. Members of the project team discussed responses to questions, often posed in a Socratic fashion. The discussions were lively and engaging; audio recorded and captured in note taking. Workshop notes were transcribed, edited and expanded. They form the essence of this book.

A theoretical worldview framework was used to guide the discussions. The framework was developed from the insights of a variety of disciplinary perspectives: religious studies, theology, philosophy, sociology, anthropology and more. The larger theoretical framework consists of four sub-frameworks, each from the perspectives of one or more particular disciplines. Each of those sub-frameworks, in turn, comprises six components, each of which fleshes out in further detail issues relating to the larger sub-framework. Chapters 1–4 will briefly describe each of those sub-frameworks and their components, and then describe responses of the project group to questions and issues raised in each of them.

Chapter 2: Cultural Dimensions

Chapter 2 focuses on a sub-framework that is based on insights gleaned from a number of disciplines, including religious studies, scriptural studies, theology, sociology, psychology and anthropology. Based largely on the pioneering work of Ninian Smart, this framework recognizes that a worldview is influenced and shaped by a number of cultural factors or dimensions (Smart 1983). The sub-framework does not seek to be prescriptive but descriptive, with a focus placed on the individual or group responses to queries regarding, for example, stories that inform the individual's or group's worldview and what teachings emerge from them that are then embraced.

Framework #1 *Cultural Dimensions*	Texts, scriptures, narratives, stories
	Teachings, doctrines
	Ethical principles
	Rituals; symbols
	Community: social gatherings of the devotees: cathedrals—sporting facilities, shopping malls, financial institutions
	Ekstasis: experiences which strengthen this worldview: sporting events, rock concerts, Eucharists

The first component focuses on texts, sacred scriptures, narratives or stories that inform one's worldview. We know that stories play an important formative role in shaping the lives and beliefs of First Nations Peoples (Gordon 2013). Among religious people of various traditions, past and present, myths, sacred texts and scriptures (Torah, Holy Bible, Qur'an, Bhagavad Gita and Tao Te Ching) form an important source for beliefs, moral and values (Campbell and Moyers 1991; Hamilton 1998). For non-religious or secular people, narratives, novels or scientific or rational theories emerging from texts become the source for their worldview. But it is not always one source that plays a formative role. Individuals may base their worldviews on a multitude of sources, nonetheless giving priority to one or to a few. Muslims living in a modern, democratic and secular society are confronted by numerous sources that address many of life's perplexing questions. Their sacred texts do not address every issue of life so they are required to resort to other sources. These sources, in turn, may shed light on sacred documents and their understanding. Hermeneutics and the questions it raises cannot escape Islamic scholars.

The second component focuses on the teachings or doctrines that emerge or arise from the sources to which one gives priority. Those teachings may concern the beginnings of the universe, the earth and humans, as captured in creations myths in sacred scriptures and stories, or even in science texts and theories (Moyers 1996). They may be teachings that address how we should live a moral and upright life, or prescribed rituals for living and dying (Campbell 1993; Rinpoche 1992). They may translate into catechisms taught by church institutions or doctrines that become the parameters of faith by many religious groups. Teachings and doctrines can also be of a secular kind (Secularism, Darwinism, Marxism, Maoism, Capitalism and Scientism) and form the basis, acknowledged or unacknowledged, of educational or political

systems in various places in the world. The teachings or doctrines embraced by individuals or groups of individuals may emerge from one particular source but they may also be enriched by insights from numerous sources.

The third component focuses on ethical principles that emerge from narratives, texts or teachings. These ethical principles serve to guide and direct the thoughts and actions of adherents, whether these are individuals, groups or even entities. Ethics involves discerning what it means to live a "good life". According to Singer, this involves determining for oneself a life that is worth living or one that is satisfying, and beyond the confines of traditional religious moral conduct (Singer 2010). Yet others reject such an individualistic approach to ethics and assert that in order for humans to flourish ethics must be grounded in some particular religious tradition (Blackburn 2001). Christian ethics, Buddhist ethics and Islamic ethics find their basis in scriptural texts. These positions, as similar or opposing as they may be, reflect nonetheless that ethical principles are embedded in worldviews.

The fourth component focuses on rituals and symbols that reflect particular worldviews. Rituals are not exclusively linked to religions, but clearly surface in all worldviews. Religious rites of passage such as baptisms and bar mitzvahs have secular equivalents in "naming ceremonies" and débutante events. These rites of passage serve to strengthen and communicate important messages regarding the worldview of their adherents. Symbols also abound in both religious and secular worldviews. Certain religious symbols such as the Christian cross, Muslim hijab and the Jewish kippa may now not be worn in some public places in countries such as France or provinces such as Quebec, yet secular symbols such as the ubiquitous McDonalds' "golden arches", red ribbons in support of AIDS awareness and people with HIV, and poppies in support of war veterans remain exempt. The fact that rituals and symbols, religious or otherwise, create controversy is testimony that they always point beyond themselves, are powerful and convey strong messages. But some rituals also fall out of favour and participation in them decreases in modern society. This raises the question of how important rituals are to reinforcing a worldview and whether these rituals are more traditionally determined rather than divinely mandated. The Muslim call to pray five times per day may be one such ritual that has fallen out of favour in a modern, democratic and secular society.

The fifth component focuses on communal and social engagements. These become important to any worldview for it is in such engagements that worldviews receive support and legitimacy. Social gatherings such as church suppers, young people events and weekly meetings serve important functions for the religiously minded in that they create group solidarity and convey group beliefs and values. Social gathering whatever their variety serves similarly important functions for secular-minded people. Humans are social creatures and young and old are impacted, shaped and influenced by membership in social groups whatever their nature. When a nation intentionally turns in a secular direction and the social functions of religious institutions are minimized or curtailed, an important medium of communicating beliefs and values is also minimized or curtailed.

The sixth component focuses on those special kinds of activities that create extraordinary happiness, joy and enthusiasm, or even frenzy or ecstasy in adherents. Here again, there are both religious and secular equivalents. Participating in a Eucharist, a pilgrimage to Mecca or a bar mitzvah are those events that leave a mark on the participants, strengthening the religious faith, beliefs and values conveyed by those special events. But vicarious participation in sporting events, marching in July 4th parades or even gyrating feverishly at rock concerts can also bring on certain joy, happiness and even ecstasy that inculcates faith, beliefs and values of a secular kind in the participants or adherents. To what extend does a modern, democratic and secular nation such as Turkey inhibit or encourage activities that enhance Islamic beliefs and values? To what extent do Islamic communities inhibit or encourage activities that enhance the beliefs and values of their adherents?

Chapter 3: Ultimate/Existential Questions

Chapter 3 will focus on a second sub-framework that is largely philosophical in nature and addresses life's ultimate or existential questions. These questions are not easy and have challenged humankind since the dawn of human history, spawning a multiplicity of different responses. The approach taken by this sub-framework assumes no right or wrong answers, only those that individuals or groups furnish. It also does not assume any right or wrong Islamic responses, only those which individuals or groups feel are supported by Islam as they understand it. The responses to these questions presented by the research group often go

far beyond Qur'anic texts or doctrinal statements and reach far into the philosophical positions of scholars past and present. The result of such endeavours is not prescriptive responses but views that emerge from the group and are deemed appropriate given the sources on which the group bases them. What follows is a brief description of factors or elements that comprise ultimate questions that in turn influence and give shape to one's worldview.

Framework #2 *Ultimate or Existential Questions*	Meaning/purpose of cosmic life, the universe
	Nature, purpose of human life
	Responsibilities/obligations
	Values, discerning good/bad, right/wrong
	Greater force, power, being in the universe: theism, Atheism, agnosticism, deism
	Eschatology: life after this life

The first component speaks to questions regarding the meaning or purpose of cosmic life or the meaning or purpose of the universe. It addresses the question why is there something rather than nothing? Is the universe here by chance, a kind of cosmic fluke on a gigantic scale yet self-organizing once it began (Jantsch 1980), or is the universe here by design and for specific purposes? It is well known that different worldviews give different responses to these questions. They range from notions that the universe is a cosmic accident and has no meaning other than that which humans give to it to those who assert that the universe was created by a higher being for distinct purposes and as such has inherent meaning. How one responds to questions such as these reflects one's worldview. Islam asserts a belief that God created the universe yet the question of how the universe was created is open for discussion. Further, the meaning and purpose of such a vast and what some consider a superfluous universe, with humans occupying only a miniscule corner of it, does raise questions which beg for some theological responses, evermore so in light of increasing cosmological discoveries.

The second component addresses the issue of the purpose of humans; why are humans here. Are they unintended results or consequences of evolutionary processes, here completely as a result of random physical and biological forces with no purpose beyond living as best as possible the life they have been given purely by accident? Or, are human here because they have been brought purposely into being by a higher being

to live purposefully on this earth? Have religious worldviews, and no less Islam, embraced an anthropocentrism, a human-centred cosmos or earth rather than an eco-centrism or earth-centred universe? To be comprehensive, answers given to these questions must be responsive to numerous insights and challenges offered by numerous disciplines. Answers simplistic in scope quickly lose credibility when they come under intense scrutiny.

The third component addresses human responsibilities and obligations: to whom and to what are humans responsible and what obligations do they have, to themselves and others. Here again, numerous responses have been given and each reflects a worldview. These responses range from a notion that humans are ultimately responsible and have obligations only to themselves (*Individualism*). Other responses incorporate a more communal or corporate responsibility to fellow humans (*Humanism*). Yet others speak of an ultimate responsibility to a higher power or being (*Monotheism*). For the Monotheistic worldviews, responsibility touches a number of levels but the extent and degree have generated considerable discussion.

A fourth component addresses the notion of discerning right from wrong. What criteria are used to determine the right action from the wrong action? Are humans the sole arbitrators of right and wrong, with right and wrong culturally determined and culturally specific, that no universal or objective truth criteria exist by which to measure the right and wrong? Or is it necessary to posit a higher power or being in order to escape an otherwise descent into cultural or legal relativism? Islam embraces a sacred text that reveals to humans the principles of right and wrong. But these principles must be applied to contexts that are different and always changing. Those who embrace an Islamic worldview do not regard humans as the sole arbitrators of right and wrong, yet they also cannot escape the conundrum of working out those principles in culturally specific ways. This raises questions regarding the degree of influence of any culture or tradition on determining the right and wrong actions.

The fifth component addresses the question of a higher power, force or being in the universe. Arguments for and against the existence of God have been debated in the past from a number of different perspectives (cosmological, teleological) and appear unabated and persistent if not with renewed vigour in the present. A secular option, however, has gained a strong foothold for the first time in human history, with newer gods or no gods for the first time supplanting more traditional understandings as the

default social or cultural norm (Taylor 2007). Yet, for those who tenaciously cling to a belief in the existence of God are further challenged in attempting to understand who or what God is, refusing to accede to the notion that God is a delusion (Dawkins 2006), is not great even if he did exist (Hitchens 2007), or that all religions espousing a belief in God are the same (Prothero 2010). Islam embraces a belief in God yet that God is understood in different ways which raises questions of the degree to which culture and tradition obscure or enhance an understanding of the character of God, or the degree to which God can even be comprehended by humans.

The sixth component addresses the notion of life after this life. Is this life all that humans are offered, with the extinction of each individual a harsh but inevitable reality? Biology and neuroscience increasingly inform us that notions of a hereafter are little more than the wishful thinking of the human brain, or that a human cannot perceive an extinction of the self. Yet others argue that there is a form of existence beyond the finality of earthly life, one that extends beyond death in a realm of existence beyond human comprehension as a destination for some or all where justice and peace reign supreme. Both arguments continue to be hotly debated with philosophers, theologians and even neuroscientists falling on both sides of the argument. Islam asserts a belief in a life after this life, yet questions abound as to the nature and scope of that life.

Chapter 4: Ontology: The Nature of Being

Chapter 4 focuses on the third sub-framework which is largely philosophical in nature. As with the second framework, this framework deals with complex issues but in an even more heightened manner. At certain levels, ontological questions cannot be avoided when discussing a worldview, for perspectives on the nature of being are crucial in shaping views of life and ways of life, whether or not those views or ways have been sufficiently articulated or expressed. What follows is a brief description of elements comprising the ontological framework for which the research group has furnished its responses.

Framework #3 *Ontology*	Nature of being, reality	Ultimate nature of reality: Philosophical Naturalism, Materialism, Philosophical Idealism (God, mind, absolute spirit)
		Metaphysical or spiritual nature
		Cosmology: origin/future of the universe

The first ontological component concerns the nature of reality and addresses questions that have been mysteries for humans for centuries. In the last century, however, new findings in science have shed new light, if not a new controversy, on these questions. In the past most people largely acknowledged that a higher power or being served as the Creator of the larger universe and the reality in which we live and have our being. Most traditional religions embrace a concept of a higher power or being. With the findings of modern science, especially evolution, those who reject notions of a higher power of being have thrown those concepts into question. Philosophical Naturalism asserts that reality is essentially and ultimately material and physical, with origins in a cosmic Big Bang. Yet others will assert that a cosmic Big Bang does not entail that all of the reality is essentially material, but that it also consists of a universal consciousness or spirit that cannot be reduced to physical matter. But perhaps a philosophical dualism no longer adequately explains the intricacies or the intimacies between mind and matter. New findings in neuroscience or neuro-philosophy attempt to shed light on these matters that may then challenge some traditional Islamic beliefs.

The second ontological component further develops this notion. Is there a realm beyond the physical universe, or even within it, that is spiritual in its essence and that does not arise out of the physical but has an origin and an existence apart from it? Further, is it possible to say anything about this spiritual nature, either in the universe in general or within human nature in particular? Buddhism speaks of a larger spiritual essence of which the human spirit is an aspect and from which it emerges and to which it will return. Monotheistic religions speak of God as spirit, an essence from whom humans emerged and to whom they will return. Responses to such questions are beyond the realm of scientific proof since science cannot prove or disprove these matters. They are largely based on faith yet they must also be credible if they are to continue to gain currency among an increasingly sceptical and educated audience. This is a challenge to adherents of Islam, as it is to adherents of any religious worldview.

The third ontological component generates no end of interest and enthusiasm as well as controversy. The notions of the beginning and the future of the universe as we know it intrigue many inquisitive minds. Our knowledge of the origins of the earth as well as of the universe has increased exponentially during the last half-century and research

continues daily to add to that knowledge. Physics has also ventured to hypothesize about the future of the universe and with it the earth that has placed challenges before certain theological doctrines that speak about eternity and Eternal life. Islam must also face those challenges so that adherents can integrate principles of their faith and the latest findings of science. The dialogue will only serve to mutually enrich both. Nonetheless, the agreement is not automatic, and substantial questions raised by each will challenge the resolve of the other.

Chapter 5: Epistemology: The Nature of Knowing

Chapter 5 implements the fourth sub-framework that focuses on epistemology. Epistemology concerns itself with the nature of our knowing: what can we know and how do we know something is true? Is there an objective reality that we can know directly or is all human knowledge mediated through perceptions? These questions are challenging for people of religious belief because certain claims must be taken on faith. Yet no one escapes these challenges for the nature of the human is that he/she cannot know with absolute certainty all that comes into the human purview. So we wrestle with what can be known as the frontiers of knowledge continue to expand in some areas but remain elusive in others.

Framework #4 *Epistemology*	Nature of our knowing: certainty of knowledge	Subjective knowledge: intuition, revelation, neural
		Objective knowledge: reason, science, authority
		Source, basis of knowledge

The first epistemological component addresses the issue of our subjective knowing. We all know that each individual's perception and experience of reality is unique for perceptions/experiences are interpreted or processed through the lens of one' own language, culture, social status and biographical characteristics. But are all perceptions/experiences relative and subjective in nature? The statement "It's true for me" asserts that the individual is the sole arbitrator of what is right and true, most especially when it concerns moral issues. All of reality becomes a social construction; there is no way of checking whether the reality we experience corresponds to any reality "out there". While Postmodernism has

opened the door to religion, its "incredulity toward meta-narratives" relativizes all claims to transcendent truths. Worldviews vying for dominance become little more than power struggles to define reality. Such assertions are huge challenges for a religious worldview, and no less an Islamic worldview, which affirms the existence of a larger spiritual being that is the "ground of all being".

The second epistemological component focuses on the notion that objective reality entails the idea or belief that a real world or state of being exists independent of a person's individual feelings, imaginings or interpretations of that world or reality. A counterbalance to subjective knowledge, it asserts a mind-independent world or reality but nonetheless one that can only be known through our perception and cognition. Critical realism asserts that we have no access to something called reality apart from the way that reality is represented in our concepts, language and discourse. Such is the case with the existence of God. God is an objectively knowable, mind-independent reality that exists. However, our concepts of God are always mediated through linguistic constructions. Religious worldviews are less challenged today in proving the existence of God as they are in giving validity to their concepts and perceptions of God. Muslims are no less challenged in this way, especially in a modern, democratic and secular state that prefers to remain silent on such epistemological claims.

The third epistemological component concerns the sources or bases of our knowledge: What are the sources of truth and knowledge? Today, science and reason are deemed to be the most reliable sources of our knowledge, leading easily to a Scientism, Empiricism, or Rationalism Scientism, empiricism or rationalism. But these sources of knowledge also have their limitations, as some are beginning to recognize (Revel and Ricard 1998). Intuition, experience and revelation are also important sources of knowledge. Yet, all of this raises questions of a hierarchy of knowledge. How dependable are certain sources compared to others? Should certain sources be privileged, especially in regard to certain areas or contexts? In the twenty-first century, these questions become important for religiously minded individuals and communities, and no less for Muslims in a modern, democratic and secular state. As knowledge becomes more specialized in specific areas, knowledge sources become all the more important. The context in which we live and work is influential in determining the sources we deem reliable and trustworthy and which sources we use for what particular purposes.

Chapter 6: Universal/Particular Beliefs and Values

Chapter 6 focuses on the fifth sub-framework that deals with beliefs and values held in common by most if not all people. These are generally recognized as universal and involve beliefs and values such as justice, dignity of people, sacredness of life, equality and diversity, openness and tolerance, and concern for the environment. Peoples in all cultures and all places, regardless of the worldviews to which they adhere, embrace these values in greater or lesser degrees. How those common beliefs and values become particularized or concretized by specific worldviews varies from culture to culture, and even nation to nation. Rabbi and Scholar Abraham Joshua Herschel (1907–1972) reminded us that "Man's understanding of what is right and wrong has often varied throughout the ages; yet the consciousness that there is a distinction between right and wrong is permanent and universal" (Dosick 1993, p. 184). That there are universal beliefs and values is less disputed today than the manner in which they are particularized in various cultures and time period.

Framework #5 *Universal/Particular Beliefs, Values and* *Principles*	Pursuit of justice: What is deemed to be just?
	Dignity of all people: How is it expressed in everyday life?
	Sacredness of life: Is all of life sacred?
	Equality/diversity: Is everyone given equal status?
	Openness/tolerance: What is tolerated; What is not tolerated?
	Environmental concern

The first component of this framework focuses on justice and its pursuits. Specific worldviews may be quite emphatic about justice but may understand its pursuit in radically different ways. Just actions towards the powerless and the disadvantaged vary even as justice as a universal belief and a value is strongly embraced. Religious people affirm that God is just but justice carried out in God's name is often shocking. The image of Islam suffers enormously in much of the Western world in regard to the treatment of women and religious minorities. Turkey has been accused by some Western nations of human rights abuses, which has become a stumbling block against their admission to the European Union. How educated Muslims understand a universal command to do

justice particularized in modern, democratic and secular Turkey may be different than what its government proposes. Their view may align more with views expressed in other Western countries. They may also serve as a model for other Muslim countries.

The second component focuses on the dignity of people and how this is expressed in daily life. Here again, a universal belief that humans are to be dignified can be understood and lived out in various ways in different contexts. The treatment accorded to the elderly, the poor and the vulnerable speaks volumes about a nation and individuals and groups of individuals within that nation. The German writer Goethe is purported to have said: "You can easily judge the character of a man by how he treats those who can do nothing for him". The Hebrew prophet Isaiah stated that God judges a nation by how it treats the poor and the orphans. But all too often today in our modern Western society, dignity is accorded to the rich, famous and powerful, and the most vulnerable in society are rendered indignities in their plight. How do Muslims living in a modern, democratic and secular society particularize the universal belief and value that all humans are to receive dignity? Is it reflected in national or communal social policy, and in a manner more generous than that of other Western nations?

The third component focuses on the sacredness of life. Are all living things sacred, that is, special, and hence warrant special protection? In an anthropocentric world, and even in anthropocentric theology, sacredness is bestowed on humans. Today, discussions on what this means or implies revolve around a more complex discussion of what it means to be human. Jean Vanier argues that all humans are sacred, that our humanness is reflected in how we threat those most vulnerable and that the physical and mentally disabled are among the most vulnerable in our society (Vanier 1998). Ethicist Peter Singer, on the other hand, does not bestow humanness on the most mentally disabled and suggests that they can be euthanized in their first years of existence (Singer 1993). Many regard foetal life as sacred and because it is also most vulnerable in need of legal protection. Yet in many instances, foetal life is not accorded legal status as human and can therefore be aborted (Steinbock 1992). Some ecological theologians consider the earth as the "body of God", thus giving it sacred status and meriting protection from environmental abuse and destruction (McFague 1993). How then do those embracing an Islamic worldview and who live in a modern, democratic and secular state particularize the universal notion of the sacredness of life?

Globalization has not only brought us an abundance of material goods, it has also brought us knowledge and awareness of how humans define, treat and regard human life.

The fourth component focuses on equality and diversity. Equality and diversity have become the hallmark of the modern world. Feminist advocates have been relentless in their push for equality, and religious communities, in particular, have often suffered their wrath. Religions are often singled out as bastions of patriarchy lacking equality among the sexes. The recent push in a number of Western nations against the wearing of the *hijab* in public is predicated on a feminist belief that it is oppressive to women and serves only to reinforce inequality. But others see the *hijab* not as a symbol of oppression but of devotion, and that a modern society should be sufficiently diverse to embrace a variety of religious and other expressions. Equality and diversity can be contentious issues but in a nation such as Turkey, both traditional and modern cultural and religious expressions might also exist peacefully side by side. Urban professionals who have been exposed to the global world may come to see equality and diversity in vastly different ways.

The fifth component focuses on openness and tolerance. As globalization spreads, the push to be more open to others who embrace different beliefs and values becomes all the more evident. Knowing self and others is an attempt to recognize where the differences lie and how to give greater understanding to those differences. Openness and tolerance of those things with which one agrees is easy and common but a lack of openness and inclusion often stems from a fear of the unknown and an assumption that the other is a threat to one's own freedom and way of life. While openness and tolerance as a general principle is embraced by many, its actualization has been contested in many Western nations. Accepting other *visions of life* and *ways of life* has created tension in many European cities. Yet, knowing what one should be open to and tolerate can become a difficult matter. An absolute cultural relativism can betray a lack of awareness and even concern for others. Certain long-standing cultural practices may need to be re-examined in light of new evidence and new perspectives. Female circumcision, child labour and unsafe working conditions have been evident for centuries but are tolerated less and less. Many speak out in principle against such practices and are in the forefront to implement public policy changes to eradicate them. Yet, worldview differences, as well as cultural practices, often stand in the way of eradicating some of them, even in modern, democratic and

secular nations. Yet, the world looks on adherents of religious worldviews to give guidance, direction and leadership on these matters, and no less so in Turkey.

The sixth component focuses on environmental concerns. Today, more than ever before, environmental issues are connected to any development project and certainly to the lifestyle of the Western world. At the same time, rare is the person who has or no little awareness of environmental issues that face us on an increasing basis. In general, most are concerned about the preservation of the environment, yet how that is expressed in particular ways varies from one context to another but also from one worldview to another. The Abrahamic worldviews assert that the earth belongs to God and that humans are to take care of it by being its stewards. But the track record of these worldviews on environmental stewardship is not stellar and has been surpassed by secular environmental groups that focus on sustainable practices. Some groups have become spiritual in nature and formed into new earth-based religions or worldviews that regard the earth as sacred ("Gaia") and a self-organizing system or web of life (Lovelock 2000). The environmental movement has prompted many traditional religions or worldviews to re-examine their perspectives, and they are now equally at the forefront reminding adherents of their responsibilities towards the earth (Gottlieb 2006; Khalid 2002). As such, educated urban Muslims in Turkey are also confronted with the teachings of Islam on environmental stewardship, their cultural traditions towards the environment and the latest scientific findings on environmental issues.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

The final chapter will draw conclusions from the use of the framework in describing in considerable detail an Islamic worldview in a modern, democratic and secular state from the perspective of a specific group. It will conclude that while that perspective is not representative of Muslims in Turkey, it will reveal that it can serve as a model for instruction. Because it is comprehensive, its value is enhanced, engaging a variety of perspectives and disciplines. It concerns itself with age-old questions and also with contemporary issues.

Its approach is also dynamic and not prescriptive, recognizing that whatever answers are furnished for today prompt further questions for tomorrow. It reveals that asking questions also enhances greater

knowledge and understanding, for the situation of today may quickly change tomorrow. The Abrahamic worldviews are about encounters with God and how humans are to respond in light of that encounter. Muslims wrestle with understanding how to encounter Allah as they journey through this world and into the next.

We recognize that our context invariably gives shape and influence to our worldview, that is, the human condition. No one sits at the mountaintop able to declare absolute truth: "they know but the outer surface of this world's life, whereas of the ultimate things they are utterly unaware" (Rum 30:7). Or, in the words of the Apostle Paul, we all "see through a glass darkly". The reality is mediated through our senses; through the situation in which we live. The context and situation of members of the group project give shape to how they understand and embrace their beliefs and values. Having a greater understanding of how context and situation influence worldview beliefs and values, however, will shed light on how to interpret the interaction between Islam as a worldview and how individuals and groups of individuals think about (*vision of life*) and live out (*way of life*) that worldview.

Chapter 2 will conclude that Islamic *visions of life* and *ways of life* are influenced and shaped also by sacred texts, narratives and stories. Their teachings weigh heavily in forming thoughts and action. Ethical and moral beliefs and values flow from these sources and become important aspects of an Islamic worldview. Communities and social interactions assist in strengthening and supporting an Islamic worldview commitments for humans are social creatures that depend on engaging with others. While beliefs and values have a clear individual aspect, they are also shared in the community for it is in the community that stories, sacred texts and teachings that emerge from them are given support and strength.

Chapter 3 will conclude that life's ultimate or existential questions demand a reflective and interactive engagement with the worldview one embraces and the life one lives and experiences in light of that worldview. Ultimate or existential questions have no ultimate or definitive answer. Life is a mystery difficult to fathom and understand to a full extent. Life is also dynamic and as such so should be responses to these questions. Engaging the questions will furnish certain answers that can be satisfying for today but will invariably raise further questions for tomorrow. Yet, it is in engaging with the questions and struggling to ascertain certain answers that the human condition and situation is understood more

fully. The insights gained from a particular understanding of Islam as a worldview will be insightful for all who seek a better understanding of religion in general and Islam in particular.

Chapter 4 will conclude that ontological questions give further depth to Islamic worldview beliefs and values. Investigating the nature of the human and what constitutes human life has a real urgency today in light of the advancements of science and neuroscience. Religious worldviews are called upon to assist in defining the human and must make their views known in the public square. They must do so, however, in language that can be understood in the public square.

Chapter 5 will conclude that any worldview must necessarily confront epistemological questions. Investigating the nature of one's knowing has urgency in light of challenges from secular worldviews that dispute the grounding of knowledge in sources other than science and reason. Religious worldviews, and no less Islam, can argue for more robust sources of knowledge, recognizing at the same time that science and reason, as helpful as they are, have their limitations. Insights gained from sacred texts add to the human array of knowledge and understanding, as Habermas and others have come to recognize.

Chapter 6 will conclude that humans can agree on a number of universal beliefs and values but come to understand that they play out in different and sometimes even contrasting manners. The Abrahamic worldviews have a wealth of commentaries on their sacred texts that are to assist adherents in living out their beliefs in varying circumstances. The notions of justice, dignity and sacredness of life are context specific yet do not require that one succumb to a cultural relativism. Here again, the insights from adherents to an Islamic worldview who live in the midst of a modern, democratic and secular society can be quite helpful in enhancing dialogue on important issues in the public square, giving certain guidance and direction on some of the most complex and contentious.

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Cultural Dimensions

INTRODUCTION

Today, religious worldviews have been studied from many different angles and different perspectives. Academic disciplines such as religious studies, scriptural studies, theology, sociology, psychology and anthropology have shed much light on the various religions of the world and the different impacts they have had on humans individually and collectively. Different perspectives have analysed the human religious propensity. Some have reduced the religious to sociological, psychological or neurological phenomena, which serves to give certain insight yet ultimately explains it away. Academic disciplines long dominated by secular perspectives, such as sociology and psychology, have contributed tremendous understanding into the nature of religion yet so often reject the reality to which it points (Ammerman 2002; Bailey 2001; Dawes 2003; Ensign 2002; McIntire 2007; Smith 2001; Segal 1994). The binaries "faith and reason", "rational and irrational" and even "science and religion", when applied in the popular mind to religion versus non-religion, often reflect false dichotomies that reduce the religion of thoughtful adherents to something even they would reject. This chapter seeks to explain (describe) an Islamic worldview, using insights gained from many different disciplines, yet will not explain it away. It seeks to enrich an understanding of an Islamic worldview as it probes it in a number of different dimensions.

The framework used in this chapter is based largely on the pioneering work of Ninian Smart (Smart 1983). Rather than approaching worldviews from a theological or philosophical perspective, he focused on matters such as myths, stories, teaching, rituals and more. He recognized certain common structures or parallels in various religious and even secular worldviews. His approach to the study of religious and secular worldviews reveals that while humans can be so vastly different in what they believe and do, there are nonetheless striking similarities in the way in which their beliefs and actions are framed. He believed that all worldviews have similar structures—myths, teachings and rituals—even if the content of those structures is different, and in some cases radically different. The content of these structures is often given particular shape by the culture in which the worldviews are embedded. A great insight can be gained by examining how beliefs and behaviours are given certain shape by the contexts in which they emerge. Smart termed his approach a cultural dimensions approach.

Some time ago, Max Weber famously stated that reason and science would lead to a disenchantment of the world (Weber 2004). When reason and science are implemented, he believed, much of religion will become implausible. Belief in God or gods, Divine miracles and sacred stories will no longer be believable. Scientific discoveries, and largely those of evolutionary science, will hold as untenable much of what sacred scriptures convey. Weber and others believed the sky had become empty. Weber feared, however, that with the disenchantment of the world, humans would confront an "iron cage", a world of rationalization, dehumanization and bureaucratic efficiency (Weber 2010).

While rationalism and bureaucracy have certainly overtaken our lives, it is not clear that the world has become disenchanted. Peter Berger speaks of a re-enchantment of the world, and sociologists now recognize that the secularization theory that predicted the demise of religion failed to materialize. Religion has seen a resurgence in many parts of the world, and a surprising resilience in places like China and Russia where it faced some of its severest persecutions in the twentieth century (Garrard and Garrard 2007; Aikman 2003; Huntington 2011; Armstrong 2001). The twenty-first century will become a global public square of many worldviews, religious and secular, where understanding and dialogue become essential.

Not only has there been a resurgence of interest in religion but also in sacred stories and myths. This has become no less apparent than in

the very areas that were to dispel them—science and reason (Veneziano 2004; Feyerabend 1975). Myths, whether religious or secular, are those larger metanarratives that attempt to give meaning to human existence in all its complexities within the cosmos that is mysterious and also complex. They are created by or revealed to humans as stories or Divine stories to assist in placing or orienting humans in the larger universe. These myths are as prevalent today as in the past but have taken different shapes in the present. Even science and reason have their own myths about the universe, how it came to be and the place of humans within it, stories that are embraced in faith by adherents of these worldviews (Hawking and Mlodinow 2012; Weinberg 1994).

From our myths and sacred stories come teachings and doctrines. Here too we see them emerge from various worldviews, both religious and secular, each with powerful, systematic responses to answer questions that arise from these myths and stories, attempts to give greater articulation and depth to that which is often enigmatic. Teachings and doctrines come to express and articulate a greater mystery that is embraced in faith. They become dogmatic when little or no room is given for further or alternative explanations.

Ethical principles and moral behaviours are predicated upon worldviews. That which is deemed right living or a life worth living varies from age to age and culture to culture, but also from one worldview to another. Ethical principles from various worldviews may have a lot in common with each other, but they are nonetheless grounded in and emerge from particular worldviews and given expression in particular cultural contexts (Kim et al. 2009). Cultural misunderstandings and even clashes often result from different interpretations of an ethical principle held in common.

Symbols and rituals are aspects of all worldviews. While many of them are generally associated with religious worldviews, they have their counterparts in secular worldviews where they are equally important and equally strong. Symbols and rituals can have long histories, with many surviving for generations if not centuries. Yet new symbols and rituals can also emerge and exist side by side or even supplant former ones. Symbols and rituals need to be both dynamic and resilient in order to have staying power. Empty rituals result in a loss of meaning, importance and power, and can quickly lead to a lack of interest and participation by adherents.

Worldview stories, teachings, symbols and rituals require communal and social support to give them legitimacy and importance. Humans

are social people and do things in common. While solitary adherence to certain cultural dimensions of worldview beliefs is not uncommon, they gain greater cogency when held in common. In the past, rural and urban societies, even entire nations, embraced one particular worldview, and its stories, teachings and rituals were mutually reinforced (Taylor 2007). Dissent was discouraged if not aggressively eliminated by means of shunning, excommunication and even death. But in our modern diversified urban societies, communities of support become smaller and exposure to numerous worldviews becomes greater, increasing the opportunity for a diversity of viewpoints and behaviours. As such, what was once deemed acceptable and obligatory now becomes optional and a matter of choice for adherents.

Nonetheless, whether required or optional, adherents often require more than social or communal support to lend legitimacy to their beliefs, values and behaviours. They require some kind of further intimate experience that reinforces in them the validity of what they embrace. These experiential encounters are focused more on generating extraordinary feelings of joy and enthusiasm, or even exuberance and ecstasy, than creating rational support for beliefs, values and behaviours (Durkheim 2008).

This chapter focuses on a framework that highlights cultural aspects that shape and influence worldview thoughts and actions. It will highlight stories and sacred texts, teachings, rituals, symbols, social and communal supports systems and experiential encounters that come to give shape to an Islamic worldview. What emerges will not be prescriptive of Islam as much as it will be descriptive of one particular understanding of it: a cultural dimensions perspective.

Sacred Texts, Narratives and Stories

Storytelling formed an important aspect of ancient cultures. It provided an opportunity to transmit from one generation to another how one ought to conceive of one's place in the universe, what beliefs and values would sustain a people, and what behaviours and action would ensure survival if not prosperity. Storytelling is still prominent among oral cultures today. Some ancient stories that have been written down which reveal the beliefs and values of ancient peoples have little connection to peoples existing today. These include many of the ancient Near East stories (Pritchard 2008). Other stories belonging to ancient peoples still

hold great importance and continue to define the world for many today. These include the Biblical stories of ancient Israel. They form sacred texts embraced by certain religious groups and still hold very powerful sway today. New stories of the universe and the place of humans within it also emerge today, with some gaining in strength and popularity (Rue 2000; Chaisson 2006).

Stories in this context form two kinds. The first are metanarratives, and these form an important aspect of traditional religious worldviews such as Christianity and Islam, but also secular worldviews such as Secular Humanism or Capitalism. The second are smaller stories within the larger metanarratives; individual stories that are found in sacred scriptures, for example, such as the Bible or the Qur'an. These can be creation stories, healing stories or redemptive stories that form part of a larger grounding metanarrative.

Those who embraced a secular worldview have begun to discount the stories of the Monotheistic worldviews that have been very powerful in the Western world and beyond. Many regard the stories of Judeo-Christianity as fables, as myths told to children, which then need to be abandoned as they mature in their thinking. Not only are these stories rejected but also those of most ancient cultures, stories that served to explain the mysteries of the universe but can no longer be adhered to in the light of the rational and scientific era in which we live today. This does not mean, however, that stories of our place in the universe do not emerge anew. They do, but they now emerge from new worldview perspectives. Scientism, for example, has a grand narrative advocating a scientific view of the universe, one that speaks almost exclusively in cosmological, physical and biological terms (Hawking 1998; Dawkins 1996). A story within this metanarrative is that of the Big Bang. Those who embrace Scientism recount, with considerable confidence, the evolutionary story of how the world came into being. Although it is based on rather solid empirical evidence, it becomes a story or a myth when it attempts to explain mysteries of the universe that go beyond what science can confidently proclaim. Why we are here and for what grander cosmological purposes we exist are questions beyond the realm of science.

Spiritual worldviews speak less about how we came into being and more about why we are here, why suffering continues to exist in the world and what may come after this life. Most of the stories embraced by these worldviews emerged in a pre-scientific world, yet may not

find themselves at odds with more scientific explanations. They simply focus on issues scientific stories fail to address. Stories of how to avoid suffering and how to seek healing or liberation in this life are the central focus of worldviews such as Buddhism and Hinduism. These stories have been recorded in sacred texts that serve as primary sources for these worldviews.

Muslims living in a modern, democratic and secular society are confronted by numerous sources that give shape to their worldview and address some of the life's perplexing questions. The Qur'an serves as their primary sacred text in responding to these. It recounts a larger metanarrative: why humans are here and how they are to live a life in obedience to the will of God. But that story and that text were compiled centuries ago. It also does not address every issue of life. Other narratives or stories supplement the sacred stories to give a deeper, broader and even fuller perspective. At times, they serve to shed more light on sacred documents and what emerges from them. The questions facing scholars and believers alike are how to interpret these sacred though ancient stories in the light of the modern context in which we live. Can they come alive in a new way for Muslims today? Can our modern context shed new light on them? Hermeneutics and the questions it raises cannot escape Islamic scholars and believers alike.

The Qur'an is regarded as a sacred text and is believed by Muslims to be the revealed Word of God. It is highly esteemed and accorded great respect and reverence, often given a most prominent place in the home. Muslims also believe that the Qur'an protects them from evil, in that reading it and embracing its ways lead them to live fruitful and obedient lives. In fact, reading the Qur'an is one of the primary prayers or duties in Islam. Often emphasizing the moral significance of an event, it serves as a book of guidance to humans so they can live in accordance with the will of God.

The Qur'an was verbally revealed to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel over an extended period of time, beginning in 610 and ending in 632 in the year he died. These revelations were written in Arabic and without error as dictated by Muhammad to his followers. The Qur'an includes summaries of or alternative interpretations of important stories found also in the Jewish and Christian sacred texts, underscoring a certain affinity with these two worldview traditions. The Qur'an is the larger story of God's ways with humans revealed through specific events up to the time of Muhammad.

Muslims see the Qur'an as the primary source of Islam that gives shape to their lives. What is written in the Qur'an was closely connected to the tangible life experiences of those who first heard it. The Qur'an addresses the religious, ethical, social and economic issues of the time in which it was revealed. It revealed how humans can overcome the morass in which they often find themselves and live more morally upright and productive lives. Yet, it is equally instructive for today, occupying a significant place in the lives of Muslims and serving as their most reliable guide. It reveals guiding principles that serve to give guidance and direction to an Islamic way of life. It is instructive in encouraging Muslims in their beliefs, prayers and ethical behaviour, and how to deal justly with others.

The Qur'an is read during prayers and at other times. Reading it is also considered an act of personal devotion and as such can be read anytime. The Qur'an is also read for study purposes, either individually or in groups, to acquire a greater understanding of that which is contained in it. There are also many different ways to read the Qur'an. A traditional way of reading the Qur'an in Arabic requires certain articulation and pronunciation, and this is taught through institutions linked to the *Diyanet* that are specialized in Qur'anic reading techniques. Those who do not know Arabic and must rely on its translations can nonetheless engage with it at a more existential level to internalize its meaning and benefit from it.

The Qur'an is a sacred text but it is also one that must be interpreted, as all texts must be interpreted. The culture and context in which it and other texts are read shapes how it is interpreted. No text, sacred or otherwise, can forgo interpretation. As such, a historical critical method is invaluable. It can shed considerable light on the manner in which instructions contained in the Qur'an are to be interpreted and implemented and how they have varied from culture to culture and context to context. No one interpretation can be assumed to fit for all times and places. For example, some insist that the Qur'an should serve as a source of law (*Sharia Law*) and that it should be implemented in countries with a Muslim majority. Others, however, disagree and interpret the Qur'anic injunction on this matter differently. Most Muslims in Turkey, for example, feel that *Sharia Law* has no place there because it is a secular and democratic country. Nonetheless, what is clear is that the Qur'an speaks to many issues in life, whether these emerge from legal, economic, ethical, moral or religious spheres of life. The question as always is how all of this should be understood.

Today, Muslims gain knowledge about the Qur'an and all that it conveys from various sources. These include family, schools, mosques, institutions of Qur'an linked to the *Diyanet*, radio, television, newspapers and the Internet. In the previous centuries, Muslim scholars were the primary interpreters of the Qur'an and others relied on their work. These scholars approached the Qur'an from two different perspectives. Some approached the Qur'an from a theological perspective (*kelam*) and focused primarily on creeds or thematic tenets of Islamic beliefs. The concern here was to develop a kind of systematic theology, one concerned with how to believe in God and what to believe about God. Other scholars read the Qur'an from a jurisprudence perspective (*fiqh/fıkıh*), one that concerns aspects of life that go beyond a belief in God and what to believe about God. This perspective focused on how to apply the principles of the Qur'an to daily life, including prayers, fasting, relating to others, ethical issues and more—in effect, how to live as a Muslim. Different scholarly thoughts and ideas have emerged over the centuries as a result of these two different approaches to the Qur'an. These diverse thoughts and ideas also needed to be put into language understood by ordinary people. This is the role played by the *ilmihal*, a form of (catechetical) instruction that assisted people in better understanding the Qur'an.

The Qur'an had a direct relation to the events of the times in which it was revealed. Those who first heard its messages could easily link them to the issues of the day, with little to no misunderstanding. For example, orphan girls were often sexually abused at the time of the Prophet Muhammad and Qur'anic verses pointing specifically to this abuse were well understood (*Nisa* 4:3). Usury was a big problem at that time and the Qur'an sought to eradicate it (*Baqara* 2:275). Polytheism (*şirk koşmak*) was also rampant and numerous verses stated clearly how it conflicted with the Qur'anic notion of the oneness of God.

For subsequent generations, however, understanding and interpreting the Qur'an became an increasing challenge. Initially, the companions of Muhammad (*sahabe*) conveyed the historical context and meaning of the Qur'an, and this was of great assistance to the listening audience. But understanding and interpreting the Qur'an soon became an activity for experts. Theologians (*kelam*) focused on clarifying the pillars of faith while Islamic law specialists (*fıkıh*) focused on adjusting the content of Qur'anic verses to the real language of life. Some scholars focused on textual interpretation while some others focused on subject matter. In

addition, scholarly, historical and linguistic contexts, as well as customs and traditions, all of which served as sources for scholars, now needed to be taken into account. But they also introduced diverse interpretations.

Contemporary Muslim scholars seek new ways to communicate with the Qur'an for new situations pose new challenges and require new interpretations. As a result, the debate has been ongoing as to which aspects of the Qur'an should be highlighted. The Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad to address people of the day and seek solutions to their problems. Classic era Muslim scholars focused the content of the Qur'an on three categories—obligations (*zaruriyyat*), essentials (*haciyyat*) and complements (*tahsîniyaat*)—in addressing the issues of their day (Shaatibi d. 1388). Contemporary Islamic scholars need to focus Qur'anic interpretations on addressing the needs of people today, seeking solutions to their challenging problems. Ethical and ecological issues, human exploitation and cruelty, the violation of human rights and incessant warfare need to be addressed today, and the Qur'an can be an inspirational source for solving such issues.

Solutions to current problems will require more than just Qur'anic interpretations, however contemporary they might be. While Muslims regard the Qur'an as their primary sacred text, they also recognize other authoritative sources that serve as narratives in better understanding the world and how to live well in it. The sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad are one such source. In the Muslim tradition, these are presented as collections of *Hadith*, which are sayings, deeds and approvals of the prophet. There are also booklets that are simpler and more understandable; the "40 *Hadith*" comes first among these. A number of Muslim scholars have compiled such selected *Hadith* collections that are readily available. Other lesser sources include the history of the prophets, biographies of mystics, stories rich in religious and ethical motifs, wisdom sayings, poems and proverbs. Even the mythical *A Thousand and One Nights* (Arabian Nights), a collection of stories compiled during the Islamic Golden Age, is used as a source to shed light on understanding the mysteries of human life.

The stories, novels, poems, music and theatre are innately and uniquely human. Today, people often nourish their lives through such works of art, whether these are secular or more specifically religious. Artistic works have an affinity with religion since they also seek to increase understanding and sensitivity and nourish the human spirit. If art is a creative process, it reflects God's creativity in humans. That

creativity is a component of their role as caliph of the world. Art can, therefore, enhance human spirituality, and knowledge gained through art can shed light on new ways of understanding the Qur'an (Selçuk 2015).

The process of Secularism has played a large role in redefining the role of religion in the Islamic world, especially in modern, secular and democratic countries such as Turkey (Esposito and Tamimi 2000; Berkes 1999). In the previous centuries, Islam dominated all walks of life, private and public. Today, because of the impact of Secularism, much of Islam has been relegated to the private sphere. Public sector areas such as law, politics, government and science have become secularized and less influenced by religious institutions. But Secularism (*laicism*) is also a worldview. Simply replacing one dominant worldview (Islam) for another (Secularism) is not necessarily an advance for Turkey, or any other country. The current sociopolitical situation has given Muslim scholars new challenges and quests regarding the nature, purpose and function of religion in contemporary human life. As a result, new approaches to theology (*kelam*) and *fiqh* have surfaced. Secularism has, oddly, enabled the essence and core values of Islam to come to the foreground. This has transformed the way people, and especially those with higher levels of education, comprehend religion. Secularism has, ironically, played a role in renewing religious thought and reminds us that a secular system (*laïcité*), more so than Secularism (*laicism*), would provide a new place in a plural secular Turkish society for a renewed Islam as it would for other worldview perspectives, religious or secular. A question that remains is: What shape an Islamic metanarrative would take in a plural secular society that does not silence religious voices but creates a place for them in the public square to come to expression? How would its stories assist in creating a society that is open and free for all?

Teachings, Doctrines

Teachings and doctrines flow from the stories, narratives and sacred texts individuals and groups of individuals embrace. These involve notions and ideas regarding the beginnings of the universe, the earth and humans, but they also speak of the purpose of life, the way we should live and how we should treat one another. They emerge from stories in sacred scriptures and such teachings may become doctrines of the faith. Islam is defined by many of these. But the teachings and doctrines of Islam,

while grounded in the Qur'an, are also enriched by insights from other sources.

The primary or most central teachings of Islam concern two very important but simple beliefs. Muslims are to believe in God and they are to lead a good life. The main and well-known Pillars of Islam, which contain duties faithful Muslims are to embrace and perform, are important but they flow from the two more central and prior teachings. What one is to believe about God and how one is to lead a good life is assisted by the Pillars of Islam (*Baqara* 2/183; *Ankebut* 29/45; *Maareej* 70/24-25). But the Pillars do not exhaust what it means to lead a good life. It is clear that not all Muslims are able to fulfil all of the five duties, yet all Muslims are able to lead a good life by being just, merciful, righteous, kind, loving, forgiving and more. These are primarily what the Qur'an instructs Muslims to be and do. All the other teachings of Islam are to be understood in that spirit.

The first important teaching of Islam focuses on the existence and oneness of God. This central teaching and belief includes the notion that all goodness and beauty has its source in God. God creates and constantly sustains the cosmos through the laws of the universe. God provides for every living being on the earth and His love is infinite. Further, God responds to the prayers of people. That is why prayers are so important; they are tangible evidence of worship of and reverence for God. Prayers give Muslims opportunity to express gratitude for what they have received in their daily lives and to interact with God; this communication is highly regarded and valuable. Muslims are also purified through prayers, for they become peaceful, spiritually at ease and feel the love and support of God at all times.

The second central teaching of Islam comes as an instruction to lead a good life, and hence focuses on what is called the "good deeds".

> As for anyone - be it man or woman - who does righteous deeds, and is a believer - him shall We most certainly cause to live a good life; and most certainly shall We grant unto such as these their reward in accordance with the best that they ever did. (*Nahl* 16/97)

Good deeds are those that are the most appropriate regardless of the situation with which one is confronted. Doing good deeds gives meaning to the lives of people. They cannot be prescribed nor fixed, for the unique

nature of each situation determines what particular deeds are called for in each specific case. Because the history of humanity is also the history of change, good deeds vary from one context to another and can vary in form and practice. A Muslim's duty is to act in the most appropriate or virtuous manner in each situation in which they find themselves. When they accomplish this, they are also motivated to seek new ways in other areas of life. Only through increasing knowledge and understanding, can one adopt a balanced, reasonable and beneficial outlook. Through their accomplishments, people can enhance their good deeds since appropriate attitudes become discernable when reflecting on human thoughts and actions. The approach to discerning good deeds in Islam is intended to be practical, flexible and realistic and applies to every area of life: religious activity, ethics, science, politics, economy, law, leisure and more.

These two primary teachings give rise to many supplementary or accompanying teachings intended to assist Muslims in their faith in God and in leading a good life. One of those involves a belief in the prophets. Why is faith in ancient prophets who lived in times so different to us so important, and how does what they did connect to leading a good life?

> Behold, We have inspired thee [O prophet] just as We inspired Noah and all the prophets after him - as We inspired Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and their descendants, including Jesus and Job, and Jonah, and Aaron, and Solomon; and as We vouchsafed unto David a book of Divine wisdom. (*Nisâ* 4/163)

God sends messages to certain special persons (prophets) so they can convey them to others. These messages not only state that God exists but they also tell stories about what it means to lead a good life under many different and trying circumstances. These messages revealed to prophets constitute the sacred texts. Muhammad was the last prophet and the Qur'an the final message. Muslims believe and respect all prophets for their life stories set good examples for them.

> The Apostle, and the believers with him, believe in what has been bestowed upon him from on high by his Sustainer: they all believe in God, and His angels, and His revelations, and His apostles, making no distinction between any of His apostles…. (*Baqara* 2/285)

Prophecy helps people better understand what they may already have intuited or reasoned; it confirms for them what is right and proper. It

serves to support and guide their actions and at times reminds them of values that may have fallen into neglect.

A second supplementary or accompanying teaching that assists Muslims in their belief in God and how to lead a good life concerns the belief in life beyond this life and is formulated as "faith in the next life". This teaching of Islam gives Muslims hope that death will not triumph but it also reminds them of their responsibilities in this life. It speaks of the next life but its focus is really on this life. It reminds Muslims that they are to lead a good life, and will be called to account for what they do in that regard. Leading a good life has meaning.

> He who has created death as well as life, so that He might put you to a test [and thus show] which of you is best in conduct…. (*Mulk* 67/2)

Time spent on this earth engaged creatively, fruitfully and wisely has inherent meaning.

The above teachings find their primary source in the Qur'an. It is here that Muslims find their most important guidance and direction in their belief in God and in leading a good life. The life of Prophet Muhammad also occupies a central place in the life of Muslims. He was intimately involved in the revelatory process, internalized its messages and implemented them in his life. The Qur'an specifically refers to him as a role model, and hence an important source for Muslims. He is one who led a good life, and the manner in which he understood how to lead a good life is significant and instructive for Muslims.

Understanding and interpreting the teachings of Islam are not confined only to the life of Muhammad. While Muhammad's life is a source for Muslims, they are encouraged to develop their own interpretations and understandings of Islamic teachings. Muslim theologians and philosophers, past and present, interpret the teachings of Islam in the context of their social, historical and cultural background. As such, approaches to Islam in general and the teachings of the Qur'an, in particular, must always be open to new interpretations for people come to the texts with new questions that arise from new or different social, historical and cultural contexts. Individuals are to be given latitude to interpret for themselves what the Qur'an is saying to them in their particular circumstance. Further, since the Qur'an was also communicated verbally, verbal communication is open to a variety of inferences. The meaning of certain words or phrases might not always be clear. Muslim thinkers regard

the Qur'an as a comprehensive verbal source and interpret it in accordance with their own knowledge, interest and experience. Science and reason can assist Muslims here, becoming yet another source for interpreting Islamic teachings. A multifaceted approach becomes helpful and beneficial.

As such, yet another source for interpreting the teaching of the Qur'an is the intellectual engagement of the individual believer with the text. The Qur'an must undergo interpretation—this cannot be avoided. This also strongly suggests that interpretations will vary according to historical context and cultural situation. The text will be defined and redefined as individuals and groups of individuals interact with it. Some clear examples stand out. One is the reference in the Qur'an to the cutting off of hands for theft (*Ma'ida* 5/38-39). While some are and have been inclined to interpret this teaching in a literal manner—the actual physical cutting off of the hands—others interpret the teaching as "cutting" any future means to steal or "cutting" them off from continuing to commit such crimes. Yet others interpret the verse as not cutting off hands physically, but as a punishment that can take the form of imprisonment or fines. Another example is stoning to death as a punishment for committing adultery. This specific teaching is not in the Qur'an. The Qur'an itself speaks only of lashings (*Nur* 24/2), and even this punishment is not advocated today in modern Turkey, even if it might occur elsewhere in the world. As with all ancient and authoritative texts, not only is interpretation required, it also varies.

That is why another important approach or source for interpreting the teachings of the Qur'an is intellectual exchange and dialogue. Jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Muslim theology (*kelam*), philosophy and mysticism (Sufism) have emerged within the Islamic tradition. Islamic teachings have been shaped and elucidated with assistance from scientific and intellectual endeavours. Interpreting the Qur'an will necessarily involve a great deal of subjectivity, which leads one to conclude that religious teachings will always be open to new meanings and interpretations. Therefore, the teachings of Islam should continually be re-evaluated in the light of new human understandings and discoveries. Subject titles of Islamic teachings need not change but interpreting and understanding the teachings are always open to change. For example, in Islamic thought, God is understood to be the Supreme Being, one who is above all creatures. Questions such as "what is the nature of God" and "how can one communicate with God" are not, however, explicitly addressed

nor defined, leading to rather diverse views. Faith in God is an indisputable Islamic teaching. The essence, character or nature of God will, however, remain an open discussion, leading to different perceptions and interpretations. Some feel that the first generations of Muslims understood the character of God in a different fashion than modern Islamic theologians and philosophers (*kelam*). As such, studies in these areas are important in helping Muslims understand Islamic teachings. Many scholars have contributed to a deeper understanding of these teaching and how to live in conformity with them. Some of the more prominent ones are Abu Hanifa, Imam Shafi, Maturidi, Al-Farabi, IbnSina, IbnRusd, IbnMiskeveyh, QadiAbdulcabbar, Mevlana, YunusEmre, IbnArabi, Muhammad İkbal, Fazlurrahman, Muhammad Arkoun and Cabiri.

Islamic teachings are conveyed to adherents in a number of places. At an early age, young people are taught them at home, school and mosque. At a later age, people can learn of Islamic teachings through the Internet, social media, communities and foundations. Further study can be made of Islamic teachings at Divinity Schools. Each of these has considerable influence on how the teachings of Islam are conveyed and interpreted. Religious education taught at schools is based on a curriculum set by the Ministry of National Education (Erdem 2008). It prepares and implements a curriculum focused on religious culture and ethical principles where students learn the basics concepts of Islam. Religious Affairs Administration, on the other hand, deals with issues such as faith, prayers and ethics.

Children experience a different learning process at home where they are influenced by parents. The socio-economic and educational background of parents will influence the quality of teaching children will receive. Children raised in households where daily prayers are performed are likely to link religiosity to ritual observance. Religious leaders (imam) in mosques give sermons (*khutbah*) at Friday noon prayers. In these sermons, the basic principles of religion are taught. Qur'anic verses*Hadiths* and interpretations of Muslim thinkers are brought to the fore, and direction and guidance are given to the members of the community. Issues of concern and daily events are also addressed.

Tradition, culture and context influence individual understandings of Islamic teachings, in content if not in concept. Religion is about individuals who are constantly changing. As individuals deepen their general understanding and experience of life, they are prone to interpret religious teachings in different ways. For example, children are initially

taught about God's loving, merciful and protective qualities, and only later may come to discover God's righteous anger concerning injustices. Fundamental religious values are subject to new interpretations and perceptions. Teachings that have direct historical and cultural significance may undergo a change in a more direct way in new contexts. For example, the term "People of the Book" and its implications have virtually disappeared today in a context where there are many who are not Muslim. In its place today is the notion of all citizens having equal rights.

At times, cultural practices can be confused with religious teachings. A particular cultural practice can gain religious importance yet be at odds with original teachings of the Qur'an. Putting religious and cultural practices in their proper perspectives is not always easy. Though highlighting or articulating values and principles conveyed in the Qur'an should take precedence, cultural values can often become predominant. For example, cultural practices such as wrapping graves with pieces of cloth, or kissing and touching gravestones, are at odds with the teachings of Islam. Yet, people seem not to be deterred in following these cultural practices.

Though the Qur'an is central to Muslim understandings the teachings that emanate from it require interpretation. Those interpretations are influenced, shaped and impacted by the culture and context in which they are read and studied, even as they influence, shape and impact that culture. Dynamically engaging with the text will lead to more clearly distinguishing between principles contained in the teachings and the cultural traditions in which they are often understood. With the assistance of additional sources, the teachings of the Qur'an can be better explicated. Additional sources as well as assessments of cultural traditions and contexts raise numerous questions in regard to the relationship between text and interpretation. A careful balance needs to be maintained for deconstructionist perspectives can easily sway one to argue that it is all about interpretation. This will inevitably result in an unfortunate power struggle to give prominence to particular interpretations.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

The question of what it means to live a good life is one that has perplexed humans throughout the ages. It is also an ethical question. It is grounded in one's worldview. Discerning a good life, or even a life that is worth living, cannot be done in isolation from the metanarratives

we embrace, and the stories, myths and sacred texts that influence and give shape to our worldview. Ethics and ethical principles are linked to worldviews.

Ethical principles such as justice, equality, dignity and respect for others are common to all of the humanity. They are constitutive of the human and to becoming human. But they are given content if not context by our place in the world, and hence by our views of the world. Our views of the world are, in turn, linked to the stories, myths and sacred texts that have influenced and shaped our perceptions.

Ethical principles embraced by secular worldviews are grounded in secular perceptions of the place of humans in the world. These principles and their implications are predicated upon humans as the highest authority in the chain of being. These ethical principles emerge from the development of human consciousness, which according to Philosophical Naturalism or Materialism occurred through biological evolutionary processes. In human sociocultural development, ethical principles became necessary for human survival, both individually and collectively. Today, those ethical principles are also fundamental to human survival but even more so to human flourishing. Not surprisingly, principles such as dignity, equality and sacredness of the human become particularly poignant in the light of some contemporary social issues focusing on human rights and gender rights. Nonetheless, the outcomes of those principles are predicated upon the secular worldviews embraced which have an exclusive focus on life in the here and now. Whether those principles are interpreted or enacted individually or communally depends on the degree to which people who embrace a secular worldview see themselves communally connected and communally responsible.

Spiritual worldviews link ethical principles to something beyond the human. While humans must necessarily work out the implications of ethical principles in the contexts in which they find themselves, these principles are nonetheless linked to something more or greater that unifies all humans. In that sense, those who embrace a spiritual worldview will see that ethical principles necessarily draw them together communally, and the sense of community may now be expanded to also include all living things not just humans.

Muslims are mandated to be good persons, to lead a good and virtuous life. Ethical principles guide and direct the thoughts and actions of Muslims, whether individually or collectively. These principles may correspond with those of other traditions, religious or secular, but they remain

grounded in the Qur'an. Nonetheless, in Islam also principles require interpretation and implementation, and here assistance may be garnered from other sources.

The Qur'an supports some practices and attitudes that lead to living a good life while discouraging others, which lends support to the notion that ethical principles and values are crucial. Leading a good life is connected to principles such as justice, dignity, equality, truthfulness, moderation, sincerity, humility and kindness. These are values common to humanity, and they originate in human spirituality, conscience or mind. According to Islam, ethical values are innate to the human, and common wisdom and conscience converge to establish common ethical principles. As can be inferred from the Qur'an, humans have the capacity for discerning right and wrong and each person must individually determine their behaviour based on the principles they embrace. These principles are supported both in the Qur'an and in the life practices of Muhammad. Ethical principles were stressed in the life of Muhammad, whom the Qur'an regards as a role model for Muslims. Muslims respect the ethical principles contained in the Qur'an and practiced by Muhammad.

Humans have the capacity to lead a good life—to act ethically and to live morally upright lives. But they do not always do so, and this causes no end of strife, hardship and turmoil in their lives, individually and collectively. We are all well aware of conflict and discord among Muslims themselves as well as between Muslims and non-Muslims because ethical principles are not followed or are applied in the harshest manner. Such actions lead to anything but the good life.

Though ethical principles are innate, they nonetheless require internalization through educational training, intellectual support and interactive experiences. The first social institution in which ethical principles are internalized is the family. Family plays a major role in one's early life. Adults, especially parents, become role models for children who often imitate them. The home and the school should support each other in this process. Consistent behaviour and attitudes of administrators and teachers help students internalize ethical principles. Social circles of friends, acquaintances and colleagues, intellectual, artistic and scientific discoveries, and various forms of media can all play a role in internalizing ethical principles.

Yet, a question remains regarding the nature of the good life. What does it mean for Muslims in general? What does it mean for Muslims

in Turkey in particular? What does it mean for the different genders, particularly women? What does it mean to live a good life in a modern, democratic and secular nation, especially where numerous lifestyles are on display? What does it mean in terms of a Western lifestyle, which is viewed by many as being progressive? These are not easy questions and pose a huge challenge for Muslims, as well as for those from other religious perspectives, whose ways of life have been moulded by centuries of tradition and hence tend towards a more conservative lifestyle.

Nonetheless, religions remain one of the most influential features in human life and along with it the ethical principles they advocate. Muslims experience the prominent aspects of their religion intensively including its ethical principles. But the secularization process has also impacted and curtailed the influence of Islam on society. In Turkey, this is particularly the case as it moved ever closer to a Western way of life. Nonetheless, Islamic values have been persistently felt in numerous areas of life. Even when surrounded by democratic and secular principles, Muslims give importance to ethical principles emanating from Islam. In Muslim communities, it is not possible to separate religious values from all spheres of life. As a result, in secular societies where Muslims dominate, the ethical values emphasized by Islam are still at play, and their impact in many areas of society is still clearly visible. This may stem largely from the fact that ethical values are closely linked to human rights and freedoms, and many of these rights and freedoms are grounded in religious worldviews. While secular social, economic and political structures and their values may dominate the public square, their influence on individual or collective thought and behaviour can never be total. Muslims find ways in their daily interactions with others to be guided by Islamic principles and values.

The matter of Islamic ethical principles shaping or influencing public policy, however, is a difficult and controversial matter. The extent of the influence varies in regard to country and culture. Public policy is determined by political choices made in any particular country, and by the kind of society people individually and collectively desire. In a secular and plural society, public policy should be determined democratically, with no one worldview perspective silencing others. Neither the principles of Secularism, Islam nor any other worldview perspective should be explicitly mandated in a modern, democratic and secular society such as Turkey.

Nonetheless, the majority cultural and worldview perspectives will undoubtedly play a role in the development of public policy but this

should not be done at the expense of minorities. In regard to Islamic ethical principles, this should not be of great concern for they correspond with the ethical principles of humanity. Public policy should not restrict individual freedom, including the freedom to be guided by one's ethical principles, as long as that freedom does not impede or impinge on the freedom of others. Some applications of Islamic principles concerning religious law may be at odds with secular principles. Muslims in Turkey, in general, have been guarded in imposing their religious beliefs and moral values on others, for freedom of expression is also one of their ethical principles.

But as with any society, public policy has to do with determining the good life that is desired in the public realm. Not everyone will agree what this might be, yet in a democratic society, public discussions on these matters are warranted. Citizens who embrace particular ethical principles and values, be these Islamic, Christian, secular or atheistic, may give public expression to them in a democratic society. That Turkey, with its majority Muslim population, seeks to be free and open, speaks to the ethical values that dominate in that country, even if it is always a challenge to ensure that these values are not eroded by powerful political forces seeking to undermine them.

Rituals and Symbols

Rituals and symbols are important aspects of human life. Only humans among all other creatures create rituals and symbols to give deeper expression to what is important to them. Rituals and symbols in and of themselves are not where their importance lies, however; it is what they represent or that to which they point that is most crucial. Here their power can be limitless, and history has clearly revealed this.

Rituals and symbols can also lose their significance. They can become empty, meaningless and lose value. When they do so interest in them is lost, their importance wanes, or participation in them or embrace of them is neglected. Sometimes new rituals and symbols will emerge, especially if the reality to which they point remains dynamic in the lives of adherents. Every worldview has its own rituals and symbols, and they engage individuals as they strengthen their beliefs, values and ways of life.

Rituals and symbols that emerge from secular worldviews are similar in nature to those of religious worldviews even if they are different in form and structure. Secular rituals such as parades on national holidays,

for example, heighten nationalistic loyalty, devotion and sometimes even fervour for one's country. A nation can become of utmost importance and significance, in a sense deified, and something for which people willingly sacrifice their lives, as is the case of Nationalism. Yet some citizens may regard a nation's concerns, priorities and actions as objectionable or offensive. Then, nationalistic rituals such as parades for them become similarly meaningless, objectionable or offensive, and lose their significance. In a similar vein, a flag is a symbol of a nation and may evoke pride and respect if the nation is highly regarded, to the extent that it may be prominently displayed and even worn with great pride. But others may be self-conscious or shamed by a nation's past history or actions, and the symbol will lose its meaning and significance.

Rituals and symbols are also common to spiritual worldviews and serve similar functions. Some parallel those of traditional Monotheistic worldviews. Rituals such as prayers, candle lighting and gatherings assemble adherents into closer communion with each other and the object of devotion or adoration. These rituals are as common to Wiccan as they are to Indigenous worldviews, even if the reference points are considerably different. Such is the case also with symbols. The ancient Wiccan tripartite symbol, the *triquetra* or *triqueta*, which was later appropriated by Celtic Christians who infused it with a different meaning, has now been re-appropriated for modern day Wiccans. Here again, both rituals and symbols point not to themselves but beyond to what is essential in the particular spiritual worldview.

Rituals and symbols are also common to Islam. But here again, they point to something deeper. Three of the most important Islamic rituals are daily prayers, fasting and pilgrimages. Three of the most important symbols in Islam are the mosque, minaret and *Kaaba*. Here too religious rituals and symbols point not to themselves but beyond to essential elements within Islam.

Rituals shape the worldview and lifestyle of Muslims. They regulate life. They assist Muslims in keeping their worldview dynamic. Rituals assist believers in maintaining and sustaining a morally upright life and in shaping their ethical identities. They create feelings of togetherness, unity and cooperation. They strengthen membership in a community and affiliation with a long-standing tradition. In short, rituals enhance and deepen both the religious and spiritual lives of people. Their purpose is to enrich the two central components of Islam: belief in God and leading a good life.

Rituals strengthen communication with God and assist individuals in making sense of their world. According to Islamic belief, everything in the world belongs to God and this awareness is renewed for Muslims through daily, weekly and annual rituals. Regular rituals such as daily prayers not only create renewed awareness of the presence of God but also enrich one's spiritual perspective—towards fellow humans, other living creatures, life in general and affairs of this world. Through rituals, Muslims renew and restore their spiritual selves: their attitudes, behaviours and the richness of their lives (*Ankebut* 29/45).

Muslims are encouraged to pray. The Qur'an gives directives to pray as much as five times a day, to plan one's day around communication with God, to always be connected to God and to give priority to God. Through prayer, a believer has a chance to feel close to God, to be spiritually purified and feel spiritually at peace. Through prayer, a Divine presence and power is felt; the love, blessing and grace of God is experienced. Muslims pray to God for support in leading obedient, responsible and fruitful lives. Prayers motivate Muslims to be gracious, thankful, caring and loving.

Praying is generally done facing Mecca, the spiritual heartland of Islam. Praying can be done in a mosque but it can also be done anywhere and anytime. Obligatory daily prayers are formal, held at particular times, follow a certain pattern and are done collectively and in unison. Friday prayers, the most important of the week, are obligatory for men though optional for women. During Friday prayers, sermons are also heard to encourage Muslims to lead faithful lives. But prayers can also be informal, individual, spontaneous and done anywhere. Prayers after meals, for example, are prayers of thanksgiving and do not need to follow any set pattern.

In the highly complex lives we live in a modern secular world, however, praying five times a day at set intervals becomes increasingly difficult and may not be practical or possible for everyone. Daily schedules are often determined for us rather than by us. But here Islam is flexible rather than rigid for it is not the number of times one engages in prayer that is most important, but the actual taking of time to pray whenever one is able. This is an important change of emphasis for it places the onus not on fulfilling a daily obligation in a mechanical way, as if a scorecard is being kept. It indicates that when one prays, one must be sincere in being connected to God. The obligation to pray five times a day is a reminder not to be negligent in staying connected to God, from the

moment we rise to the moment we sleep, even when meeting that obligation becomes difficult.

Fasting is also an important ritual for Muslims. It is training for self-control, an exercise to prepare one for the real difficulties of life. Fasting entails refraining from food and drink but it is also much more. It is a time for spiritual discipline, reflection and purification, a time to reassess values and behaviours, and an opportunity to resist enslavement to habits. But here again, fasting is not possible for everyone. Not participating in a fast does not make one less of a Muslim.

Ramadan is the most important fast for Islam, lasting for an entire month. It changes the order and routine of an entire year for its annual dates are not fixed due to the Islamic lunar calendar. The Ramadan fast introduces a whole new perspective by diverting attention away from worldly matters and focusing instead on worship, devotion, charity and empathy towards one's fellow humans. Fasting lasts from dawn to sunset. Then, an evening celebration of food and drink (*iftar*) is held to end each daily fast, and these are often social gatherings of family and friends. At the end of Ramadan, an even bigger celebration of food and drink takes place.

Another important ritual for Muslims is the *hajj*, a once in a life-time obligatory pilgrimage to Mecca for all able-bodied Muslims who have the means to do so. Not everyone is able to participate in a *hajj*. In that sense, it is less an obligation and more so an opportunity strongly encouraged by the Qur'an for the spiritual experience that can be gained from it. The various rituals performed during this pilgrimage, including seven counterclockwise marches around the *Kaaba*, are re-enactments of past historical events that serve to enhance spiritual devotion and worship. They are also intended to create equality, unity and solidarity among participants, for all worshippers are from a variety of different cultures, traditions and social positions. It is a life-changing experience for participants. Studies indicate that a *hajj* experience increases accord between Muslims worldwide, encourages greater acceptance of female education and employment and leads to peace and harmony among adherents of other religions (Clingingsmith et al. 2008). Malcolm X, the famous American civil rights activist, participated in a *hajj* in the 1960s and had a life-changing experience. Witnessing a gathering of people of all colours and races from around the world walking in peace and harmony led him to feel that America needs to better understand Islam for it could erase his society's race problems (Malcolm and Haley 1999).

There are other rituals or ceremonies that are important but considered less so in terms of enhancing spiritual devotion and piety. These include naming ceremonies, circumcisions, weddings and funerals. Wedding ceremonies tend to be less religious and more cultural. Funerals are, however, events where people link more closely with their Islamic beliefs. Verses of the Qur'an are read eloquently and elucidated, to console the sorrowful. Harmony is also created through condolences offered. Food is brought and shared with neighbours and relatives, to create a sense of shared community in joy and in sorrow.

As in other societies, secular rituals are also important for Muslims. National holidays are celebrated with excitement and vigour. Numerous activities are organized, poems appealing to national feelings are read and discussions are held. Turkish national history is brought to mind once again and national feelings are celebrated. Such celebrations are not viewed adversely for Muslims recognize that these secular rituals can influence their worldview in a positive manner. They share the same national feelings with other citizens regardless of the religion to which they belong. Connecting with others provides a wider perspective and reminds everyone that as a nation they are one big family.

Symbols in Islam developed over time, arose from some cultural expressions and from the imaginations of fervent followers. The colour green has become symbolic, decorating many mosques, incorporated in numerous national flags, and sometimes used in elaborate bindings of the Qur'an. The star and the crescent have also become symbolic of Islam and are also incorporated in national flags. The Turkish national flag has become a sacred symbol. It not only contains the star and crescent but is a unique symbol of Turkish independence. It may not be abused in any manner. The call to prayer (*azan*) is yet another significant symbol. It reveals that there are Muslims living in the neighbourhood. The call to prayer evokes the spiritual world of Muslims, giving them peace, serenity and security. Quotations written on fountain stones and grave stones also remind Muslims of God. Mausoleums of wise and great spiritual men, as well as minarets, are also important tangible symbols of Islam. The latter in particular suggest devout feeling rising heavenward, like hands reaching out and praying to God.

Perhaps one of the most controversial symbols in Islam today is the *hijab*, and with it the *burqa*, *chador* and *niqab*. As mentioned previously, feminists decry it as a symbol of oppression and patriarchy, and feel it has no place and is out of place in a modern Western society. They call for its ban,

and their efforts have been successful in countries such as France. The *hijab* was also banned in Turkey for many years for it was seen as an ostentatious religious symbol for a country that had become purposefully and distinctly Western and secular. But the law was rescinded recently in 2013, to give freedom of expression to those who desired to wear it as a symbol of devotion. Strangely enough, Turkey's first ban on clothing was aimed at the *fez*, a short conical red felt hat long worn in Turkey since Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II made it official national attire in 1826. Ataturk banned the *fez* through the Hat Law of 1925, but did not concern himself with banning the *hijab*. He felt that as people became more enlightened, they would quickly abandon it. This did not happen and in the 1970s and 1980s, the matter became quite politically controversial, and the *hijab* was banned. Removing the ban in 2013 created an equal amount of controversy.

The Qur'an does not specify any form of head covering or dress. It simply says "Let them (women) draw their head coverings over their bosoms" (*Nur* 24/31). The Qur'an also speaks only of dressing modestly (*A'raf* 7/26). Various head coverings or even full body coverings are cultural expressions of the injunction to dress in a way that is not suggestive, as so much of Western fashion has become, and applies equally today to men as well as women. Some women choose to wear coverings as expressions of faith and devotion, but doing so remains an individual choice. Some see coverings as symbols of liberation and even empowerment, especially in regard to interactions with people who are then forced to focus more on what women say than the way in which they look. But the wearing of the *hijab*, for example, should always be a personal choice and a personal decision; not expected, not coerced and not a representation of greater or lesser form of piety.

SOCIAL AND COMMUNAL

Humans are social and communal beings—they need others. A community serves to lend support to one's worldview so one's communal affiliation and social activities become important. Communal and social activities also vary among age groups. The challenge of living in a secular and diverse society is that one's communal and social connections and engagements can also become diverse—one does not always interact or associate with similar minded people.

As in the other communities, Turkish people also come together at various times for religious and social reasons. In many cases, both are

involved. Friday prayers and religious holidays are clear examples where both are involved. Muslims gather together in the mosques on Fridays and on religious holidays to pray but they also have an opportunity to socialize. In the mosques, greetings and good wishes are exchanged, and excitement and happiness are shared. Weddings and circumcisions also have both religious and social purposes, with families and friends participating in these ceremonies. Funerals are also both a religious and a social occasion, though the gathering is more sombre. But through Qur'an readings and support for the family of the deceased, sorrow is shared, pain is eased and community is deepened. In Turkey, the birth of Muhammad is celebrated in the "holy birth week". Discussions, conferences and symposiums take place throughout the week, as a way to encourage people to enhance their knowledge and understanding of Prophet Muhammad.

The month of Ramadan provides for Muslims many opportunities for social interactions where worldviews are also strengthened. Adherents gather daily in the mosque for prayers. They break their fast every evening in the community at the same dinner table, whether with immediate family, extended family or others. Breaking the fast together enhances unity and solidarity of Muslims and is often organized by the wealthier members in the community.

People also gather for other occasions that generate community and as such serve to strengthen one's worldview. These occasions may be family gatherings, birthday parties, graduations, ceremonies commemorating important persons, foundation and association meetings, and municipality and non-governmental gatherings and events. Numerous foundations and non-governmental organizations organize cultural and religious events. In each of these gatherings, Islam is invoked in one manner or another, with individuals sharing their points of view. Such occasions not only promote community but also shape and influence religious perceptions.

Every religious, cultural and social event influences the individual. Gatherings in which Islamic teachings or points of view surface in ways that go beyond ritual devotion serve to enhance an Islamic worldview. Social events often raise awareness about pressing issues and encourage individuals and groups of individuals to reassess their views and opinions, assisting them in making connections between Islam as a *vision of life* and a *way of life*. They become one more building block in shaping and influencing an Islamic worldview.

The modern era entices people to be more individualistic, and Muslims are increasingly impacted by this phenomenon. They too are inclined to adopt a secular lifestyle and easily act and behave in an individualistic fashion, engaging in religious practices that have become more individualistic. Perhaps the intellectual classes are most impacted and vulnerable here. They tend toward a more individual experience of their religion, for their tendency to take a critical approach to Islam—an examination of Islam in all its breadth and depth from a variety of perspectives—is generally frowned upon. Yet, the importance of a religious community structure has not escaped them. That structure has often been the mosque.

Mosques have taken on many different roles and functions, and they do so with greater or lesser degrees of success. They are, first and foremost, places of worship. Since devotion to God is central to Islam, places of worship become the focal points where Muslims as a community can collectively pray. Daily prayer times and Friday prayers have become the most prominent activities in most mosques. While daily prayer times are frequented sporadically, Friday prayer times see many mosques teeming with worshippers. Such occurs also during Ramadan. Today, both Muslims and non-Muslims equate the mosque primarily with Islamic worship.

A mosque is, however, much more than a place of prayer. It is also a community centre, an operational base where Muslims come together to build a healthier society. Socialization takes place both before and after daily prayers but most importantly and especially after Friday prayers. Here, the Muslim community comes together as a community to build their community in a variety of ways that communities often do: extending personal greetings, sharing news and information, care and concern for others, supporting young and old alike, meeting special needs, strengthening relationships, welcoming new members, networking and more. It is also a place of celebration, of special community or family events or activities. Perhaps less so today but in other times and places weddings and funerals were held in mosques, as Muhammad advised his companions. Mosques have also been used to host travellers, strangers and overnight guests.

Mosques are places for meetings and deliberations. Muhammad often gathered his companions in the mosque to discuss important matters. This still takes place today, though perhaps less in certain contexts and locations. Nonetheless, mosques serve these purposes for where better would Muslims gather to resolves issues confronting them, whether these are of a social, communal, political, legal or religious nature. They

would serve as a springboard for bringing issues important to a religious subgroup to a larger society.

Mosques are also important centres of learning. Young children receive an education in the teachings and values of Islam including that of the Qur'an. In former times but also in other places in the world, literacy is taught to adults in the mosque. Mosques are also centres of intellectual engagements, where learned men and women discuss and debate issues of a wide variety.

In all of this, it can be seen that mosques serve an important social function in generating and strengthening community which in turn shapes, influences and supports an Islamic worldview. The exact nature and extent of that worldview will be predicated on the particular characteristics of the mosque with which one is affiliated. In Turkey, where mosques are administered by a secular state, a more moderate, controlled and worshipped-centred Islam may characterize them. Some feel, however, that mosques no longer serve their intended purposes. In some regions of the world, whether in countries where Muslims are in the majority or to which large numbers of them have immigrated, mosques may serve as ethnic enclaves, hotbeds for political activity, structures segregating one Muslim group from another, ghettoes of mainstream isolation or even places where *Sharia Law* is enacted. Further, to the extent they also fail to engage younger and older alike in ways that sustain and support them in their own worldview journey, they become less relevant to people in a modern, individualistic and dynamically changing secular society, where tantalizing attractions easily distract people from other perhaps more worthy pursuits. Mosques, as well as churches, then become places of worship for those declining few still inclined to pray, and monuments to former days when religion occupied a more central and dominant place in society.

Conclusion

A worldview is seldom if ever shaped in isolation for humans are social creatures that are influenced by a variety of factors that in turn weigh heavily on what we individually and collectively think and do. Our social and cultural location largely determines, though not exclusively, many of the beliefs and values we embrace. In more traditional societies, where beliefs and values could be circumscribed and prescribed more readily, one's worldview differed little from those around. Today, in our modern

and global societies, beliefs and values are still shaped by cultural circumstances, but they are impacted by a variety of thought patterns much more heterogeneous in nature. A plethora of seductive voices and alluring behaviours impinges on us daily, vying for attention, devotion and allegiance. The shaping of a *vision of life* and a *way of life* undergoes a vital and momentous journey woven through the complexities and intricacies of modern life.

As such, various narratives and metanarratives, each with its stories to tell characterizing and defining the realities in which we live, impact it. But an Islamic worldview begins and ends with a metanarrative grounded in the Qur'an, a revealed source trusted in its scope, breadth and depth to give a reliable picture of the nature of reality in which we live that will lead to peace, joy and happiness. But that source, revealed in more ancient and traditional cultures, requires translation and interpretation. While the principles contained in the ancient stories are enduring, the context in which they were revealed is considerably different from today. As such, other sources can shed light on how to understand the Qur'an in a modern, democratic and secular context. An Islamic worldview recognizes that comprehending the nature of reality and the place of humans in it is a rather complex matter that requires careful discernment.

From the larger Islamic metanarrative comes teachings that are instructive for all aspects of life. These teaching are sourced in the Qur'an, taught to young and old alike, and are the means to living as a good person. But these teachings, products of centuries of discussion and debate, refining and explication nonetheless require further interpretation to meet the exigencies of today. How to be a good person in a particular context requires not only knowledge of the principles taught but also knowledge of the context in which those principles will be applied, even as those contexts themselves face dramatic changes. An Islamic worldview must engage with worldviews vastly different from its own if it seeks to remain dynamic.

This is particularly relevant when it concerns ethics, when the question of living as a good person is raised. Knowing what it means to live as a good person requires considerable discernment of the ethical principles contained in the Qur'an. Knowing how to apply those principles in a modern context is made all the more challenging, if not difficult, in a very complex modern society. The principle of equality between the genders, for example, is well known, yet can become highly contested

when traditional and modern ways of life confront each other. In a modern, democratic and secular society highly influenced by Western styles of life, traditional teachings and ethical principles require continual assessment. An Islamic worldview recognizes that it needs to remain dynamically engaged with the culture in which it finds itself, even if that culture clashes with more traditional Islamic visions and ways of life.

All worldviews, religious or secular, have certain rituals and symbols that point to the core of their beliefs and values. Islam is recognized as having rituals that are quite set and distinct, particularly the obligatory daily prayers. But a highly differentiated, modern and secular society often makes it difficult to perform these rituals as mandated by the Qur'an. It also places a creative opportunity before Muslims—is it possible to connect with God through means other than ritual prayers? If ritual prayers are a means to a particular end, can the means be changed to achieve the same end? An Islamic worldview recognizes that while the modern, secular world creates burdens for adherents, it also places unique challenges and opportunities before them, giving the creative human new and dynamic ways to enhance connections with God and live a good life.

An Islamic *vision of life* and *way of life* is difficult to sustain in isolation: It requires communal support and nourishment. Such is generated in and around family and mosque community activities and involvements. But social connections in a highly individualistic, diverse and modern society are not likely to be limited to these but will reach far beyond them. Social support networks generated around academic learning communities, for example, can have great impact in giving new shape to one's *vision of life* and *way of life*, especially when those communities focus on giving greater knowledge and illumination to what it means to be Muslim: how to connect with God and how to be a good person. This may generate new understandings and initiatives, some of which may be at odds with more traditional *visions of life* and *ways of life*.

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Ultimate/Existential Questions

Introduction

The so-called big questions of life are not ones to ask frivolously. They do not make for easy or polite conversation and are not for the superficial. They are complex and require time, reflection and considerable thought. Glib responses satisfy only momentarily if at all. Answers are manifold and varied. Yet, we do struggle from time to time to make sense of them. Life can suddenly confront one with difficulties, sorrows or pain that beg for some responses in order to make sense of life. We seek to create meaning for we cannot long live with meaninglessness around us (Parks 2011).

Questions such as the meaning of life or our place in the universe have perplexed humankind for millennia. These questions are dynamic, for each new situation or generation confronts humans with new ideas, notions or insights. At each juncture, we struggle to give some response, some riposte, if only because the inquisitive human mind constantly confronts the mysteries of life and seeks to take meaning from them. Responses are endless. Some assuage immediate existential crises. Others have more enduring value and import beyond the immediate. They are necessary, nonetheless, for we seek to align our thoughts and ideas *about* life with our decision-making and behaviours *in* life.

Responses we give to the ultimate or existential questions influence and give shape to a worldview. They reflect what we think or believe about certain matters, for example, the existence of some higher immanent or transcendent power, being or force, or some form of life after

this life. They, in turn, impact how we live our lives. Responses to these and others questions effectively shape our visions and ways of life—our thoughts, actions and behaviours.

Taking time to carefully reflect on these matters is not for everyone. Some readily and happily accept without further question what authority figures or scholars have asserted. Critics of religious worldviews often refer to this as "blind faith". Such criticism holds equally, of course, for those who embrace secular beliefs without question. The more inquisitive, however, seek to determine for themselves the nature of the beliefs confronting them, regardless of whether these are religious or secular.

At times throughout history, such independent thinking has created turmoil, power struggles and even bloodletting. It has led to religious strife and confrontations with traditional institutional structures that require unquestioned allegiance to established doctrines. But it has also led to secular strife and confrontations between nations seeking domination and control, of which the twentieth century was perhaps the most notorious and bloody. Today beliefs, whether they are religious or secular, need to be dynamic to survive the exigencies of the modern world. Challenges to established beliefs may create new knowledge and understanding that serves to deepen rather than undermine them. Claims purporting to have an exclusive grasp on the truth, however, become more difficult to sustain in a postmodern age.

Those who seek to embrace an Islamic worldview that is dynamic, responsive to the needs of the day, yet grounded in a long-standing tradition recognize the gravity of all of these matters. They seek to fashion a *vision of life* and a *way of life* that is not prescriptive or definitive yet is embedded within an Islamic understanding of the world. They venture beyond what is often accepted as given or orthodox even as they struggle to remain loyal to accepted sources. They seek to explore or expand a tradition to give more depth and meaning to their understanding of it as they face issues in a modern, democratic and secular society. One way they do so is to seek answers to some of the life's big questions using various sources, teachings and narratives that can shed further light and knowledge on traditional teachings.

Meaning and Purpose of Cosmic Life

That there is something rather than nothing is a mystery that has presented itself to human consciousness since the dawn of time. It has confronted civilizations and preoccupied the philosophically inclined. Many

have become aware that they are part of something greater than themselves; an enigma that is unfathomable yet draws humans to it nonetheless. What constitutes that greater mystery has come to be understood in various forms over time, yet it is known to give some greater meaning and purpose to life: human life, the life of the Earth from which humans draw their existence, or the life of the greater universe. With our expanded scientific knowledge and awareness of the universe, notions of what might constitute meaning and purpose of life from a philosophical and even theological level have not only been challenged but have also changed (Abrams and Primack 2012; Collins 2006; Peters 2005; Davies 1993).

Many ancient peoples believed that meaning and purpose of life (human, earthly and cosmic) was linked to the realm of a god or gods, a being or beings much more powerful than they. These beings controlled earthly elements and human destiny, and in a manner that could be as capricious as it could be inexplicable or mysterious. That life had a meaning or purpose, however, was clear and unquestioned, even if it was far beyond human comprehension.

That mystery surrounds us is still apparent to most today but our understanding of it has deepened considerably. The notion that there is a greater meaning or purpose to life, however, is not so clear and is questioned by an increasing number. Here responses vary considerably, each reflecting a particular worldview.

Some argue that the universe came into existence by chance or accident and as such has no inherent meaning or purpose. It is believed that random forces, initiated by a primordial and unexplainable "Big Bang", have led to the formation of universes with no particular purpose and for no particular reason: they simply exist (Krauss 2013). There is no God to give a meaning or purpose to the universe. The only meaning or purpose it has is what humans add to it and that can be whatever they choose (Watson 2014). Such a view is expressed by those who embrace a worldview identified by Charles Taylor as *Exclusive Humanism* and includes Scientism, Atheism, Secularism, Humanism, and more.

Spiritual traditions recognize that there is an inherent meaning and purpose in the universe that goes beyond what humans might attribute to it. They believe that there is a spiritual force that resides behind, in or through human, earthly and universal life. That spiritual force may remain a mystery and beyond human comprehension, but in becoming more aware of it and living in tune with it is where meaning and purpose is found. Such views are expressed by Indigenous worldviews, Creation

Spirituality, Hinduism and more (Swimme and Tucker 2011; Berry 1988; Suzuki and Knudtson 1992).

The Monotheistic worldviews affirm that God created the universe, and as such, it has inherent meaning. Here, the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) are in agreement. A Creator God has purposely brought human life, earthly life and universal life into existence and by virtue of the fact that they exist, they have meaning. An Islamic worldview affirms that God created the universe and hence gave it meaning and purpose.

Its full meaning and purpose is not, however, always clear, even from an Islamic worldview perspective. Increasing cosmological discoveries make it apparent that the universe is vast and, with humans occupying only a miniscule corner, much of it seems superfluous. Physicists indicate that the universe is expanding at an ever increasing rate yet may collapse within itself if or when it begins to contract (Meadows 2007). We have also become aware that the sun, as a star, has a lifespan and is currently at midlife. When it ages, it will become a supernova, soon swallowing within its fiery expansion all of the planets in the solar system. While this cosmological event is still quite some distance away, in fact, some six billion years away physicists tell us, it still begs questions regarding future (Eternal) life and God's intentions regarding current (temporal) life, specifically the universe in which we currently live.

All of this raises questions that beg for theological responses. Some have ventured boldly in that direction but theological answers to such questions may not be easy to formulate. We live in a new and different world and context, one far different from that in which the Qur'an was revealed. Such questions may not have preoccupied writers and scholars of the time but today they do emerge ever increasingly, and no less because of the prominent role of science in our society and culture. Some theologians broach these questions carefully, if only to further their own understanding of the meaning and purpose of life—of humans, the earth or the universe. No doubt some responses even border on the speculative. Yet, the theological speculation can stimulate new and creative thinking and lead to new understandings of what is revealed in sacred scripture (Russell 2008; Ellis 2002; Polkinghorne and Welker 2000).

At this point, what is clear from the perspective of an Islamic worldview is that since God created life, it has inherent meaning and purpose. The purpose and meaning of earthly life is to be that place where

humans can live fruitful and responsible lives in harmony with others and the natural environment. The purpose of human life is for humans to give glory to God and to live their lives in a way that gives them the freedom to live in harmony with others and the earth. Humans are earth creatures and the earth is their home—it is their place of residence—it is where they live, move and have their being (Marshall 1998). Humans are not space creatures; they cannot naturally live apart from the earth. In uncovering the grandeur and rich diversity of the earth, humans can also become more enamoured with the creative powers of God—the earth and the universe reflect attributes of God.

An anthropocentric view has dominated much of the Western world in the modern period and has been faulted for encouraging a destructive dominance over nature, leading to a present ecological crisis worldwide. Such a perspective is, however, too narrowly focused on this earth and its exploitation. It also seems unmindful of the fact that the earth itself is such a small and seemingly irrelevant player in the vastness of the universe. The earth as a planet could disappear without the universe taking much if any notice, as no doubt has been the case with so many other planets and stars throughout cosmic history: The universe seems to merrily go its way seemingly unmoved by the loss of yet another planet or even another galaxy. A cosmic-centred perspective would be more attuned to these realities, stark as they are and even recognize that the universe is indeed finely tuned. Yet, it would not draw from that fine-tuning any particular meaning or purpose.

An Islamic worldview advocates a theocentric perspective, one that places God at the centre. Theocentrism gives meaning and purpose to the universe and allows humans to give glory to the grandeur and power of God as Creator of the universe. Humans can become awed by the vast expanses of the heavens. Turning one's gaze up into the clear night sky to see the myriad stars and universes, in turn, inspires awe.

Much of God's ways remain a mystery to humans, however, including the creation of such a large and expanding universe. Science increasingly reveals the complexity of the universe and its incredible fine-tuning. For Muslims and others, this reveals a rational order, which points to a Creator. God's creative powers seemingly far exceeded what was necessary to instil in humans a sense of awe and reverence; humans can hardly fathom let alone comprehend the vast reaches of the universe. Was God "playful" in his creativity; did God go "overboard" as it were? Is the vastness a simple yet extensive continuation of the very evolutionary process

initiated by God at the beginning of the universe, one that also brought humans into existence? Is there meaning and purpose to the vastness of the universe, other than to reflect God's power and glory, that humans have not yet discovered or of which they have not yet become aware?

Responses to these questions can at this point only be speculative, and perhaps even playful. But speculation and even playfulness can enhance awe and respect for God, even create greater understanding. An Islamic worldview affirms that God is Creator of life—human, earth and cosmic. As such, these speculative questions and attempted responses should not be feared nor seen as disrespectful for they allow the human mind to think about that greater power, force or being that brought life in all its complexity into existence, a complexity that humans can never fully fathomed.

Nature and Purpose of the Human and Human Life

The question regarding the nature and purpose of human existence is linked to the discussion above. Why there is something—human life— follows from similar questions regarding cosmic life. Here too responses vary and are reflective of particular worldviews.

Some argue that humans are a result of a long evolutionary process that has no larger or general purpose or meaning. Human life is simply here due to processes that, while not completely random, are certainly automatic and unguided by nature: a "Blind Watchmaker" (Dawkins 2006). Yet, even from this perspective, human life is regarded as a miracle, in that it emerged through a random, rare and never to be repeated mixture of physical and biological forces. Why it emerged is not known and it has no larger significance on a cosmic scale. Nonetheless, human life is the most complex of all that the evolutionary process has brought into existence, and its nature and purpose is to live as best as possible now that it is here and also because evolutionary physical and biological forces propel it to do so (Pihlström 2007). Further, with the rise of human consciousness, the desire *to* live in general far outweighs the desire *not to* live, even if humans have a propensity to be destructive and even destroy themselves in large numbers. In spite of forces (natural or human) that result in discord and destruction of human life, humans strive to unfold their creative powers to enhance life and make it pleasant and enriching for themselves individually and collectively. Such views are generally embraced by secular worldviews.

Yet others affirm that humans are part of a larger creative spirit or spiritual force that flows through the universe and gives it life, and that this spiritual force is not merely reducible to natural processes. Humans are one result or product, perhaps even a by-product, of a long evolutionary unfolding of life that has brought into existence also a myriad of plant and animal life. Spiritual worldviews, as in the case of secular worldviews, affirm that humans are by far the most sophisticated of creatures in that they have consciousness and creative and reflective powers. In general, their nature and purpose is to live individually and communally in tune with that larger creative, cosmic and spiritual force for from it they gain their life, their being and their meaning. Some spiritual traditions state that life is to be viewed from an earth-centred or eco-centred perspective. Human destructiveness occurs, it is argued, because of anthropocentricism—humans assuming that they are the centre of the earth and that it is theirs to use or abuse as they please.

Islam asserts that humans have been brought purposefully into being by God to live purposefully on this earth. The exact manner in which they have been brought into being, that is, the "how", is still being debated and discussed by scientists, with the convincing arguments now falling on the side of an evolutionary unfolding from smaller and earlier life forms. Those who embrace a spiritual worldview assert that there is a spiritual force that has animated the human. Islam asserts that God has animated the human. But God is identified not as a spiritual force: God is God. The Qur'an speaks of God breathing into the human a breath of life—a breath from God—and the earth creature came into being (*Hijr* 15/29). Through this imagery, the Qur'an is stating that the earth creature is constantly dependent on God for the breath of life, that God is the source of all life, great and small. The earth is home to human creatures; it is where they live and have their being. That being, however, came into existence not by accidental and random evolutionary means. It came into existence through natural processes guided by the hand of God.

God created humankind as a vice-regent (*caliph*), bestowed with certain authority, responsibility and obligation for fulfilling its role on earth. According to an Islamic worldview, the human is both body and soul. Body and soul are not disconnected nor in conflict: The soul is not imprisoned in the body. The soul is linked to God and connected spiritually. The body is the means by which the essence of the human is able to grow, develop and express itself. The physical world is the place where

God expects humans to flourish. As such, spiritual development and a nurturing of the soul do not entail asceticism, a retreating from the world, but involve full immersion in all aspects of life. Muslims will be as active in the affairs of this world as those who embrace Secularism, if not more so, for they have obligations not only to themselves but also to God.

Men and women together are *caliphs*. Here, there is no difference between the genders: women and men are equal before God. Men and women have the same rights—they have been given equal rights. Both also have a free will and are to make their own choices. There are, of course, differences between the genders, such as biological differences, and so created by God for specific purposes, especially procreative purposes. But these differences are not to be understood in any way to imply, entail or confer any superior or inferior status on any one of the genders. Before God, they are equal. Differences in gender roles or status are a result of cultural practices, and these practices change as cultures change (Helie and Hoodfar 2012; Engineer 2008; Barlas 2002; Wadud 1999; Ahmed 1993).

Humans are the crown of creation—God's special creature. The human is the *caliph* of God on earth: the representative of God (*Baqara* 2/30). Together, men and women share the responsibility of being *caliphs* of God on earth; both are trustees of God (*Isra* 17/70). Both have the same religious and moral duties and responsibilities (*Ahzab* 33/35). Both can participate and collaborate in social and political life (*Tawbah* 9/71). Humans are to be stewards of all that has been given to them by God. Since the earth is also a creation of God, humans are to care for it so that it also flourishes as God intended. The earth is a Divine creation; humans may not destroy it or be destructive of it.

Humans have been granted intelligence and freedom of choice as a result of their status as vice-regents of God. A story in the Qur'an states that God offered the trust of reason and volition to the heavens, the earth and the mountains, but they were afraid and refused to undertake the responsibility that came with it (*Ahzab* 33/72). Humans were then given this responsibility and freedom to exercise it, for God knew that responsibility without freedom to choose is not possible. All things on earth are for the benefit of humans who have been granted freedom to exercise dominion, recognizing that they are dependent on the earth and all it brings forth for their very existence and livelihood (*Baqara* 2/29). In caring for themselves, they must care for the earth. The earth

is considered a mosque and humans are mandated to "walk on the Earth in humility" (*Furqan* 25/63) (Abdul-Matin 2010).

The earth is the abode where humans exercise and unfold their creative activity. It is the place where they become human—where they develop a vision of what it means to be human and where they live as humans before God. They have responsibility and willpower, two crucial existential qualifications of the human. They are to become aware or conscious of their existence and to live their existence in the context in which they find themselves. They have been given life by God and have a responsibility to God to live that life as best as they can. Humans have a relationship with God and can be morally strong by following the ways of God.

The Qur'an refers to the common qualities of God and the human. In being responsible, creative, caring and loving creatures, humans reflect God. According to the Qur'an, knowledge of God enables humans to be free; to live a free, creative, responsible and caring life—to pursue the best and the most beautiful ways of living. Expressing that freedom, however, is always relative to an existential context or situation: One lives their life in a particular place.

The names given to God in the Qur'an are anthropomorphic. Words referring to God such as strength, love, sight and knowing are also human qualities. Characteristics or qualities of the human and the names of God are conceptually linked (Selçuk 1998). God and humans share some common features, though none are understood to infer that God has a physical nature. The words attributed to God have an infinite meaning; in humans, they have a finite meaning or reference. An existential or ontological difference exists, however, between God and humans (Al-Ghazali 1999).

Muslims come to know the meaning and purpose of life from the Qur'an, which is to know God through knowing themselves (*marifet-ullah*). To come to a more complete awareness and understanding of themselves, they turn towards the Divine, the source and ground of all of life. God instilled in the human awareness and knowledge of his own human nature (*A'raf* 7/172–173). God wanted Muhammad to turn his face towards religion—creation—and asserted that only through following this path could he reach God (*Rum* 30/30). Humans came to recognize that they have an affinity with God, yet discover that they can find God only in their hearts (*Anfal* 8/24) .

Muslims also became aware that a notion or understanding of God comes to them via the culture situation into which they are born and in which they have their existence. Adults and children develop a consciousness and understanding of God through encounters with God–human relationships in the tradition in which they are born. This may develop and grow through the influence of parents and family, through Qur'anic teachings in the mosque, through religious education courses, through rituals of worship and devotion, and more, but these will always take the form of the context in which they live. Awareness of God and how to live in accordance with Qur'anic injunctions is always mediated through culture. As such, while there are many things that remain universal for all Muslims, the manner in which these are expressed always takes on particular cultural hues.

The dynamic nature of history requires humans to adapt to new situations that unfold before them. Muslims are challenged to find meaning and purpose of life in their particular sociocultural and sociopolitical settings. They are able to discern principles of right living based on insights gained from the Qur'an and from a variety of commentaries—theological, philosophical, historical and cultural discourses reflecting on models of living—that have emerged in different situations in different time periods. A dynamic interaction between the two—Qur'anic directives and discursive interpretations—assists Muslims in determining how best to live in obedience to God in the situations in which they find themselves.

In a careful reading of the Qur'an, Muslims also come to realize that differences between various religious worldviews are not something to be overcome; instead, they are to be respected. Other religious worldviews are not there to be eradicated, nor is there a compulsion to convert, for there is to be no coercion in Islam. If there is to be competition between different religious traditions, it should be focused on people increasing or enhancing goodness and benevolence in every sphere of life (*Ma'ida* 5/48). The Qur'an emphasizes that it is not religious differences but the quality of individual actions that should be the measurement of the validity of one's religious beliefs.

Living in a secular society also results in some life changes for Muslims. But Muslims can make the social, cultural and political adjustments required in living in a secular society without losing the most important purpose of life: to live a life in relationship with God and be a good person. Muslims can remain believers as they reflect and live out their life within a secular context. Their embrace of God and the various

tenets of Islam need not change. A secular society does not need to create an impossible existential situation, even though it might lead them to seek new ways in living their life connected to God. A new or different sociocultural and political context will raise new questions that lead to new understandings and to new ways of life. It will also assist Muslims in distinguishing between Qur'anic injunctions and cultural mores.

Submission to God and dressing modestly are two important Qur'anic injunctions. But submission can be manifested in a variety of ways. Individual Muslims should be free to express this submission in their own way and appropriate to their cultural context, without having one particular way prescribed. Wearing the *hijab*, for example, is one particular manifestation of both submission to God and dressing modestly. The *hijab* emerged, however, from a particular time-bound cultural tradition and need not be a convention prescribed for all times and places. The *hijab* can be an important religious symbol but only if one chooses to wear it as such; it need not be worn by all women and in all places. Each sociocultural and historical context will manifest new and different symbols, with individual Muslims free to determine for themselves how they will choose to live out their beliefs and values.

Responsibilities/Obligations

The question of human responsibilities and obligations comes at us today with great impact and intensity. In traditional, less differentiated societies responsibilities and obligations were early ingrained and closely connected with traditional ways of life. Most knew what was expected of them for individual and collective survival was often intimately linked to them. Responsibilities and obligations regarding religious rituals were also ingrained early for all lived with the understanding that God existed, watched over them and in turn required of them certain acts of worship and devotion. These were expressed or enacted in specific ways, many of which did not change for generations. While life was far from simple, responsibilities and obligations were well understood by most and well spelled out.

In many modern, highly differentiated and individualistic societies of today, however, responsibilities and obligations are less well ingrained, less clearly evident for everyone and generally more complex. Most of us live in larger urban centres where anonymity is widespread and communal connectedness limited. A disconnect with others exists in spite of living in

close proximity. At the same time, we live in a global world. Knowledge and awareness of conflicts and developments in distant places are instantly brought to us through various forms of media broadcasting and reporting. At times, we feel more connected to people in faraway places than to those in our immediate neighbourhoods. Disconnectedness and anonymity challenge our sense of responsibilities and obligations. A sense of responsibility and obligation now also surfaces in regard to the environment. Humans are coming to recognize that they are damaging the earth. Those from First World countries are confronted with the fact that due to extravagant lifestyles, their footprint is hugely disproportionate to those from other parts of the world with far simpler ways of living. Today, some but no longer all recognize a sense of responsibility and obligation to something beyond the human, to some greater essence that exists in a relationship to humans yet who is beyond the human.

Secular worldviews do not acknowledge the existence of any being greater than humans, and hence, their responsibilities and obligations are directed to humankind and the earth. A denial of the existence of God does not, however, translate into a sense of reckless irresponsibility, in spite of those who feel that we cannot be good without God (Buckman 2001). Humanists, for example, feel a great sense of urgency and responsibility in making human existence less conflictual and destructive and more peaceful and harmonious (Epstein 2010). But Individualism also runs rampant in Western society, and here, the focus shifts foremost to the individual where there is a great desire to make life as enjoyable and pleasurable for the self as possible. Whether such a worldview orientation will achieve its intended goal has been debated, nonetheless, it does reorient notions of responsibilities and obligations (Koch 2013; Putman 2000; Houellebecq 1998; Bellah et al. 1991, 1985).

Spiritual worldviews recognize a sense of responsibility and obligation towards something that is greater than the human. Indigenous Spirituality acknowledges a Creator to which one is obliged to give reverence because the Creator has given life to all that exists. As such, humans have a responsibility to live a life of mutual respect and to care for all of life: for all the flora and fauna in and on the earth. Some Creation Spiritualities and Mother Earth Spiritualities also express such a view (Starhawk 2005; Fox 1963). The basic message is that humans have responsibilities and obligations to others and to the earth and that in exercising these, one is put into a relationship with a Divine spirit that resides in all living things.

According to an Islamic worldview, responsibilities and obligations are innate and can be found directly in the human heart. Muslim discourse analysts (*kelam*) assert that an awareness of responsibility lies deep within human consciousness—in the inner world of the human. Humans are created as *caliphs* and hence, a sense of responsibility lies deep within their heart. They come to a mental or conscious awareness of this responsibility and what it entails. Even those conferred on individuals by an external source, such as the state, have their counterparts in human consciousness. A sense of responsibility is nurtured and strengthened by God's revelations in the Qur'an. Responsibility, in general, is felt and acknowledged deep inside one's being but what that responsibility entails is determined by context, situation, skills and abilities.

Humans have been given freedom. With freedom, however, comes responsibility, and for responsibilities to be carried out a sense of the self is necessary. Humans own their responsibilities and obligations, even if these come from different sources. Entities such as the family, the community or even the state assist individuals in gaining awareness of what their responsibilities and obligations might entail.

In general, there is no strict or systematic priority in fulfilling one's responsibilities and obligations, whether to God or to others. Religious, familial, social and political obligations and responsibilities are fulfilled depending on one's particular situation in life. An obligation or responsibility might even be delayed or given certain priority, or even abrogated in extenuating circumstances. For example, a Muslim has a religious obligation to avoid eating pork but may find it necessary to do so in order to avoid starvation and death. Survival has a higher priority and a particular obligation might be rescinded if a situation warrants it. In general, however, responsibilities and obligations touch a number of levels and aspects of life.

Humans are responsible to God. Muslims believe that human creation is a gift of God, and as such, humans are to be grateful to God for their existence. An important aspect of being alive is to gain awareness of one's place in the universe. This awareness indeed means "knowing oneself". It is stated in a *Hadith* that "those who know themselves know their Lord as well". Hence, the responsibility and obligation to know the self, in turn, lead to a greater knowledge of God.

Muslims are responsible to themselves as individuals. They are to bring to bear and develop the particular skills and abilities they have been granted by God and make efficient use of them. They also have responsibility in maintaining their own well-being: physically and spiritually.

They are to take care of their bodies and ensure that their physical health is maintained. Bodily hygiene is emphasized in the Qur'an, and not least in the required ablution prior to each daily prayer. Diet leading to good health is stressed through the eating of healthy food, abstaining from harmful intoxicants and fasting at Ramadan as a means to bodily self-purification. Exercise is also stressed (Yosef 2008; Rahman 1998). Human are also to take care of their spiritual natures: their "inner world". They are to develop qualities such as sincerity (*Bayyinah* 98/5), self-love (*Maryam* 19/96), self-respect (*Ma'ida* 5/54), self-discipline (*A'raf* 7/201) and self-criticism (*Imran* 3/135; *Qıyamah* 75/2).

Muslims have responsibilities and obligations to others. These vary, however, from culture to culture. In Turkish culture, for example, younger people feel a responsibility and obligation to care for their elderly parents. Parents and community members feel a responsibility, for example, to financially support newly-weds or to send food to funeral homes in the case of the death of a family or community member. Other general responsibilities include charitable giving, self-sacrifice, cooperation with others and sharing joys and sorrows with loved ones.

In regard to the social sphere, however, responsibilities begin to differ and vary. How responsibility is exercised, how it is actualized, is depended on the particular cultural context and often depends on cultural norms. Professions and duties also vary. The responsibilities of a father, mother, teacher, student or doctor, for example, are not the same in each social or cultural context. Discerning responsibilities, therefore, requires careful reasoning, experience, knowledge of the context and even logical decision-making in order for them to bear their greatest fruit. It also entails a conscious desire to be responsible and to carry out one's responsibilities.

Humans also have a responsibility and obligation to care for the earth. The earth is a Divine creation and must be treated with respect. As vice-regents of God humans have a responsibility to care for the earth and the environment. These are given to them for their survival and enjoyment, but must not be abused and destroyed for individual enrichment.

Discerning Right from Wrong

Humans are decision makers and must make moral choices. At every juncture, they are faced with new challenges, new situations and new opportunities. But how will humans discern what is good and what is

not good, what is the right thing to do and what is not? How humans decide right courses of action, and the criteria they use in doing so, is determined in part by the worldview they embrace.

Those who embrace a secular or atheistic worldview regard the human as the sole arbitrator of right and wrong. Right and wrong is individually and collectively determined, and often culturally specific: There are no universal or objective truth criteria by which to measure right and wrong. Universal beliefs and values, such as equality and dignity, may be applied, but these also require interpretation. Human reason is applied but ultimately right and wrong behaviour or courses of action are socially, culturally and even democratically determined and encoded into human laws and regulations.

An Islamic worldview asserts that there is a difference between right and wrong. Discerning what that difference might be is a complex matter. Muslims do not regard humans as the sole arbitrators of right and wrong. They embrace a firm belief in the existence of God and of God's revelations to humans. Hence, there is a Divine element to discerning right from wrong. Yet, sacred revelations are not all that is at play. Constitutive elements of the human must also be considered. Furthermore, the contexts in which people find themselves give particular expression to that which is right and wrong. As such, for Muslims, there are a number of factors at play in discerning right from wrong.

First of all, Muslims embrace a sacred text that assists them in discerning right from wrong. The Qur'an, as a revelation from God, becomes an authoritative source for Muslims in establishing what is right and what is wrong. The Qur'an does not, however, prescribe to humans that which is right and wrong; it only reveals principles. These principles serve as a crucial guide for giving assistance and direction in regard to right and wrong thoughts and actions. But these principles must always be applied to contexts that are seldom the same and are always changing. For these reasons, Muslims rely on more than just the principles emerging from the Qur'an.

Second, while Muslims do know that humans are not the sole arbitrators of right and wrong, they are nonetheless intimately involved in the process of establishing it for themselves, individually and even collectively. To begin with, humans have an inherent or innate moral sense—a moral compass. There is an intrinsic ethical dimension to human nature. Humans come equipped with essential codes in discerning right from wrong and good from bad. This is reflected in young children at play.

Young children have an intuitive sense of right and wrong and can detect very early and quickly when something is not fair.

Third, in addition to the innate ethical dimension of the human and the revelation of ethical principles from the Qur'an, Muslims also recognize that right and wrong is socially and culturally developed and constructed. Discerning what is right in any particular place and context is more difficult to ascertain. But here a Muslim is aided by other sources.

Family, community and culture play a role in discerning right from wrong. We are all impacted by our social context and environment, and these can weigh heavily and become quite influential. Discerning the degree of influence of any culture or tradition in determining one's ethical stances is important. Yet, individuals and even groups of individuals can also be at odds with traditions established by their immediate social and cultural context.

Education has become another huge factor in assisting us in this area. Education opens up new worlds and subsequently new ways of thinking about right and wrong. Science and reason have also given us great insights into human thinking, behaviour and understanding. Hence, education and science can sometimes clash or conflict with earlier held views but they can also breathe new life into them by expanding or deepening the thinking behind them. This may result not so much in abandoning the spirit of earlier held views as in finding new ways in which they can be expressed. This can lead to changes in thinking, behaviour and ritual expressions, and in ethical perceptions.

A strong relationship exists between knowledge, experience and ethics, and this raises questions regarding situational ethics. An attitude or behaviour might be right for some cultures, settings and situations but not in others. Here, Muslims are assisted by an in-depth knowledge of ethical principles gained from the Qur'an and its various commentaries. Each of these must be weighed carefully in order to arrive at a good decision, and that decision may or may not hold for all times and all places. This becomes clear in regard to certain contentious social issues, such as abortion or female circumcision. These may be deemed legal, illegal or repugnant, depending on the context and situation, but Muslims cannot avoid making ethical decisions in regard to them. Here, Islam can shed some light on them via its "good deeds" principle, which implies practicing appropriate, reasonable, efficient and useful means of action in any context. Using knowledge gained from the insights and achievements of the sciences and social sciences can further enhance what

those are. Muslims may, nonetheless, find themselves in societies where certain public policies codified in law conflict with their own conscience.

Existence of a Higher Power, Force of Being

The existence of a higher power, force or being in the universe was hardly questioned prior to the modern secular age, as Taylor has adequately argued (Taylor 2007). Numerous philosophical discussions regarding the nature of God had been advanced but denying God's existence was rare. Even Voltaire, known for his severe dislike of the church and clergy, embraced a concept of a higher being. While that concept was often described in pantheistic or even panentheistic terms, few embraced an outright Atheism. That changed in the modern era and most significantly so with the emergence of evolutionary theory.

Today, the question of the existence of a higher power, force or being in the universe generates considerable debate and discussion, perhaps even more so than in the past. While secular worldviews hold considerable sway in the public square, even in education, and have attempted to restrict reference to God in many spheres, the question never seems to disappear. Both those who affirm as well as deny the existence God engage in the debate (Nürnberger 2011; Long 1999). Arguments for and against the existence of a higher being, posited from anthropological, cosmological and teleological positions, both convince and fail to convince. No solid argument for or against has ruled the day. Instead, many arguments and interpretations, new and old, litter the landscape, and this can hardly be surprising for numerous worldviews also dot the landscape. One's embrace or rejection of God, as well as one's knowledge and understanding of God, is embedded in one's worldview.

Secular worldviews, most specifically Atheism, Rationalism, Scientism, and Philosophical Naturalism, reject any notion of the existence of God. Some feel God is largely a projection of an ideal of humanity (Feuerbach 2008). Others argue that reason and science, and most particularly evolutionary theory, preclude the existence of God, thereby implying that those who retain beliefs in God embrace an irrationalism—an inferior and out of date thinking (Dawkins 2006; Harris 2004). Some argue that religion is merely a natural phenomenon; a product of evolutionary development that has shaped the human journey until today but is no longer needed (Dennett 2007). Recent arguments surfacing from neuroscience and neurobiology claim that religious proclivity is a matter

of unique brain functioning, a result of a so-called "God gene" passed down through evolutionary means and largely if not exclusively a product of natural selection (Hamer 2004; McNamara 2009; Searle 1990). Others, more reluctant to reduce religion to functions of the brain, nonetheless affirm a close link between religion and neurobiology (Ward 2014).

Spiritual traditions reject such notions, though not entirely. What many reject are ideas that link the notion of a higher power, force or being in the universe to that of a Monotheistic and transcendent God. Further, some spiritual traditions feel such notions are too closely linked to anthropomorphic or patriarchal characteristics, which have their roots in cultural traditions dominated by males. Many spiritual traditions embrace the existence of a being greater than the human, but one that has more amorphous characteristics, that is immanent and regarded more as a life force permeating all that exists than a being with separate existence.

An Islamic worldview affirms a Monotheistic being known as God, commonly referred to as *Allah* in Arabic. God is the Supreme Being who has an independent existence beyond time and place; a sovereign entity above all creatures who is omniscient, omnipotent and all merciful. God is theistic, not deistic, and has not disappeared after creating the universe, nor is God disinterested in it. God is Creator and the ground of all being who sustains the laws of the universe and the ongoing natural systems of the earth.

An Islamic worldview affirms that while God is supreme, transcendent, above and beyond humans, God does intimately care for them. God is involved in an existentialist relationship with humans. Humans know that they owe their existence to God as Creator and life-giver. God challenges humans to use their minds, to make efficient and reasonable use of the skills granted to them, and to practice the "good deeds".

While God's essence cannot be fully comprehended or understood by humans, God's existence and manifestation can be known. Muslims believe that humans constantly feel the presence of a supreme power above them yet also at their side. Their awareness of God is manifold. The Qur'an mentions that God breathed into the human God's life-giving spirit. The fact that God created humans points to an inseparable connection between them; the concept of God is ingrained in humans. Such awareness and recognition sustain self-confidence. The perception

of supreme power influences human awareness of God's love and care which are what keep humans alive on the earth.

Knowledge of God increases with the help of Divine revelation, according to Islam. Through the prophets, God established an informational connection with humans and shared a certain amount of God's infinite knowledge with humans. Revelations have served to guide, direct and illuminate humans. Humans also become aware of God through nature and through the laws of the universe. The more these laws are explored, the more one becomes aware of and understands God. Furthermore, through the use of their own reasoning, humans can make inferences and come to further conclusions concerning God.

Human knowledge and awareness have limitations, however, for they are incapable of comprehending the full magnitude of God. Muslims feel that the messages revealed to Muhammad pertaining to God were informative and indicative, yet Muslim philosophers and scholars have developed different perceptions of God. Original messages pertaining to God's nature and character were delivered in a specific language, and invariably, there will be different interpretations because of language differences. In the final analysis, however, perceptions of God will always take on humanistic qualities, which entails that notions of God are influenced by the culture and tradition out of which they emerge. Culture and tradition can both obscure and enhance an understanding of the character of God, or the degree to which humans can comprehend God. Social, cultural and historical conditions might create obstacles preventing some from perceiving God in a broader manner, but humans also choose to separate themselves from God's essence and God's purpose for the creation. Individuals can have different perceptions of God, often conditioned by their own tradition. Different historical and cultural experiences will lead to different perceptions. Those who live in tumultuous, punitive cultural and traditional environments may focus more on God's harsher or judging nature. Those living in secure, urban and modern environments may emphasize God's love and mercy. Historical and anthropological studies also readily reveal that perceptions of God undergo changes through the ages.

Muslim philosophers and theologians recognize a dilemma between an all-powerful God and the existence of evil, often referred to as the theodicy problem. If evil exists in the world is God then also the Creator of evil? An Islamic worldview affirms, however, that the source of evil

does not lie in God; God is unfailingly good and creates only goodness. Humans generate the evil that exists. Yet, if God is an all-powerful and all-knowing being who cares intimately for humans, why does God allow human disasters such as disease, famine and bloodshed to continue to kill and injure so many people? Is God powerless to stop such evil?

There is, however, a difference between natural disasters and human evil. Why natural disasters occur results from the way in which the earth has been created. Natural laws sometimes result in natural disasters. The more humans understand nature and explore the laws of nature, the greater will be their understanding and the more they might be able to avoid certain natural disasters.

Human evil is, however, a different matter. Since humans are moral creatures with responsibilities, they must also have free will. Human freedom and responsibility go hand in hand and make meaningful God's mandate to humans to care for each other and the earth. Human freedom comes from God, and God does not limit human freedom. But with human freedom comes also the possibility to do evil. In fact, history is replete with the death and destruction humans have unleashed on their fellow humans and the earth. Since God is bound by the freedom given to humans, God cannot or will not restrict human actions without curtailing human freedom. Why God chooses this course of action may be beyond human comprehension. God does, nonetheless, demand that humans account for their freedom and all that they do with it. While God is benevolent, merciful and fair, God does judge people according to what they have done in this life.

In the Qur'an, God is also portrayed as a Supreme Being that can be influenced. In the discourses of Islam (*kelam*), God is regarded as an active being and the Qur'an does indicate that God responds to those who pray to Him. God loves those who are involved in good deeds and rages against those who do evil. This implies that God's attitudes towards the practices of humans do differ. While God cannot be manipulated, there is an interaction, a relationship between God and humanity. Prayers are considered to be part of this interaction. The Qur'an refers to God as intimately involved in the midst of life (Albayrak 2011).

How God does all of this is a question that has undergone considerable discussion, particularly in regard to modern science and its exclusive empirical grounding. Although Islam has a history of engagement with science dating back to the Middle Ages, modern science has proven to be more challenging for Muslims, especially concerning evolutionary

theory. Studies indicate that some readily "accept evolution scientifically but reject it religiously" (Paulson 2011). Some speak of a "sacred science", but one that largely rejects modern science (Nasr 1996, 1993). Others find Islamic faith and modern science incompatible, leading to a rejection of the former (Edis 2007). Still, others feel the two are compatible and work towards interpreting Qur'anic statements in light of modern science (Guessoum 2011; Dallal 2010). Yet, the question does remain as to how God interacts in the world, when modern evolutionary theory increasingly asserts that there is no longer any room for such intervention.

Eschatology: Life After This Life

Life expectancy in the Western world has been increasing steadily in the last 50 years and more. Unfortunately, that cannot be said for much of the rest of the world. Nonetheless, whether or not we add another score to our median "three score and ten" years, we invariably face the same fate: Our lives will come to an end. Regardless of the fortune or misfortune we have in this life, we all face a similar end. No amount of wealth, power or fame will spare us from the same outcome. As much as we hasten or deny death, it will eventually overtake us all. Death consumes us all no matter what kind of life we have lived. Rich or poor, powerful or weak, famous or infamous, the result is the same. Whether or not we make the most of life on this earth, death confronts us all. Some "game changers" may live on in historical memories for centuries to come. Most of us, however, will fade from history within three generations of family memory. But is death really the end?

All living things on earth are part of a natural biological life cycle. Death and decay is necessary for new life to begin and flourish; new life feeds on what was formerly alive. Physical and biological death is a necessary aspect of earthly life; death is a necessary part of life. Yet, all of life struggles to combat death. All living things struggle to prolong life, to live rather than to die, even if all things ultimately succumb to death. Life seeks to triumph over death, but eventually yields to it.

Human earthly life is caught up in this life cycle—we live and we die. However, once a person is born and tastes life, the sense of an ultimate end seems to go against or contradict the very essence and nature of life. Death seems an affront to life, to negate all that life strives to be or achieve. All of life resists death and struggles to overcome it. Humans,

unique among all creatures, consciously and subconsciously are acutely aware of this fact. Non-existence is startling and appears to go against the grain, even if humans ultimately surrender to it.

Are humans then to acquiesce to death, to simply if reluctantly accept it not just as an inevitable reality of life as an earth creature among all other creatures but also as a final reality? Are humans, in spite of all they are able to achieve, do and think to resign themselves to the fact that ultimately for each individual life results in death? Indeed then, is all not ultimately meaningless, as the Preacher declared (Ecclesiastes 1:2), and as existentialists such as Sartre state? We may indeed make of our lives as much as we can and give it as much meaning as we are able, but in the cosmological scope of things does it not have some ultimate meaning and consequence? Are we ultimately cosmic orphans and who should simply enjoy the ride, individually and collectively?

Secular worldviews recognize the inevitability and finality of death. Death is a harsh reality: a grim end to life on earth. We may hope for a life well lived, but there is no hope beyond death: death triumphs. There is nothing beyond the grave. Such a view is relatively new in the history of humankind, for peoples far and wide, past and present have embraced some form of life after death. But that belief is no longer held for an increasing number of people today who embrace secular worldviews. Further, biologists, philosophers and neuroscientists of late have argued that because humans simply cannot comprehend an extinction of the self, they have concocted notions of an afterlife. Such claims, they argue, are little more than wishful thinking for there is no scientific evidence for life beyond the grave. Even those who have undergone near death experiences, with claims of peace and serenity, fail to convince. Their experiences are reduced to little more than the last gasps of an oxygen-deprived brain. The most we can hope for is that our DNA will be passed on to our offspring, and that our bodily remains will nourish the soil. Our physical death marks the end of our individual self—nothing survives or surpasses death (Gray 2011; Churchland 2013; Humphrey 2011).

Spiritual traditions do not share those views. Most affirm some existence beyond the grave. Ancient religions assumed some sense of the afterlife, with many of the rich and powerful buried in elaborate tombs complete with all the amenities necessary for travel into the afterlife. Indigenous traditions of past and present acknowledge death as a transition to a spiritual existence with the Creator. Eastern religions such

as Hinduism and Buddhism believe that one's spirit or essence survives death only to live on again (reincarnated) in another earthly form until the life–death–life cycle is eventually abandoned and one's spiritual being becomes united with Being itself. Creation Spiritualities believe our individual selves become united with the life spirit that undergirds and is present in all living things.

An Islamic worldview argues that death is not considered the ultimate end to human life. There is life beyond the grave, even if a complete understanding of such a life is beyond human comprehension (Smith and Haddad 2002). Yet, Muslims are challenged by secularists and even by their own adherents to give greater articulation to the nature and scope of that life. Vague answers do not long satisfy the more inquisitive minds. As we become more knowledgeable about human life, more questions regarding human death and afterlife also surface.

An Islamic worldview recognizes that death is unpleasant, frightening and traumatic. We resist and avoid it as much as we can. The effort to repress death, according to this worldview, shows that humans innately defy it. It recognizes that all humans struggle against it, believing it to be an unnatural end to human life. It is also aware that belief in a life beyond death can be construed as a psychological crutch or wishful thinking in the face of inevitable death. Muslims affirm, however, that belief in an afterlife is a reality and is linked to belief in God. They believe in the resurrection of humans to a new life beyond the grave. They recognize also that this belief allows one to more calmly face the reality of their own death.

Yet, there is much more than individual calm and comfort at play. All the cruelty, injustice and suffering in this life cry out for a response, not the silence of death. A Muslim longs and hopes for a time and place where peace and justice reign supreme. Faith in a life beyond this life corresponds to this longing and desire for a stress-free life, one where pain and suffering have vanished. But is such a life realistic; is it even possible? Is there any scientific evidence or hint of it, or must it all be taken on faith?

The human mind is capable of venturing far beyond the limits of this life. Aware that the Qur'an speaks of resurrection, judgement and a new life after death, a Muslim will more clearly recognize responsibility for what is done in this life and is given strength to fulfil responsibilities and obligations that exist in this life. A Muslim's ultimate aim is to strive for goodness and justice, yet recognizes that attaining them will be

difficult if not impossible in this life. Faith in the next life gives hope and is a desire for a time and existence where God's justice can be perfectly implemented.

Muslims satisfy a longing for Eternal life by having faith in the life to come; they embrace it. Faith in God as an Eternal being satisfies a Muslim's longing for eternity. Eternity is conceived of theocentrically, that is, as linked to God's Eternal existence, which has no beginning and no end (Böwering 1997). The most remarkable evidence of the next life (*ahiret*) is the sense of eternity ingrained in the human heart.

Since God is omnipresent, humans survive and flourish in their connection with God. The next life is conceived of as going back to God as the source of human life. Humans come from and return to God, having journeyed through this life. God gave them life and God restores them to a new life in the life to come. For Muslims, returning to God is an honourable and eminent idea.

What the next life entails is understood differently by different disciplines. Theologians define it as a physical experience and in terms of the justice of God. Philosophers refer to it as a spiritual experience. Mystics speak about it in terms of the love and forgiveness of God. Scientists affirm that humans have little if any information, proof or evidence of it. Hence, much of it is speculation. But from that speculation arise notions that life after this life will be a new creation; God will recreate all creatures. Humans will retain their individuality and will be consciously aware of themselves as individuals. They will recognize others. They will awaken to a new life seeing things clearly. How we will be or what we will become, however, remains largely unknown.

A literal reading of the Qur'an does, however, yield insights. It states that humans will stand before God as individuals. Muslims who have been responsible in their actions in this world will once and for all be able to justify their practices on the day of reckoning. They will be called to account for all that they have done in this life. All deeds are taken into consideration. Individuals will need to account for their unjust acts and will be required to reconcile with those to whom they have acted unjustly. Human follies such as self-deception, omission or excuses will not be accepted.

God's justice, benevolence, mercy and grace will all be experienced on judgement day. Priority will be given to justice and God will be just. Muslims pray, however, that God will not act towards them with God's justice. They pray that God will act with mercy and that God will forgive.

The forgiveness of God is a hope, even if they have done many wrong things. They believe that God will forgive but that they must first reconcile with others.

Muslims affirm the reality of punishment in the next life, but there is debate as to whether that punishment will be Eternal or temporary. Many accept a literal reading of the Qur'an on these matters and feel God consigns evildoers to an Eternal hellfire. But others opt for a more metaphorical reading and believe that punishment will be a temporary purification process leading ultimately to a rescue from everlasting punishment and separation from God. They argue that Eternal punishment in the afterlife appears rather excessive for deeds done in a brief and temporal journey in this life.

Muslims affirm more readily the reality of a heaven in the afterlife. Various images of that afterlife have been recorded in the Qur'an, the *Hadith* and various other writings and commentaries: an afterlife of peace and happiness. The faithful and righteous will be blessed with Eternal contentment and bliss, restful in the presence of God, in "gardens beneath which rivers flow" (*Baqara 2/25*).

Muslims believe that people are humanized by doing good deeds, and doing such deeds adds value to being human and to humanity. People are called to use the skills they have been granted by God most effectively and efficiently. The more one does so, the more this world becomes a better place in which to live. Efforts expended in doing so are rewarded in the next life. Yet, they are done not just for rewards in the next life. Muslims are to be aware that what is done in this life is most important for this life. One must not simply live one's life waiting passively for the next. Under no circumstances should one lead an inactive or indolent life, even if one is in a dire situation. One can dynamically and enthusiastically experience and participate in the richness and beauty of each moment and should do so to the fullest. In other words, one should give importance to this life since it is what is done in life and in this world that will be taken into account.

In the Qur'an, there are some sayings that stress the significance of the next life over this life. Concluding that the life beyond is more important than this life would, however, be an inaccurate reading of the text and lead to a misinterpretation of such sayings. The main purpose of stressing the value of the next life is to increase or enhance human activity in this world, motivating Muslims to focus their lives on goal setting and activity that befits the purpose of their creation. The Qur'an

emphasizes the primacy of the next life; however, this is not intended as an ontological comparison of this life and the next life.

The words "life" and the "next life" are terms used largely to make some distinctions. For Muslims, however, there is only one life without interruption: seamless from beginning into eternity. This life begins at birth but transitions at death to one lived in a different dimension. Death is not an end as much as it is a journeying through to a new phase of life, a new but different kind of existence. Humans are well aware of what this life entails. They are also aware that this life comes to an end at physical death. But Muslims believe that physical death marks a transition, not an existential and ontological end of the person. Physical death is but a transition through a veil to the next life. Unfortunately, we cannot see through that veil from this side of eternity. Our best science and reason cannot penetrate it. But Muslims believe that not being able to see or comprehend what lies on the other side of that veil does not mean it does not exist. There are sufficient hints and yearnings—a sense of eternity written on the human heart, a desire for justice and peace, a conviction that death will not finally triumph—as well as Divine revelation that leads them to conclude that faith in the next life is not a blind faith: It is a reasoned faith, and one that is far more promising.

Conclusions

Humans are conscious, reflective and thinking beings. They are also limited beings; incomplete and imperfect in their abilities and knowledge. In spite of the advances in human understanding and progress, of human invention and imagination, of human perception and development, humans wrestle with the unknown, the inexplicable, the incomprehensive and the mysterious. They struggle with big questions—ultimate and existential dilemmas that confront them in this life. Through time answers have proliferated, yet they are not definitive. Humans are left to discern for themselves—individually and/or collectively—to answers that assist them best in making sense of the life they live and confront. An Islamic worldview attempts to render certain satisfying responses to those big questions of life, recognizing that here too faith and trust are paramount.

Yet, Islam is clear in certain responses when it comes to the big questions of life. It asserts that there is meaning and purpose to cosmic life. The cosmos in all its vastness and splendour, in all its abundance and

mystery, is not an accidental or random occurrence. It is a creation of God. As such, it has inherent meaning, called into existence by God for purposes that include giving God glory and awe. While humans may not be able to fully comprehend the extent of the meaning and purpose of the vastness of the cosmos, they can marvel at its existence, and ever-more so at the ineffable Being who created it.

Marvelling at the immensity of the cosmos often renders humans as little more than insignificant beings in the vastness of space and time, overwhelmed by the magnitude of all that lies beyond their reach and perception. Yet, Islam asserts that humans are special creatures, closely linked to the very Creator of the vastness that often perplexes the human mind. Humans above all other creatures have been endowed with reflective and discerning powers that give their very existence meaning and purpose. Regardless of how humans came into being, they have been endowed with significance as vice-regents, male and female. They are a unique and marvellous constitution and a constellation of both body and soul, linked both to the earth and to God for their physical sustenance and spiritual energy, bestowed with powers of freedom and choice.

It is that unique combination of freedom and choice that gives to the human unique responsibilities and obligations. Humans are first of all responsible and accountable to their Creator—to God—for the life they have been given. They have a responsibility and obligation to live their life to the fullest, as creatures of the Divine and as understood from the principles embedded in the Qur'an, in the place and context in which they find themselves. They have responsibilities and obligations to others, far and near, in their various roles as social, familial, political and economic beings concerned also for the welfare of those around them. As vice-regents, they are to care for the earth, to take from it all that is necessary for daily sustenance but not to abuse or destroy it in the process.

Humans are unique creatures with the power of discernment. They are to make choices for the good and resist that which is wrong. Determining the distinction between those is never easy, for right and wrong are readily complicated by culture, time and place. Yet, they are assisted by principles contained in their sacred text, which serve not to prescribe but to guide and direct. They are assisted by reason, knowledge and experience, all of which also render new insight in the progression of time and discovery.

In all of this, however, there is one constant that is affirmed in an Islamic worldview, and that is a belief in the existence of God, a being far

greater than the individual, the collective and the cosmos. God is not a being created in the image of the human, but quite the reverse; a being both intimately connected to the human yet transcendent, a being who is revealed yet whose essence cannot be fully comprehended, a being who is merciful yet just and whose ways are discernable yet mysterious. It is this being who cares for the human creature and all other creatures, and to whom the entire cosmos remains intimately linked for sustenance.

Yet, an Islamic worldview also recognizes that death is inevitably linked with life, a harsh reality from which humans cannot find an escape. As significant as humans may be, as accomplished as they may become, as powerful as they may feel, the reality that awaits us all is our own individual death. Humans too are part of the natural biological cycle of life—we live and we die. Yet, according to an Islamic worldview, it is not death that finally triumphs but life itself, and no less human life. The triumph of life over death is linked to a belief in God: a God who has ingrained in the human here in this life a sense of Eternal life, and a God who answers cries of injustice with judgement and who restores humans to a new life in a life to come.

An Islamic worldview gives responses to life's perplexing and existential questions, recognizing that even these responses come with numerous further questions. These questions will continually and inevitably arise, as individuals and communities struggle to find answers to give life meaning in the face of uncertainty. But finally, the search for answers exhausts itself, and the human creature is confronted with a necessary leap of faith. That leap of faith takes the Muslim to a just and merciful God, in whom he or she finds peace in this life.

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Ontology: The Nature of Being

Introduction

What constitutes the nature of being or the nature of the person is a question that has confronted humans for millennia but even more so in the last century or two. Scientific advancements in the areas of genetic manipulation and in vitro fertilization put the question back into the public domain with a certain degree of urgency. Speculation regarding artificial intelligence and future human life all prompt questions of what constitutes life and being as we see and experience it. Scientific discoveries regarding the origins and future of the universe, even life in distance universes, all raise questions about the nature of being. Responses to these questions vary revealing that different worldviews can have considerably different views on them.

Lurking behind these questions is a larger one concerning the ultimate source of being—from where did it all originate. This is not only a scientific question but also a philosophical one. One of the greatest challenges to Islam, but also to Judaism and Christianity, is that posed by Philosophical Naturalism or Materialism. This perspective or worldview has launched an intense philosophical debate, sometimes vociferous, that directly confronts and disputes traditional Islamic beliefs and doctrines regarding the nature of being and its ultimate source, based on insights gained from evolutionary theory.

Philosophical Naturalism or Materialism asserts that the ultimate or essential source of all that exists is the matter or material substance

of the physical universe. In other words, from this perspective, there is no credibility given to the existence of a greater being beyond space and time whose creative endeavours resulted in the coming into being of the universe and of human life. In essence, there is no metaphysical dimension or spiritual realm beyond the physical that is the ultimate source of human and universal life; there is no mystery that is the "ultimate ground of being", to use Tillich's words. According to Philosophical Naturalism, we can know nothing about the existence of anything beyond or distinct from physical matter or the physical universe. All that constitutes human and universal life originated at and from the Big Bang—there is nothing behind or beyond it. There is no greater Being, spiritual dimension or realm distinct or separate from the material or physical universe that brought it into being and is intimately connected with it.

Muslims, however, disagree. They believe that a higher power or being is the Creator of the universe and the earth on which we live. They readily accept evolution theory, yet reject a notion that reality is essentially and ultimately material and physical or that the human soul, spirit or consciousness ultimately emerged from physical matter. They embrace a notion of God as Creator of all that exists and who is connected to and interested in humans and what they do. According to them, the nature of being is connected to a Creator God.

The Physical Nature of Being

Science contributes immensely to increasing knowledge of human life and of the universe. Empirical science is crucial because of its ability to provide highly accurate or highly probable information on which humans can place a high degree of certainty and trust. Information that is accurate is highly valued by the Qur'an, and as such, scientific discoveries have great value for Muslims.

According to Islam, however, existence consists of more than what can be revealed to the senses. It is also more than what can be uncovered by science. Scientific knowledge has its limitations. Existence also exceeds human comprehension. The vastness and complexity of a dynamic physical universe exceeds human ability to fully understand for we are earthly creatures that stand not above or beyond it but integrally immersed and enmeshed in it. Hence, it is important to consider the sources of our knowledge into the complexity of existence, especially human existence.

Science, philosophy and revelation are valuable sources of knowledge and information. Each is a different way to understand, comprehend and explain the nature of existence and the world in which we live. But taken together, they also reveal that reality extends beyond the physical universe. Humans can gain considerable insights from these different sources of knowledge.

Science renders great insight into the complexities of the universe and the human. Knowledge gained from science can shed great light regarding all that God has created. But science as a human activity is limited in what it can achieve; its interpretations even change over time. It can say little regarding mysteries that lie behind the universe, and it can reveal little about the existence of God. For that, humans must turn to sacred scriptures. Divine revelations regarding the mysteries of the universe and of the existence of God comes by way of the Qur'an or other Divine sources and can add greatly to the knowledge we gain from science. Knowledge conveyed through revelation comes by way of special and extraordinary persons, and Muslims regard revelation as a particular but valid source of knowledge. It conveys deeper insights and understandings regarding God and humans that go beyond the reach of science.

Knowledge about God is largely confined to that which is given in the Qur'an, and here, Muslims also quickly become aware that the nature of God is beyond human perception. As such, they do not claim to fully know the nature of God. What they do know, however, is that God is an essential and necessary Being, without whom there would be no existence; the universe cannot come into being without a Creator. Earthly and human existence begins with God. Nothing on the earth comes into being on its own; neither so with the universe as a whole.

We cannot fully explain existence by means of matter and substance alone. Muslims believe human existence or being has properties that exceed matter. As such, the physical death of individuals is not the end of the human. God defines death as "dying of the self" yet there is no such thing as "death of the soul" in the Qur'an. According to Islamic tradition, the death of the body does not necessarily mean the death of the soul. The Qur'an does not distinguish between body and the soul but gives importance to the human as a whole. From a theological perspective, death and resurrection takes place at the same time. Muslims know that it is God that gives and maintains human life as we experience it, and it is also God who ends earthly human existence.

What humans think regarding the nature of existence determines the way they perceive God. If we consider existence as pure matter, there will be no room for God. But according to Muslims, existence is an inclusive term; it involves much more than we experience in the here and now. The Qur'an does not separate spiritual and physical properties but incorporates them both in its concept of the human. Existence might be much more than we can envision or comprehend. Humans are only a part of a greater whole. We know that some things exist even if we cannot see them; that existence is beyond what the eye can see. But Muslims believe that there may also be other forms or levels of existence, of which humans as of yet have little knowledge.

Muslims believe that humans are the most evolved of all creatures. Human thought processes, creativity, imagination and self-consciousness are indeed very sophisticated and complex. But they also believe that humans are more than just sophisticated, evolved physical matter; humans also have a spiritual aspect to their being. That spiritual aspect or dimension is connected to God. As such, Muslims disagree with a Humanistic worldview that asserts that humans are autonomous and alone in the universe; that they are a law unto themselves, that there is only one life to live and that death extinguishes the individual. Muslims deny the finality of death, believing instead that individual death leads to another dimension of existence. Death is often perceived as the annihilation of the individual because of the expiration of the physical nature of the individual. But Muslims believe in resurrection and as such believe that death is a transition to a different level of existence. The nature of that existence, however, is largely unknown because humans are not able to pierce through the veil that separates this life from the next. Nonetheless, all of this is an affirmation of a metaphysical dimension to the reality we experience.

The Metaphysical Dimension of Reality

Muslims scholars regard the Qur'an as a valid source of knowledge, but recognize the validity and importance of reason and science in interpreting what it contains. All scriptures must be interpreted and the historical-critical method is used as an interpretative tool to gain a better understanding of what is revealed. God's revelation in the Qur'an occurred in a specific context to a specific people in a specific time period. What was disclosed and expressed in the Qur'an was not placed

under scientific scrutiny at that time, nor were its statements of a scientific nature. Yet, reason and science, by means of the historical-critical method, can shed light on what was conveyed and what can be inferred from it. Muslims affirm what the Qur'an says about an existence beyond the physical dimension that we perceive only with the senses. What it says about this dimension of reality outside the system of physical cause and effect—a non-material component to reality—nonetheless requires interpretation and for this, the use of reason is both required and helpful.

According to the Qur'an, the universe is a whole with its visible and invisible aspects. This invisible metaphysical dimension of reality cannot be seen with the naked eye but we know of it from what has been revealed. The Qur'an gives clues about it, and angels are considered one of those clues. Angels belong to that invisible spiritual dimension. They have a relationship with God and interact in the lives of people. Some pray to God for the protection, support and goodness of humans; others record human activity. Belief in the existence of God is yet another affirmation of the metaphysical dimension. God is the invisible Being that makes things visible, affirming that existence consists not only of things known and seen. The human mind also lends support to a dimension beyond the physical. Human thought and understanding are echoes or reflections of an invisible part of the universe and not simply a product of the human brain. Human imagination is capable of reaching many dimensions for they force the limits of their imagination with their experience and nature. God breathed a spirit of liveliness and creativity into the human designed and created with physical form.

Being created from dust (*Fatir* 35/11) highlights the physical quality of creation. The Qur'an states that the body was created first and then God breathed a spirit into it (*Sajdah* 32/9). It is unclear, however, whether God's breath refers to the infusion of the soul into the body or to breathing life into or giving life to the body. Those who first heard the Qur'an understood this as God giving life to the human: God is the "life-giver" according to the Qur'an. The Qur'anic phrase "breathing life into the human" corresponds to the "life-giving" quality of God, but "breathing His spirit into the human" should not be perceived as a mechanical occurrence. It is a process. These phrases in the Qur'an show an affinity with the theory of evolution.

The nature of the human is far from settled, however, in the Islamic world where different perspectives have surfaced in regard to the mind–body relationship. Muslim understanding is not clear and precise

in regard to the notion of "spirit" or "soul". According to Gazali, the human has a dual nature: a body–soul dual entity, often referred to as a dualist position. *Kelam* offers a monist perspective, however, maintaining that the human is comprised of a unique whole consisting of body and soul not as separate entities but as one. All of this remains open to further philosophical and even scientific research and study about creation.

According to the Qur'an, the invisible, spiritual world (*gayb*) is not an epistemological issue. The Qur'an gives information about that spiritual world and its components but no guidance or direction for interacting or communicating with beings of the spirit world. Yet what the Qur'an does assert expands people's visions of this world. Furthermore, because the afterlife is about the future, it refers to "time". People's future experiences in that forthcoming "time" are explained. Islam defines the future as a "relative" spiritual world (*gayb*). Once the time comes, it will become reality. The Qur'an states that Allah will set up "just balance-scales" on Resurrection Day:

> But We shall set up just balance-scales on Resurrection Day, and no human being shall be wronged in the least: for though there be [in him but] the weight of a mustard-seed [of good or evil], We shall bring it forth; and none can take count as We do! (*Anbiya* 21/47)

In the Islamic tradition, there are two approaches regarding the understanding of resurrection: one is spiritual and another is physical. Muslims philosophers such as Al-Farabi (d. 950) and Avicenna (d. 1037) favour a spiritual resurrection. Muslim theologians speak of a physical resurrection. When explaining religious matters, preference is given to the perspectives of Muslim theologians. Nonetheless, whether we believe in a physical or a spiritual resurrection, most important is to reflect on the impact of that belief on our *vision of life* and our *way of life*. What is the relationship of the belief to our human responsibilities? When we come to a clearer understanding of that relationship, our faith becomes more meaningful.

Cosmology: Origin/Future of the Universe

Muslims believe that the universe could not have come into being on its own but was created by a Supreme Being; by a Divine, creative mind. They believe that the unfolding of the universe has taken place over time

and under the guidance and direction of God, and that this process is a natural system. Here, the beliefs of Islam do not conflict with current evolutionary theory. Science uncovers basic facts about the origins of the universe and renders interpretations and explanations accordingly, even if at times it presents theories that conflict or differ.

Scientific models, theories or analysis regarding the beginnings of the universe are not intended to prove or disprove the existence of God. This is beyond their jurisdiction for scientific knowledge has its limitations. They are theoretical explanations based on the best evidence currently available. Some scientists consider the existence of the universe a cosmological accident or mere coincidence because they are unable to explain what occurred prior to the "Big Bang", as this first "coincidence" has been termed. But such a claim, often made by those who embrace Scientism or Atheism, enters the realm of metaphysics and then becomes one worldview or metanarrative claim among others. There is no supporting scientific evidence that the universe came into being by coincidence. Science is unable to get beyond or behind the initial "Big Bang" to make such claims.

A claim that the universe was created by God or was a result of a cosmological accident is a claim based on faith or belief, not on scientific evidence. These two claims are two opposing metaphysical claims, based entirely on two different metaphysical or worldview beliefs. Evolutionary theory no more supports one than the other. It is simply a theory—a scientific explanation—of how the universe has evolved and can be embraced by both secular and religious worldviews alike. From this point of view, the "Big Bang", a scientific claim based on empirical evidence, and a belief that God created the universe, a faith position based on metaphysical claims, do not conflict. They are simply two different levels of explanation—one from the perspective of science, and the other from the perspective of a worldview. Once evolutionary theory claims that the universe came into existence purely by accident or coincidence, it ceases to be science and begins to make metaphysical claims. Since metaphysical claims cannot refute each other scientifically, they can only present different explanations or interpretations, and these now belong to a metaphysical sphere governed by faith claims, whether these are religious or secular.

Muslims can accept evolutionary theory as a scientific explanation regarding the coming into existence and unfolding of the universe. Cosmologic explanations asserting that the universe is expanding or

shrinking can also be valued as scientific explanations. Muslims regard such information as assisting them in their own enriching journey of discovery. These theories or explanations do not, however, affirm scientifically whether or not a Supreme Being created the universe. For such explanations, Muslims turn to their revealed text where they learn what existed before the universe came into being. The Qur'an speaks to them of the existence of a Creator God and states that all that exists is evidence for God's existence. Each and every thing in the universe points to God's existence, a God who has a perpetual relationship with a universe that science says is expanding and shrinking. Expanding or shrinking theories of the universe refute neither the idea of God's existence nor His constant relationship with the universe.

According to Islam, God already existed before the universe was created and in this sense, the universe is neither Eternal nor the beginning of existence. The only Eternal being is God. Other beings are created by God and exist because of God's creative powers.

According to the Qur'an, the universe was created within a certain period of time. God announces the creation of the heavens and the earth in six days. In the light of science today, this period can be referred to as six phases. Scientific evidence shows that the formation of the universe is a process. The Qur'an does not contradict these scientific explanations nor does it give information about the exact time the earth came into being. Scientific explanations give us certain ideas or theories that can be enlightening but do not contradict the Qur'an. How the earth was formed and how nature unfolds are issues left to humans and science to explore. Islam recognizes that science is a human activity and, as such, does not seek to interfere with this activity. Scientific studies are valuable for humans for everything that contributes to the benefit of humans is called "good deeds". These constitute every kind of good and beneficial engagements or involvement. Accordingly, it is not possible to conclude that Islam has problems with science.

Religion exceeds or goes beyond scientific explanations by focusing on the metaphysical dimension, which is of little interest to science as such. It uncovers a more profound aspect of earthly existence than offered by science. It speaks of the notion of why the earth was created not how. It says that the heavens and the earth were created for the benefit of humans (*Jaathiya* 45/13); the earth is God's gift to humanity. Mountains, rivers, oceans, plants and animals are for humans to enjoy. It reveals that there is a priority given to the God–human relationship.

Humans are responsible for living stewardly on the earth and, as such, will explore nature in order to have a harmonious relationship with it.

According to Islam, God created humans. How they were created is not stated, only that they are made of "dust", that is, of earthly substance. That is why human nature is in complete harmony with the earth. Human material substance is intricately connected with the material substance of the earth. Human spirituality, however, comes from a Divine source—God breathes the spirit of life into the human. Humans are not created out of nothing but from material substance and a spiritual essence.

The creation of the earth precedes the creation of humans. Before humans were created, angels had already existed. In fact, according to the Qur'an, angels did not support the creation of humans (*Baqara* 2/30). Only after humans had been created, angels began to respect them. The Qur'an maintains that a significant amount of time had passed before humans came into existence (*Insan* 76/1)—they were a late creation. They were also created in a relatively short period of time, something both the Qur'an and science appear to advocate. Yet here, science will provide more accurate details, and this can be of great benefit as humans come to better understand their historical and cultural origins.

Here too it is clear that the language of science and religion differ but these differences do not necessarily make them contradictory. Each uses its own language within its own purposeful framework. The Qur'an does not address issues in scientific language. Yet, its religious language opens a new perspective for humans by saying that they have been created by a supreme power; they are a creation of God to be in a relationship with God and to live responsibly on the earth. Science, on the other hand, helps them to understand themselves and the earth better. Humans and the earth can be an object of study for science.

What then does the future hold for humans, the earth and the universe? Science speaks of a universe that is expanding and shrinking. It also speaks of a sun that is expanding, and that its expansion may ultimately devour the earth. While these scientific paradigms might change over time, they can, nonetheless, be quite enlightening for humans as they explore the physical future of the universe. Even though some Islamic scholars find a correspondence between science and the Qur'an concerning the expansion of the universe, this notion does not comply with the language, tone and objectives of the Qur'an. The Qur'an dwells less on the end of the universe issues and more on human corruption

and reconstruction. Using religious language, it speaks of a Day of Judgment, where everything on the earth will be upside down, every single living being will die, the earth will be transformed, the stars will cease to shine, the sun will roll up and the sky will split. People will be judged, rewarded and punished for their good and bad deeds. In short, the universe we know will totally change and be reconstructed in a new form. Might this be religious language for what science predicts will be a physical end to our known universe?

Individuals will need to decide for themselves whether such a scenario complies with scientific understandings. It is clear that what was revealed in the Qur'an concerning Judgment Day was conveyed to people in the seventh century in religious and not twenty-first century scientific terms and concepts. Science was in its elementary stages at that time. Nonetheless, the hearers of the Qur'an believed in an impending Judgment Day and with it the transformation of the earth. The same holds for Muslims of today, who affirm a Divine source for this information. Scientific explanations that assist in explicating these matters serve to strengthen a Muslim's faith and trust in God.

The focus of the Qur'an is largely with human moral action in light of their relationship with God and others. Humans are to concern themselves with "good deeds" in the contexts in which they find themselves recognizing that God will hold them to account at Judgement Day for what they do with their lives here on earth. When that Judgement Day will come or in what form is not made clear, other than that it will be a future event. What science tells us regarding future events is speculative at this point and further entails a universal time span that is almost unimaginable for humans relative to their short earthly time span. While the religious and scientific language may not necessarily conflict with one another in regard to a final scenario, huge questions continue to surface. From a scientific perspective, an expanding sun will entail the annihilation of the earth, but from a religious or Qur'anic perspective, Judgement Day speaks of a transformation or renewal of the earth. Can these two scenarios be reconciled? Or does the scenario from science address only a cosmological problem posed from the perspective of a future physical universe—existence of a physical earth—while the scenario from the Qur'an addresses only a moral problem posed from the perspective of future human existence that says little about its Eternal nature or its relationship to existence on a future transformed earth? No doubt, these are complex questions to which answers are not readily

found. Posing them, however, serves to push the boundaries of both scientific and religious knowledge and reminds us that the two should not operate in isolation, for as Einstein reminded us, "Science without religion is lame. Religion without science is blind".

Conclusion

Ontological issues and concerns challenge Islam, as they do all worldviews, whether religious and secular. To be credible, reliable and significant in the twenty-first century Islam must respond to the issues of the day not only to give guidance and direction but also engage new ideas and behaviours. Humans are dynamic, and our ever-changing circumstances require a dynamic religion.

Islam presents an ontology that recognizes the physical nature of being, whether that is the universe as a whole or humans as but part of that larger physical realm of existence. Humans are earthly creatures and, as such, are made from the very material substance of the earth. Our very physical elements are linked to the very physical elements of the universe. But according to Islam, the human as a creature of God has also been given an animating spirit that originates not exclusively or ultimately from the physical realm of existence but from God. Humans are spiritually linked to God, whose nature is spiritual and Eternal. Whether the human consists of a soul and body conceived of as a dualistic or monistic nature is still heavily debated within Islamic circles. What is not debated, however, is that a metaphysical realm exists beyond the physical. Islam affirms that there may well be realms of being beyond the scope discernable by the physical sciences.

Affirming a metaphysical realm, and the existence of God and humans as intricately linked to God, will not, however, stem the flow of myriad questions that may arise from such affirmations, nor should it. Humans continually seek greater knowledge and understanding, and no less so in regard to the ontological questions. However, while the pursuit of knowledge and understanding is germane to the human creature, what we can know and know with certainty, itself opens up a whole new area of inquiry.

Epistemology: The Nature of Knowing

INTRODUCTION

Issues raised in the previous chapter in regard to the nature of being lead eventually to epistemological questions: What can we really know, what can we know regarding the nature of being and can we really know if something is true? Further, can we experience an objective reality that is out there, and to what extent is it directly or indirectly knowable? Is it possible to know God directly, or is God knowable only indirectly? Further, what can humans actually know about God? If all human knowledge and understanding is mediated through our perceptions what must be taken on faith?

What is knowable or at least worthy of admission is that absolute certainty seems to escape the human. As our knowledge expands in some areas, it remains elusive in others. Further, the more we seem to know, the more we realize that we do not know. Yet, the desire if not the struggle to understand and increase our knowledge propels the human with great curiosity and imagination to further explore the nature of our being and the nature of our knowing.

Experience and learning have indeed taught us that humans see and perceive the world differently. Our immediate context shapes and influences how we understand and interpret that world, and so our individual knowing and perception of reality is unique. As such, our knowledge is subjective. Yet, a question remains as to whether all of our knowledge and all our perceptions and experiences are relative and subjective in

nature so that the truth or certainty of anything becomes merely an individual or even a social arbitration. Is the reality we experience little more than an individual or a social construction, with no way of checking whether what we experience corresponds at all to any reality "out there?" This is the challenge of Postmodernism with its incredulity towards metanarratives. Worldviews, as it has often been argued, are little more than power struggles used by the ruling elite to define reality for everyone else, and then usually to their advantage. This presents a huge challenge to Muslims, who perceive and experience reality through the lens of Islam. But it presents a huge challenge to those holding any worldview, religious or secular.

SUBJECTIVE KNOWING

We know that each individual's perception and experience of reality is unique. No two perceptions are exactly the same. Each is interpreted or processed through the lens of their own language, culture, social, economic and even biographical characteristics. Each is different. We all know that this is true, but the question that arises is to what extent or degree is this true. Might there also be sufficient similarities so that we might conclude that certain perceptions and experiences held in common and with sufficient regularity can be determined to be true? Or does it entail that anything we can ever conclude with any certainty is necessarily to be reduced to opinion?

Science has a unique method of establishing the truth. The empirical method has assisted humanity is establishing verifiable knowledge and with great certainty in many areas. Yet, science is limited in investigating only that which can be empirically investigated and we are well reminded of the words of Einstein, less we place scientific investigation on too high of a pedestal: "Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts". Hence, knowledge ought necessarily to come from multiple sources, and religious knowledge can offer insights closed to science.

Neuroscience is a relatively new science that has yielded numerous insights into the workings of the brain. It can detect brain activity when, for example, one engages in religious activities. It cannot, however, ascertain whether that to which the religious activity is directed, that is God, actually exists objectively or is rich speculation derived from subjective brain activity. Yet, to paraphrase the words of Stephan J. Gould, the

absence of scientific or neurological evidence for the existence of God is not sufficient evidence to conclude that God does not exist. So the question remains a live one: Does religious knowledge about God, for example, warrant more credibility, or is it entirely subjective and little more than one's opinion? On what basis can one so argue?

Subjective knowing asserts that all truth is relative and subjective in nature. Things only exist to the extent that they are perceived. There is nothing outside the individual by which to measure whether what is assumed to exist actually does so. What is right or wrong is treated in an equal manner. No distinction is made between what one knows and what is to be known; between knowledge and subjective knowledge. Reality and truth is validated through self-reflection, internal coherence, personal experience and deep, personal contextualization. One can only argue one's own truth, based on one's own reality and experience.

Subjective knowing asserts that the source of truth or knowledge is the self; it is the individual that determines what is right and true, most especially when it concerns moral issues. The truth of moral statements, for example, depends on the particular beliefs, values or feelings of an individual or group of individual. We often hear this expressed in the statement "It's true for me".

As such, debating the truth of certain matters becomes more difficult. Taylor argued that in the recent past, for the first time in the history of the Western world, an increasing number of people live completely secular lives as if God does not exist. The belief that God does not exist is becoming an increasing societal default, with religious beliefs considered to be optional, personal preferences that have no real significant social or cultural importance or consequence.

Radical constructivism, sometimes referred to as anti-realism, is a philosophical perspective that argues that there are only perceptions, and there is no way to measure whether these perceptions actually correspond to reality. The only means to do so is to test whether they "work" for us, whether they are meaningful to us. Radical constructivism asserts that all of reality is a construction. There is no way of checking whether the reality we experience, for example, the existence of God, corresponds to any objective or concrete reality "out there". It asserts that at most we should remain agnostic about such existences. However, the notion that God's existence depends solely on personal opinion or whether it works for some individual or groups of individuals seems somehow less than satisfying.

Radical Postmodernism argues that our perspective is all there is. We have no way of checking if our construction of reality corresponds to anything external. There is even a question whether there is any reality outside our perceptions. There are no features of this world that can function as independently existing norms or criteria for truth and goodness to which we can appeal. Criterion used to determine truth and goodness is itself not only a human construction but furthermore also a social construction. It is always the construction of reality of someone or some group that ends up being the dominant construction that guides social life—whose reality or whose view of reality. Postmodernism argues that defining reality is largely about power, mastery and control.

According to Nash and Murray, the task of the individual person is to name things, to invent and construct concepts and categories that give meaning the phenomena we observe in the world. In Postmodernism, the philosopher's task is to create, define and change the world as it appears to us. The world is not "what it is" but rather "what we name it to be". There are many stories to be told, many of which are equally valuable. But which one is ultimately true "depends on our story, because it is the story that frames, explains, and justifies any claim to an exclusive truth" (Nash and Murray 2010, p. 45). Nietzsche argued that truth is a matter of perspective and makes sense only when understood against the perspective of a particular socially constructed story, and the dominant language that goes with it. Lyotard asserted an "incredulity toward meta-narratives", characteristic of Postmodernism. There is no overarching story of truth, whether religious, political, historical or economic. All claims to religious truths are little more than the dominance of particular "language games", supernatural stories and influential power hierarchies; everything is interpretation. Postmodernism deconstructs the view that any one particular metanarrative is objective and free of human construction. It argues that all perspectives are human constructions vying for power, mastery and control. Postmodernism was heavily critical of the Eurocentric worldview, which tended to be imperialistic, male dominated, white oriented and capitalistic centred. While such a critical stance towards a Eurocentric worldview has merit, perhaps Postmodernism claimed too much, with the result that it collapsed under the weight of its own logic (Nash and Murray 2010).

Islam rejects the notion that all of the reality is subjective, and largely if not exclusively a social construction. Yet, Muslims can learn from the critique of Postmodernism. They can recognize that there is a

considerable subjectivity at play in interpretations. They can realize that one's context and language influences and shapes what it is that they interpret. Further, they can admit that power sometimes clouds one's judgement or limits one's willingness to be open to new interpretations and understandings that deviate from accepted or traditional ways of thinking and acting.

OBJECTIVE REALITY

Objective reality entails the idea or belief that a real world or state of being exists independent of a person's individual feelings, imaginations or interpretations of that world or reality. From this perspective, a world or a reality is said to exist regardless of our perceptions or interpretations of it. It is mind-independent, that is, it exists independent of how our mind perceives it. In a similar manner, truth and knowledge do not depend upon the beliefs or feelings of any individual or group of individuals. As such, moral judgments or statements can be considered true regardless of individual beliefs, opinions or predilections.

The notion that there is an objective rather than only a subjective world is long-standing and reaches back at least to the time of the Greek philosophers. Plato spoke of an ideal world or a background world of forms where universals exist and on which particulars dependent. Aristotle agreed but argued that universals exist not independent of each particular thing but within it, that is, universals are the essence of a thing. The task of individuals or philosophers is to discover these objective things or the objective world, examine and understand them, adapt to them and invest them with meaning. Looking behind their appearances to find a set of permanent truths that might hold for all times and places does this.

Modernism affirmed that an objective mind-independent world exists. But it asserted that objective knowledge of that world can be gained only by means of the empirical method and through the natural sciences and, more guardedly, through the social sciences (Tarnas 1991). Beliefs or ideas not supported by science bordered on speculation, including and not surprisingly of all religious beliefs. This led to the rise of Scientism and Rationalism, and the assertion that true knowledge can only be gained through reason and science. No small wonder then that science and reason became the new religion of the modern period, with Comte as its first self-declared High Priest.

Critical realism takes a somewhat different position. It argues that an objectively knowable, mind-independent reality exists, yet we have no access to something called reality apart from the way that reality is represented in our concepts, language and discourse. Everything we know comes to us through our experiences and our senses. Access to the reality "out there", the reality that exists outside of ourselves, is always mediated by our own senses, and even more so by our own linguistic, conceptual and social constructions. We can never get outside our own knowledge to check the accuracy of what we know or perceive to know against objective reality, although science can verify much of what we come to know through these means. Critical realism admits that there is a distinction to be made between reality "out there" and our perception of it. It accepts a mind-independent world that is interpreted and understood by mind-dependent people.

Critical realism asserts the existence of God, and this is where it departs from Modernism. It asserts that God is an objectively knowable, mind-independent reality that exists. However, our concepts of God are always mediated through our linguistic and conceptual constructions. Within the Western religious tradition, God is often referred to as a male, and in the Christian tradition often in terms of mediaeval perceptions of a king and kingdom. Critical Realism recognizes that our perceptions of God are a human construct, a way of coming to some understanding of God. As such, perceptions of God can vary: a harsh tyrant, a gentle friend, a mother, a powerful being, Creator, absolute reality and more. Critical realism asserts that there is a reality "out there" which has been called "God", but humans can never know God as God really is. We are limited in that way. We can only know God through our human concepts of God, and our knowing requires some critical thinking. According to N.T. Wright, critical realism "is a way of describing the process of 'knowing' that acknowledges the reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower (hence 'realism'), while fully acknowledging that the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiralling path of appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known (hence 'critical')" (Wright 1992, p. 35).

From a Muslim perspective, the accuracy and objectivity of knowledge is the domain of philosophy, which presents numerous perspectives regarding sources of knowledge and recognizes that each perspective sheds some light on the complexity of human knowledge. But the nature

of human knowledge is a matter that must also be addressed by religious scholars. Since the first hearers of the sacred books were of various backgrounds and socio-economic levels, their means of communication were much more functional and direct. Messages conveyed in the Qur'an take into consideration cognitive, affective, cultural, linguistic and historical aspects of the time period in which they were revealed. The language of the Qur'an was not intended to be complex but to be understood by everyone, regardless of his or her scientific or philosophical acumen. Less important in the era in which it was revealed was to give priority to extensive analyses regarding the nature and source of the knowledge conveyed in the Qur'an. This only later became important and a special area of study.

To achieve common understanding, the Qur'an was revealed in a "common knowledge" format, containing references to nature, history, geography, culture, language, religion, economy, politics, art, agriculture and commerce. References to matters and elements familiar and well known to the audiences of the Qur'an have resulted over the centuries in its positive receptions. The Qur'an succeeded in striking a realistic tone with convincing content and argument. Faith and moral issues concerned everyone in society, and everyone was capable of understanding them. The Qur'an required its hearers to adopt certain moral values and beliefs and held them responsible for doing so. This was clear to those who read it.

Informing and persuading people of the things for which they would be held responsible necessitated developing in them a fervent faith and an understanding of concepts such as prophets, the Day of Judgement, justice, cruelty, halal, prohibition, prayers and more. To be successful, these concepts had, at a minimum, to be based on their own world of experience and knowledge. Accordingly, the Qur'an used language appropriate at the time for communication without the need to refer to the nature of knowledge. Hence, it makes reference to events and experiences well known to people: natural disasters, historical events, relationships, troubles between nations, religious and moral issues and more. That this information would assist people in recognizing God and internalizing moral values was of highest priority, recognizing that minimal knowledge and experience would suffice. People were not required to have a special educational background or extensive philosophical knowledge to understand the message of the Qur'an: everyone was capable of comprehending its message.

The Qur'an analyses the value of people's knowledge and gives guidance regarding its reliability and assists them in finding true knowledge. For instance, the Qur'an criticizes drawing conclusions too quickly based on assumptions that lack sufficient evidence. It highlights the term *hak* (truth/right), which refers to the link between some thing or event and the knowledge or information one has about it. The Qur'an reminds us that we should not overvalue things for which there is limited knowledge or information.

Yet, the importance of evaluating the knowledge and information we do have remains. But it must always be done within the constraints of human knowledge. The Qur'an asserts that God has complete knowledge but humans have limited knowledge. Only a Supreme Being can have extensive knowledge of existence. Nonetheless, experts can study every source of information and new conclusions can be reached. Knowledge, information and awareness can be enhanced through research and analysis. The Qur'an hints at a hierarchy of knowledge, mentioning the "wise" and the "wiser" from which it might be concluded that the Qur'an does not object to a critical approach to knowledge, an approach reminiscent of Critical Realism. It recognizes issues related to the social and cultural shaping of knowledge and states that every religious community will have different sociocultural guidelines and every individual knowledge limitations.

Yet, as complex as these matters can be, the Qur'an delivers a common message with a common responsibility: recognize God, believe in the Day of Judgement and do good deeds. Cultural contexts, social situations and knowledge limitations do not prevent people from acting on this simple message. All are equally capable of understanding this message and of their responsibilities towards it. In this sense, there is recognition of a common level of knowledge and understanding for all people. It is into this midst that the Qur'an delivered its message, affirming that God counts on the basic human understanding that emerges from matters such as hearing, seeing and making sense of things. The Qur'an states that humans are created with a capacity for understanding and that sources of knowledge include the mind and the senses.

The Qur'an also speaks of knowledge and information in terms of that which is new. God by means of the Qur'an conveyed that which was new to Muhammad. That which was new was passed down to the generation that followed Muhammad and is known as the *sunna* or tradition. There was no mistrust concerning that which was new or its passing to

this generation. It was undoubtedly regarded as a reliable source for new things.

Transferring the tradition to subsequent generations was not, however, free of concern. Much of the knowledge and information contained in the Qur'an are to be found in the experiences of people; they have an idea about it. The most crucial parts of the Qur'an are contained in these sections. However, the Qur'an also speaks about matters that exceed the capacity of many humans. These other matters are open to interpretation and studies such as *kelam* (study of remark), *fiqh* (Islamic law), as well as Sufism (Islamic mysticism), constantly attempt to interpret the Qur'an. Since that which is contained in the Qur'an has real informational value, the first hearers of the Qur'an were able to make their own interpretations and produce new awareness. For example, the Qur'anic proposition that "God exists and is the sole power" is accurate and reliable information. The nature of God is not, however, clarified in the Qur'an and, as such, is open to different interpretations. Muslim scholars are granted certain latitude in their approach and thereby create diverse interpretations on many such issues. In this sense, all propositions in the Qur'an can be interpreted and evaluated with reference to how well they correspond to reality.

Contemporary philosophers are generally sceptical of achieving objective knowledge. Yet, philosophers have historically sought to do this. Religions also stress the importance of achieving objective knowledge, and theological analysis considers objective knowledge a given. Religious doctrines address the situations in which people find themselves and seek to communicate relevant truths with them. As a result, it is widely accepted that theologies address knowledge that is common to all people and Muslims affirm that revelation sent via Prophet Muhammad is objectively true.

Muslims affirm that what is objectively true is that God created humans, giving them the capacity for self-reflection and the ability to reason and communicate in language. Adam, who is the first human according to the Qur'an, named things and gave them meaning. In having these abilities, he is superior to angels. According to the Qur'an, creation and religion are linked, that is, the bio-psychic nature, cognitive and sensual properties which are integral to the creation of the human are also integral to religion. This indicates that humans are capable of creating a common knowledge area or base. When they observe the world, humans notice that they have created common knowledge areas

in language, science, art, culture, ethics, civilizations and the production of ideas. The fact that humans are able to live together shows that objective knowledge is possible. Even if they do not speak the same language, humans can communicate with each other, which implies that there is a common experience and knowledge base.

Objective knowledge is achievable in regard to ethical values. Whether or not they are deemed to have an independent existence may be immaterial: all humans are consciously aware of them. The idea of justice is a prime example. Every individual has a sense of justice even if there is a considerable divergence in how justice is exercised in various communities. Humans have numerous common values, holding out the theoretical possibility of much common ground among them. Centuries of common human experience give witness to at least some degree of objective knowledge. The terms in the Qur'an such as *beyyine* (evidence), *hüccet* (argument), *yakin* (certainty) and *hak* (truth) support this notion. Religions, in general, consider humans to be responsible beings, expecting of them a certain level of behaviours and attitudes. Holding them responsible for their actions also points to an objective knowledge base. Internalizing responsibilities requires a degree of cognition developed in the early years for which humans also take responsibility. Those who do not feel responsible for their actions are among the smallest minority.

Sources of Our Knowing

Muslim theologians classify sources of knowledge into three categories: reason, the senses and received knowledge (*khabar*). Together, they nourish Muslim daily life. Reason undergirds science and critical thinking. The senses are at play in discovering and interpreting what is experienced in daily life. The received knowledge corresponds most specifically to the Qur'an and its tradition.

The most important sources of knowledge for Muslims remain the Qur'an, the tradition of Muhammad and human experience. Although there is a fixed hierarchical order of sources, whichever one is best suited for addressing the issue at hand is given priority. For the basic faith issues or rules regarding Islam, the Qur'an remains the primary source. In the complicated pace of daily life and in many daily encounters, however, the Qur'an need not be regarded as the preferred source, for Muslims also give primacy to human experiences. Issues of a social, educational,

scientific, political or economic nature often require other non-Qur'anic sources for depth of understanding. Muslims are called to involve themselves in the customs and cultures (*urf*) of their day. This encompasses the culture, lifestyle and experience of the communities in which they reside. These too serve as sources. For Muslims in general, however, individuals must determine for themselves what informational sources are best suited to shed light on the issues before them. Sources offer data and individuals produce, improve and transform their knowledge and understanding based on the information they receive. From this perspective, Muslims are quite open to change.

Muslims receive knowledge and awareness of God largely from the families to which they belong and also from their immediate environment, that is, from parents, local religious leaders and school. What they come to know of God might come from the understandings and interpretations of Muslim scholars that lived in the previous centuries. Theologians also offer views on the nature of God, which is often put into systematic form. In Muslim communities, the interpretations of scholars from Asharites, Maturidites and Şhiites traditions are still very influential. In recent decades, however, ordinary Muslims have resorted to the Qur'an as a direct source of information regarding God, largely because it is readily available to everyone in their own language. Also more readily available today are the contrasting interpretations, views and opinions of Muslims scholars, past and present.

Human understanding is dynamic, and as a result, views and understanding of God are ever changing. Muslim scholars have the task of renewing and revitalizing their concepts of God by re-examining the sources they use in light of current human experiences, emotions, needs and situations. For instance, in a plural society, theologians must decide which properties of God should be highlighted. Depicting God in a God–servant (*abd*) relationship, an image that often derives from mediaeval conceptions, may not have the same impact as depicting God as friend and protector of the individual. Nonetheless, if the crucial point is communication with God, then the environmental, spiritual and mental conditions of an individual come into play. As such, the interpretations and formulations of modern theologians are of great consequence. In all of this, however, questions will continue to arise that require an approach that is sufficiently open and flexible so as to avoid rigid understandings and stifling traditions.

Conclusion

Epistemological questions and concerns challenge Islam in new ways in the twenty-first century. No religious worldview can escape questions pertaining to what can be known and to what extent can religious beliefs grounded in revelation be justified. But epistemological certainties confront all worldviews, both religious and secular. To remain dynamic, Islam does not avoid difficult questions, recognizing nonetheless that answers will not always be readily available.

Understanding the nature of the human, the nature of existence and the future of the universe requires humans to enhance their knowledge by seeking information from sources beyond the Qur'an. Islam embraces scientific knowledge and does not see an inherent conflict with it. Religious knowledge and scientific knowledge are of two different and unique sorts and both can lend greater understanding to what it means to be human and how we should live.

Knowledge of the reality in which we live is not direct but requires interpretation. This lends itself to a certain subjective approach that is difficult to avoid because we are all conditioned by our circumstances. But our subjective knowledge does not mean that it cannot point to an objective reality, one that exists beyond our own appropriation and apprehension or denial of it. Knowledge of the reality of God and God's ways with humans comes by way of various sources, each of which requires discernment. Some of those sources are scriptural sources, and these are regarded as bringing information to humans that does not come in other forms, and speaking in a language that is intended not to confuse but to engage everyone in their daily lives with their everyday concerns. Muslims are greatly assisted here by the Qur'an and the traditions in which it stands.

The Qur'an remains the primary source of knowledge of God and how humans should live according to the precepts of God. But Muslim scholars are well aware that the revelation contained in the Qur'an is not the only source of knowledge available to humans as they seek greater understanding of the world in which they live. As such, human understanding is greatly assisted by other sources of knowledge, sources that can also shed helpful light on revelations from the Qur'an. Together, these various sources of knowledge can give Muslims certainty in their faith and their beliefs, recognizing nonetheless that because full and complete knowledge of God and the human situation is beyond the grasp of the human, a leap of faith is inevitable.

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Universal/Particular Beliefs and Values

Introduction

Abraham Joshua Herschel (1907–1972) once stated that "Man's under-standing of what is right and wrong has often varied throughout the ages; yet the consciousness that there is a distinction between right and wrong is permanent and universal" (Dosick 1993, p. 184). Herschel reminded us that we all have a sense of what is right and wrong. This is universal. It applies to all individuals and all groups of individuals, from the most saintly to the most ruthless. Disagreements surface, however, in regard to the exact nature of what is right and wrong and how to deter-mine or distinguish between the two. Here discussions can be endless, and situations, circumstances and worldview differences play a major role in determining how we understand the two and put them into practice.

A similar case can be made for other beliefs and values. There are cer-tain beliefs and values held in common—these are universal. How they are put into practice, however, changes from situation to situation. That is, a sense of what is right or just in one situation or by one group of people may be perceived in an entirely different manner in and by another. That there are universal beliefs and values is less disputed today than the manner in which they are particularized in various cultures and time periods. This chapter will focus on universal beliefs and values such as justice, dignity of people, sacredness of life, equality and diver-sity, openness and tolerance, and concern for the environment. Peoples of all cultures and all places embrace them, yet may mean considerably

different things by them and play them out in considerably different ways.

Islam also embraces universal beliefs and values. The Qur'an promotes justice, the dignity of all people and the sacredness of human life. It recognizes the importance of gender equality and the diversity of people. It addresses openness and tolerance towards others and their views. It mandates Muslims to be stewards of the earth. Yet, the manner in which Muslims in different times and different places understand what these mean or imply and how to live them out varies tremendously. In certain Muslim countries, these beliefs have been understood and lived out in very traditional ways, and yet are often attributed to mandates from the Qur'an. The role of women, for example, is often linked with traditional cultures that have been in place for decades if not centuries and sometimes renders them as second-class citizens, if not to a suppressed and oppressed status. Such a status has become glaringly obvious to their gender counterparts in other places in the world, especially in modern Western countries, and has been severely criticized as unjust.

Turkey has been heavily impacted by the modern Western world since the nineteenth century, and this influenced it in numerous ways. Beliefs and practices accepted in an earlier time have been reassessed in light of Turkey's secular constitution. Yet, traditional ways of life exert influence that have a long lasting effect and shape the character of Turkish society. How these combine in a dynamic process reveals the uniqueness of a Turkish way of life as a modern, democratic and secular society influenced by a compelling Islamic worldview. In a global world where universal beliefs and values become more apparent, so do the ways in which they are particularized in various cultures and time periods.

Turkey stands at an interesting crossroad—between a dominant modern and secular global influence, on the one hand, and a more traditional Islamic way of life, on the other hand, which in some countries has translated into one of the two extremes. According to Elizabeth Prodromou, Turkish history to date has revealed that "militant Secularism is as much a threat to religious majorities and minorities as is militant religious fundamentalism" (Prodromou 2005, p. 11). But Turkey has always managed to create a delicate balance between the two, and this makes it a thought-provoking model to explore. How it understands universal beliefs and values from its particular context can be inspiring for other nations which seek to value their Islamic heritage while at the same time not rejecting Western progressive thinking.

JUSTICE

Justice is a universal belief and value. All peoples everywhere regardless of the worldviews they embrace have some concept of justice, even ruthless dictators and criminal gang members. What individuals or groups of individuals mean by justice and how it is particularized or enacted can vary from one context or culture to another and in greater or lesser degrees from one another. Further, the particularization of justice by individuals or groups of individuals remains dynamic; it changes depending on context, culture, traditions and time periods.

Religious people, in general, affirm that God is just, as are God's actions. Yet secular or non-religious people are often appalled by the injustice carried out in God's name by those who claim to be fervent followers of God. On the other hand, the record of secular acts of justice does not fare much better. History is replete with examples of justice enacted in the name of God, state, emperor or empire. Modern day notions and acts of justice have progressed from the past in certain areas, such as the rights of women, yet just actions towards the poor and the powerless, on the other hand, have improved only marginally.

The Qur'an speaks of justice in no uncertain terms. God mandates it: "God commands justice and fair dealing" (*Nahl* 16/90). Justice is a supreme virtue in Islam; a central and basic objective second only to worship of God. It is a directive from God to believers: "O you who believe, be upright for God, and (be) bearers of witness with justice!" (*Ma'ida* 5/8). Justice is central to God's revelation to humans: "We sent Our Messengers with clear signs and sent down with them the Book and the Measure in order to establish justice among the people" (*Hadid* 57/25). It is fundamental to the Qur'an.

Yet, in spite of this crucial emphasis, the image of Islam suffers enormously in much of the Western world. Justice carried out in God's name by Muslims in various places in the world is often quite shocking. The treatment of women and religious minorities are a case in point. Reports emerging from the media highlight on an almost daily basis some action occurring in some Islamic country that oppresses, maims or even kills women because they sought equality, freedom of movement and even the opportunity to be educated. No less frequent are reports of hostile treatment, including murder, of those of non-Islamic religious beliefs. The Western media more times than not and rightly or wrongly attributes these actions to an Islamic belief system. Small wonder then of the negative image of Islam in the Western world.

Turkey has been accused by some Western nations of human rights abuses, which has become a stumbling block to their admission to the European Union. Many regard Turkey as an Islamic country. But how educated Muslims working in a modern, urban and academic environment understand a universal command to do justice may differ from what a particular government proposes, even as both struggle to particularize it in modern, democratic and secular Turkey. Views may align with those expressed in Western countries but they may also lean towards more traditional ways of religious life. Addressing the issue of justice, therefore, becomes paramount.

Stories, narratives and sacred texts speak about justice but they often do so largely in terms of principles. Sacred scriptures generally do not explicate how a justice principle ought to be enacted. Justice principles are for guidance and direction more so than legislating or prescribing specific actions. scriptural commentaries, on the other hand, may do so according to a specific context or circumstance, recognizing that scriptural principles always require interpretation.

The Qur'an speaks mostly of principles of justice and how to achieve them. It provides general guidelines but no prescriptives. Neither does the Qur'an specify a fixed means by which justice is to be achieved. What facilitates and advances the cause of justice without violating *Sharia Law* or the laws of the land is considered valid. Sometimes, Qur'anic principles of justice can be clearly discerned in cultural notions of justice. At other times, they appear to conflict, and Qur'anic principles of justice stand in judgment of cultural practices.

The Qur'an does not define justice as such for it presupposes that its hearers already have an understanding of justice; it is regarded as innate. For that reason, as with other ethical notions, the Qur'an addresses people's conscience and mind. It reminds people of values they already possess. The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of being just or fair because God is just and fair, and hence demands this of others. The Qur'an asserts that God loves just and fair people and praises those who in all their activities initiate fair practises. It also encourages Muslims to be fair to their enemies even if they might be full of hate and hostility against them (*Ma'ida* 5/8). The Qur'an states that everyone should be fair in his or her assessments of others. Being fair is especially important while solving cases between different sociopolitical groups. According to the Qur'an, one should be fair even if it might be disadvantageous for his/her parents, close friends or relatives. One should also be fair to members

of other religions (*Shuraa* 42/15). Being fair is also very important in testimonies. Being emotional, subjective or overambitious is the biggest barrier for achieving justice according to the Qur'an.

The Qur'an indicates that God has sent principles of justice to people via messengers. Warnings in the Qur'an about the principles of justice are directly related to the events of that period. As a result, these events might be taken as examples or reference points. This becomes clear in regard to the example of the inheritance system in traditional agricultural communities. In these communities, inheritance was regulated in accordance with gender and the contribution people made to production, and women, in general, were not given an inheritance. The Qur'an, in an effort to reform such practices, awarded one share of the inheritance for every two granted to men, recognizing that men still had obligations and responsibilities towards extended family members. When this system of inheritance is applied to cases in the modern world, however, further reforms are expected. In Turkey today, the principle of just inheritance stresses equal distribution of inheritance among all family members, regardless of gender or position.

While justice is inherent to humans, according to the Qur'an, there is a sufficient recognition that cultural and environmental features play a key role in how justice is put into practice in each case; what its practical face entails. How to act fairly or justly in new cases, therefore, depends on examples recorded in the Qur'an. Each case determines the way justice should be enacted. In the process, conscience, knowledge and experience become valued assets. Wisdom, reason and the advancements of the modern world are to be employed in interpreting the examples recorded in the Qur'an. Indeed, the Qur'an allows people to determine for themselves how to practice justice since there are not enough examples in the Qur'an for all possible cases. Even though the idea of justice is considered as a single, independent concept, enactment of justice is closely related to historical, cultural and environmental conditions. Therefore, it requires that people have an awareness of justice, that the educated individual will make the right decision and that institutional authorities will have sufficient common sense and an objective attitude to guarantee the rights of the individual. This requires trust.

Issues of justice are faced in almost every situation, and it must have priority in all areas of life. It surfaces in regard to individual moral behaviour. For example, a mother who does not treat her children in an equal manner is considered to be unjust. But justice issues also surface in

regard to social, political, economic and legal matters. The Qur'an indicates that it is always the duty of an individual to act justly and prevent injustices regardless of the circumstances for injustices can be seen and witnessed in many forms and in many situations.

Justice can sometimes be enacted in rather harsh manners. This has been witnessed in some Islamic countries where *Sharia Law* has become the law of the land. But even in these situations, basic human rights should always have priority, especially the right to life. Turkey upholds that right and has eliminated capital punishment. It recognizes neither *Sharia Law* nor that certain kinds of behaviours mentioned in the Qur'an warrant harsh corporal or capital sentences. While harsh punishments for certain moral indiscretions, such as adultery, are still applied in certain Islamic countries, Turkey is not among those that do. In 1996, Turkey's highest court decriminalized adultery, arguing that it was unjust in its discrimination against women. An attempt to revive the law in 2004 was short-lived, with protests coming from numerous women's groups and pressure from European Union officials. Religious fundamentalists feared abandoning adultery laws would encourage immorality. Most others argued, however, that a secular state should not legislate morality, leaving moral behaviour to the discretion of the individual and his/her own religious or secular convictions.

Notions of fair and just business dealings are also given considerable attention in the Qur'an. Islam is supportive of market enterprise whereby people can earn their livelihoods through buying and selling but prohibits the kinds of activities that lead to injustices and can cause harm to people. The Qur'an disapproves, for example, of the wrongful taking of property: "Do not devour one another's property wrongfully, nor throw it before the judges in order to devour a portion of other's property sinfully and knowingly" (*Baqara* 2/188). A Muslim is encouraged to avoid any illegal means of earning a living, even transactions that appear dubious and doubtful.

Islam strictly forbids usury for it is perceived to involve oppression and exploitation: "Allah has permitted trading and forbidden *Riba* (usury)" (*Baqara* 2/275). But the charging of interest is a mainstay of Capitalism, and a modern society could hardly do without this practise today. Hence, what is advocated in the Qur'an is not legislated in the same manner in a country's legal code. In fact, most encourage a *laissez faire* approach to business, and "business as usual" seldom violates the law of the land, even if it does violate the spirit of a Qur'anic injunction.

But Muslims are encouraged to heed the Qur'anic injunction to be just and fair, and as such, these injunctions can restrain unbridled Capitalism. The Qur'an speaks of just wages, safe working conditions and fair treatment for workers to ensure that unjust exploitation of the poor by the rich and powerful and the gap between the rich and poor are not ever widening.

> Those are your brothers [workers under you] who are around you, Allah has placed them under you. So, if anyone of you has someone under him, he should feed him out of what he himself eats, clothe him like what he himself puts on, and let him not put so much burden on him that he is not able to bear, [and if that be the case], then lend your help to him. (*Bukhari* 2002)

Such injunctions do not always find their way into legal codes for what is legal may not always be in tune with Qur'anic teachings. Hence, Muslims are to take a critical and ethical approach, struggling against injustice where it arises in their community and resorting to law to rectify it. Muslims see this as the duty of a responsible member of society (Rice 1999; Abeng 1997).

Human Dignity

While it is almost universally accepted that humans deserve dignity, the manner in which this is expressed varies throughout the world. All too often today in our modern Western society human dignity is accorded to the rich, famous and powerful, and the most vulnerable in society are rendered indignities in their plight. The German writer Goethe said that "You can easily judge the character of a man by how he treats those who can do nothing for him", an admonition of the wealthy who ignore the plight of the poorer elements of society. The Hebrew prophet Isaiah stated that God judges a nation by how it treats the poor and the orphans, that is, the most vulnerable. Jean Vanier says that "those with intellectual disabilities are among the most oppressed and excluded people in the world", a recognition that societies prefer to exclude rather than include those who fit in the least (Vanier 1998, p. 72). In modern, democratic and secular societies, the universal belief and value that all humans are to be treated with dignity is reflected in national or communal social policy, but it is understood and practiced in various ways in

different contexts, and not infrequently in a manner that prioritizes certain individuals and groups. How is all of this reflected in a nation such as Turkey, where a cultural focus on communal well-being is still evident?

According to Islam, God breathed a life-giving spirit into the human, and as such, each individual is unique and precious. God has equipped humans with unique qualities and assigned them as the *caliph* of the world. God has rendered the human dignified. This grounds the notion that humans are to be dignified and respected. Each individual is also aware of his or her own dignity, and this sense of dignity should then be extended to others also. Individuals deserve to be treated with dignity, regardless of their abilities or disabilities or the social, economic or religious group to which they belong. Human dignity is innate and does not depend on positive or negative qualities or characteristics acquired later in life. As a consequence, even persons who commit crimes, however severe, should be treated with dignity.

The value of humans is highlighted in the Qur'an and evidenced by several stories told of Muhammad. For example, Muhammad stood up and showed respect as a funeral procession of a Jewish person passed by. Further, he did not reprimand the person who defecated in the prayer room, but asked only that his friends assist in the clean up. Muhammad also respected the elderly and showed affection and love to the children. The thirteenth-century theologian and Sufi poet Rumi affirmed the dignity Muhammad bestowed on people:

> O humans! You are the image of the God's book! O humans, the mirror of the beauty of the Shah, the happy humans. You are everything. What is there in the universe is not outside of you. Whatever you are looking for, look to thyself since you are the existence! "God has revealed the secrets of mightiness in humans. If you pray (prostrate) in front of the human, Kaaba becomes the place wherever you turn to.

According to Islam, therefore, all humans are to be treated with dignity in the same manner and in the same way.

It is well known, however, that in many societies, the rich and powerful are given more respect. If this respect pertains to their social role and status, it cannot be considered inappropriate. If it is built upon fear or is otherwise inappropriately rendered, however, members of a society should carefully examine why such respect is given and what purposes it serves. Each and every individual is to be respectful and each and every

individual deserves respect and dignity regardless of their socio-economic status or class. Class distinction is a result of socio-economic and political developments of history. Human dignity and honour is innate to the human condition.

The Qur'an asserts that a person should be treated with respect because he or she is human. No other criteria enter the picture. Muhammad once made a face because a blind man interrupted him. God warned Muhammad that such reaction to a blind person was wrong and to be avoided. The Qur'an emphasizes that the weak, poor and orphans have a certain priority in regard to respect and dignity. It advises that charity should be given to the most vulnerable but this should be done in secrecy and with all humility. This shows that human dignity is an inviolable essence.

Living out the universal belief and value that all humans are to receive dignity in a modern, democratic and secular society comes with challenges. But those challenges can be overcome when use is made of both traditional perspectives and the values brought by the modern world. Since religious, cultural and traditional values are still prominent in Turkish communities, they are given priority. We are reminded that the concept "human dignity" goes back millennia, especially in regard to religious injunctions, even if the term itself and its practice is a rather modern one. Turkey, as well as other modern societies, gives prominence to pluralism, democratic values and basic human rights and freedoms that unquestionably enhance human dignity. Democratic values in particular support and enhance inclusion more so than exclusion, and the contributions of the Enlightenment and modernity should not be underestimated here. It may be safe to say that both religious and secular impulses have combined to create legislation concerning human dignity.

All of this does not mean, however, that challenges do not continue to arise in a nation such as Turkey, and in all other modern, democratic and secular societies. Human indignities continue to surface in all too many instances. Increasing disparities between rich and poor continue to be a problem faced by modern societies, with many left out of the advantages and benefits gained by modern economic systems. Insufficient or inferior education, healthcare or financial resources continue to prevent many from rising beyond a subsistence level. Muslims, and others who embrace religious worldviews, are continuously reminded to heed the religious injunctions to provide for those among them who are vulnerable and less well off in their societies. The Qur'an and other sacred

scriptures continue to compel their hearers to dignify the human for the human is a creation of God. Muslims are encouraged, therefore, to do what they can to this end. This may entail initiating or supporting public policy that strives for eliminating or minimizing poverty by providing adequate housing, employment opportunities and education and health protection for everyone. In this sense, Muslims can be politically active for these concerns are shared in common by many others, religious and secular alike.

Sacredness of Life

Muslims believe that life is sacred because God creates it. The principle "sacredness of life" specifies that life be accorded special status so that it is protected and will not be easily and whimsically eliminated. But at certain junctures, a general rendering requires more specificity for questions abound today regarding what forms of life are sacred and to be protected. Today, the very definition of human life—its nature, when it begins and when it ends—is questioned. Some feel sacredness should be accorded also to non-human life. Concerns arise regarding animal life. Animal rights activists argue for better protection and treatment of animal life. Concerns arise regarding ecological life. Ecological theologians consider the earth as sacred—as the "body of God"—and not to be abused and destroyed (McFague 1993). They argue for better protection and treatment of ecological life. How then do those embracing an Islamic worldview and who live in a modern, democratic and secular state understand and particularize the universal notion of the sacredness of life?

The right of living is a natural value as life is a consequence of an ontological relationship with God. In this sense, all living things in the universe are sacred. The concept of sacredness can be found in the Qur'an: There is no existence on earth that does not glorify God (*Isra* 17/44).

In an anthropocentric view of the world, and even in anthropocentric theology, sacredness is bestowed on humans. Today, discussions regarding the sacredness of life revolve around a more complex discussion of what it means to be human. There is an almost universal command that "you shall not kill", but it is specifically intended for humans not to kill or murder each other. Yet, in specific cases killing is sanctioned—in the protection of innocent lives, in wartime, in abortion and in capital punishment.

Globalization has not only brought us an abundance of material goods, it has also brought us knowledge and awareness of how humans define, treat and regard life. Jean Vanier argues that all humans are sacred regardless of their abilities or capabilities (Vanier 1998). Ethicist Peter Singer, on the other hand, does not bestow humanness on the most intellectually disabled and suggests that they can be euthanized in the first years of their birth (Singer 1993). Pro-life advocates regard foetal life as sacred and in need of legal protection because it is most vulnerable. Pro-choice advocates do not regard foetal life as human and resist granting it legal status so it can be aborted. In a number of Western countries, euthanasia has become legal. Supporters of euthanasia argue that a person should have the freedom to "die with dignity", since old age and dementia often rob people of their dignity. Others argue that human life is sacred from conception until natural death and should not be ended by human means at any stage (Somerville 2000). When human life begins and when it should end have been discussed by theologians, ethicists and medical and legal experts with little or no agreement (Steinbock 1992).

According to Islam, in principle, the sacredness of life is extended to all humans, from conception to natural death. One's mental abilities or disabilities are not criteria that determine the sacredness of human life. Life is a creation of God, and hence, it is sacred and not to be killed. While the sacredness of life is a general principle, it is not, however, an absolute one. People get killed, and especially in war. Yet, protecting the right to live is still there. In wartime when soldiers are threatened with death, eliminating the enemy becomes inevitable. The Biblical "an eye for an eye" principle has been implemented throughout much of human history but it is to be regarded as the maximum punishment to be inflicted or enacted not necessarily the only punishment, for, as Gandhi reminds us, "an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind".

Punishment is ethical and legal by its very nature. Some feel that criminals should not be executed nor remain imprisoned for life but should be reintegrated into society, advocating the sacredness of life principle. Others argue that the punishment should fit the crime and that deterrents are needed to ensure a safer society. Discussing the merits of capital punishment is not directly a part of theological study and perhaps these issues are best left to governments and their legal systems. Turkey has nonetheless eliminated capital punishment.

It is in regard to the situation of abortion, however, the principle of the sacredness of life is highly controversial and clearly not absolute. According to Islamic teachings, the soul does not enter into foetal life until the fourth month. Hence, during the first four months of pregnancy, abortion is permitted. After this period, the foetus becomes a living soul and abortion is restricted. Only in the case where the life of the mother is in danger does her right to life take primacy over that of her unborn, for the mother is considered the "source of life" while a foetus is a "potential life". Some Muslim scholars have consented to abortion after the fourth month in the case of foetal deformity where care would become exceptionally difficult for the parents. In cases of rape, however, opinions are divided. Some scholars feel that children conceived through rape may not be aborted after the fourth month. Others make exceptions in regard to rape that occurs during wartime and permit abortion even after the fourth month (Brockopp 2003). Turkey legalized abortion for medical reasons in 1965 and in 1983 broadened the right to abortion in the first ten weeks of pregnancy. Yet, it remains a controversial issue. Government initiatives to restrict abortions have met with huge public outcry. Some, in tune with much liberal Western thinking, argue for the right of women to choose for themselves. Others feel Islam forbids all abortions, applauding the general principle of the sacredness of human life, even in its earliest stages.

The general principle of the sacredness of life is also extended to non-human life. From the Qur'an it becomes clear that all things on earth are linked to the Creator. In this regard, all of the creation is sacred since it comes from God. Ontologically, God is the sole Creator of everything on earth. The things we can see in nature are evidence of God's presence and power: they all praise and dignify God. Every part of creation serves a greater purpose and is sacred in this respect. Support can, therefore, be seen here for animal protection and for animal rights activists who argue for better protection and treatment of animal life. Support can also be seen for those who argue for better protection and treatment of ecological life.

How humans are to treat non-human life is related, however, to the principle of the purpose of all living things. Non-human life is sacred, though again not in an absolute fashion. Nature is a source for the existence and enhancement of human life, but it is not to be dominated and consumed wastefully by humans. A Muslim's relationship to non-human life must be based on principles of basic human needs and ecological

balance. The Qur'an states that all of nature is offered to humans for their benefit, for humans as a collective are the crown of creation: "Allah has made subject to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth and amply bestowed upon you His favours, [both] apparent and unapparent" (*Luqman* 32/20). Humans are superior to other living creatures. They may make use of other living creatures, animals in particular, but this must be done in a manner that respects them as creatures of God and does not cause them to suffer. They should not be killed or hunted merely for human sport; they are to be valued: "Nor take life which Allah has made sacred except for just cause" (*Isra* 17:33). Just cause would be for food. Humans also need protein to survive and protein can be gotten from consuming animal products. But the killing of animals for food must always be done in a manner that is quick and does not inflict unnecessary pain. The harm caused to animals and wastefulness goes contrary to the wishes of God and violates God's good creation. While Islam may not fully endorse the animal rights movement, nor advocate a vegetarian diet, it does support treating animal life with great respect and forbids its wanton destruction, wastefulness and abuse. Stewardship of all of the creation includes stewardship—care and concern—towards animal life.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Equality and diversity as principles have become hallmarks of the modern world. Most agree that all people are equal and that diversity is a good thing. The level of equality between men and women, for example, has become a means of measuring the progressive nature of any particular nation. Diversity is also often regarded as beneficial to any nation and many support pluralism. Yet, what individuals, groups of individuals or nations understand regarding equality and diversity differs widely. The United States Declaration of Independence, for example, stated clearly when it was written in 1776 that "all men are created equal", yet slavery continued for more than a century and discrimination against blacks prevailed until the latter half of the twentieth century. Today, many Western nations pride themselves on the diversity within their population, yet racial intolerance often percolates just under the surface and reveals its ugly head from time to time in many countries today. Implementing equality and diversity principles continues to be a challenge and a struggle and notoriously difficult to implement. Perhaps they remain ideals for

which to strive recognizing that achieving them remains elusive. Nations where traditional and modern cultural and religious expressions are evident may find those challenges in greater degrees. Nonetheless, advances have been made. Gender equality and racial diversity, for example, are regarded as progressive, and the Western world has taken steps to incorporate them, in spite of detractors, tensions and conflicts.

Islam is not perceived by many Western nations as being at the forefront of implementing new notions of equality and diversity. In fact, Islam has been heavily criticized for promoting inequality and exclusion. Among those are non-Muslim religious minorities, the socio-economically disadvantaged, those with different sexual orientations and with physical and intellectual disabilities, and of course women. Historically, they have been pushed to the margins of society. Equality and diversity touch many areas and in essence are about including into full social participation many who have historically been excluded.

Equality and diversity as notions are rather modern and have emerged with great intensity in the last number of decades. Even though these terms have not been part of the social lexicon until recently, they had been known and experienced in previous centuries and are of long-standing within many religious traditions. Just as the concept of justice has been familiar for thousands of years, it can be assumed that concepts of equality and diversity fall under the notion of "justice". They have ontological, epistemological, ethical, sociological, anthropological and theological connotations. Various points of view might be adopted as a result. Further, these notions have gained more individualistic meaning in the modern era and, as such, have more specific connotations.

It is necessary to repeat from time to time that holy books that speak of ethical matters emerged from a particular time period and hence focus on the sociocultural, sociopolitical and socio-economic context of the day. Since the notions of equality and diversity are relatively modern, they will not be addressed directly in the Qur'an, though these concepts can be inferred and even referred to indirectly. For example, the Qur'an states that "God breathed his spirit into man" and created the human with His own hands. From this, it can be inferred that humans are ontologically equal for God created everyone and breathed his spirit into them. The Qur'an also states that God created humans as honourable beings, which further lends itself to equality and diversity concepts. The Qur'an further states that humans are created as different tribes

and communities. In addressing the Abrahamic traditions, it states the following:

> To each of you We prescribed a law and a method. Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation [united in religion], but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you; so race to [all that is] good. To Allah is your return all together…. (*Ma'ida* 5/48)

The above verse supports a notion of diversity, yet not with the purpose of having various nations clash endlessly. Accordingly, it can be concluded that in general, the Qur'an adopts a positive approach to equality and diversity.

Some verses in the Qur'an, however, clearly appear to discriminate between man and woman. The following is a case in point, rendering men guardians of women, women as obedient to men, and even granting men the right to beat them, which has led to much acceptance of domestic violence in Muslim countries, especially those under *Sharia Law*.

> Men are the maintainers of women because Allah has made some of them to excel others and because they spend out of their property; the good women are therefore obedient, guarding the unseen as Allah has guarded; and (as to) those on whose part you fear desertion (committing a religious sin), admonish them, and leave them alone in the sleeping-places and beat them; then if they obey you, do not seek a way against them; surely Allah is High, Great. (*Nisa* 4/34)

Another verse specifically places men above women: "that Muslim men are a degree above Muslim women, and Allah is Mighty, Wise" (*Baqara* 2:228). In regard to witnesses, women are again considered inferior to men: "if there are not two men, then a man and two women, such as ye choose, for witnesses, so that if one of them errs, the other can remind her" (*Baqara* 2:282).

Understandably, many feminists claim that Islam treats women as inferior to men. As a result, they have been relentless in their criticism of Islam and their push for gender equality. Muslim but also other religious communities have often suffered their wrath for they are looked on as bastions of patriarchy. Recently, feminists have petitioned against the wearing of the *hijab* in public in some European countries. They call for its ban, predicated on a belief that it is oppressive to women and

serves only to reinforce inequality. Others, however, see the *hijab* not as a symbol of oppression but of devotion and argue that a modern society should be sufficiently diverse to embrace a variety of religious and other expressions.

While Turkey has a majority Muslim population, it is a secular society not bound by the religious rule. Since the establishment of the republic, Turkey has put many reforms in place that grant women all the rights of men, and that also promote equality between the genders. Atatürk was a great promoter of women's rights and elevated them to full participation in society in building the nation. He sought to break down many of the traditional barriers that kept women subjected to the prejudices of male-dominated institutions, including religion. While some felt that not much changed in the latter half of the twentieth century compared to the early advances of Ataturk, there have been reforms initiated at the beginning of the twenty-first century in criminal and civil law (Arat 1996). Since then, the rights of women and men pertaining to marriage, divorce and any subsequent property rights have all been equalized. Changes continue to be implemented bringing Turkey very close to a European equivalent, but for some, the process continues to be slow (Dedeoglu 2012).

Some feel that Muslims are intolerant of non-Muslim religious minorities in their midst, and incidences of discrimination, violence and injustices do occur. But such actions are not condoned or supported by the Qur'an, nor in the *Hadith*.

> Beware! Whoever is cruel and hard on a non-Muslim minority, or curtails their rights, or burdens them with more than they can bear, or takes anything from them against their free will; I (Prophet Muhammad) will complain against the person on the Day of Judgment. (Abu Dawud)

Islam recognizes that there is a plurality of religions in this world. Individuals are granted the right to choose their own faith for a forced belief is not a free belief: "there is no compulsion in religion" (*Baqarah* 2:256). While the Qur'an has always encouraged the promotion of religious tolerance, it did recognize the superiority of Muslims: "Ye are the best of peoples evolved for mankind enjoining what is right forbidding what is wrong and believing in Allah" (*Imran* 3:110) . As such, traditional Islamic teachings have often subjected those of other faiths to various forms of intolerance, humiliation, segregation and marginalization.

Even today, this occurs in various Islamic countries. That this does not occur in some countries with a majority Muslim population, such as Turkey, is a result of decisions made by political authorities. Turkey as a modern, secular and democratic country encourages diversity and protects the freedom of all regardless of religious or non-religious belief. In this sense, it has embraced the Qur'anic principle that maintains that God grants all religions, and humans are to live in peace absent of conflict and war.

At issue in much of this is the crucial need to differentiate between general Qur'anic principles and particular social, cultural or legal matters. At times, particular Qur'anic sayings need to be evaluated or analysed as offering practical solutions for particular sociocultural problems of the time. Therefore, claims made by some feminist groups that Islam orders men to suppress women are rendered invalid. Impressions that the Qur'an supports male/female inequality stem all too often from literal or direct interpretations of the Qur'an, but without taking context into consideration. Modern Muslim scholars, however, implement a historical-critical method to come to a greater understanding of the context in which such Qur'anic texts were revealed. They seek to make a distinction between the principle behind the texts and the contextual application of the principle. From this point of view, one of the basic principles of the Qur'an is that everyone is equal regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, language, age, disability and gender.

A nation such as Turkey with both traditional and modern cultural and religious expressions can serve as a model where equality and diversity can exist peacefully side by side and persons can choose for themselves how to live within the tensions that are ever present. As such, urban professionals in Turkey who are Muslim and who have been exposed to the global world may come to see equality and diversity in ways that differ from radical feminists in much of the Western world.

OPENNESS AND TOLERANCE

As globalization increases, the demand to be open to those who embrace different beliefs and values also increases. Knowledge of the beliefs, values and ways of life of others then becomes all the more important. Openness and tolerance of those things with which one agrees is easy and common enough, especially among those for whom openness and tolerance has become a virtue. Being open and tolerant of those things

with which one vehemently disagrees, however, is quite another matter and requires a measure of leniency one is not easily or generally inclined to grant. Close-mindedness and intolerance, on the other hand, stems at times from a fear of the unknown or a belief that others may threaten one's own freedom or way of life. They can result from insecurity in oneself, a psychological fear of doing things differently, or a failure to appreciate different ways of life. All of this raises questions regarding the requirement to be open and tolerant but also a discernment regarding what one should or should not tolerate.

Openness and tolerance ought not to imply or demand a cultural relativism, which can as easily betray a simple lack of awareness or even concern for others. The long-standing social, cultural and even economic practices often warrant re-examination in light of new perspectives or new situations. Practices that have been evident for centuries, such as child labour and unsafe working conditions, are tolerated less and less in modern societies. Yet, many who passionately speak out against these matters may nonetheless support abortion and euthanasia, practices almost unheard of in traditional societies. Careful reflection is required to discern what one tolerates and why.

Openness and tolerance are two concepts or attitudes that appear most when there is an atmosphere of trust. Openness, in particular, emerges once trust has been established. Self-confidence, love and respect are key components that can lead to tolerance. Tolerance accepts and respects differences of opinions or views on how things can or should be done. It also recognizes that differences can be rooted in culture.

Openness and tolerance surfaces when greater appreciation is gained for the lifestyles, perspectives and worldviews of others. It is impossible to speak of openness and tolerance to those who lack empathy for or even understanding of others. To paraphrase the German philologist Max Müller, he who knows only one worldview or way of life really knows none. Openness and tolerance cannot easily be gained or appreciated by those who are entrenched only in their own cultural perspective. A higher sense of openness and tolerance is needed that exceeds particular cultural codes and is based on universal values. To achieve this requires re-evaluating existing worldviews and ways of life, and perhaps even reorganizing education accordingly. Communities that are more plural in nature will accomplish this more easily.

Openness and tolerance has individualistic and sociopolitical dimensions. Social and political dimensions are determined through laws and consensus. Individuals should accept practices that exist in so far as they

create no direct harm. If practices violate laws, formal procedures to rectify the situation can be pursued.

The notion of "freedom" is also central to any discussion of openness and tolerance. Openness and tolerance is not about granting freedom for one person or group if the result is the loss of freedom for another. Actions curtailing the freedom of others cannot be tolerated. Beliefs, values and practices of individuals or groups of individuals can be tolerated only to the extent that they do not infringe on the beliefs, values and practices of others. As such, one cannot tolerant human indignities and the violation of basic human rights. Politics is often inclined to determine the life of humans in a total way. This must be resisted for such total control of the lives of others curtails freedom and, as such, should not be tolerated. Lack of openness and intolerance towards diverse opinions and attitudes can easily overcome a modern, democratic and secular nation. But this must be resisted. Diversity is healthy provided that it does not lead to the very thing it seeks to prevent. Resisted must be those thoughts and actions that judge or condemn others through crass or simplistic generalizations. Involved here in all of this is undoubtedly another key concept: respect and love for others.

Islam has within it fundamentalist elements that lack openness and tolerance. This is similar for Judaism, Christianity and other religions, for often their sacred texts are read in radically different ways to support beliefs and actions that clearly clash. Sacred texts must, however, be interpreted very carefully and this is where context and history become so important. Bilgrami makes the argument that revelations contained in the Mecca verses of the Qur'an have a different theme compared to those of the Medina verses. According to him, the Mecca verses focus more on the spiritual and universal aspects of Islam with the Medina verses concentrate more on matters related to state, community and inter-communal relations (Bilgrami 2002, p. 63). Building on Bilgrami's argument, Barkey claims that Islam has been able to adapt itself to many different social and cultural situations. Leaning on Geertz, who indicated that religion can lend support to a variety of social and cultural contexts by offering existential meaning, she explores how the Islam of the Ottoman Empire created a situation of openness and tolerance at certain times in its history towards other religious groupings. Barkey accepts Geertz's argument that

the mediating conditions that shape the religion are more important than the doctrines that make up the content of religion. The diversity of the

concrete substance of religious experience as lived in the everyday life of believers remains far more important than its theological content. (Barkey 2005, p. 8)

Whether or not this is the case is subject to debate, nonetheless, it can lend support to the notion that the relationship individual Muslims have with the Qur'an can as easily lend itself to openness and tolerance than to the reverse, depending on the sociocultural conditions in which they find themselves. It also means that those who claim that Islam invariably leads to oppression and violence, especially of women, have not sufficiently explored those historical and sociocultural contexts in which Islam has also supported the very opposite (Ali 2008; Manji 2003).

Turkey is a secular country, and at its foundation, reason and science were infused into a traditional Islam to create a nation where Secularism came to dominate. Perhaps it was assumed, as did some secularists, that as Turkey became more secular through constitutional regulations and institutional reforms, Islam would soon fade from the lives of people. But this clearly has not been the case, as is evident also in other Western countries. According to Keyman,

Islam has been a significant symbolic system, giving meaning to human existence and thereby forming an effective cultural basis for individual and communal identity in Turkey". [It has always provided] religious group norms and values by which individual subjects can integrate themselves into a community that gives them a more concrete feeling of belonging than (and beyond) the abstract idea of general will and laicist national identity. (Keyman 2007, p. 224)

Keyman makes the further argument that the Secularism of Turkey was never sufficiently secular but has always been influenced by Islam, and hence, Islam was never marginalized, neither at the political, communal nor economic levels. Turkey nonetheless continues to struggle to create a balance between the religious and the secular, even between various groups within society. What is unique, however, is that a certain kind of openness and tolerance has long been created within the Turkish mindset, perhaps one that goes far back into its Ottoman heritage, as argued by Barkey. While everyone may not embrace this open and tolerant mindset, it is one that has shaped and influenced a certain kind of worldview, one that recognizes the contributions made by Secularism yet one

that is grounded in Islam. It is one that strives to understand what it means to be Muslim and how to live this out in a modern, democratic and secular society. It also necessitates a certain dynamic Islam, one that values contributions and insights from the past but recognizes the need to translate them in a new situation: history does not stand still.

Environmental Concerns

The modern Western world is leaving an environmental footprint that far exceeds its population proportions relative to other parts of the world. The Western lifestyle is not especially ecologically friendly and climate changes appear to be a stark reflection of an irresponsible way of living. Environmentalists have spoken of impending and imminent catastrophic events in the form of melting icecaps, rising water levels, species disappearance and habitat pollution and destruction if we do not change our way of living. Rare is the person who has little or no awareness of these looming scenarios.

Yet, we seem to plunge headlong into more and more destructive ways of life casting caution to the wind in a collective denial of our immense vulnerability. So intent are we in our Western lifestyle pursuits that the groaning of the earth is now only faintly heard by a few who have become trained to hear it. Our modern capitalist/consumer way of life gives us increased material comforts and benefits but it comes with a huge price; the earth may not long be able to sustain this continued onslaught. We have adopted what some regard as a Cartesian dualism which not only separates the body from the soul or spirit but also separates our various kinds of sciences and knowledges: the natural from the social and the philosophical from the religious. This has deprived us of sacred insights that lie at the heart of Divine revelation—knowledge of the whole of reality (Ouis 1998; Nasr 1981).

The ecological crisis, however, comes not only because of a dualistic outlook. It also results from certain human inclinations. Humans are to be stewards of the creation but there are also certain human characteristics that lead them to abuse what has been given to them by God. While the Qur'an recognizes humans as highly evolved image bearers of God, it also characterizes them as "unjust and foolish" (*Ahzab* 33/72) and "a most ungrateful creature" (*Hajj* 22/66). The human is "given to hasty deeds" (*Isra* 17/11) and prone to "transgress all bounds in that he looks

upon himself as self-sufficient" (*Alaq* 96/6-7). Ouis feels that, according to the Qur'an, "pride, egoism, disobedience to God and lack of reverence initiated a wrong attitude towards nature" (Ouis 1998, p. 156).

Reflection on our extravagant ways is needed, and this needs to come from worldviews and lifestyle other than those of Capitalism and Consumerism. Some feel this can come only from the religious worldviews, and most specifically the Abrahamic worldviews. Yet, secular environmental groups and new earth-based spiritualities or worldviews often surpass the Abrahamic religions by their sustainable practices. Nonetheless, the Abrahamic worldviews, in asserting that the earth belongs to God and that humans are its stewards, have reason to take up common cause with others to become more environmental friendly (Gottlieb 2006). Turkey is a modern nation that is undergoing tremendous development. Muslims need to reflect on how environmentally friendly that development should be, and this comes by way of examining what Islam has to say about how humans should live in the environment God has created for them (Khalid 2002).

According to Islam's theology of nature, the earth is full of verses pertaining to God. In other words, each and every existence is evidence for God's existence. As such, the earth is a major source for humans to become aware of and to recognize God. A Muslim thinks that there is always an ontological connection between the creation and God, even if the two are always to be kept distinct. The only dualism acceptable to Muslims is that between God and the creation; all other forms of dualism are to be rejected. There is no contrasting of body and soul, the spiritual and the worldly or the holy and the profane—all are aspects of God's creation (Ouis 1998). The theological concept of *tawhid*, a belief in God as one, teaches that all life is also essentially one, a unified whole created by God.

The Qur'an mentions that everything on earth is created for the benefit of humans. In this sense, the earth is one of the greatest blessings from God. A Muslim benefits from the earth materially, and this should be done in a moderate and stewardly manner, not leading to extremes in living. The bond humans form with the earth should not turn into a relationship based on domination and exploitation.

Humans not only depend on the earth for their existence, their desire for the aesthetic—for beauty, splendour, grandeur and art—is also satisfied by means of it. The earth also has a spiritual dimension. Every earthly creation praises and glorifies God. From this point of view, it can

be understood that everything on earth has a conscience or spirit, even if humans cannot completely understand this praise and glorification, as stated in the Qur'an. In light of what is stated in the Qur'an, a Muslim comes with a new perspective on his or her relationship with the earth. As such, a Muslim is expected to have a more meaningful relationship with the creation. Rather than regarding the earth merely as a means to satisfy daily needs, a Muslim sees it in a more full-orbed manner also as a meaningful spiritual encounter with God.

Such awareness of the environment inevitably motivates Muslims to have a positive, stewardly, harmonic, meaningful and emotional relationship with the earth. In renewing one's lifestyle in this manner, environmental disasters can be decreased with less likelihood of ecological ruin. Islam mandates Muslims to become environmentally sensitive and responsibility: it is their duty. Protecting and developing a harmonious relationship with the environment is indeed an obligation of the human. Muhammad stated that, "Even though you know the day of doom may come at any moment, if you have a tree, do not hesitate to plant it". As stated above, Nasr suggests that the Muslim should "not only feed the poor but also avoid polluting running water. It is pleasing in the eyes of God not only to be kind to one's parents, but also to plant trees and treat animals gently and with kindness" (Nasr 1997, p. 9). This suggests, according to Nasr, that we should maintain our contact with the environment until our last breath.

Within the larger ecological debate, two essential positions hold the greatest sway. Biocentrism states that nature has intrinsic value in itself, whether or not humans live in it. The earth is a living entity quite capable of existing without humans. In fact, humans appear to be its biggest threat. Anthropocentrism states that nature has value because it is beneficial to humans. Humans are at the centre and use the earth as an object and source for their seemingly insatiable needs. Many ecologists argue that anthropocentrism is the biggest threat to the survival of the earth.

Theocentrism is a third view offered by Islam (Ouis 1998). It is Islam's theology of nature. It gives nature an independent value based on the view that the earth is a creation of God given to humans in trust. Humans as vice-regents (*caliph*) are mandated to be its stewards. Such a view does not regard humans as essentially ecological culprits but as stewards with a responsibility to care for that to which they have been entrusted (Ouis 1998, p. 162). As stewards of the creation, knowledge and education become pivotal so that humans will know how to be stewardly *caliphs*. According to Ramadan,

reason, intelligence, language, and writing will grant people the quali-
ties required to enable them to be God's *caliphs* (vicegerents) on earth,
and from the very beginning, Quranic Revelation allies recognition of the
Creator to knowledge and science, thus echoing the origin of creation
itself. (Ramadan 2007, p. 31)

Islam's ecological knowledge structure presents "a holistic and integral
epistemology" and draws on a wide array of existing knowledges—from
that which is revealed (Qur'an) to that which is generated by humans
(natural and social sciences)—to better understand how humans can live
responsibly in nature (Mohamed 2014, p. 319).

How Muslims in Turkey will implement all of this remains to be
seen. Qur'anic teachings such as "Those who, when they spend, are
not extravagant and not niggardly, but hold a just (balance) between
those (extremes)" (Furqan 25/67) are surely mandated to economize
the use of natural resources before they are depleted and unavailable for
future generations. Since the Qur'an regards it a sin to waste, the cur-
rent ecological mantra "reduce, reuse and recycle" must also be heeded
by Muslims so that nothing is squandered in our all too often wasteful
and excessive use of natural resources. A moderate way of living on a
general subsistence level for everybody is to be preferred to that which
we increasingly see around us where only a few live shameful lives of
extravagance and luxury (Ouis 1998). What it will mean mostly, how-
ever, is adopting an "Islamic worldview", one which includes "ritual
obligations and other religious duties as well as efforts of personal or
social significance, including, environmental care" (Wan Daud 1989: 74,
quoted from Mohamed 2014, p. 320). The Qur'an makes explicit the
link between knowledge and action; God repeatedly praises "those who
believe and do righteous deeds".

Conclusions

What divides humans, and leads to conflict, strife and warfare, are not
beliefs and values held in common; it is how those beliefs and values
are particularized, how they are put into practice. Our understanding
of these universal beliefs and values are shaped and influenced by the
particular situations in which we live: cultural traditions, institutional
structures, educational backgrounds, social environments and more.
We are all products of our time and place. Beliefs and values such as jus-
tice, human dignity and the sacredness of life play out in certain ways

within the modern, democratic and secular Turkish context and are shaped in part by traditional Islamic beliefs and values. As with all "People of the Book", the combination can render unique insights and enhance dialogue on some of the most complex and contentious issues before us, offering guidance and direction in how to meet the challenges of the present, with insights gleaned from the wisdom of the past.

Issues of justice will challenge any society as we move further into the twenty-first century. Islam will continue to be troubled by the past that has been rife with injustices, especially towards women. But careful discernment between principles emanating from the Qur'an and cultural mores may yield new insights into matters of justice that will rectify wrongs of the past. Certain humility in asserting to know the will of God and knowledge gained from the philosophical, cultural and political insights of respected leaders past and present will enhance the march towards creating a just society. Turkey stands at a crossroad, for it is well equipped to embrace insights from the best of its secular and religious traditions to enhance justice in all areas of life.

While religious traditions value dignity, they have not always lived up to what they espouse. Muslims, as well as non-Muslims, live in cultures and traditions that tend to dignify the rich and the powerful. While dignity bestowed on these is not necessarily unmerited or misguided, Muslims must at the same time reflect on why they grant them such dignities. They must also examine their hearts and consciences to see if similar dignities should be bestowed on others, especially those so identified in the Qur'an. All humans are created by God and, as such, merit dignity, even those whose identity, behaviour and actions may lead one to feel otherwise. Insights gained from the social sciences easily confirm that public policies all too often continue to render indignities on those who historically have been marginalized. Turkey as a modern, secular and democratic society with considerable economic wealth and power can create opportunities so that dignity in the form of employment, opportunity, education and healthcare can be bestowed on those who so often lack them. Doing so might require the efforts of Muslims who have been awakened to the Qur'anic injunction to dignify all of God's creatures.

One of the major issues that will continue to confront humans in the twenty-first century will be that of discerning what it means to be human. It will arise in regard to healthcare, education, employment and more, for issues such as who to keep alive, how long to prolong life, who

to educate and why, who is or is not productive and who is expendable and when will become more critical. In a society with plural worldviews and interests, definitions of the meaning of human life shift. Islam has, in general, revealed that all of life is sacred, especially human life. But even such a general principle requires discernment, for the preservation of life is not an absolute as societies, past and present, reveal. While Muslims grant abortions in the first four months of foetal life, aligning themselves with the demands of many in the modern world, for example, they may well do all in their power to make it "safe, legal and rare", as advocated by moderates opposed to abortion but also opposed to criminalizing it. But they ought also to align themselves with certain of their secular counterparts who also recognize that to be human is connected to living well on the earth. The Qur'an makes it clear that humans are *caliphs*; they are to be stewards of what they have been given by God.

Globalization has focused increased attention on equality and diversity and those places in the world where huge disparities continue to exist. The modern Western world has become increasingly vocal about disparities especially between the genders. Here too Islam has not fared well, at least in terms of media reporting. Onus will be placed on those who recognize that Islamic teachings regarding men and women need to be understood in terms of the context in which they are uttered so that Qur'anic principles free both genders to be what God created them to be rather than have cultural traditions elevate one gender to the detriment of the other. But no less attention needs to be focused on disparities between rich and poor. Here the Qur'anic teachings are clear for such disparities are contrary to the wishes of God. No less is the injunction to encourage diversity, for all are creatures of God. Muslims stand at a remarkable crossroad as they embrace the contributions of modernity from insights rendered from Qur'anic teachings. Muslims are challenged to live out their beliefs and values regarding equality and diversity in a society that is dynamic but also one beset by major issues that can easily thwart initiatives in this direction.

Europe has presented Turkey with a number of demands in its initiative to join the European Union. Some of those demands hint strongly at the need for Turkey to become more tolerant and open to the ways of the Western world. There is a fear among many Europeans that inviting into its ranks a country with a majority Islamic population may unleash within its fold a kind of Islamic fundamentalism as found in many other Muslim-dominated countries. Such fears may be unsubstantiated but

they are nonetheless real. As such, Turkey will not only need to become more open and tolerant in the eyes of the rest of Europe but will also need to be perceived as such. Here the onus falls on moderate Muslims to demonstrate that they have appropriated a Western mindset. But what that Western mindset entails may be difficult to discern and even more difficult to demonstrate. Turkey can be as open and tolerant as citizens of other European countries, and at times perhaps even more so. Yet, should openness and tolerance of everything be the hallmark of a European mindset? One must necessarily draw a line in the sand on certain issues. Muslims living in the modern world who are guided by Qur'anic principles and insights from other knowledge sources may well be able to join with fellow religionists in Europe in giving guidance and direction to some of the society's greatest challenges. They can both be open to new changes yet oppose economic and social initiatives that can be seen as destructive to a society in the long term. A delicate balance exists here and requires wisdom, discernment and courage to which moderate Muslims have much to contribute.

One of the pressing challenges that face us today is that of climate change. Our modern world and its unprecedented growth and advancements have come back to haunt us. Scientists and others have pressed upon us that in general our lifestyles, enriched by modern convenience, travel and communication, are having adverse effects on the environment and especially climate. There is a reluctance by many of us, however, to change our ways of life and as such we face an uncertain future, if not a perilous one. Turkey, with its rapid economic growth in recent decades but also its urban population densities and disparities between socio-economic groups, faces the same challenges as any other country in the modern world. But Turkey can also position itself to become an environmental leader if its moderate Muslim population joins forces with other religious groups across Europe to create an ecological consciousness based on its regard for the earth as a creation of God. Muslims, as with Jews and Christians, are tasked with stewardship of the earth, not its neglect, abuse and destruction. Their very existence and fulfilment is dependent on living in communal harmony with the earth from which they draw their very sustenance. The Abrahamic worldview, perhaps more so than any other, is grounded in the belief that the earth is a sacred creation of God. Humans are to be caretakers for abuse of the creation can be seen also as heaping abuse on God as its Creator. The degree to which Muslims become more conscious of how their lifestyles negatively impact the

health of the planet is the degree to which they are to reflect on how they are invoke not neglect God's injunction to be *caliphs*.

Similarly to others worldwide, they embrace universal beliefs and values that guide their thoughts and actions. Similarly to others worldwide, they understand and live them out according to the particular context in which they live. Turkey stands at a crucial juncture between more traditionally based Islamic societies that are a bane for many in the Western world and more liberal Western societies that are a bane for many in the Muslim world. Moderate Muslims in Turkey are challenged to give expression to their universal beliefs and values guided by Qur'anic principles, traditional teachings and other modern knowledge sources. To do so, however, requires an understanding of those beliefs and values and how to live them out in a plural context.

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Conclusions

Islam is the second largest religion in the world, second only to Christianity. Like Christianity, its influence has spread far beyond its birthplace, and after 1400 years, its adherents number approximately 1.8 billion and live in many regions of the world (Pew 2017). Its impact is formidable, shaping and influencing the lives of many individuals, groups of individuals, governments, societies and cultures. Throughout its history, it has shaped art, architecture, science, literature, law, public policy and more. Its influence continues to grow in the modern world, even in countries embracing secular policies and ways of life. Islam is more than a religion as it is often conceived today. That is, it is more than beliefs and rituals confined to private lives. It has public expressions. As such, Islam is a worldview: a *vision of life* and a *way of life*. It impacts how people view or think about the world, and it impacts how they live in the world.

Turkey is a modern and democratic nation, and guardedly secular. Since the beginning of its republican government, it has separated religion and politics, and strongly resisted any form of *Islamism*, that is, a politicized Islam that seeks to overtly influence the shaping of government policy. It is especially resistant to any attempt to institute *Sharia Law* as the law of the land. It has embraced a *laïcité*, a model similar to that emulated in countries such as France.

Turkey is also overwhelmingly Muslim. Islam is the majority belief of Turkish citizens. This is also recognized by the government, which has taken steps to ensure an Islam that is open to modern values and is non-politicized through its supervision of religious education by the Ministry

of Education and management of the mosques through the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*). Turkey seeks to avoid two extremes: a radical Secularism and an Islamic fundamentalism. In essence, it seeks a middle path.

An Islam that avoids those two extremes may also be an Islam that leads to a better understanding of Islam for both the Western world and more traditional Islamic cultures. Understanding such an Islam may be best done not be focusing narrowly on Islamic doctrinal beliefs and ritual activities but on Islam as a worldview—an exploration of a *view of life* and a *way of life*. Looking at that worldview not in the abstract but as it is understood and lived in a particular way yields a more comprehensive understanding of Islam that avoids stereotypes and misinterpretations and an Islam lived out in a modern, democratic and secular context. The approach taken here has been comprehensive as it engaged a variety of perspectives and disciplines in asking age-old questions in light of contemporary challenges.

The views and understandings of an Islamic worldview that have been presented here are those of a particular group of individuals. This worldview perspective does not assume to be representative of Turkey or elsewhere; in fact, it is unique to their particular situation. No doubt, this may raise numerous questions. Yet, such a worldview exploration of a particular group of people may yield benefits rather than concerns, for Islam must be dynamic as any religion must if it is to engage its adherents in the context of a modern, democratic and secular society.

A worldviews approach recognizes that our situation and context influences and shapes how we look at the world and how we live in it. Families, communities, education, gender, socio-economic situations and more shape our views and the manner in which they are expressed, as they have shaped the views that are expressed in this book. Team members also know what it means to live in a modern, democratic and secular Turkish context, for this has also influenced their beliefs, values and ways of life. Yet, all of these do not necessarily define them, for influences other than one's environment also work powerfully to determine views and ways of life, which in themselves always remain dynamic. Education especially has been a factor. All team members are highly educated, well read and very articulate in expressing their views. They are aware of the variety of knowledge sources that give insight into one's understanding. As such, the approach taken here has been dynamic rather than prescriptive as it reached into the heart of Islam to determine an Islamic

worldview. A worldview framework has been used to describe that world-view. This book has been a journey to that end.

Chapter 2 addressed issues that are germane to gaining insight into an Islamic worldview using a framework that focuses on cultural dimensions. It begins in an important way with queries about what stories, metanarratives and sacred texts influence that understanding of the world. For the Islamic worldview represented here, the Qur'an remains a primary and influential text that gives guidance and direction. It grounds Islam. But it is also known that the Qur'an was revealed at a particular time, place and context. It must be interpreted, not only to discern principles from prescriptions but also to comprehend its larger metanarrative, for the Qur'anic discourse differs radically from other perspectives regarding meaning and purpose, why humans exist and more. The Islamic worldview described here interprets Qur'anic texts with assistance from other narratives that come in the form of novels, poetry and songs. Muslims are challenged, as are all those who embrace ancient texts, to determine what can be taken literally, metaphorically or symbolically, knowing full well that what an author intended by the words written is not necessarily how we might understand them today. Other knowledge sources can shed light on interpreting Qur'anic discourse.

This is no small undertaking for radically different interpretations lead to radically different teachings that in turn can result in radically different beliefs and actions. The beliefs expressed from this Islamic worldview perspective may differ from those that have been expressed elsewhere, indicating that what some regard as specific teachings of Islam, that one gender is inferior to the other, for example, may in fact not be what the Qur'an teaches for Muslims living in the twenty-first century in modern, democratic and secular societies (Esposito 2002). Such a position is arrived at through one's own intense search and in discussion with others, using whatever resources are at one's disposal. It is also a position that becomes one's own and is not simply accepting what others advocate or proclaim. It is an Islam with teachings that one can critically assess and personally embrace. It is also one that takes distance from those whose violent, destructive and repressive actions are proclaimed in the name of God, for one comes to understand that these clearly go against the will of God. Teachings must be reasonable and will be assisted by historical-critical methods of inquiry.

An Islamic worldview recognizes that discerning right and wrong relies heavily on the teachings of the Qur'an. But here again, insights

from other knowledge systems, principally science and reason, can shed great light on what this entails. Humans are to strive to be good persons in all that they do, for Islam is also a way of life. Being a good person before God begins with engagement in rituals but extends to social action and interaction.

Rituals form important roles in all worldviews, religious and secular. For Muslims, as well as Jews and Christians, they provide an opportunity to encounter God. The Qur'an has prescribed particular ways in which Muslims can encounter God, such as through daily prayers, fasting and the pilgrimage to Mecca. These rituals are, however, the means by which to connect with God; they are not an end in themselves. An Islamic worldview understands that routine performance of rituals loses its purpose and meaning when cognizance is not taken of why they are performed. But this also means that Muslims become free to find new and innovative ways to connect with God that go beyond certain prescribed rituals.

Like other worldviews, social cohesion serves to strengthen one's place in the world. Beliefs, values and behaviours are transmitted and given support through social connections. Humans are social creatures and do not exist in isolation. An Islamic worldview recognizes that one's faith is supported and strengthened through connections with mosque communities but even more so through connections with families and extended families. The extended family unit becomes the place where beliefs are reinforced but so too are behaviours, such as generosity and care and concern for others. Within this context, hospitality too is reinforced, as in the sharing of food as a way of connecting with others. Muslim hospitality exemplifies communal connectedness, a way of life considerably different from that often found in the Individualism of the Western world. Yet a highly mobile urban way of life experiences communal connectedness in ways different than that of smaller rural areas. Individualism easily creeps into a modern urban existence, and this too can impact an Islamic worldview.

An Islamic worldview also becomes reinforced through specific experiences of a heightened nature (*ekstasis*) that takes one out of a more routine way of life. A pilgrimage to Mecca, for example, may represent the lifetime highlight in a Muslim's religious experience, where a journey to Islam's most holy place will draw one into a communal ecstatic experience that will be remembered throughout one's life. Fasting during Ramadan and naming ceremonies as well offer up important experiences for the faithful.

An Islamic worldview is further discerned by responding to ultimate or existential questions. Stories, metanarratives and sacred texts serve to address these questions and provide important sources from which to draw responses. These questions attempt at definitive answers but because of the inquisitive and constantly changing nature of the human, there is recognition that conclusive answers are elusive—human knowledge is limited. Thoughtful responses are advanced but new questions constantly arise, which prompt yet further responses for human knowledge and awareness are dynamic. Nonetheless, an Islamic worldview emerged from reflective and interactive engagements with these questions. Though hesitation surfaced at times, there was no reticence in clearly marking out certain parameters. Responses regarding meaning and purpose of life, for example, were always ultimately linked to a belief in the existence of God. Meaning and purpose of life, whether life in general or human life in particular, could not be conceived of apart from some connection to God. From an Islamic worldview perspective, meaning and purpose is not something pertaining exclusively to the here and now, that is, an exclusive secular focus. There is a larger meaning and purpose apart from what humans generate for themselves. Yet individual meaning and purpose in the here and now is significant, for Muslims are responsible for giving meaning and purpose to their lives. But it is affirmed that this meaning and purpose is given greater significance when it is linked to a mystery that is beyond the human.

As such, it is affirmed that the nature of the human is also linked to this greater mystery revealed and known to humans as God. While the question of how precisely human life came to its present form is best left to the inquisitive investigations of the natural sciences, an Islamic worldview affirms that humans ultimately came to be through an act of God and not by a mere random cosmic accident. Yet, it affirms that humans are made of the stuff of the earth but are enlivened by the spirit of God. Further, what it means to be human is not determined by their ability to reason, reflect or be economically productive; it is in forming relationships with God and fellow humans. Humans are created in the image of God, mandated as *caliphs* to be stewards of the earth and tasked to unfold their potential with the gifts given to them by God.

As they unfold their potential, humans need to discern right actions, for the human is tasked with making choices. They are to be in a relationship with God and strive to be good persons, that is, they must act ethically. What it means to be a good person is straightforward in many

cases, but not always. The Qur'an gives guidelines and directions in the form of principles and models but these must be translated into concrete action in contexts much different than when the Qur'an was revealed. An Islamic worldview acknowledges that Muslims can be assisted in their decision-making by reference to Qur'anic principles and Islamic tradition but also by appropriating insights gained from other knowledge sources, recognizing that ethical action may differ from one context to another.

Yet, an Islamic worldview affirms that in all of this, a Muslim seeks to remain connected to God and to do God's bidding. This already implies a statement of faith that there is a God and that there exists a power, force or being greater than the human. It is a statement of faith that is contrary to an increasing vocal number of people who claim there is no God. Muslims claim that there is no god, *but* God. Humans are the highest on the chain of living beings on the earth but there is a greater being that is Creator of all things.

Yet, an Islamic worldview acknowledges that the nature of God is not completely known to humans; humans cannot fully fathom the being of God—God is beyond human comprehension. The 99 names attributed to God by the Qur'an, for example, are attempts to make God known to humans, using language and concepts that humans can understand. Humans can only understand God as God is communicated to them, and this is always in relational, contextual or existential form. Yet, questions concerning the nature, being and actions of God persist for those embracing an Islamic worldview. Some arise due to adverse life experiences on earth, a subject of concern regarding the so-called theodicy question—why does God allow so much violence, suffering and death. This has become a stumbling block for an increasing number of people, yet it need not result in a disbelief in God. Other challenging questions arise from Atheism that claims that a Creator is unnecessary in the evolutionary unfolding of the universe. New studies from the neurobiology claim that notions of God arise from and are little more than the neurological activity of a biological brain. These and other issues continue to present challenges to those who embrace an Islamic worldview—they beckon responses and cannot be ignored.

Even more challenging today is the notion of life after this life. Those embracing an Islamic worldview affirm that there is existence beyond this life, and that their brief time on this earth is not the end of the human journey. Life in the here and now is but a temporal and transitory existence, but much more awaits the human beyond the grave. So does the

Day of Judgement, for all humans will be held responsible for their deeds while they lived on Earth. But what all of this might entail for an Islamic worldview is not altogether clear. Images of rewards and punishments surfacing in the Qur'an but also in Islamic tradition *(Hadith)* must be carefully interpreted for not all that is mentioned is to be taken literally. Nonetheless, what is made clear from an Islamic worldview perspective is that Muslims must focus on living a good life in the here and now, and that good deeds will be rewarded when the veil of death is lifted for them. An Islamic worldview as a *vision of life* and a *way of life* involves an encounter with God and how to respond in light of that encounter. It wrestles with understanding how to encounter Allah as Muslims journey in this world and into the next.

An Islamic worldview is further deepened when it responds to onto-logical and epistemological challenges. What constitutes the nature of the human and human life and what constitutes knowledge have urgency in the twenty-first century in light of huge advances in science, neuro-science and the philosophy and sociology of knowledge. For an Islamic worldview to gain credence in the twenty-first century in Turkey and elsewhere, it must confront these questions. And so it does. It affirms that humans are earth creatures, and with the aid of scientific insights, it can also affirm that humans are late in coming into being, products of slow evolutionary processes by which God brought them into being. Yet, humans are not solely products of the earth; they are not essentially biological and physical for they are also spiritual. There is a spiritual dimension to human existence and a metaphysical dimension to reality. Humans connect with God on a spiritual level, and this enlivens their whole being and existence.

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges to an Islamic worldview, and no less a Jewish and Christian worldview, concerns epistemological ques-tions—how do we know what we know? Can Muslims with any certainty affirm that God exists, that the Qur'an is a revelation from God, that there is life after this life and more? Grand metanarratives receive little currency today for they all too often have resulted in attempts at power and influence. Postmodernism argues that there are no grand narratives, just multiple stories, each attempting to understand reality from a par-ticular perspective. The truth of a metanarrative, it asserts, lies in how it transforms individuals, not how it corresponds to some objective real-ity. All knowledge is subjective. An Islamic worldview recognizes that its beliefs and values must transform individuals, connecting them with

God and making them better people. It recognizes that human knowledge is subjective; that what we know is shaped by human concepts, language, culture and discourse. Yet, it affirms an objective reality, even if it is mediated. Humans perceive something "out there". They come to understand it through their own processes of knowing. Then they give it meaning. An Islamic worldview perspective recognizes that at times that meaning can be fraught with errors, distortions and misrepresentations. Human knowledge and understanding has its limitations. Nonetheless, it recognizes that while certainty can be assisted with a variety of knowledge sources such as science and reason, ultimate certainty necessarily is embedded in a faith of some kind, and in this case, a faith that is ultimately embedded in revelations emerging from the Qur'an.

While worldviews generally tend to focus on views of the world—*visions of life*—worldviews are also *ways of life*. A worldview as a *way of life* puts beliefs and values into action, into daily living. Focusing on universal beliefs and values and examining how they are understood and put into action in particular contexts will reveal much about a worldview. To expand and deepen even further an understanding of an Islamic worldview, Chap. 6 focused on a number of universal beliefs and values to see how they played out or came to be understood in particular ways in the Turkish context. Actions and behaviours speak volumes about the worldview we hold.

The Islamic worldview that has emerged from this book affirms a number of universal beliefs and values. One of those is the universal principle of justice that is understood in a particular way, which may or may not accord with the views of others. This difference of views regarding what is just results from the fact that this worldview emerges from a Turkish society confronted with a modern, secular outlook but also one that experiences traditional Islamic ways of life. What is common, nonetheless, is an Islamic worldview that affirms justice as a supreme virtue and looks to the Qur'an for principles to give direction and guidance for just action. Justice is understood in general as being fair in all one's activities: in business dealings, in how one treats others, in political affairs, legal matters and more. Justice is also not to be meted out harshly, as some feel is warranted by *Sharia Law*, for example. Further, for an Islamic worldview justice in a larger secular society means that certain behaviours that may be considered immoral by the Qur'an are not to be regarded by the state as criminal and punishable by law. It also affirms that basic human rights are always to be protected and given priority regardless of what a person does.

An Islamic worldview insists that humans must be treated with dignity. All must be respected regardless of their status and rank. While dignity can be extended in a special way to those fulfilling particular roles in society or in public affairs, even the most destitute are still creatures of God and must not be neglected. The Qur'an gives examples from the life of Muhammad that serve as models for a worldview perspective that includes all, even of those with whom one fiercely disagrees. An Islamic worldview, therefore, supports democracy, to ensure that there is a place for everyone. This does not deny, however, that there are huge challenges. Poverty, lack of healthcare, educational opportunities, adequate housing and meaningful employment continues to rob people of their dignity. But an Islamic worldview supports endeavours to improve the welfare of the disadvantaged, encouraging all to extend charity to those who are all too often left at the margins of society.

Linked to the dignity of humans is the notion of the sacredness of life, another universal principle at the heart of an Islamic worldview. All humans have a right to life and that right is based not on individual abilities but on being creatures of God. An Islamic worldview recognizes that life is complex and so is the human and as such much discourse surrounds the notion of the beginning of life and an absolute right to life. For example, foetal life in the first forty days is not considered human for the soul has not yet entered into it, according to more traditional Islamic views. But this remains controversial today for our understanding of when life begins has been enhanced by discoveries in science. Some Muslim scholars permit abortion until the fourth month; others do not support it at all. Turkish society has permitted it only in the first ten weeks. Acknowledging individual circumstances and granting freedom of choice, an Islamic worldview finds abortions regrettable yet concedes that it should be "legal, safe and rare".

The sacredness of life has now also come to focus on non-human life. An Islamic worldview affirms that all of life is sacred because it is a creation of God. Humans must, therefore, treat non-human life with respect. As *caliphs*, they may use all non-human life to meet their needs but this must be done in a manner that is not destructive, harmful and wasteful. Unnecessary pain must not be inflicted on animals when they are used in the service of humans.

It is in the area of equality and diversity that Islam has received considerable criticism, especially from the Western world. But an Islamic worldview affirms the equality of all people and seeks to be inclusive. The rights of women are upheld and equal access for them is encouraged, in

particular regarding education and employment opportunities. While some Qur'anic verses appear to discriminate against women, they must be viewed in the time and context in which they were revealed. The larger principle of equality overrides particular cultural traditions, and this is recognized by an Islamic worldview. So is the notion of diversity. The Qur'an commends diversity, and this principle is acknowledged in Turkish democratic society where pluralism is applauded for all the benefits it bestows. Again, all of these matters are complex and not without controversy and opposition, but an Islamic worldview upholds the principle of equality and diversity and seeks to implement it in all aspects of society.

No less complex and controversial is the principle of openness and tolerance. Openness and tolerance increases when there is greater awareness and understanding of others, especially those whose *views of life* and *ways of life* are different from one's own. A plural and democratic society will incorporate diverse ways of life to which not everyone subscribes but tolerates or accepts nonetheless, including those of fundamentalists and extremists. An Islamic worldview does not tolerate, however, behaviours that are harmful to others, ways of life that curtail the freedom of others and actions which result in human indignities and the violation of basic human rights. Such an understanding has a long history of support that may stretch back to the Ottoman Empire but nonetheless one more open than those still enmeshed in traditional and conservative Islamic cultures. It is also a worldview that is dynamic for it recognizes modern societies, and cultures are constantly changing. Yet, it may also lend some stability to a modern society in that it is inherently progressively conservative.

An Islamic worldview would be remiss if it did not also reflect and act on environmental concerns that are increasingly at the forefront of global agendas. It recognizes that humans have been foolish and greedy, which has led to behaviours that may soon have catastrophic consequences for the planet. It reminds people that they are *caliphs*, stewards of the earth, mandated to care for its unfolding as they unfold themselves as responsible creatures of God. Humans are earth creatures dependent on the earth for their survival and well-being. They are to care for the gift of the earth that has been given to them by God. They are to adopt a lifestyle that is sustainable and develops a harmonic, meaningful and emotional relationship with the earth. An Islamic worldview avoids the extremes of a biocentric and anthropocentric connection with the earth and adopts

a theocentric view, one which recognizes that the world belongs to God and has an independent value but is given to humans in trust. It mandates Muslims to use the knowledge sources available to them to better learn the rhythms of nature and how humans can leave a smaller and softer footprint on the earth. It also reminds them that God dislikes those who waste.

The Islamic worldview presented in this book has been shaped by two powerful forces: a modern, democratic and secular society, on the one hand, that reaches back almost a 100 years and a rich religious tradition, on the other hand, that reaches back almost 1400 years. It has been shaped and influenced by numerous factors. It is comprehensive in that it touches on various aspects of life, all of which impact and shape one's *vision of life* and one's *way of life*. It wrestles with traditional views and interpretations of sacred texts and tries to understand them in new and changing contexts. It uses a variety of knowledge sources to achieve a greater understanding of itself, of others and also of the complexities of life.

Religious worldviews will not disappear anytime soon. In fact, their moderate views may again serve to give renewed meaning and purpose to life. The Islamic worldview emerging from this book may serve to give renewed meaning and purpose to a Western way of life that has achieved much for humanity but at a great price. The Islamic worldview emerging from this book may also be an inspiration for Muslims in various parts of the world where religious conflict rages and results in much death and destruction. It is also hoped that the Islamic worldview presented in this book will continue to stimulate discussion and deepen insight into what it means to be human in this world. It is further hoped that this worldview will enhance dialogue with others on important issues in the public square, giving guidance and direction on some of the most complex and contentious issues humans face.

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