

Al-Attas's Critique of the Christian-Western Worldview: A Historical-Philosophical Review

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Abstract

The article reflects on the Attasian perspective and epistemology of the West, by highlighting the critique of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas of Western secularism and the production of its modern secular outlook that projected Hellenistic influence on its intellectual and historical tradition, arising from its physical and materialistic concern which contradict with Islamic teaching of ethics and morality and its metaphysical worldview. Its objective is to survey its doctrinal impact on Muslim spiritual life which has caused confusion and error in their vision of reality and truth. The study is based on descriptive-qualitative approaches in the form of literature and documentary survey. The data were analyzed using inductive and deductive method by way of analytic, historical, empirical, hermeneutical, and philological technique. The finding reveals that al-Attas's critique of the West was designed to dismantle its dewesternization and desecularization framework and the corruption of knowledge and its ideological impact on Muslim society. Its discursive ground was argued in his work on Islamic Metaphysics that defined "Islamic psychology, Islamic cosmology and Islamic ontology" articulating its nature and difference from Western philosophy influenced by its European-Christian thought embedded in its religious experience that make up its substance, premises and values. The research contributes to highlight al-Attas's philosophical argument and his critique of the West and its contemporary relevance in Muslim society.

Keywords: Al-Attas, Dewesternization, Secularism, Islamic Worldview, Adab.

INTRODUCTION

The thought of Tan Sri Professor Di Raja Terpuji Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas on the structure of Western civilization, epistemology, and ideology represents one of the most significant intellectual responses from the Islamic world to the challenges of modernity. Al-Attas firmly identifies that the crisis currently facing the West—and which is being exported to other civilizations—is a fundamental and widespread crisis of knowledge. According to him, the root of this crisis resides in Christian-Western thought and the historical background dominantly shaped by the philosophical foundations of

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secularism, humanism, liberalism, and materialism.¹ The secular view that regards nature as *qadim* (*eternal*) has fostered a total disenchantment towards religion, systematically neglecting divine value (*rabbani*), and underestimating the role of revelation as a source of knowledge.² The impact of this materialistic view is very evident in the Western intellectual tradition, leading to the corruption of knowledge and a fallacy of understanding.³ This chaos arises from the dualistic dichotomy of Western epistemology—namely, the rigid separation between the sacred and the profane, spirit and matter, and revelation and reason—as profoundly discussed in his classic work, *Islam and Secularism*.⁴ The limitations of rationalism, empiricism, positivism, and pragmatism, which are restricted only to the natural sciences, are considered a total failure in reaching the essence of existence, making science a very dangerous tool for nature and humanity due to its flawed framework regarding God, man, and revelation.⁵

Previous studies have given extensive attention to al-Attas's thought. His major work has been the subject of repeated analysis; for example, Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud has explained how patterns of secularization have infiltrated the consciousness of various *ummahs*, causing the collapse of *adab*, the dichotomy of knowledge, and the emergence of incompetent leadership. Furthermore, al-Attas's critique of the Western worldview is also highlighted in the comparison made by Muhammad Hanapi, who examined the views of al-Attas and Pendita Za'ba in responding to Western hegemony, demonstrating the need for a rational scholarly attitude rather than wholesale acceptance.⁶ Other studies also highlight al-Attas's thesis on the tragedy in the Western religious tradition, as explained in *The Meaning and Experience of Happiness in Islam*,⁷ which differentiates the Islamic concept of happiness (*sa'adah*) that comes from fulfilling the highest purpose, from *shaqawah* (misery) that resembles the Western conception.⁸ Subsequently, the study by

¹ Achmad Muhibin Zuhri et al., "Chinese Muslims' Ways of Being Nationalist: Combining Islamic Cosmopolitanism, Acculturation and Social Roles," *QIJIS (Quidus International Journal of Islamic Studies)* 9, no. 2 (2021): 279–314, <https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v9i2.9649>.

² Basim Aldahadha and Mohammad Al Dwakat, "Development of an Islamic Temporal Focus Scale: Factorial Analysis, Validity, and Reliability," *Islamic Guidance and Counseling Journal* 7, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.25217/0020247442900>.

³ Mohd Nor Wan Daud (Wan.), *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization* (International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1998).

⁴ Miroslawa Czerniawska and Joanna Szydlo, "Conditions for Attitudes towards Native Culture, Religion and Church and Religiously Motivated Ethics," *European Research Studies* XXIII, no. 4 (2020): 123–34.

⁵ Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas (Syed.), *Islam and Secularism* (Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, 1978).

⁶ Muhamad Hanapi Jamaludin (P54171), "Peradaban barat menurut Syed Muhammad Naquib al Attas dan Pendita Za'ba : kajian perbandingan" (Dissertation, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2014), <https://ptsdigital.ukm.my/jspui/handle/123456789/456108>.

⁷ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, "The Meaning and Experience of Happiness in Islām," in *Consciousness & Reality*, ed. Sayyid Jalal al-Din Ashtiyani et al. (BRILL, 2000), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004452930_007.

⁸ Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas (Syed.), *Islām, the Concept of Religion and the Foundation of Ethics and Morality: A Lecture Delivered on Monday the 5th of April 1976 to the International Islamic Conference Held Under the Auspices of the Islamic Council of Europe in the Hall of the Royal Commonwealth Society, London* (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia, 1976); Al-Attas, "The Meaning and Experience of Happiness in Islām."

Huringgin and Azfathir discusses the concept of de-westernization put forward by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and its relevance to the Islamization of knowledge.⁹ Merican discusses the theoretical framework and perspective of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas in responding to and criticizing the Western worldview and knowledge (*Occidental Knowledge*).¹⁰ Finally, Huringiin focuses on Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's critique of secularism and the solution he offers.¹¹

Although these studies have provided a comprehensive overview of the image of Western modernity, there is a clear gap in the literature that less focuses on the details of al-Attas's theological and philosophical critique of the Christian-Western doctrine itself.¹² This inadequacy lies in the insufficient exploration of the role of philosophy and the damaging manifestations of Christian-Western doctrine that form a deification of the human being,¹³ where the secular human relies completely on rational intellect alone, and how the separation between church power and worldly affairs has given birth to the distinctive Western idea that places all practical aspects of life outside the religious arena.¹⁴ Therefore, this paper intends to fill that void by presenting a detailed analysis of al-Attas's critique regarding the influence of Christian-Western philosophy and doctrine as the primary root of the civilizational crisis and the corruption of knowledge. This analysis offers scientific novelty by specifically unraveling the Islamization of Knowledge program—the concept that forms the background of al-Attas's analysis of secularism and secularization—as a systematic strategy to dismantle the foreign values hidden within Western scientific disciplines, theories, concepts, terms, and frameworks. This review will clarify how al-Attas responds to the Western worldview that is limited to the physical senses, and at the same time, reasserts the importance of revelation, *adab*, and divine value as the basis of Islamic ethics, morality, and civilizational development (*tamadun*).¹⁵ Through this approach, the understanding of the depth of al-Attas's critique

⁹ Nabila Huringiin and Halimah Nisrina Azfathir, "The Concept of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas on De-Westernization and Its Relevancy toward Islamization of Knowledge," *Kalimah: Jurnal Studi Agama Dan Pemikiran Islam* 16, no. 2 (2018): 266–84, <https://doi.org/10.21111/klm.v16i2.2867>.

¹⁰ Ahmad Murad Merican, "Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas and the Dialogic of Occidental Knowledge: A Passing Glance to the Study of Society in the Malay Archipelago," *Al-Shajarah: Journal of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC)* 26, no. 1 (2021): 99–111, <https://doi.org/10.31436/shajarah.v26i1.1229>.

¹¹ Nabila Huringiin, "Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas' Critics Toward Secularism," *Akademika : Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 27, no. 1 (2022): 89–100, <https://doi.org/10.32332/akademika.v27i1.4801>.

¹² Widya Masitah et al., "Exploring Religiosity as Mediator of The Association Between Democratic Parenting, Peer Support, and Self-Concept Among Adolescent Moral Literacy," *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 2 (2024): 436–57, <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v7i2.5060>.

¹³ Daud (Wan.), *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas*.

¹⁴ M. Amin Abdullah, "From Dialogue to Engagement: Experiences of Civil Society Organizations in Religious Literacy Programs for Multicultural Education Curriculum in Indonesia," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 21, no. 2 (2023): 264–74, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.v21i2.10234>.

¹⁵ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas;, *Tinjauan ringkas Peri Ilmu dan Pandangan Alam* (Percetakan Mesbah SDN BHD, 2019), Selangor, https://digilib-unida.id%2Fcenter%2Findex.php%3Fp%3Dshow_detail%26id%3D25724; Moh In'ami et al., "Contextualising Adab in Islamic Education from the Perspective of Al-Attas," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 20, no. 1 (2025): 145–58, <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol20no1.11>; Mohammaddin Abdul Niri et al., "Astronomy Development since Antiquity to Islamic Civilization from the Perspective of Islamic

and its implications for the reform of knowledge and *adab* will become more comprehensive, offering a sound, substantive, and rational scholarly response to the challenge of Western intellectual hegemony.¹⁶

METHOD

This research is qualitative in nature, based on literature review and content analysis. Data sources were obtained from primary literature (from the original work of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas) and other secondary sources as supporting material. The collected material was analyzed descriptively, normatively, analytically, philosophically, and historically, reviewed from a theoretical, hermeneutic, and thematic framework and M. Amin Abdullah's integrative-interconnective perspective. The analysis process included three stages: data reduction and filtering; data presentation; and verification to test the validity of the data critically and applicatively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The discussions by al-Attas are fundamentally directed towards an introduction to Islamic metaphysical philosophy which elaborates on its ontological framework, explaining the truth concerning the concepts of religion (*al-Dīn*), knowledge, the "nature of man," and the reality of his existence. It aims to counter the challenges of the Western current brought by liberal, evolutionist, Marxist, nationalist, modernist, hedonist, and secular democratic groups, which advocate the separation of religion from worldly affairs in a narrative that has created turmoil and dilemma in the Muslim soul and a misconception about Islam and the reality of creation.¹⁷ His critique is reflected in his rejection of the flawed idea of secularism embedded in Western consciousness, which brings forth a corrupt worldview resulting in fundamental imbalances in matters of religion and faith, and a loss of hierarchy and *adab* (discipline/manners) today.

In this context, he elaborates on the long history of the evolution of Western civilization, which has a decisive influence on world culture, apart from Islam.¹⁸ According to him, modern problems arise because of the Western man's experience, which resulted in confusion and perplexity about the definition of man, developing from the evolutionary ideas of its later philosophers, a consequence of the mythological and belief elements of the Latin, German, Celtic, and Nordic peoples that have merged into Western history. The Western people's encounter with Greek philosophy after the advent

Historiography," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 18, no. 1 (2023): 169–77, <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol18no1.14>.

¹⁶ Muh Ibnu Sholeh Sholeh et al., "Transformation Of Islamic Education: A Study Of Changes In The Transformation Of The Education Curriculum," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 20, no. 1 (2023): 39–56, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.v20i1.6770>.

¹⁷ Sobri Febrianto, "The Islamization of The Science of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas and Its Implications for the Interpretation of the Qur'an," *Proceeding International Conference on Islam, Law, And Society* 2, no. 1 (2023), <https://incoils.or.id/index.php/INCOILS/article/view/74>.

¹⁸ Sarbini Sarbini et al., "The Character Education Model as a Strategic Framework for Nurturing Religious Moderation Within State Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia," *QIJIS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies)* 13, no. 1 (2025): 1–38, <https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v13i1.30618>.

of Islam introduced ideas about the soul, the nature of the cosmos, knowledge, education, justice, virtue, ethics, and the state among its philosophers, which were later absorbed into Christian teachings.¹⁹ This led to a major change for the West, introducing it to ancient Rome and Greek philosophy, and its historical shift from the Dark Ages, Middle Ages, the Renaissance (which means *reborn*, and trying to rediscover the ancient era), the Enlightenment, the modern, and the postmodern eras.

Western philosophers then tried to explain the idea of man and the soul, originally expressed by Plato and Aristotle, such as Immanuel Kant, who regarded it not as *psyche* (soul) but as *anthropos*. After that, it was defined as an animal, and subsequently as a rational being, where this *rational* was interpreted as the *mind*, later called *reason*. This concept of *ratio* was developed in a tumultuous Western intellectual history and is viewed as problematic—by Muslims—because it separated ‘intellect’ or *intellectus* in the process of secularizing its ideas that flowed through the history of Western thought since the ancient Greek and Roman times.²⁰ Following this, William James and Sigmund Freud emerged, introducing psychoanalysis, which described it as a physical reality (*consciousness*). Psychoanalysis was not viewed as a science of the soul but rather of human action, and thus psychology subsequently became secularized.²¹ This, in turn, has given rise to the problems of confusion and skepticism (*shakk*), agnosticism, atheism, utilitarianism, and evolutionism in Western philosophy.²²

He presents an original and scholarly critique of the materialistic Western values that eliminate the role of religion and morals in the realm of development and progress.²³ The conflict arising from this modernist view has led Western civilization to dualism, relativism, subjectivism, and tragedy. Tragedy has become a hallmark of its civilization where man is viewed as an unfortunate being, burdened by original sin, the unattainment of all his efforts, clinging only to his own capacity—speculative reason—to attain truth.²⁴ He views life as a catastrophe that has led to hatred of God, whereas in Islam, life is a gift from God to man and His other creatures.²⁵ According to him: “well-being and happiness do not refer to the bodily and physical nature of man, not to the animal nature of the

¹⁹ Nurul Azizah et al., “Religious Moderation in The Industrial Era 4.0: Deradicalization Through The Development of Intellectual Traditions at Fadhlul Fadhl Islamic Boarding School Semarang,” *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 20, no. 2 (2023): 233–46, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.v20i2.7771>.

²⁰ Anne Guillard, *The Relevance of Theological Rationality to Public Discourse*, n.d., accessed October 3, 2025, <https://dx.doi.org/10.5406/21564795.46.01.02>; Dillon Cook, “Unearthing Evidence for St. Augustine’s Racial Blackness and Paralleling Augustine’s Christian Mystical Religion to Traditional African Religion’s Mysticism,” *Say Something Theological* 8, no. 1 (2025): 46–100.

²¹ Enjang Sukandi and Siti Nia Anisa Inayah, “Naqib Al-Attas Educational Thought in Contemporary Islamic Education,” *Al-Afkar, Journal For Islamic Studies* 7, no. 4 (2024): 831–42, <https://doi.org/10.31943/afkarjournal.v7i4.303>.

²² Andiana Rosid et al., “How Psychological Ownership Increases Subordinate Commitment in Islamic Spirituality Workplace? A Case of Indonesian Islamic Boarding School,” *Islamic Guidance and Counseling Journal* 7, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.25217/0020247417100>.

²³ Khalif Muammar A. Harris and Muhammad Ikhwan Azlan, “The Question of Intelligence in the Philosophy of Artificial Intelligence,” *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah Dan Pemikiran Islam* 27, no. 1 (2025): 427–62, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar>.

²⁴ Al-Attas, “The Meaning and Experience of Happiness in Islām.”

²⁵ Al-Attas (Syed.), *Islām, the Concept of Religion and the Foundation of Ethics and Morality*.

bashari (human) quality; nor is it a state of man's mind-intellect that can only be enjoyed in the realm of thought and rational speculation alone. Well-being and happiness refer to the self-conviction of the Absolute Ultimate Reality that is sought—namely: the state of self-certainty about God Almighty—and the performance of deeds by the self based on that conviction and obeying its inner command.”²⁶ With the intention of explaining the reality of that significant moral experience, he compares the differences between Islamic and Western moral theories, the latter of which fails to recognize the nature of man, such as that put forward by David Hume, who argued that man must follow his instincts for happiness, whereas in Islam, true happiness lies in submitting one's *nafs* (self/ego) to the will of God.²⁷ The meaning and purpose of ethics in Islam is centered on the individual, where a person becomes good because Allah and the Messenger (saw) have commanded it, and his true allegiance is to God.²⁸ It cannot be burdened by the state except through a social contract. Furthermore, happiness in Islam is linked to certainty in the ultimate truth and the fulfillment of actions that are consistent with that certainty—namely, the certainty of God's truth and man's final destiny.²⁹ The person who violates and denies this is considered to have breached the Primordial Covenant (*Perjanjian Azali*) and has been unjust to himself. This differs from Western theory, where, according to Immanuel Kant, man is responsible for doing good based on his own good will without being guided by any fixed standard of good and evil as a guide.³⁰

Western Secular Thought

In his analysis of the history of Christianity in the chapter “*The Present-Day Western Christian Background*” featured in his book *Islam and Secularism*, al-Attas unveils the Western theological doctrines and views, along with its intellectual and religious crisis influenced by the Hellenization philosophy in metaphysical and existential essence issues, brought by Thomas Aquinas. The effect of relying on external existence, according to William Ockham, led to doubt about the existence of God, rooted in the empirical intuitive consciousness of René Descartes (1596-1650). The concept of God in the early development of this theology was a mix of the Greek concept of *theos*, the Jewish *Yahweh*, *deus* from Western metaphysics, and the gods and goddesses in pre-Christian Germanic traditions.³¹ These conflicting, pseudo-concepts caused a crisis of faith and the abandonment of religion by Western society, leading to secularization. The doctrinal impact that eroded church belief was reflected by Christian philosopher Jacques

²⁶ Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas and Muhammad Zainiy Uthman, *Ma'na Kebahagiaan Dan Pengalamannya Dalam Islam* (ISTAC, 2002).

²⁷ Lili Sholehuddin Badri and Ahmed Abdul Malik, “Implementation of Islamic Education Values in Building Students' Religious Character through an Affective Approach Based on the Qur'an,” *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 21, no. 1 (2024): 217–33, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.v21i1.7260>.

²⁸ Nur Agus Salim et al., “Fostering Moderate Character of Santri: Effective Hidden Curriculum Strategy in Islamic Boarding Schools,” *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 2 (2024): 357–72, <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v7i2.4676>.

²⁹ Masturin Masturin et al., “Tawhid-Based Green Learning in Islamic Higher Education: An Insan Kamil Character Building,” *OJIS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies)* 10, no. 1 (2022): 215–52, <https://doi.org/10.21043/ijis.v10i1.14124>.

³⁰ Al-Attas (Syed.), *Islām, the Concept of Religion and the Foundation of Ethics and Morality*.

³¹ Al-Attas (Syed.), *Islam and Secularism*.

Maritain, French Augustus Comte, and German poet Friedrich Nietzsche concerning the rise of science threatening the collapse of religion and the rejection of its ultimate truth, which was eventually replaced by postmodern philosophy by neo-modernist proponents and the Protestant secularization current.

In his elaboration on the idea of Western secularism formulated in the chapter “*Secular-Secularization-Secularism*,”³² al-Attas defines secularism as a philosophical program, highlighting its problems and effects on Christianity and the counter-response through Islamization. This is reviewed through Harvey Cox’s *The Secular City* and related theories developed by Max Weber in his seminal work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, which examines the relationship between religion and social theory. He outlines three key aspects of secularization: the disenchantment of the natural world, the removal of sacredness and religious authority from politics, and the abolition of the sacredness and absoluteness of life’s values.

Al-Attas’s critique of the biased and prejudiced Western scholarship against indigenous religions, customs, and beliefs is presented in his book *Historical Fact and Fiction*, which rejects the conjectured premises and arguments put forward by European historians. He refutes the historical fallacy regarding the origins of Islamic history in the Malay Archipelago, distinguishing it from fabricated and imaginary stories with the actual historical truth supported by rational arguments and empirical evidence.³³ According to al-Attas, “*In all their theories, the stain of a persistent antagonism towards Islam can always be seen. The partiality towards other cultures and religions and non-Islamic influences is clearly evident.*”³⁴ And this applies to European historians of the Malay Archipelago, including pre-historians, ethnologists, archaeologists, philologists, and sociologists who harbor prejudice against Eastern phenomena:

“*There are several problems of knowledge and method that we must question, which they and their followers among our own scholars have raised in our understanding of our history. We must question the way they arrive at their theories; the way of reasoning and analysis; the submission of premises and the attainment of conclusions; the creation of problems and the acquisition of solutions; the understanding of things whose meanings are ambiguous; the raising of doubts and ambiguities and their insistence on empirical facts. Indeed, they may be right in some of their assumptions and estimations and in some answers to the questions we must raise, but in others, they are clearly wrong.*”³⁵

The Concept of Religion and Ethics

The explanation of the concept of religion as *al-Dīn* is elaborated by al-Attas in

³² Al-Attas (Syed.), *Islam and Secularism*.

³³ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Sejarah Islam Di Alam Melayu: Antara Fakta & Rekaan* (UTM Press, 2025).

³⁴ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Historical Fact and Fiction* (UTM Press, 2011), https://www.academia.edu/126645241/Historical_Fact_and_Fiction_Syed_Muhammad_Naguib_Al_Atta_S.

³⁵ Al-Attas, *Historical Fact and Fiction*.

his book *Islam: The Concept of Religion and the Foundation of Ethics and Morality*³⁶ based on the explanation of Ibn Manzur al-Ifriqi (1232-1311) in his Great Dictionary *Lisān al-'Arab*, “which is a fixed standard for the arrangement of Arabic words”³⁷ explaining its semantic, syntactic meaning, and fundamental characteristics, which encompass the religious beliefs and practices adhered to individually and collectively³⁸, where Islam is the true religion in the sight of God and the religion for Muslims, who are called *Muslim*.³⁹ And ethics (*akhlak*) (derived from the Arabic word *khuluq*) as the fundamental qualities that underlie the religious life of a Muslim, meaning temperament or behavior, habit, conviction, dignity, or religion that reflects a person’s inner form.⁴⁰

Al-Attas outlines four key concepts derived from the word *al-dīn* based on the etymology of the Qur'an and Hadith: indebtedness (*daynūnah*), natural inclination or tendency (*dāna lahu*), judicious power (*dayyān*), and submissiveness (*idānah*).⁴¹ He rejects its meaning in the term “*religion*,” which “does not share the same meaning and intent as the concept of religion as interpreted and understood in the history of Western religion, or other religions that are not Islam,”⁴² which gives a narrow meaning compared to its wide connotation accommodated within the Islamic context, where “all the seed-meanings or basic meanings (in the term *dīn*) collectively form a solid, profound, and clear conceptual unity, as reflected in the Holy Qur'an and in the Arabic language that possesses it.”⁴³ According to al-Attas, although the authority of religion cannot be questioned, many Muslims are confused by Western ideologies, their intellects colonized by the influence of Western education. This confusion is also caused by the misrepresentation of secularism, such as the term ‘secularism’ (*sikular*) being expressed as *'ilmāniyyah* and *'almāniyyah*, both rooted in the word *ilm* (knowledge), which leads to the distortion of the view that a person rejecting secularism also means rejecting knowledge.

The effect of modernism has also driven a new direction from theocentrism to anthropocentrism, from God-centeredness to human-centeredness, exemplified by the shift of the religious center from Jerusalem to Rome, which brought the seeds of secularization from its Westernization process because Rome was the center of the Roman Empire. This confusion is also caused by the wrong application of Greek philosophy into the realm of Western theology and metaphysics in the 17th century,

³⁶ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam: Faham Agama Dan Asas Akhlak* (IBFIM, 2003).

³⁷ Al-Attas, *Islam: Faham Agama Dan Asas Akhlak*.

³⁸ Subhan Subhan et al., “Towards a Tawhidic Framework in Islamic Higher Education Curriculum: A Comparative Study of Indonesia and Malaysia,” *QIJIS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies)* 12, no. 2 (2024): 333–70, <https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v12i2.28676>.

³⁹ In’ami et al., “Contextualising Adab in Islamic Education from the Perspective of Al-Attas.”

⁴⁰ Abdessamad Belhaj, “The Ethics of Hayā’ in Contemporary Middle Eastern Salafism: Meaning, Forms and Functions of Modesty,” *IJORESH Indonesian Journal of Religion Spirituality and Humanity* 4, no. 1 (2025): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijoresh.v4i1.1-24>; Sameeullah Bhat and Nabi, “Islamic ,Ethics Islamic Ethics: Exploring Its Principles and Scope,” *International Journal of Applied Ethics* 10 (December 2024), <https://doi.org/10.51245/ijaethics.v10i1.2024.93>.

⁴¹ *Islam: The Concept of Religion and the Foundation of Ethics and Morality* (IBFIM, 2013).

⁴² Al-Attas, *Islam: Faham Agama Dan Asas Akhlak*.

⁴³ Al-Attas, *Islam: Faham Agama Dan Asas Akhlak*.

brought by René Descartes (1596-1650) with his teaching of doubt and skepticism. This Westernization of Christianity has given rise to atheism, agnosticism, utilitarianism, dialectical materialism, evolutionism, and historicism since the 18th century until the modern era. The closed Christian metaphysical practice is challenged by the open dimension of secularism and its secularizing values that separate God from science. However, the attempts of Christian modernists to accept the importance of secularism and the belief in evolution were in vain because they eventually reached an impasse and failed to find definitive answers. This evolutionary view is rejected by Islamic epistemology as it contradicts the reality of creation and the nobility of man,⁴⁴ its practice rejects the evolutionary style for achieving truth because the nobility of this religion transcends time.⁴⁵

The Concept of Education

To explain the fundamental difference between the philosophy and goals of Islamic and Western education, al-Attas provided an impressive definitional framework presented at the Second World Conference on Islamic Education in 1980, which, for the first time in contemporary Islamic thought, articulated a clearly and coherently formulated new and original idea and definition.⁴⁶ He defined the fundamental elements in the concept and process of education as envisioned by Islam from its key concepts such as religion (*dīn*), man (*insān*), knowledge (*ma'rifah* and *'ilm*), wisdom (*hikmah*), justice ('*adl*), right action ('*amal* and *adab*),⁴⁷ which are elaborated within the framework of Islamic educational philosophy, discussing, among other things, concepts inherent in the methodology of studying nature according to the lines of Qur'anic interpretation (*tafsir* and *ta'wīl*),⁴⁸ the Islamization of language and its relation to Muslim thought and worldview, and the difference between *tarbiyah*, *ta'dīb*, and *ta'līm*.⁴⁹

According to al-Attas, knowledge is not neutral and value-free because it is influenced by religious belief, custom, and worldview that shape the spirit and intellect of man. To rival the authority and expertise of other nations, mastery in various fields is

⁴⁴ Syed Muhammad Naquib; Al-Attas, *A Commentary On The Hujjat Al-Siddiq Of Nur Al-Din Al-Raniri* (Ministry Of Culture Malaysia, 1986), Kuala Lumpur, //opac.stt-gke.ac.id%2Findex.php%3Fp%3Dshow_detail%26id%3D18647%26keywords%3D; Ahmad Munawar Ismail and Mohd Farhan Firas, "Environmental Degradation and Radical Solution from Islamic Perspective," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 26 (December 2024): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.26.2024.297>.

⁴⁵ Raudhatuz Zahrah et al., *Islamic Guidance and Counseling Practices for Strengthening Student Adjustment: A Multisite Study in Urban Modern Pesantren of Medan*, n.d.

⁴⁶ Unun Zumairoh Asr Himsyah and Kholili Hasib, "Decolonialization of Contemporary Science According to Professor Syed M. Naquib al-Attas as the Aufklarung Movement in Islam," *Adabuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran* 3, no. 1 (2023): 60–71, <https://doi.org/10.38073/adabuna.v3i1.1117>; Mukarromah and Rika Sartika, "Riwayat Isrāiliyyāt," *Al-Jadwa: Jurnal Studi Islam* 1, no. 2 (2022): 130–50, <https://doi.org/10.38073/aljadwa.v1i2.717>.

⁴⁷ Syarif Syarif et al., "Multiculturalism among Students in Madrasah: Knowledge, Challenges, and Social Capital," *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 2 (2024): 390–408, <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v7i2.4710>.

⁴⁸ Zarkasi et al., "Learning Al-Qur'an Hadith Using Study Tours to Improve Religious Moderation Attitudes and Socio-Cultural Literacy of Madrasah Aliyah Students," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 21, no. 2 (2024): 461–76, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.v21i2.8744>.

⁴⁹ *Islam: The Concept of Religion and the Foundation of Ethics and Morality*.

required with the command of *fard 'ayn* (individual obligation) and *fard kifāyah* (communal obligation) knowledge, aiming to bring one closer to the ultimate truth, to know God, and the creation of the universe.⁵⁰ This knowledge is obtained in two ways: from God's gift and through intellectual search. Knowledge granted by God requires devotion and proximity to Him, known as the science of gnosis. This is where the importance of Sufism lies, which he defines as the practice of *Shari'ah* at the *maqām al-ihsān*, encompassing the breadth of the inner reality of Islam, from which a profound understanding of Islam is obtained.⁵¹ This also concerns the relationship between the worldview and language, where "language is the instrument of the intellect that at the same time influences the thought of its user,"⁵² which necessitates the improvement of the meaning of key Islamic terms that refer to the concepts of justice and education (*ta'dīb*), true progress, ethics, and happiness (*sa'ādah*). According to al-Attas, the foundation of this Islamization rests on the individual, namely the personality and character of Prophet Muhammad (saw), which should be emulated in the process of Islamization, aiming to produce the true *insān* (human being) and the reality of its meaning. This is the difference with Western civilization, which does not view the strength of the individual as the pillar of culture.⁵³ The effect is summarized by al-Attas (2020) concerning the harmonious unity of Islamic doctrine:

*"Islam is the harmonious relationship established between the soul and the body... it is the heartfelt acceptance of the truth of the testimony (kalimah shahādah)... Islam is the unity of all that, with all its demands, in belief and in action, in the personality of the Muslim and in society as a whole."*⁵⁴

CONCLUSION

Al-Attas' formulation of the fundamental contradiction between Western culture and Islam, as well as his metaphysical views, holistic belief system, and morality within the scope of life, which encompasses aspects of education, art, ethics, and political order. This is as formulated in his books such as Islam and Secularism, which highlights the flawed and corrupt values of Western/European civilization, as well as his rejection of the philosophy of secularization that emerged from the influence of secularism and the westernization of science. This formulation explains the fundamental difference between Islamic and Western ideologies, which provide a comprehensive, thorough, and universal revelatory view that reflects the uniqueness of Islamic truth, about the essence of existence (*ru'yat al-Islam li al-wujud*) that reveals the dialectic of thought, the view of essence (*tasawwur*), and its concept of divinity (metaphysics) regarding "truth revealed in rational contemplation and reflection" on the reality and essence of the existence of the

⁵⁰ Iskandar Mirza et al., "Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas Education Concept as the Basis of Islamic Education," *Tianjin Daxue Xuebao* 55, no. 12 (2022): 587–96, <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/AEGHW>.

⁵¹ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin* (ISTAC, 2001).

⁵² Al-Attas;, *Tinjauan ringkas Peri Ilmu dan Pandangan Alam*.

⁵³ Al-Attas;, *Tinjauan ringkas Peri Ilmu dan Pandangan Alam*.

⁵⁴ Al-Attas (Syed.), *Islam and Secularism*.

universe in this world and the hereafter. Based on his review of the principles of unity and the vision of Islam, he introduced an Islamization program aimed at formulating a strategic education plan that provides an alternative to eliminate the confusion and inconsistency of Western Christian beliefs and reconstructs his worldview inspired by the framework of dewesternization and desecularization of knowledge. His approach is practical in the context of curriculum change, reorganization of textbooks and learning syllabi, and the establishment of universities as vehicles for Islamization that emphasize issues of morality and reason, in “facing the rapid tide of secularization” and creating the creative changes needed from the process of thinking and scientific vision based on the paradigm of tawhid, understanding of morality, morals, moral principles, as well as true reason and sharia.

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