

# Summary of the CASIS Saturday Night Lecture by Prof. Dr. Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas on 8<sup>th</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> Dec 2012

## Values and Virtue

Prepared by Khayrul Rijal

The discussions of value should be inseparable with virtue in order for goodness to be put into practice. The act of reducing virtue with value would only make ethics or moral philosophy as something that are merely an object of discussion, but not practical. Knowledge should be put into action. In that sense all knowledge, including philosophy, should be lived in. A real connection between value and virtue lies within religion. The four principals of virtues - *wisdom, temperance, courage, justice* - is not something clear in itself without its religious connection. It is not Greek in origin. So, the fact that the philosopher themselves cannot explain, for example concerning justice, it is because that word was already well-known in the society. Then, philosophers were just trying to understand the meaning of it. We can understand that those ideas came from revealed religions. For in that time, the revelation of the revealed religion was already on air and easily spread to and received by peoples in many places.

The principal virtues are connected each other. Each of them will overflow and finally becomes complete in justice. This justice can be understood as Universal justice or natural justice and partial justice. Universal or natural justice related to the word nature (*ṭabi'ah*) which means to make an impression and gives the right measure. It implies that the giving of wrong measure will be resulted as false (*bā'il*) which occur in relation to man's action toward nature.

If we want to inculcate virtue in ourselves, we must be trained in a proper way. Then, it will emerge in the self, not in the sense of automatically emerge. But, it is God's Gift. The virtue, especially wisdom, is His Gift, whether theoretical nor practical wisdom. It is not man's creation.

There are two kinds of virtue, that is, philosophical and religious virtue. The philosophical virtue is not sufficient to bring us to happiness that stable and permanent. It is because there is no higher principle to judge the action, except man. Man is in the highest degree in the world. Whereas, religious virtue will make us arrive at the stable and permanent happiness. The second kind of virtue much deeper in relation to man because it also refer to the exercise that should be doing by the soul. For example, the trust in God (*tawakkul*) will move and exercise human soul from the state of the soul that incite to evil (*al-nafs al-ammārah bi 'l-sū*), to the soul that in training (*al-nafs al-lawwāmah*), and finally - by God's Gift - to the state of peaceful, certain, and tranquil soul (*al-nafs al-muṭma'innah*).

The arrival at the state of tranquil soul means that the soul already achieved happiness. Happiness is in two kinds, that is, momentary happiness and permanent happiness. The momentary happiness is the one that endure in moment by moment. It is subject to change, temporal and psychological in characteristic, which is related to the fulfillment of needs and wants. Today, many people, especially in the West, that only talk about this kind of happiness as the only happiness which attainable. The reduction of the meaning and experience of happiness, they are secularizing our understanding about happiness. They are separating moral codes in relation to happiness. Then, the implications of the understanding of the word are already unfolded gradually in reality.

There are other kinds of happiness which is permanent and can be experienced and be conscious about it in this world. This condition is possible because of certainty (*yaqīn*) and true belief (*īmān*). Certainty and true belief is the foundation of happiness. It freeing us from misery, especially the internal misery, for example is doubt. *Īmān* is accepting in the tongue, established firmly in heart, actualize it in the body.

From that understanding, it is very important to us to control our internal condition, especially, conscious of our intention (*niyyah*). It is so important because it is one thing that we have (*al-kasb*). For the intention is where we can do our choice. Meanwhile, the aspect of our doing, it is God's creation.

If there is no *īmān* in man, then he or she will be experiencing tragedy. Then, the question, "Why are we not committing suicide?" for his existence in earth will be occurred and become the substratum of his life. Tragedy is an artistic imitation of what actually happen in life. It is consisted in Act one, two, and three. The characteristics of tragedy are it is existed in unity of acts. By the existence of noble and grace of the protagonist who use magnitude language and poetry. He is lofty in human character and having the discursive understanding (*dianoia*) of reality. But, the lack of insight into the real tragic flaw (*hamartia*) made him fall into temptation (*kairos*) that made him fell. After that, the protagonist with the pride (*hubris*) opposed God because of the pursuing of Fate (*ananke*) recklessly pursuing with fatefully (*ate*) towards the hero and the next generations. The story is reversal (*peripateia*) from good condition to bad condition and *vice versa*, that also involving blood (*sparagmos*). Then, finally he discovered (*anagnorisis*) a dreadful reality of life in the third Act.

The purpose of play tragedy is to put the misery to the end and achieve the relieve (*katharsis*). But, it is not the right way to put the end of it. *īmān* is the way out from such tragedy. It is the right religious way of getting out of it. But, the story of man is not all of it like the one that told in the folktales and myth of world's culture. Adam *as* admit the mistake and he was forgiven and not sent to the earth as a punishment. This world is a test of *īmān*. We must prove our *īmān* to have the ticket to the heaven.

#### *12th of Prof al-Attas' Saturday Night Lecture (December 22th, 2012)*

For the learned, to be acquainted with ethics, especially virtue, is *farḍu 'ayn*. It is including learning the philosophical virtue and religious virtue. Basically, this distinction is not strict. It is because, to us Muslim, all virtues can be regarded as religious virtues. So, the philosophical virtue is called as if philosophical because of the very influence from revelation to the existence of such virtue. We know that literally philosophy means love of wisdom. Then, the existence of wisdom itself is a proof that it is one of the principal virtues. It is also the reason of Muslim, later on, using *ḥikmah* to denote the science of love of wisdom, though in the first time they were using *falsafah*. This is because the maturity in dealing with the Greek philosophy. So, it is also important thing to remember that wisdom and justice are the mother of virtues and is important because they are also Allah's Names. This is also one proof that language can influence our thinking and that the issues of ethics not simply related to choices but also to revelation.

Nowadays, universities did not taught about *akhlak* because they are misunderstood about it. They regarded it as something that not needed to be explained in deeper regarding the content and the method. Even the state also needed to be viewed as something that needs to practice virtues, for it is the reflection of man.

There are two kinds of religious virtues, that is, the external (*zāhirī*) virtue - which is related to the *arkan al-Islām* - and the internal (*bāṭinī*) virtue which is related with our soul. These religious virtues are overlapping each other.

In our time, there is some problems that occur because of too much emphasizing on the aspect of chain transmission (*sanād*), especially concerning the reports that is in great importance to the understanding of God, including happiness. Sometimes the Ahlu al-ḥadīth going to much emphasize on the aspect of *sanād*, and less considering the *mutawattir* aspect of the *sunnah*. *Mutawattir* means report that established by the tongues of people of whom reason cannot conceive that they would purpose together on a falsehood. In fact, it is one of the

channels of knowledge that acknowledge by Muslim. The *mutawattir* traditions contain information about ethics and metaphysics. It is not a problem to be strict concerning legal matter in terms of *sanad*, but we must using our reason to the mutawattir tradition, especially the content (*matn*) which should be in corresponding with all the Qur'ānic system. The Qur'ānic system is so great in importance. So, when we talk about happiness, we must also refer the meaning of words of happiness in the Arabic of the Qur'ān. Then, we will have the proper understanding about what we should understand.

With a proper way of thinking and sufficient knowledge, and certainly by means of inspiration (*ilham*) and guidance (*hudā*), Prof al-Attas able to arrived at the conclusion concerning *shaqāwah*. With a good analysis and wide and deep reading about folktales in the West and also the East, Prof al-Attas able to come with a formulation of what tragedy is. it seem that the folk people knew something about the story of First Man, and it is certainly comes from revelation.

The sense of tragedy is the substratum of them that reject God's guidance. So, it is happens not only in the West. But, the West is the example of the sophistication of tragedy and made it to be infused with all their life. All the art in the West is based on tragedy.

We know that the West is trying to get out from tragedy through religion. But, they did it not in a good way because even God must involve in this tragedy by sacrificing his son. So, the Christian hopes that the feeling of guilty of sin in the past, which is tragedy, will be put to an end. They might think that they are happy. It is possible, but they must wait for the final Act, because they already put God out from what they believed. There is no reincarnation, no turning back. If they forget God, then God will make them forget themselves.

All of this understanding about tragedy and other things that Islam criticised since its beginning is what made Islam and the West are in a Permanent confrontation. Firstly, Islam challenged Judaism and Christianity in terms of theology. Later on, the Muslim challenged the Roman Empire, in terms of area and period. Gradually, the Muslim also attacks the Greek philosophy by the example of al-Ghazzālī. That it is why that the West chose to colonize the Muslim world, in the 16-17<sup>th</sup> CE as the period of deterioration of the muslim world.

Islam does not have such a thing like tragedy. It is also why the Muslim did not develop their art based on tragedy or utter loss condition. We must be remembers that *shaqawah* used only for people that reject God's guidance. Meanwhile, it is test (*ibtīlā*) which is properly used for Muslim. Only with *īmān*, we can enduring all of the suffering in this world, including death. With *īmān*, this existence is not a tragedy. Since we asked to be created, then the proof that we are here, so "to be or not to be" is not a problem. Even though forgetfulness (*nasiya, insān*) is our nature, we already sent the information from revelation to be reminded about our true nature. Defatalization of history as the deliverance of fate from the understanding of history is only happen to them that reject this revelation and guidance. So, although they put Freedom as a belief for the Western civilization, but basically freedom is ultimately has to do with himself and God, to achieve peace and happiness. With a code of conduct as means to various levels of happiness, and *yaqīn* and *īmān*, the needs and wants will be decreased. Finally, happiness is only means to the love of God.