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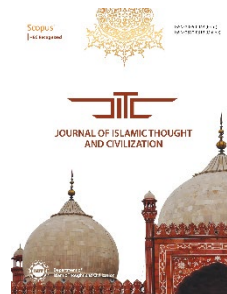|	
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Religion and Reason in Contemporary Islamic Ethics:
A Comparative Study of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Taha Abderrahmane Thought

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Abstract

The current research was based on a comparative study of the views of two prominent Islamic intellectual figures, namely Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Taha Abderrahmane regarding the position of reason and religion in contemporary Islamic ethics. As library-based research, the current study applied a comparative and textual analytical method to study the primary sources obtained from al-Attas' and Taha's works as well as supplemented by secondary sources from journals and books that are relevant to the topic of discussion. This study concluded that the difference between them was more obvious than the similarities. Through a philosophical lens of virtue ethics, al-Attas viewed ethics as an endeavor to cultivate and refine one's character and spirit by honing the key virtues, wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice, guided by the practical reasoning informed by the overarching influence of theoretical reason. Meanwhile, Taha rejects virtue ethics because for him to limit human actions to only a few elements of virtue cannot be justified since humans are ethical creatures who produce limitless actions. Through the conception of supported reason, which combines theory, praxis, and living experience, he strives for comprehensive ethics based on Sufi approach. However, they share the same opinion that in ethical decisions, the reason is dependent on religion, which they elaborate on through their respective arguments.

Keywords: ethics, reason, religion, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, Taha Abderrahman

Introduction

Along with the development of studies and literature, the field of Islamic ethics is increasingly getting the spotlight. Pertaining to this case, two trends are followed in Islamic ethical studies including Qur'ānic ethical thought which explores ethical values in the Qur'ān and Islamic ethical thought which explores ethics through various forms of thoughts, such as theology, philosophy, and Sufism.[1] In the latter context, two important works provide an overview of trends and issues in Islamic ethics that should be mentioned including Majid Fakhry's *Ethical Theories in Islam* and George Hourani's *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics.* Fakhry's work provides a typology of classical Islamic ethics, namely scriptural, theological, philosophical, and religious ethics.[2] His research is very important as it illustrates the development and categorization of the diversity of classical Islamic ethical thought. Moreover, Hourani discusses the issue of relationship between reason and religion in Islamic ethics where he mentions that there are five positions related to the issue. These five positions include (1) Revelation and independent reason having two different forms of emphasis (a) Revelation supplemented by independent reason, that is, Abu Ḥanifa (699-767AD) and Malik (711-795AD) (b) Independent reason supplemented by revelation, that is, Mu'tazilite theologians; (2) Revelation supplemented by dependent reason, that is, majority of Sunnites, such as

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[1]Mohammed Hashas, and Mutaz Al-Khatib, *"*Introduction: Modern Arabic-Islamic Scholarship on Ethics in Islamic Ethics and Trusteeship Paradigm," in *Islamic Ethics and Trusteeship Paradigm: Taha Abderrahmane's Philosophy in Comparative Perspectives,* (Eds.) Mohammed Hashas and Mutaz Al-Khatib (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 4.

[2]Majid Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam* (Leiden: E.J Brill, 1991).

Shāfiʿī (767-820AD) and Ash'ārī; (3) Revelation alone, that is, Ibn Ḥanbal (780-855) and Zahirites; (4) Revelation extended by imams, that is, Shi'ite. (5) Reason is prior to revelation as echoed by several Muslim philosophers, such as al-Farābi (870-950AD), Ibn Sinā (980-1037AD), and Ibn Rushd (1126-1198AD).[3] Hence, in Hourani's view, the role of reason and revelation in ethical judgments occur in a variety of ways and there are different modes in which reason relates to ethics.

Two studies provided an overview and road map to conduct the current research where the former discussed ethical themes and the latter explained the relationship between reason and religion. However, both based their classification and research on classical Islamic thought. The current research sought to examine contemporary ethics. A study of modern ethics has been conducted by Donaldson who examined modern Islamic reformers, such as al-Afghānī (1838-1897), ʿAbduh (1849-1905), Iqbāl (1877-1938) by focusing on the issue of modern ethical interpretation of Islam.[4] Donaldson examined the reformers' ethical thought in general, rather than focusing on the issue of reason and religion as the key elements of this study.

The current study aimed to examine the contemporary Islamic ethical ideas, especially the issue of relationship between reason and religion in terms of moral foundations and ethical judgments by examining the ideas of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (b. 1931) and Taha Abderrahmane (b. 1944). The reason to select these two figures is twofold. Firstly, they both are the prominent modern Islamic thinkers in their respective regions in Southeast Asia and the Arab world who have ethical concerns. Al-Attas devoted his ideas to ethics, specifically in his work, *On Justice and the Nature of Man* and his other important works, such as *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* and *Islam and Secularism*. While, Taha, as a philosopher who was concerned with the field of ethics, wrote several important works on ethics and the reformation of reason entitled, *Suʾāl al-Akhlāq* and *al-ʿAmal al-Dīnī wa-Tajdīd al-ʿAql*.

Secondly, each of them possessed a distinctive characteristic in presenting the Islamic ethical thought which indirectly reflects the grand narrative they were carrying. The ethical concept presented by Al-Attas can be understood in the context of his efforts to promote an Islamization of present-day knowledge which is a response to the degradation of knowledge and values as a result of secularization and the hegemony of Western civilization.[5] He called for the Islamization of knowledge which is pursued through the process of isolating the principal elements from the western civilization and then re-infusing them with the Islamic key elements, such as religion, humanity, knowledge, wisdom, justice, and right action in which these principles are linked, one of which, with Islamic ethics.[6] This step is taken in order to achieve a standpoint that is in accordance with the Islamic worldview as the teachings and guidance of the predecessor scholars who held religious teachings in developing science. In this case, al-Attas made al-Ghazālī a role figure who constructed ideas according to religious teachings as well as critical of foreign thoughts, such as Greek philosophy.[7] When al-Attas was still in command of ISTAC (International Institute of Islamic

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[3]George Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 271 - 276.

[4]Dwight M. Donaldson, *Studies in Muslim Ethics* (London: S.P.C.K, 1953), 247-261.

[5]Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995), 85, 114.

[6]Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1993), 163-164; Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam,* 5.

[7]Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Commemorative Volume on the Conferment of the Al-Ghazālī Chair of Islamic Thought* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1994), 27. M. Afifi al-Akiti, and H. A. Hellyer, "The Negotiation of Modernity through Tradition in Contemporary Muslim Intellectual Discourse: The Neo Ghazalian, Attasian

Thought and Civilization, Malaysia), he occupied al-Ghazālī's chair, demonstrating his adherence to al-Ghazālī. Subsequently, al-Ghazālī's impact on al-Attas' commentary on reason and ethics of virtue would be particularly obvious in this situation.

Meanwhile, Taha's views on ethics can be perceived within his trusteeship paradigm (*al-I'timāniyya*).[8] Although, it is relatively late in introducing the paradigm, the principle underlying it can be observed in prior works because it is at the heart of his philosophical project.[9] The core of the idea is that reason, revelation, ethics, and practice or doing are neither separate nor antagonistic to each other.[10] Here, the practice of Sufism, serves as a source of inspiration for Taha's intellectual endeavor.[11] On this background, a comparative analysis was undertaken in order to get a better understanding of the similarities and differences between Taha and al-Attas' ideas, particularly pertaining to the role of reason and religion in ethical judgments.

As library research, the current study applied textual analysis and comparative methods to extract the data from primary sources, such as al-Attas and Taha's works and supplemented by relevant secondary sources, such as books and journals. The research directly described and compared the thoughts of al-Attas and Taha pertaining to the contemporary Islamic ethical issues, such as 1) the relationship between reason, religion, and ethics, 2) ethical concepts, 3) the role of reason in ethical judgment, and 4) approaches to ethics. The current research attempted to fill the gap concerning the contemporary discussion of Islamic ethics, particularly on the issue of reason, religion, and ethics.

2. Reason and Religion

2.1. Al-Attas' Theoretical and Practical Reason

In order to review the relationship of reason, ethics, and religion in the thought of Taha and al-Attas, it is important to discuss the concept of man. This is very crucial since both have different perspectives on human essence whether it is reason or ethics. This leads to a discussion regarding the importance of reason and ethics in human beings. Human beings, according to al-Attas, are constituted of a soul and a body. Hence, a human being is a physical and spiritual being. Since God rules the universe, the human soul governs his body. Moreover, human beings have two souls, which are equivalent to their dual nature: rational soul (*al-nafs al-nātiqah*) and animal soul (*al-nafs al-ḥayawāniyyah*).[12] The animal soul is a manifestation of physical form, whereas the rational soul is a spiritual condition. These two types of souls have the potential to be commanders and followers. The rational soul should ideally become the commander over itself to control the animal soul. Resultantly, the spiritual status of the soul is higher than that of the animal soul.[13] The rational soul is also the

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Perspective," in *Knowledge, Language, Thought and The Civilization of Islam: Essays in Honor of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas,* (Eds) Mohd Nor Wan Daud, Muhammad Zainiy Uthman and Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas (Skudai: UTM Press, 2010), 129-131.

[8] Mohammed Hashas, "'Taha Abderrahmane's Trusteeship Paradigm: Spiritual Modernity and the Islamic Contribution to the Formation of a Renewed Universal Civilization of Ethos,'" *Oriente Moderno* 95, no. 1 (2015): 102.

[9] Farid Suleiman, "'The Philosophy of Taha Abderrahman: A Critical Study,'" *Die Welt Des Islams*, Vol. 61, no. 1 (2020), 15.

[10] Hashas, "'Taha Abderrahmane's Trusteeship Paradigm: Spiritual Modernity and the Islamic Contribution to the Formation of a Renewed Universal Civilization of Ethos," 69.

[11] Taha Abderrahmane, *Ḥiwārāt Min Ajl al-Mustaqbal* (Casablanca and Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 2011), 137 - 140.

[12] Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism,* 69.

[13] Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: Ta'dib International, 2018), 23.

commander governing moral acts as well as the principles of vices and virtues.[14] Due to the importance of rationality for human beings, al-Attas defines human beings as rational animals (*ḥayawān nāṭiq*), and therefore it is rationality that distinguishes them from other creatures and determines their essence.

Meanwhile, according to Taha, it is an ethical feature that distinguishes man from animal, not rationality. Hence, ethics defines a man.[15] He further insists on the fact that ethics is not a complementary or additional quality (*kamālāt*) added to an individual's identity. Ethics is an integral aspect of human beings, a prerequisite without which the human essence would not exist, if that feature is gone, the human essence would be lost as well.[16] Taha argued that ethics should be considered as a prerequisite to define the human identity itself and this does not place human existence before the moral state, however, should coexist with it. Thus, he emphasized the need to establish a theoretical understanding of the metaphysical concept of ethics that combines the prerequisites of morality and the prerequisites of humanity.[17] The significance of character in a human being is as important as its creation. According to Taha, there is no humanity without ethics.[18] It is important to note that the difference in viewpoint on human nature leads to a difference in the elaboration of the concept of reason between al-Attas and Taha, as presented below.

According to al-Attas, reason is both rational and *intellectual*, and they are not mutually exclusive. Moreover, reason is similar to heart (*qalb*). The difference is that reason or intellect is a cognitive organ, while heart is a spiritual organ. He argues that the '*aql*, *qalb*, *nafs,* and *rūḥ* are interrelated because they represent the same reality. They move simultaneously to adjust with the modes of state (*aḥwāl*). The involvement in apprehension and intellectual activities refers to intellect. The movement of body is connected with the soul. The illuminative intuition is received by heart and when it refers to an abstract entity it is a spirit.[19] In other words, the intellect operates not on one at time, but many at once.[20]

The nature of reason, according to al Attas, is a spiritual substance by which rational soul can distinguish the truth from the falsehood.[21] In this case, the movement of the rational soul involves two forms of intellect, namely active or practical reason ('*āmilah*) and cognitive intellect or theoretical intellect ('*ālimah*). The latter refers to the power to process knowledge by processing absolute forms that are abstracted from matter. In other words, this cognitive intellect is a medium for obtaining knowledge and truth, where it is involved in the movement of the soul towards meaning.

In this case, cognitive intellect acts through speculative powers that involve four aspects of the intellect functioning to regulate the stage of human intellectual development from mere potentiality to actualization. The initial cognitive facet pertains to the material intellect (referred to as *al-'aql al-ḥayūlānī*), denoting the pure material form capable of assimilating forms congruent with its unique potential or strength. This capacity is not the same for every individual. The second aspect is the possible intellect (*al-'aql al-mumkin*) which is the power that has been activated in it to receive from the main intelligence where the premises of truth are obtained through understanding the truth. If the

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[14]Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam,* 155 - 156.

[15]Taha Abderrahmane, *Suʾāl al-Akhlāq: Musāhama fī al-Naqd al-Akhlāqī lil-Ḥadātha al-Gharbiyya* (Casablanca and Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 2000), 55.

[16]Ibid., 54.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid., 55.

[19]Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam,* 196.

[20]Muhammad Zainiy Uthman, "'Al-Attas on Action, Thinking Framework and The Human Soul,'" *International Journal of The Asian Philosophical Association* 13, no. 1 (2020): 51.

[21]Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam,* 14.

material intellect only has pure potential without action which has no instrument to actualize itself, then it is the possible intellect that acts as an agent to activate the potential of the intellect.

The third aspect refers to possessive intellect (*al-'aql bi al-malakah*) which allows the material intellect to accept the speculative aspect of primary intelligence. Here, the possessive intellect acts as a storage, since intellect is possessive in the sense of being capable of possessing and preserving the knowledge. In this case, there is a role from the intellect-in-action (*al-'aql bi al-fi'l*) which evaluates the speculative forms of its actions while performing intellect. This intellect-in-action movement aims to produce an action. This leads to the fourth aspect, the acquired intellect (*al-'aql al-mustafād*) referring to the state of intellect that moves from mere potentiality into absolute actuality.[22]

In other words, material intellect is a pure potentiality to receive an intelligible form. Whenever its dormancy state is activated by intelligible impression driven by intellect-in-action, then it is possible for it to have knowledge. This leads to the second stage, namely the possible intellect where intellect is no longer at the stage of absolute potentiality, however, it is already possible to possess the principles of knowledge. Once this intellect is activated by the intellect-in-action, it becomes a possessive intellect that can perform acts of thinking by itself and then it becomes accustomed. The highest form of intellect or acquired intellect stage can be reached when the possessive intellect can reflect on itself by thinking or self-intellect then it reaches absolute actuality.

According to al-Attas, the actualization of intellect from absolute potentiality to absolute actuality presupposes the existence of an external intelligence called active intelligence (*al-'aql al-fa'āl*) or also known as The Holy Spirit (*al-rūh al-quds*). It transforms the human intellect from the state of pure latency to perfect actuality. The active intelligence acts to generate the potentiality of the material intellect from its dormant state to the possible intellect where it recognizes the universal forms and eternal truths and then becomes a habit and is more actualized in the possessive intellect which then achieves self-intellect. In the development from one stage to another, these four intellects are driven by intellect-in-action as agents of active intelligence. Through these explanations, al-Attas revealed that the first three stages of reason are common in all mankind, whereas the highest intellect, the acquired intellect, is the state of the Prophet, saints, and learned people who are established in knowledge.[23]

Moreover, the process of intellectual cognition discussed above tends to affect the second form of rational soul, namely active intellect, or practical reason (*āmilah*) which acts as the principle of movement of the human body. It is a practical reason that deals with human actions in agreement with the theoretical faculty of cognitive intellect. In this case, practical intellect has the capacity as a giver and receiver of effect. When it acts as a giver, the practical intellect governs the body and what is below it, such as influencing emotions and the power of the estimative imagination of reasoning which functions to recognize and regulate the behavior. Meanwhile, as the recipient of the effect, it consults with the cognitive intellect to regulate the ethical and moral rules related to vices and virtues.[24] Thus, in al-Attas's view, the position of theoretical reason is superior to practical reason since it acts as a source and process of knowledge to be transformed into action driven by practical reason to discern right and wrong. In this case, although the role of practical intellect is very important

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[22]Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam,* 159-160.

[23]Ibid., 161 - 162.

[24]Ibid., 155 - 156, 176.

in ethical judgment, its presence is always subordinated to theoretical intellect.[25] In this context, Taha's opinion differs from that of al-Attas.

2.2. Taha's Abstract, Guided, and Supported Reason

According to Taha, the superiority of theoretical reason over practical reason is problematic. He argued that the superiority of theoretical reason assumes that rationality is the essence of man and thus a person is valued more for his knowledge than the result of his ethical realization. This leads to two problems. Firstly, the substantialization of intellect. If the reason is a substance, it is divided into practical and theoretical reasons, hence both are considered as substances. However, the fact is that the substance is something that is neither divided nor composed and hence, it is an undivided form. Additionally, if it is placed according to its function, that theoretical reason is an essence, while practical reason is a form of action, then the two are contradictory. Since, action (*fi'l*) is an accident and the accident is different from the substance.[26] In other words, if it presupposes the substantialization of reason, it refers to theoretical reason since practical reason, in this case, becomes the accident of substance. Thus, it assumes the superiority of theoretical reason over practical reason.

This leads to the second problem, namely: the subordination of practical reason. If the position of theoretical reason is superior to practical reason, then it makes the latter subordinate to the former. In this case, this opinion leads to derivative problems, such as the assumption that reason is a theoretical activity and not a praxis. According to Taha, this is unacceptable since the activity of reason is a perpetual process of actions.[27] Additionally, the second assumption which cannot be justified is the opinion that theory is a prerequisite for action, or that there is no action without theory. In this sense, it is assumed that there is a pair of human essences, namely: theory (*naẓar*) and praxis ('*amal*). In this case, according to Taha, this opinion can be revised by stating that the nature of humanity is one, namely the nature of actions that are connected to all human actions, especially *qaṣd* (intention) and *irādah* (will).[28] On the basis of these arguments, Taha attempted to insist that practical reason is superior to theoretical reason.[29] Thus, it confirms the difference between Taha and al-Attas regarding the concept of reason. However, instead of continuing the polemic of the dichotomy and function of theoretical and practical reasons, he formulated a different form of reason. In this case, it Taha's attempts must be understood to reform the concept of reason, a practical reason infused with Sharia and morality.

Taha built three forms of reason. The first form as well as the lowest stage of reason is abstract reason (*al-'aql al-mujarrad*) which refers to an action in which a person understands an aspect of a thing and bases his judgment on a certain evidence. It is also this reason which states that rationality is the essence of man which distinguishes him from animals. Taha attempted to criticize this view since it tends to objectify, which makes rigid thinking characterized by self-affirmation of autonomy, identity, and individuation. In addition, this form of reason is divisive, separate, and autonomous as well.[30] Additionally, for Taha, the abstract reason is a reason disjointed from religious practice (*al-*

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[25]Deborah L. Black, *"Psychology: Soul and Intellect,"* in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy,* Eds. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 323.

[26]Taha Abderrahmane, *Suʾāl al-ʿAmal: Baḥth ʿan al-Uṣūl al-ʿAmaliyya lil-Fikr wa-l-ʿIlm* [The Question of Doing: A Search for Practical Origins in Thought and Science], (Casablanca and Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 2012).

[27]Ibid., 79.

[28]Ibid., 80.

[29]Ibid., 88.

[30]Taha Abderrahmane, *Al-ʿAmal al-Dīnī wa-Tajdīd Al-ʿAql* [Religious Practice and the Renewal of Reason], (Beirut and Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 1989), 18.

'amal al-Shar'i). It does not have any of its effects, nor does it has the content of Sharia in it, and as such, it is abstract from the practice of religious law. Moreover, since this is a reason without practical action, its possessor no longer attributes action to anything but himself and sees nothing but external phenomena. He does not get certainty, either from the usefulness of an action or the conception of right and wrong. Hence, in terms of *Sharī'ah*, the abstract reason is a reason that refuses to return to the nature in which it was created.[31]

To go beyond the limitations of abstract, intellect presupposes a praxis or doing (*'amal*). However, not every praxis can achieve a noble purpose. Therefore, the praxis in question is praxis in accordance with the religious law (*Sharī'ah*). This leads to the second form of reason, namely guided reason (*al-'aql al-musaddad*) referring to a rational human capacity to bring benefits and avoid harm supported by the divine law. This is based on three things, namely an action must comply with *Sharī'ah* law, bring benefits, and transform in the forms of praxis (*ishtighāl*).[32] The position of guided reason is superior to abstract reason because it is supported by *Sharī'ah* affiliation to stay on the right track in articulating knowledge that leads to the benefits of realizing it in practice. In other words, guided reason is an abstract reason that is added or equipped with a *Sharī'ah* basis[33] that aims to move from the abstract conceptual realm to the actualization of praxis.[34]

With the presence of *Sharī'ah* embedded in reason, it is not to be conceived as that humans lose their freedom or autonomy (*istiqlāl*). Here, Sharia becomes a complement to abstract reason with divine guidance because abstract reason tends to ignore divine commands and prohibitions. Based on the Sharia, guided reason does not limit itself, in fact, it elevates to guidance that comes from a higher order.[35] Additionally, since the subjectivity of abstract reason has the tendency and desire to control and exercise power, the divine law ensures the presence of higher principles to control and guide the subject in relation to his sub-activity. However, guided reason is vulnerable to two problems, namely pretension (*taẓāhur*) and conformity (*taqlīd*).[36] This occurs because it focuses solely on the phenomena of external practice, ignoring what is at the inner aspect of things.

To overcome this problem, Taha proposed the highest form of reason, namely supported reason (*al-'aql al-muayyad*) indicating an action that a person attempts to determine things within themselves, namely, what makes them what they are, by investigating the entire range of praxis and Sharia including optional practices, in addition to performing obligatory actions.[37] The supported reason represents a person's exploration to determine the internal identity of a meaning, action, or form of a thing by investigating the purpose of law and intentions behind it as well as to transform it into complete practices without leaving mandatory actions. Here, this kind of reason obtains its most perfect form in Sufism.[38] In this case, the supported reason is characterized as a reason which comprehends the essence of things. It must be distinguished from theoretical reason which merely perceives things from external attributes. Moreover, it is an essence as an accumulation of external actions guided by practical reason. The supported reason recognizes an essence as personalization in the form that needs to be known with a combination of theoretical (*naẓarī*), praxis (*'amal*), experience (*tajribah*) and thus forming what Taha called *al-naẓar al-'amalī al-ḥayy* or a living

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[31] Abderrahmane, *Suʾāl al-ʿAmal: Baḥth ʿan al-Uṣūl al-ʿAmaliyya lil-Fikr wa-l-ʿIlm,* 93.

[32] Abderrahmane, *Al-ʿAmal al-Dīnī wa-Tajdīd al-ʿAql,* 58.

[33] Ibid., 67.

[34] Wael B. Hallaq, *Reforming Modernity: Ethics and the New Human in the Philosophy of Abdurrahman Taha* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 165.

[35] Abderrahmane, *Al-ʿAmal al-Dīnī wa-Tajdīd al-ʿAql,* 67.

[36] Ibid., 83 - 89.

[37] Ibid., 121.

[38] Ibid., 146-56.

practical knowledge.[39] Here, he acknowledged the notion of *tajribah* which means a spiritual experience inspired by Sufism. According to Taha, a spiritual experience is an important concept, just like reason (*`aql*) and sense *ḥiss*). Hence, spiritual experience is a complement to theoretical reasoning, rather than a barrier.[40]

If the guided reason is built on the principle of praxis, while the abstract reason is built on theoretical principle, then the supported reason is a combination of theory and practice and living experience.[41] Additionally, it is important to note that pertaining to theoretical and practical reason, Taha identified guided reason similar to practical reason.[42] Nonetheless, equating abstract reason with theoretical reason is incorrect.[43] Here, Taha seemed to go beyond the category of theoretical and practical reason. He attempted to go further by developing the notion of living practical knowledge, which integrates the unity of theory, praxis, and living experience. At this point, Taha's understanding of reason differs from that of al-Attas, who places a greater emphasis on theoretical reason.

Moreover, Suleiman argued that Taha's tripartite division of reason is similar to that of al-Jābirīs, however, there is a significant difference in their positions on the appraisal of the ranks of reason, particularly when al-Jābirī condemns Sufi reasoning while Taha emphasizes its significance.[44] Apart from that, Taha's notion of reason demonstrates that it has several degrees, not just one, as he concedes.[45] Besides, more importantly, he intends to show that rational acts have a moral dimension.[46]

3. Religion and Ethics

Al-Attas and Taha have opposing viewpoints on the relationship between religion and ethics, as well as their respective positions. According to al-Attas, religion is the ultimate source of ethics because it is the foundation of morality and ethics.[47] Religion, as a submission, demands an understanding of the essence of religion to fully comprehend its moral and ethical foundations.[48] This requires an understanding of what true religious obedience entails as well as how religious norms are manifested in everyday life. This realization is achieved by comprehending human identity as a caliph tasked with faithfully carrying out God's command, upholding His law with *amanah,* or trust. This religious mandate also necessitates individuals to oversee a social order that represents the kingdom of God on earth. The principle of trust, according to al-Attas, reveals the core of Islamic ethical principles and morality.[49] In this case, thus, the ethical position in Islam is a part of the religion. As Al-Attas said ethics is an important branch of religious science.[50] In other words, for al-Attas, ethics is subordinated to religion.

Al-Attas' opinion opposes Taha's standpoint. According to Taha, the opinion that ethics is subordinated to religion is an interpretation of the phrase "to maintain religion is to maintain

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[39]Ibid., 122.

[40]Abderrahmane, *Ḥiwārāt Min Ajl al-Mustaqbal,* 139.

[41]Abderrahmane, *Al-ʿAmal al-Dīnī wa-Tajdīd al-ʿAql,* 124, 166.

[42]Ibid., 53 f.

[43]Abderrahmane, *Suʾāl al-ʿAmal: Baḥth ʿan al-Uṣūl al-ʿAmaliyya lil-Fikr wa-l-ʿIlm,* 93.

[44]Suleiman, "The Philosophy of Taha Abderrahman: A Critical Study," 13.

[45]Abderrahmane, *Ḥiwārāt Min Ajl al-Mustaqbal,* 139.

[46]Abderrahmane, *Suʾāl al-ʿAmal: Baḥth ʿan al-Uṣūl al-ʿAmaliyya lil-Fikr wa-l-ʿIlm,* 83.

[47]Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam,* 41.

[48]Ibid., 53-54.

[49]Ibid., 56.

[50]Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *On Justice and the Nature of Men* (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2015), 10.

morality." This implies that ethics, like worship, is a part of religion. To put it another way, it ranks ethics after religion and worship. Subsequently, if ethics is subjugated to religion, it becomes something optional that may be performed or neglected, rather than obligatory. For Taha, this opinion cannot be justified because worship and ethics are inseparable.[51] Furthermore, Taha argued that ideas that attempt to separate religion from ethics, as well as those that attempt to submit religion to ethics, are both incorrect. The true opinion on the relationship between religion and ethics is "*falā dīna bighayri akhlāq wa la akhlāk bighayr dīn*" or there is no religion without ethics and there is no ethics without religion.[52] In other words, religion and ethics are one.

4. Ethical Concepts: The Idea of Virtue Ethics and The Supported Ethics

4.1. Al-Attas' Virtue Ethics

There are significant differences between al-Attas and Taha's viewpoints when it comes to the idea of ethics. Ethics, according to al-Attas, is concerned with virtues (*fadhīlah*) to train and to develop a good character or a stable state of soul. It is achieved through intentional, directed, and disciplined interactions by the soul towards the four principles of virtue, namely wisdom (*ḥikmah*), courage (*shajāáh*), temperance ('*ïffah*), and justice ('*adl*). These four principles are subsumed under the rule of wisdom and justice originating from God's names as the essential foundation of ethics.[53] Moreover, it is important to note that wisdom and justice are driven by the rational soul, while courage and temperance are driven by the animal soul.

Regarding the elements of virtue, al-Attas describes them as follows. Courage represents the greatness of the soul, patience, fortitude, endurance, pardon, bravery, self-possession, and correct evaluation of the self. Courage is obtained from the ability to control anger which is subdued by religion and reason and to obey both of them faithfully. Meanwhile, temperance is an act of abstaining from what is morally and ethically unlawful, not exceeding the limits of common sense, wanting what is recommended by reason, and submitting to reason and religion. It resists the demands of the subdivision of lust and anger from the animal soul. Both, courage and temperance come from the faculty of the animal soul (*al-nafs al-ḥayawāniyya*), therefore controlling and gaining mastery over them is a must.[54]

Moreover, wisdom is knowledge given by God which enables the recipient to know and to give a correct judgment about the proper place of a thing or object of knowledge.[55] The purpose of wisdom is self-development and to transform it into the common good based on true knowledge. Wisdom can be achieved through two ways. Firstly, through God's gift to whom He wills. This gift of God depends on revealing His secrets to the soul that hopes to provide illumination and understanding of a reality that is inaccessible to reason. Secondly, wisdom can be achieved through learning from wise or learned people. In this second aspect, wisdom flows in the rational soul, namely in the aspects of cognitive or theoretical reason (*'ilmī*) and practical reason ('*amalī*). The latter moves according to the principles of theoretical reason. If the theoretical reason is not trained and developed through correct knowledge, practical reason would fail to know and distinguish between right and wrong.[56]

Furthermore, the most important aspect of ethics, according to al-Attas is justice, referring to a condition in which things or objects of knowledge are in the right place. In order to achieve justice,

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[51]Abderrahmane, *Suʾāl al-Akhlāq: Musāhama fī al-Naqd al-Akhlāqī lil-Ḥadātha al-Gharbiyya,* 52 - 53.

[52]Ibid., 52.

[53]Al-Attas, *On Justice and the Nature of Men,* 10.

[54]Ibid.

[55]Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam,* 129.

[56]Al-Attas, *On Justice and the Nature of Men,* 12.

it requires training in wisdom based on actions that are in accordance with moral and ethical principles recommended by religion and reason.[57] In this case, according to al-Attas, justice is the main principle of Islamic morality and ethics.[58] In Islam, the justice he mentioned does not only refer to balance and harmony between one person and another, or between society and the state. Justice, al-Attas argued, refers to a harmonious relationship between man and himself.[59] It is because the purpose of ethics in Islam is for the individual with the meaning that someone comprehends and recognizes his acts are in accordance with the commands of God and his messenger. Thus, neither the state nor society is the main source of obedience, however, the true obedience according to al-Attas is to God.[60]

Justice in a man is achieved by his fulfillment and affirmation of the agreement between himself and God. He is not bound by a social contract, however, by an individual contract that reflects his soul's covenant with God.[61] In other words, Islamic morality and ethics are an understanding of truth that is called for by the higher order while realizing that there is a binding agreement between human beings and God. Through that understanding, a person can guide and regulate himself and act in accordance with the true value of daily life.[62] Therefore, for al-Attas, justice is a very important aspect where its position in virtue ethics can be interpreted as a part and as a whole. In relation to other three virtues, justice can be interpreted as part of the four virtues. At the same time, it can also be considered as the sum of all virtues.[63]

Conceptually, the primacy of justice as the sum of the total of all virtues has been expressed by Aristotle[64] which has also been elaborated by Ibn Sīnā (980-1037)[65] and al-Ghazālī (1056-1111).[66] In fact, in this case, al-Attas was indeed inspired by these two Muslim philosophers. He did not accept the notion at face value, however, refined it and connected it to his concept of *adab*. In al-Attas' philosophy, the position of *adab* is essential. It is tied to disciplining and managing one's body, mind, and soul.[67] This is, obviously, related to one's discipline and control over his temperance and courage to achieve "a stable state of the soul" or "good character." Additionally, *adab* becomes the culmination of wisdom and justice as al-Attas said that "*adab* is the spectacle (*mashhad*) of justice as it is reflected by wisdom".[68] Moreover, "justice is the condition of being in the proper place; *adab* is the purposeful act by which that condition is actualized".[69]

Furthermore, al-Attas argues that *adab,* as an implication of knowledge, derived from wisdom, is an internal and external activity of the soul arising from ethical and moral virtues and values. In this case, the source of the principal virtues is faith (*īmān*). Thus, the four main principles, namely wisdom, temperance, courage, and justice along with their subdivisions are religious in nature,

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[57]Ibid., 2.

[58]Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism,* 66.

[59]Ibid., 76.

[60]Ibid., 75.

[61]Ibid.,141.

[62]Ibid.,83.

[63]Al-Attas, *On Justice and the Nature of Men,* 13.

[64]Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics,* W. D. Ross, and L. Brown, *(Eds)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[65]Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of the Healing,* Ed. and Trans., Michael Marmura (Provo: UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005). 378; see also Ibn Sīnā, "Fī 'Ilm al-Akhlāq, in *Tis' Rasāil Fī al-Hikmah Wa al-Tabī'iyyāt*, (Cairo: Matba'ah Hindiyah, 1908), 152.

[66]Al-Ghazālī, *Mizan 'Amal, Ed. Sulaimān Dunyā* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1964), 264, 272.

[67]Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism,* 105.

[68]Ibid.,150.

[69]Al-Attas, *On Justice and The Nature of Men,* 14.

because they are not sourced and originated from philosophy and science, however, from religion.[70] Therefore, by positioning the idea of virtue on religion, al-Attas aims to underline the fundamental difference regarding the source of virtue, while at the same time distinguishing himself from the conception of virtue in Greek philosophy. Pertaining to the emphasis made by al-Attas on the doctrine of the concept of virtue in ethics, it can be said that al-Attas's conception of ethics is virtue ethics.[71]

4.2. Taha's Supported Ethics

Al-Attas' concept of virtue ethics is in contrast with Taha's concept of ethics insisting that ethics does not consist of certain virtues. Taha argues that the idea of virtue including temperance, courage, wisdom, and justice, is a tradition that dates back to Plato. These elements of virtue are considered universal and inclusive. This universality is perceived to be possessed by everyone who comes from their character and will. According to Taha, this universality, in fact, is something formed or constituted. Additionally, it also leads to the monopolization of virtue.[72] He also realizes that the idea of virtue ethics has been adopted and elaborated by classical Muslim thinkers, however, that does not mean it should be taken for granted since there are problems behind it.[73]

Regarding al-Attas' idea of the four virtues, it is evident that he does not try to limit ethical principles. He presupposes that if one can control courage and temperance as well as an accomplishment of wisdom and its transformation to achieve justice as the moral and ethical goal in Islam, he would automatically be able to fulfill and accomplish ethics in a complete manner towards himself, society, and his God. However, such presuppositions in Taha's viewpoint would only reduce the essence of ethical values and messages.

To present his critique pertaining to the notion of virtues, Taha brings it to the problem of the countability and un-countability of human actions and their relationship to the finite (*mutanāhī*) and the infinite (*allāmutanāhī*). According to him, the first point that should be emphasized is that morality encompasses all human actions and since human actions are incalculable, so are ethics that surround him. Hence, sorting out certain types and forms of ethics or virtues of human actions is futile because there are many variations and anomalies in it. Moreover, a moral act is not a single category, rather an endless variety in which one type of goodness may manifest itself in a different way on other occasions. Here, Taha mentions that ethics is a way to comprehend the meaning of infinity. In this case. He revealed that the rreasonableness of human action can be understood in two forms. These forms include fragmentary or surface intelligibility referring to actions that are assessed as far as having reasonableness in them and complementary or deep intelligibility referring to actions that are judged as far as their existence affects others in the world. The latter cannot be quantified since it involves infinity.

These two forms of reasonableness have a correlation with two forms of ethics. In this case, there are surface ethics and depth ethics that match surface intelligibility and deep intelligibility, respectively. Surface ethics refers to the finiteness of actions in relation to the finite. Meanwhile, depth ethics refers to ethics in which actions ascend to seek the infinite. According to Taha, the two

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[70]Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam,* 18, 34.

[71]Dinar Dewi Kania, "Konsep Virtue Ethics Dalam Pemikiran Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas Dan Tantangan Postmodernisme," [The Concept of Virtue Ethics in the Thought of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas and the Challenges of Postmodernism] *Tasfiyah,* Vol. 1, no. 2 (2017), 157–178.

[72]Abderrahmane, *Suʾāl al-Akhlāq: Musāhama fī al-Naqd al-Akhlāqī lil-Ḥadātha al-Gharbiyya,* 55.

[73]For Taha's detailed assessment and critique of the Greek influence toward classical Islamic thought on virtue ethics see, Taha Abderrahmane, *Tajdīd al-Manhaj fī Taqwīm al-Turāth* (Casablanca and Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 1994), 381-395.

are not unbridgeable, however, may be overcome by following God's Law. Once it is accomplished, one ascends from a finite state to an infinite horizon. Understanding and implementing this divine commandment is important since human beings can only generate something that is finite, but God, who is infinite, leads to the infinite.[74] The following explanation might serve as a starting point to comprehend Taha's concept of supported ethics, which is comprised of four principles based on supported reason:

- The first principle is the principle of obligation (*mabda' ījāb*) referring to ethics in the stage of supported ethics as something that is mandatory, not optional. The obligation to obey ethical principles encourages the subject to go beyond the provisions of law. Neglecting it leads to the destruction of both, the individual and society. If the consequence of a person leaving an obligation is a punishment, then the person who abandons a moral act would be punished, not by the external authority, but by the inner authority. The punishment takes on a spiritual dimension rather than a physical one.[75]

- The second principle is reproductive principle (*mabda' takthīr*) which states that moral activities can take many various forms according to space, time, and condition. Taha made intention (*niyya*) as an example. Here, the intention is not limited to a single-action objective, rather as a goal that is reproduced as much as possible just like an action that may have many branches of action that are interrelated with one another. According to Taha, moral actions based on religious ranks are established on three pillars: namely time (*zamān*) which is the realization of actions, conditions (*ḥāl*) which are the spiritual effects of these actions, and space (*maqām*) as the consequence of effects on oneself. By dividing one action into various actions, it means making time, place, and conditions into various forms. Resultantly, one must enrich himself with morality so that he can have an appropriate attitude and make proper judgments in a variety of times, spaces, and situations.[76]

- The third principle is the principle of the organization (*mabda' tartīb*) referring to the scope of ethics that is not a single degree, however, rather a range of gradations and refinements. Each of them has a distinctive characteristic distinguished from the other. For instance, a person may be sincere in his doings, however, maybe unaware of it. He may raise this sincerity to a higher level, thus he is unconcerned if he is sincere or disloyal with his sincerity. Sincerity is one degree and the consciousness of sincerity is one degree higher and beyond this awareness of sincerity is a third rank higher than these two. In other words, the same moral act can have different varieties and forms.

- The last principle is the principle of extension (*mabda 'ittisā*) which argues that ethics is pervasive and all-encompassing. In other words, everything is never separated from ethical thoughts and moral actions. In this case, ethics include not just human-to-human relationships, however, also other living things, such as animals and plants, and non-living things, material and immaterial. Taha upholds that moral actions encompass everything, just like the Creator who surrounds His creatures, because every creation has a moral right.[77]

5. The Role of Reason in Ethical Judgment

5.1. Al-Attas' Virtue Ethics and the Role of Theoretical and Practical Reason

The apparent differences between al-Attas and Taha, regarding the concepts of reason and ethics, as discussed earlier result in different interpretations of how reason works in ethical decisions.

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[74]Abderrahmane, *Suʾāl al-Akhlāq: Musāhama fī al-Naqd al-Akhlāqī lil-Ḥadātha al-Gharbiyya,* 56.

[75]Ibid., 81.

[76]Ibid., 82.

[77]Ibid.,83.

In al-Attas' views, in the context of ethical judgment, the true and real agent of human moral and ethical actions and behavior is the rational soul that operates through the power of the cognitive and active intellect.[78] It thus presupposes the great role of the theoretical and practical intellects in ethical judgment. The most dominant aspect of ethical judgment is the practical intellect as mentioned in the previous discussion. However, the active intellect or practical reason cannot act independently because it is influenced by the cognitive intellect which processes various theoretical knowledge about universality and essential truth. It involves material, possible, possessive intellect to the highest intellect, namely the acquired intellect where knowledge reaches its peak stage. The process of intelligence, in the end, comes from the highest intellect, namely active intelligence or the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, according to al-Attas, the source of knowledge of justice and wisdom does not only come from reason, however, also from divine sources.[79] In other words, in al-Attas' view, without guidance from religion, reason cannot reach the idea of the ultimate ethics. In this context, he does not deny the philosophical attempt of rational reflection on ethical problems. He realizes that his concept of virtue ethics is in accordance with the idea of philosophy, however, as far as philosophy reduces reality to a secular understanding, it is necessary to place the idea of virtue in its religious relations as an authoritative source.[80]

In this case, perhaps al-Attas realized that the idea of virtue ethics is not the original idea of Islamic thought, however, it is an idea introduced by ancient Greek thought originating from Plato and Aristotle which then spread and became a common conception adopted by Muslim thinkers, such as Ibn Miskawayh, Ibn Sinā, and al-Ghazālī. The attempt to offer the idea of virtue was introduced under the narrative of the ancient Greek tradition, although there are some differences and additions made, which reveal that Muslim intellectuals are trying to reconcile the understanding of moral philosophy with the Islamic vision.[81] Here, al-Attas seems to rely on his interpretation of virtue ethics to al-Ghazālī in which he quotes al-Ghazālī's ethical sourcebook, namely *Mīzān 'Amal*.

5.2. Taha's Supported Ethics and the Role of Supported Reason

Related to the act of reason in ethical judgments, Taha presents through his typology of reason: abstract, guided, and supported reason as well as provides an explanation of how they operate the ethical judgment. Taha states that the abstract reason, as empty of the principle of usefulness and benefit, is very dangerous. To overcome the abstract reason is to go to the principle of praxis ('*amaliyah*) since praxis stimulates and nourishes the reason which leads to new insights. This is of course in accordance with the religion that teaches the principle of charity in ethical actions.[82] Here, at first glance, guided ethics based on guided reason can offer a solution leading to an in-depth knowledge of the benefit (*maṣlaḥaḥ*). However, even though it can attain the purpose of legislation (*maqāsid sharī'a)* and if it stops at that stage then it may not reach the stage of comprehensive benefit (*an-Nājiah*). If it does not go to the next stage and stop at guided ethics, then it leads to problems namely pretension (*taẓāhur*) or the difference between appearance of action and the reality of intention and conformity (*taqlīd*); a condition in which a person acts according to the words of others without knowing the truth that proves the benefits of those words.[83]

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[78]Al-Attas, *On Justice and the Nature of Men,* 39.

[79]Ibid., 11.

[80]Ibid.,2.

[81]M. A Sherif, *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 39-40.

[82]Abderrahmane, *Suʾāl al-Akhlāq: Musāhama fī al-Naqd al-Akhlāqī lil-Ḥadātha al-Gharbiyya,* 69.

[83]Ibid., 71-72.

According to Taha, supported reason can offer effective and comprehensive solutions that may not be achieved by abstract or guided reason. This accomplishment is achieved through the unification between concepts and actions, which involves a shift from abstract cognitive activity to an elaboration stage that affects behaviour, unification between knowledge of things with knowledge of God, and action extends to principles of avoiding harm and achieving the benefit; an understanding of that presupposes the unity of words and actions, knowledge of things and knowledge of God, and the growth of knowledge and the presence of benefit.[84]

Taha calls for transformation of conceptual understanding from abstract reason and guided reason to the perspective of supported reason in terms of ethical judgment. According to him, in the view of abstract reason, religious ethics is a collection of laws perceived as an activity of assessment and recognition of the law and how to transform these considerations into action. Hence, it involves the ability to assess and apply these theoretical principles. Within the framework of supported reasoning, the faculty of "judgment" undergoes a transformation into "acceptance," driven by the truth through which His commands and messages are understood and carried out in one's lifetime. Meanwhile "the ability to transform" is converted to acceptance and testifying that God always sees him, and if he fulfils by witnessing with pleasure in his actions, then God will bestow a true happiness on him.

Furthermore, in the view of guided reason, religious ethics consist of rituals of worship and *mu'āmalah* which requires someone to perform it according to the provision to achieve benefit (*maṣlaḥaḥ*) which has two points: "principle of obedience in ritual" and "*mu'āmalah*.". According to the perspective of supported reason, the first principle turns into busying (*ishtighāl*) oneself by thinking about Allah so that one realizes that he is God's servant and does not think about anything except His command. While, the principle of *mu'āmalah* extends its consequences from mere *mu'āmalah* among creatures to *mu'āmalah* with the Creator.[85] Through the description above, Taha aims to combine theoretical knowledge, praxis, and ethical spiritual experience derived from Sufism.

Moreover, if it is categorized in Hourani's typology of the relationship of reason and religion in ethics, al-Attas and Taha's opinions fall into the category of reason depending on religion in ethical decisions. They insist that reason is not partial-independent (al-Attas), as well as empty of religious-ethical principles (Taha). Taha and al-Attas argue that religion strengthens reason to create ethical decisions and conditions. Although, based on the same understanding of the dependence of reason on religion, both Taha and al-Attas present different perspectives. For them, the dependence of reason on religion is not something that hinders the role of reason as in the opinion of Hourani who dreamed of Mu'tazilite's independent reason as the future ethical principle that must be fought for.[86]

6. Approaches to Ethics

6.1. Al-Attas' Philosophical Approach

The greatest distinction between them is in their approach to ethics, namely, al-Attas is philosophical and Taha is Sufism. In this case, it does not mean that the author states that Al-Attas rejects or has no interest in Sufism. For al-Attas, Sufism is an important science, especially in Islamic metaphysics and its relationship with the philosophy of science.[87] However, after a thorough exploration of his thoughts on ethics and its theoretical judgment, it can be said that al-Attas's ideas are inclined towards the philosophical exploration of virtue ethics derived from medieval Muslim

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[84]Ibid., 73.

[85]Ibid., 74.

[86]Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics,* 276.

[87]Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *The Positive Aspects of Tasawwuf* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Academy of Science (ASASI), 1981), 8.

philosophers rather than Sufism. Moreover, in the discussion of ethics, although al-Ghazālī became al-Attas' inspiration, as proved by his reference to al-Ghazālī's *Mīzān 'Amal* and *Ma'ārij*. However, he did not entirely follow the path of al-Ghazālī who synthesized the philosophical, religious, and mystical teachings.[88] Al-Attas also tried to synthesize the three axes of thought, however, in his review of ethics and the act of reason, his ideas appear more philosophical in nature. It is apparent that al-Attas was inspired by al-Ghazālī in the notion of virtue and the role of rational soul which involves the power of theoretical and practical reason in ethical reasoning. However, in this case, al-Attas does not elaborate further on how ethics relate to mystical exercise and practice (*riyāḍah* and *mujāhadah*) as al-Ghazālī did[89] and only elaborates on philosophical and religious exploration. Additionally, al-Attas' reference to Ibn Sinā's *Shifā* and *al-Najāt* becomes an additional argument for his inclination towards a philosophical approach.

6.2. Taha' Sufism Approach

On the other hand, Taha takes a Sufi approach towards ethics. This can be seen from his attribution to supported reason and supported ethics which is a conception derived from reasoning and praxis of Sufism. It cannot be separated from his background as a member of the *Qadiriyya-Budshishiyya* order. The *Qadiriyah-Budshishiyya* order is a *tariqa* that originates from Morocco and is one of the Sufi orders with the largest number of followers in this country. As a Sufi philosopher who philosophizes through Sufism, Taha not only elaborates ideas in three forms of reason, however, he also emphasizes practice (*'amal*).[90] His emphasis on praxis is his attempt to criticize and surpass Western civilization characterized as a civilization of "logos" and "speech" which is empty of praxis and ethical aspects. Whereas, for Taha, Islamic civilization is the civilization of deed. Additionally, proposing an alternative for rationalism based on Sufism and a spiritual understanding of Islam, Taha aims to criticize the Western logical tradition, while at the same time rejecting al-Jābirī's view which states that Sufism is the cause of the decline of the Muslim world.[91] In this case, he was inspired by the Sufi ratio which he identified as supported reason as the most complete and perfect form of reason in comparison to abstract and guided reason. Through supported reason, Taha strives to produce supported ethics based on four principles: obligation, reproduction, expansion, and organization, as described above. These principles give birth to a new view where the principle of obligation gives birth to an understanding of living ethics (*al-ishtighāl al-mubāshir*), while the principles of reproduction and expansion are the inspiration that unlimited ethical attributes come from divine attributes (*al-takhalluq bi-al-ṣifāt al-ḥusnà*). Their infinity guides a person towards a consistent and ethical perfection and closeness to divine ethics. Moreover, since humans need real examples of ethical aspirations, the prophetic figure is the most perfect example (*al-iqtidāʾ al-ḥayy*).[92]

7. Conclusion

After examining in detail the comparison of thoughts between al-Attas and Taha regarding the relationship between reason and religion in ethical judgment, the difference between them is more obvious than the similarities. *Firstly*, the distinctive characteristic that defines human beings according to al-Attas is rationality, while according to Taha it is ethics. *Secondly*, pertaining to the

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[88]Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam,* 193.

[89]Ibid., 198.

[90]Mohammed Hashas, and Mutaz Al-Khatib, "Introduction: Modern Arabic-Islamic Scholarship on Ethics in Islamic Ethics and Trusteeship Paradigm," 17.

[91]Abdessamad Belhaj, "The Fall of The Western Family" Ṭāhā 'Abd Al-Raḥmān's Critical Islamic Ethics."," *ReOrient,* Vol. 4, no. 1 (2018): 33.

[92]Abderrahmane, *Suʾāl al-Akhlāq: Musāhama fī al-Naqd al-Akhlāqī lil-Ḥadātha al-Gharbiyya,* 84-86; Hashas, "'Taha Abderrahmane's Trusteeship Paradigm: Spiritual Modernity and the Islamic Contribution to the Formation of a Renewed Universal Civilization of Ethos," 83.

concept of reason, al-Attas presupposes a role between theoretical and practical reason, where the latter depends on the former. Meanwhile, according to Taha, the position of practical reason is higher than theoretical reason. Taha then divides reason into abstract, guided, and supported reasons. He favors the latter as a rationality that combines theory, praxis, and spiritual experience. *Thirdly*, regarding the position of religion and ethics, for al-Attas ethics is part of religion, while for Taha, religion and ethics are one. *Fourthly*, related to the concept of ethics, al-Attas introduces the ethics of virtue. Meanwhile, Taha rejects the ethics of virtue because it is unacceptable to select several forms of virtue in moral actions. Instead, Taha proposes the principles of supported ethics. *Fifth*, regarding the role of reason in ethical decisions, al-Attas argues that the rational soul is the agent of ethical decisions that works through the capacity of theoretical and practical reason. In this case, although practical reason plays a central role to govern the body and recognize good and bad, it depends on the data and knowledge supplied by theoretical reason. Meanwhile, Taha presupposes the role of supported ethics in ethical decisions that internalize ethical values and transform them in all their actions. However, both agree that reason alone cannot be the sole guide of ethical values, it requires religious guidance to achieve a comprehensive benefit. The last point is that both have different approaches towards ethics, namely, al-Attas leans towards a philosophical approach, while Taha towards Sufism. Additionally, the current research presented that the study of contemporary Islamic ethical thought received great attention from contemporary Islamic intellectuals, such as al-Attas and Taha whose conception of ethics and its relationship with the concept of religion, reason, and human essence they formulated succeeded in providing new insights in contemporary Islamic ethical discourse. However, further studies on their intellectual projects in general and its relationship with their ethical concepts are needed.

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