

Surah al-Asr: It's Relevance in a Postmodern World

Dr. Rodrigue Ancelot Harvey Fontaine
Kulliyah of Economics and Management
International Islamic University Malaysia

ABSTRACT

This study explores the relevance of surah al-Asr in a postmodern world. Surah al-Asr is a summary of the Qur'an (Khan 1993). Based on Khan's (1993) reflections, four ontological propositions are derived. The study then explores the evolution of Western philosophy since the 18th century. This includes the birth of the humanist project, Nietzsche's deconstruction of Western idealism, Heidegger's reflections on being, and the shift from a modern society to a postmodern society. Postmodernism is a world in which the digital world is more real than reality. Ferry, a French philosopher, summed up the dilemma of Western society by noting that Westerners are desperately in search of a purpose to their lives. All these conflicting philosophies offer profound insights into the second ayah ("Verily, mankind is in a state of loss). The study concludes that surah al-Asr offers profound insights for Muslims and non-Muslims in the 21st century.

INTRODUCTION

This study builds on Fontaine's (2018) "*The philosophical foundations of Islamic management.*" He reviews the main ideas of Western philosophy and contrasted them with the teachings of Islam. He focused on epistemology, the source of knowledge. He found that European philosophers were obsessed with proving the existence of God whereas Muslim scholars were more concerned with proving that Muhammad¹ was a real prophet. If he was, then God's existence necessarily followed. Unfortunately, European philosophers were not interested in philosophical questions outside of their own tradition. Since then, a number of studies have been completed in the area of Islamic management (Fontaine 2017a, Fontaine 2017b, Fontaine, 2018, Fontaine 2019). This has raised new issues concerning the philosophical foundations of Islamic management. As Fontaine (2018) focused on epistemology, it was felt that ontological issues needed to be addressed.

Rather than comparing the Western tradition with the entire Islamic corpus, it was felt that a starting point would be to focus on one *surah* that summarizes adequately the Qur'an and the Sunnah. A literature review shows that many Muslim scholars have said that the essence of the Qur'an is summarized in *surah al-Asr*. Thus, the aim of the study is to present *surah al-Asr* in the light of Western ontological ideas.

¹ The prayer "peace be upon him" is implied in the text every time the Prophet is mentioned

Methodology

In the spirit of the *tawhidic* paradigm, it is assumed that the Qur'an is the most reliable source of knowledge. Any other source of knowledge – like the writings of philosophers – could be used if they shed light on the Qur'an, but they cannot be relied upon if they contradict the Qur'an. The author reviewed the Western philosophical literature by comparing modern and postmodern thought. Due to the limitation of space, the literature cannot be comprehensive but, hopefully, it is representative.

The Qur'anic Perspective

Scholars agree that *surah al-Asr* is a good summary of the Qur'anic perspective. For example, Imam al-Shafi'i said that a deep and thoughtful study of this *surah* alone provides adequate guidance for salvation (Khan, 1993, p.7). Khan (1993) translates it as,

1. *By Time*
2. *Verily, mankind is in a state of loss*
3. *Except those who have faith, and do righteous deeds, and join together in the mutual teaching of truth and of patience and constancy*

Khan (1993) says that the *surah* is divided into two parts. The first part (by time, verily mankind is in a loss) is a statement about the general human condition. The second part formulates the “*essential requirements and conditions of a successful life*” (Khan, 1993, p.8).

Before reviewing its lessons, he compares *surah al-Asr* with *surah at-Teen*. *Surah at-Teen* has a more optimistic tone because it states the primordial goodness of man (95:04). Both *surahs* allude to the two paths that humanity can travel. On one path, the majority of people will follow cultural traditions without really thinking about their purpose of life. On the other path, a minority of people will think deeply about their purpose of life before drawing certain conclusions and acting upon them (Khan, 1993, p.10). Khan (1993) insists that *surah al-Asr* and *surah at-Tin* should be studied together, or else individuals might end up with a pessimistic view of the human condition.

The first *ayah* can be interpreted in multiple ways. One way is to think about history, the rise and fall of civilizations, numerous military campaigns, and billions of people living and dying. Thus, time is the “*greatest teacher and mentor of man*” (Khan, 1993, p.12).

The second *ayah* epitomizes the tragedy of mankind. This works at multiple levels. At the macro-level, history confirms the human tragedy. At the micro-level, “*the complete preoccupation with the immediate environment and personal problems*” prevents individuals from maturing spiritually (Khan, 1993, p. 11). The Qur'an describes this reality and how everyone will eventually meet Allah on the Day of Judgment. Allah says,

“*O mankind, indeed you are labouring toward your Lord with [great] exertion and will meet it*”
(84:06)

The last *ayah* delineates the sole means of survival. The success of human life depends on: i) *iman* (faith), ii) *amal salih* (good deeds), iii) *tawasi bil-haq* (mutual exhortation to truth), and iv) *tawasi bil-sabr* (mutual exhortation to constancy and steadfastness). Khan (1993, p. 15) notes that these *ayat* define success in way that is diametrically opposed to the ones prevalent in a materialistic society. These four conditions form the absolute minimum requirements to protect oneself from destruction. If even one of these conditions is missing, the result will be failure.

Khan (1993) explores these four conditions and points out that there is a logical progression between these concepts. Real faith should lead to good deeds, good deeds must include a concern for the society which naturally leads to *tawasi bil-haq* and this requires patience. Khan (1993, p.18) explains that the link between faith and actions is “*so closely united and intertwined that the latter can be treated as the sine qua non of the former.*” Khan (1993, p. 18) emphasizes that *amal salih* include both the religious and moral teachings of Islam. These include the rights of Allah (like the prayer) and the rights of individuals (like honoring parents).

With regards to *tawasi bil-haq*, Khan (1993, p. 21) insists that ‘*al-haq*’ refers to both religious and moral duties. This requires fighting for social justice and establishing communities of believers who reinforce one another (Khan, 1993, p. 23).

Khan (1993, p. 27) comments on a general misunderstanding that many Muslims have about Islam. Often, Muslims put too much emphasis on performing religious rituals without considering the duty of *tawasi bil-haq*. This is a misguided attitude. *Tawasi bil-haq* is not optional, it is obligatory. Khan (1993) concludes that Muslims must find the right balance between social and religious duties. He adds that every person will be questioned about his or her efforts within his or her capacity.

To shed more light on *surah al-Asr*, the following *ayat* from *surah al-A'raf* are pertinent. Allah describes the creation of Adam and the disobedience of Iblis. Iblis didn't disbelieve in God but he didn't want to follow the religion authority of Adam. After blaming Allah, Iblis said,

“(Allah) said, “*what prevented you from prostrating when I commanded you?*” (Satan) said, “*I am better than him. You created me from fire and you created him from clay*” (7:12)

“*Then I will come to them from before them, and from behind them, and on their right, and on their left and You will not find most of them grateful*” (7:17)

“*But Satan whispered to them to make apparent to them that which was concealed from their private parts. He said, “Your Master did not forbid you this tree except that you become angels or permanent dwellers*” (7: 20)

Khan (2018) explains that Iblis starts by making a social comparison. He considered himself better than Adam. Most sins start with social comparisons. Social comparisons often lead to a denial of Allah's favour and to diseases of the hearts like arrogance and jealousy. The attacks from the front means that Iblis will preoccupy people with their immediate future to the point that they forget the Hereafter. The attacks from behind them means that Satan will use people's past against

them. For example, a person might have been a good person in the past but has deteriorated over time. Iblis will persuade him that he can never be a good person again. Or someone questions why Allah decreed that certain events happened to them. Iblis wants people to live in the past, become hopeless and ultimately blame Allah. The attacks from the right means that people's few good deeds will make them complacent. For example, people will feel certain that their good deeds have been accepted and that they wipe away all their sins. They don't feel the need to improve themselves. The attacks from the left means that people's many sins will persuade them that there is no hope for them. With regards to the whispering of Satan, Khan says that the aim of Iblis is to persuade people that whatever thoughts come to their mind is their own. The strategy is to gradually lead them astray. It is a very subtle attack that spares no one.

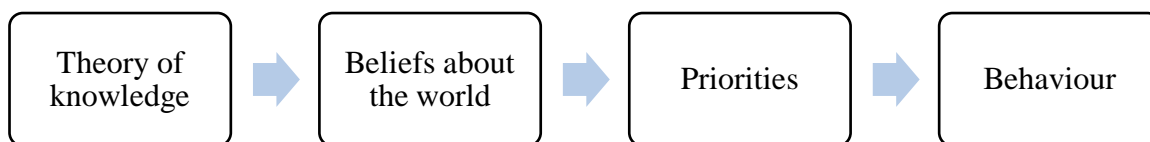
Additionally, to better appreciate why most people are in a state of loss, one *ayah* in *surah al-Mulk* is relevant. Allah describes people entering Hell. They will say,

And they will say, "If only we had been listening or reasoning, we would not be among the companions of the Blaze." (67:10)

Khan (2016) says that Iblis's main strategy is not to simply get people to commit sins. His strategy is to stop people from thinking.

Traditionally, there are four fundamental branches in philosophy: epistemology, ontology, axiology, and ethics. Indeed, there is a link between people's theory of knowledge (epistemology), their beliefs about the world (ontology), their priorities (axiology), and their behavior (ethics). This link is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Four Branches of Philosophy



In the case of *surah al-Asr*, what is implied is that,

- The source of knowledge is primarily revelation. Although science is useful to explain questions that deal with "what" (e.g. "what makes up the world around us?"), science is unable to answer questions that deal with "why" (e.g. "why does this world exist?"). Revelation explains why things exist.
- Beliefs about the world include all the things mentioned in the Qur'an and the Sunnah – whether seen or unseen.
- Allah explains man's purpose of creation. This helps people set their priorities. These priorities are summarized in *surah al-Asr*.

- Having understood one's purpose of creation, one's behavior ought to reflect that understanding. The purpose of thinking is to constantly compare what one knows and how one behaves. If one identifies a gap, one can change one's behavior.

In short, *surah al-Asr* implicitly or explicitly includes all four main branches of philosophy in a concise and comprehensive manner. The analysis above allows five core propositions to be made.

Core Propositions

Based on *surah al-Asr*, five core propositions are derived. These are,

1. Human beings are born a state of primordial goodness of man and Allah has given them the faculties, the strategy, and the abilities to stay in a state of goodness throughout their life (*surah at-Teen* and *surah al-Asr*).
2. Human beings have a fundamental responsibility to think. Thinking allows them to choose the right path and avoid the wrong path. Thinking is different from simply possessing knowledge as it implies constantly monitoring one's behavior to make sure that it is aligned with one's knowledge (*surah al-Mulk*).
3. Most human beings are in a state of loss (*surah al-Asr*). Allah has explained Iblis's strategy to prevent us from reaching our goal (*surah al-Ar'af* and *surah al-Mulk*).
4. To achieve success, human beings must follow the four conditions laid out in *surah al-Asr*. If one forgets one of the four conditions, one reverts automatically to the category of the one who is in a state of loss.
5. To achieve success, one has to work within a community. *Surah al-Asr* emphasizes the collective nature of success (e.g. "those who believe" not "the one who believes"). Helping others to succeed is the key to saving oneself.

However, Muslims cannot live without being affected by the global social, political, and economic system. It is therefore important to understand the philosophical roots of the current global economic system. This study will present a highly summarized overview of the history of philosophy since the beginning of the humanist project.

The Humanist Project

A review of the literature indicates that it is not possible to accurately define when the humanist project started as in different countries in Europe, humanism evolved in different forms (Marias, 2014, pp. 189-197). There are multiple dimensions to this project. There is an intellectual dimension (a reliance on personal thought rather following dogma), a religious dimension (the rise of Protestantism), an economic dimension (the rise of capitalism) and a political dimension (the

rise of modern states). Humanism will affect every aspect of life – including popular culture – so that every aspect of life changes.

There are two periods in the humanist project. Humanism 1.0 focuses on the rational man. Key figures include Descartes, Hume and Kant³. It is sometimes referred to as the Enlightenment (Marias, 2014). There seems to be a break around the 19th of century with the writings of Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud. This leads to what can be loosely called Humanism 2.0. These promote rational values but try to take into account the recent findings of neuroscience as well (this point will be explored below). Today, many philosophers classify themselves into two broad categories: modern thinkers (i.e. inheritors of the humanist project) and post-modern thinkers (Hicks, 2004).

Nietzsche

Nietzsche (1844-1900) is a controversial thinker. Baird and Kaufman (2008, 1011-1038) note that there are recurring themes in Nietzsche's work. One theme is the "death of God", a provocative and paradoxical expression. Nietzsche means that "*all absolutes have collapsed and there is no transcendent basis in any area – religion, philosophy, science, or politics – for making meaning of life*" (Baird & Kaufmann, 2008, p. 1013). Nietzsche was wary of the traditional scientific project so he proposes a new method – genealogy – to understand where ideas come from (Ferry & Renault, 1991). This is the time where Europeans were becoming aware that consciousness is only the tip of the iceberg. The subconscious is the rest of the iceberg. The "death of God" is Nietzsche's attempt to systematically destroy all philosophical ideals. Accepting that there is nothing permanent allows individuals to establish their will to power. Nietzsche argues that traditionally, the Greeks believed that there was a certain harmony in the cosmos. In reality, Nietzsche sees only conflict. Nietzsche argued that the Greeks encouraged a master mentality. However, he argued that Christianity had introduced a slave mentality in Western civilization. This conflict between the master mentality and the slave mentality became central to his philosophy (Baird & Kaufmann, 2008, p. 1013).

Nietzsche's ideas have often been misunderstood. He was really promoting a type of stoicism. The will to power is really the will of power over the self. One will "*overcome his animal nature, organize the chaos of his passions, sublimate his impulses, and give style to his character*" (Baird & Kaufmann, 2008, p. 1013). People are often scared of two things: their past and their future. Nietzsche argued that one must simply confront the present with wisdom (Ferry & Renault, 1991). The phrase that symbolizes Nietzsche's worldview is "*amor fati*" – a Stoic formula that translates as "*love your fate*".

Nietzsche's influence cannot be disputed. His philosophy challenged the ideals of the humanist project. His work allowed other thinkers to pursue their attack of Humanism 1.0. This will eventually lead to Humanism 2.0 and then to postmodernism.

Heidegger

Heidegger's (1889-1976) philosophy is complex but this section is based on Baird and Kaufmann (2008, pp. 1066-1096). Prior to Heidegger, the big philosophical question was the origin of knowledge. Heidegger wanted to explore ontology. He said that people had taken the human being for granted. So he wanted to understand the concept of Being. He notes that philosophers have focused too intently on human beings outside of any context. Yet human beings are always somewhere – in the office, at the supermarket, or in bed. To make distinguish between an abstract notion of being and a concrete notion of being, Heidegger uses the term *Dasein* which is translated as “being-in-the-world”. *Dasein* has unique properties. He can reflect on his own existence and his own mortality. To overcome his anxiety about death, he becomes part of the crowd – he goes to the cinema with friend, he falls in love and so forth.

For Heidegger, when *dasein* remembers his death, he lives an authentic life. When he forgets his death and loses himself in the crowd, he lives an unauthentic life. Using phenomenology to assess modern life, Heidegger notes the “*modern technology frenzy*” that makes people forget their own selves (Baird & Kaufmann, 2008, 1069).

An important aspect of Heidegger is that he questions individualism. People are never alone. They are born in a family. They are raised in a society. They necessarily follow social norms. For Heidegger, Descartes should not have said, “*I think therefore I am*”, he should have said, “*we think, therefore we are*”. The individual is really an abstraction that has no ontological validity.

There is a three-fold structure of *dasein* in time: the past, the present, and the future. With regards to the past, *dasein* is born and “thrown” in a world. He inherits a culture, a language, a socio-economic status, and a morality. With regards to the present, he flees from nothingness so he fills his life with activities that are essentially meaningless. With regards to the future, *dasein* makes plans that will be interrupted by death. Despite his apparent pessimism, Heidegger was an optimist (Baird & Kaufmann, 2008, p. 1069). Thinking about death becomes a means to motivate oneself to make one's life meaningful. Ultimately, the knowledge of our death us liberating.

Heidegger had an enormous influence on a wide range of philosophers. Many of these 20th century philosophers became disillusioned with the humanist project and they gradually created a post-modern philosophy.

Postmodernism

It is difficult to define exactly what postmodernism is and when exactly it started. A key point is to understand the influence of Marx (1818-1883). Marx argued that capitalism reduced human beings to animals that work in order to survive, leading to self-alienation (Baird & Kaufmann, 2008, p.988). Many philosophers became leftwing thinkers. For political reasons, they associated humanism with capitalism. As Marxists, to reject capitalism, they needed to reject humanism (Hicks, 2004). Some philosophers, like Marcuse (1898-1979) extended Marx's argument by

introducing the manipulative power of advertisers. Through advertising, people are conditioned to like what they get, rather than getting what they would truly like (Wolff, 1981, p.120). Others argued for radical freedom. Sartre (1905-1980) said, "*Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself*". Even though all actions are ultimately futile as one will die, one can still choose how to live (Baird & Kaufmann, 2008, 1129).

This cannot be over-emphasized. Virtually, all European philosophers hated capitalism and were hoping for a victory of communism. When the reality of Soviet communism became apparent in the 1950s and 1960s, many rejected capitalism and communism by essentially focusing on the human subjective experience. Slowly, the difference between modernism (i.e. Humanism 1.0 and then Humanism 2.0) and postmodernism became clearer. Modernism is about progress. It is "*not to understand the world but to change it*" (Lawler, 1999, p.1). It is about objectivity (Hicks, 2004). The modernist ideal is that the economy will grow every year, people will have better jobs, the education will become better. Crucially, in the modernist's mind, this will go on forever.

Postmodernists assume that the modernist project is failing. Growth cannot go on forever. Things don't necessarily become better. The structural problems remain and the human condition remains a mystery. Postmodernists do not believe that it is possible to make human life "*predictable, tranquil, secure and carefree*" (Lawler, 1999, p.1). Postmodernists assert that the human existence is groundless. Life has no purpose. Postmodernists do not try to transform reality but to come to terms with it (Lawler, 1999, p. 2). It is about subjectivity (2004). One aspect of postmodernism is the emergence of "silent voices" or ideas from the periphery as Derrida (1930-2004) would have said (Baird & Kaufmann, 2008, p. 1179).

Hicks (2004) says that the first generation of postmodern thinkers were deep philosophers. As succeeding generations of postmodernists, the focus is less on epistemological doubt and more about asserting political and social demands. A new phase in postmodernism started with the digital era. For example, Baudrillard (1927-2007), started as a Marxist and he gradually became more and more fascinated with the media and digital technology. Historically, he said, the media was linked to tangible things. A painting with a chair and a table represented a real chair and a real table. With the rise of new technologies, the media has become increasingly divorced from reality. It has reached a stage where the reality in the digital world is more real than reality in the real world. Baudrillard called this "hyperreality." Like most postmodernists, Baudrillard believed that the world has stopped to be fundamentally rational. Poster (2002, p. 7) writes,

"The concurrent spread of the hyperreal through the media and the collapse of the liberal and Marxist politics as master narratives deprives the rational subject of its privilege access to truth. Individuals are no longer citizens, eager to maximize civil rights; nor proletarians anticipating the onset of communism. They are consumers (...)."

In a postmodern world, citizens are simply consumers. Ferry's (2011)¹ analysis is similar but with an important difference. He argues that globalization has created a system of hyper-competition and hyper-consumption. Advertising, in particular, is a very powerful tool to get

individuals to buy things they don't need. This creates a society where people feel alienated and where people have to stop thinking in order to remain sane. The promises of globalizations are two-fold: i) if you climb the corporate ladder, you will be happy, and ii) if you consume more products, you will be happy. For Ferry (2011), globalization only works if people think less. Ironically, the revolutionary movements in the 1960s led to the destruction of traditional institutions and traditional values that made globalization possible. Ferry's (2011) points out that philosophy has been able to deal with questions related to epistemology, ontology and morality. However, it has failed to provide Western individuals with a purpose of life. Having briefly looked at the current state of affairs in the Western world, let us consider the Islamic perspective.

Discussion

The author started with a brief description of *surah al-Asr* and ended up with five core propositions that seem to summarize the Islamic worldview. This was followed by a brief overview of some key Western philosophers over the last two hundred years. One could observe how Western ideas about truth, science, and objectivity have completely disintegrated in the light of the postmodern movement. At the end of the day, what is left is a sense of collective confusion, collective subjectivity, and collective anxiety.

It is crucially important to understand that in the Western perspective, progress is not about economic achievements. Progress is about replacing religious beliefs with a deep-seated belief that people are rational and through scientific progress, the world will become a better place. This incredible optimism in the human potential has been replaced with a deep despair in the awareness that people's ability to control their destiny seems incredibly limited in the 21st century. By contrast, the word "progress" in the Muslim world seems to be reduced to economic progress only. The evolution of Western philosophy over the last 1,400 years, culminating with modernism and modernism is in fact an illustration of the second *ayah* in *surah al-Asr* namely,

Verily, mankind is in a state of loss

This analysis does beg an important question. What will happen to the Muslim youth? As numerous philosophers have pointed out, the omnipresence of popular culture has created a culture where people consume more and think less. Will this happen to the Muslim youth? Or will the Muslim youth experiment with postmodernism, see that it seems to lead nowhere, and rediscover it's Islamic heritage?

Over the last ten years, Fontaine and his colleagues have experimented with online Islamic learning. Students have been asked to watch one Islamic video a week throughout the semester. Every week, they need to summarize their reflections in a diary that they submit at the end of the semester. Psychometric data shows that as the semester progresses, students report a higher level of spiritual intelligence (Fontaine, Ahmad & Oziev, 2017). Since 2010, Fontaine and his colleagues have worked with more than 3,000 students. Many have reported a higher level of spirituality and

a greater sense of purpose in life. The key take away in Fontaine's work is the distinction between knowing and reflecting.

Many students start with a knowledge mindset. Their report reads something like "*this scholar said this about that ayah.*" This is a beginning but it is not very useful. Students are asked, "*what does this surah mean to you?*" For example, after discussing *surah al-Asr*, do they give "*tawasi bil haq*" to their friends who don't pray? If they do, what is their experience.

Last semester, the author asked his students to keep a diary on *surah al-Fatihah*. One student wrote the following entries:

"15/03/19 – It's already one month that Dr Ridhwan gave this assignment. After Friday prayers, I decided to watch the video. To be honest, I had no idea why Dr Ridhwan gave us this assignment. This is a surah that I memorised when I was 5. After watching the video, I realised that it was not an ordinary surah. It not only changed my perception but it made me curious.

5/04/19 – I got busy with assignments so I have forgotten what the video was about. I watched the video again. I was amazed that we are actually having a conversation with Allah without realizing it.

6/04/19 – While driving, I was thinking of surah al-Fatihah. I realise that the beginning starts by praising Allah. I start to think about the gifts that Allah has given to us. They are countless and I realise that we must use these gifts in the right way.

14/4/19 – Since this assignment exist, my schedule changed a bit. I now do my reflection after fajr prayers. Yesterday, a thought came to my mind. Knowing the al-fatihah really changed my life but perhaps knowing the other parts of what is said in the prayers can help me concentrate more. So this morning, I searched about the meanings of the words in Arabic that we say in the prayer so that they come from the heart, not just from the tongue.

17/4/19 – After Ishah prayers, I decided to do some research on the two groups ("those that earn anger" and "those who are astray").

5/5/19 – This will be the last entry in my diary. I plan to do more reflections on more surahs. To be honest, there are a lot more entries but these are the ones that I can share. The other entries relate to my personal matters."

Another student made an interesting comment. He is currently doing his practical training in an accounting firm. He has been struggling for several months with a high workload and a difficult supervisor. He has relied more and more on the Qur'an. First, he reported doing personal self-reflections after the morning prayers. Then, he started watching Friday sermons on line. He found that incredibly helpful. When asked why the sermons made a difference, he said, "*it is very difficult to reflect on the Qur'an when you are depressed. When you lesson on the sermon, the speaker has done the reflection for you and it makes it easier for you to understand.*"

The feedback from students is generally very positive. Once they are asked to reflect on the Qur'an, it ceases to be a text that only Muslim scholars discuss. It becomes a text that every Muslim can relate to because they are relating the text to their everyday life. With this in mind, Table 1 was constructed.

Table 1: Modernism, postmodernism and the Islamic worldview

	<i>Source of Knowledge</i>	<i>Individual</i>	<i>Collective</i>	<i>Comment</i>
Modernism	Human experience only	Objective	Objective	Modernism starts with the premise that individuals are rational. By the 19 th century, that premise proves to be false. Nonetheless, through collective effort, some scientific facts can be established. But the purpose of life cannot be addressed through scientific enquiry.
Postmodernism	Human experience only	Subjective	Subjective	Postmodernism ends up denying that human progress is possible. Truth is no longer possible. Everything is subjectivity. People live to consume.
Islamic perspective	Revelation and human experience	Subjective	Collective wisdom	Every person can know God. Individuals cannot be objective about the world but the Qur'an and the Sunnah can give us an objective standard. A shift from "knowledge" to "reflection" might be necessary. However, individuals can use revelation to pursue a personal agenda. Through collective discussion, personal agendas can be challenged and collective wisdom can emerge.

Conclusion

Prior to analyzing the opinions of philosophers, some reflections of surah al-Asr were given based on Khan (1993). Five propositions were derived. The propositions below have been modified to include some insights from social psychology. These were,

1. Human beings are born a state of primordial goodness of man and Allah has given them the faculties, the strategy, and the abilities to stay in a state of goodness throughout their life (*surah at-Teen* and *surah al-Asr*).
2. Human beings have a fundamental responsibility to think. Thinking allows them to choose the right path and avoid the wrong path. Thinking is different from simply possessing knowledge as it implies constantly monitoring one's behavior to make sure that it is aligned with one's knowledge (*surah al-Mulk*).

3. Most human beings are in a state of loss (*surah al-Asr*). Allah has explained Iblis's strategy to prevent us from reaching our goal (*surah al-Ar'af* and *surah al-Mulk*). For example, Iblis influences some people so that they put pressure on their peers (*surah al-Furqan*).
4. To achieve success, human beings must follow the four conditions laid out in *surah al-Asr*. If one forgets one of the four conditions, one reverts automatically to the category of the one who is in a state of loss. Part of *sabr* is resisting social pressure.
5. To achieve success, one has to work within a community. *Surah al-Asr* emphasizes the collective nature of success (e.g. "those who believe" not "the one who believes"). Helping others to succeed is the key to saving oneself.

The ideas of Western philosophers were presented. The survey was limited to a few names but the essential ideas of modernism and postmodernism have been captured. Referring to the second *ayah* in *surah al-Asr*, one can say that both sets of ideas explain how people end up in a state of loss. In some cases, people worship reason and science. They dismiss all forms of revelation because of their worldviews. As Fontaine (2018), Western philosophers have been focused on proving the existence of God. Muslim scholars have pointed out that this is the wrong question. The right question should have been "was Muhammad a real prophet". However, Western philosophers only seem to seriously consider philosophical questions that originate within their own community (Fontaine, 2018). In other cases, people worship subjectivity. They consider true whatever they like.

The role of Muslim scholars is a delicate one. They have to benefit from both revelation and science. For example, it seems important that whatever Islamic worldview emerges in the 21st century, it seeks to include the lessons from neuroscience and social psychology. Thus, the subjectivity of individual Muslims has to be acknowledged. Similarly, individual Muslims can seek out Muslims that have the same prejudices as they have. One ends up with religious groupthink (Fontaine, Ahmad, & Oziev, 2017). These are limitations that need to be acknowledged and publicly discussed.

Not wanting to end on a depressing note, the author's experience with encouraging students to reflect on the Qur'an is very encouraging. Future research will try to determine whether this is a good practice.

End Notes:

1. Luc Ferry (1951-) is not a postmodern thinker but his analysis includes some postmodern themes such as insights into globalization.
2. I am being very careful with my words. I am not saying that Islamic rulings should change because of insights from social psychology. I am saying that if Islamic rulings are presented in the right way, they can be easily accepted by the general public. If they are presented in the

wrong way, the general public might misunderstand the wisdom behind the rule and the credibility of the *shariah* in the eyes of the people might be unnecessarily undermined.

3. Kant (1724-1804) is difficult to classify because his work helped Humanism 1.0 turn into Humanism 2.0.

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