WORLDVIEWS AND BELIEF SYSTEMS

A COMPARATIVE INTRODUCTION

HASHI, ABDUREZAK ABDULAHI, *PHD*

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A Comparative Introduction

This book, *Worldviews and Belief Systems,* constitutes a comparative introduction to the foundations and conceptions of dominant belief systems and philosophies of life. It illustrates major areas of differences and similarities among belief systems; it provides descriptive accounts on the basic concepts, fundamental teachings and types of worldviews and beliefs systems such as religious, philosophical and scientific worldviews. Conventional ideologies and approaches to life such as materialism, modernism, positivism, secularism and postmodernism, as well as forms of religious belief systems and faiths such as polytheism, pantheism, monism, deism and monotheism are highlighted. The central idea of this book is to offer, for the beginners in this field, an opportunity to read about different perspectives on these subjects.

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A COMPARATIVE INTRODUCTION

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PREFACE

Human beings are born with natural curiosity towards understanding life, its origin, its purpose and ends, so that they can relate themselves to the surrounding realities and incidents in a meaningful way. In denial of enduring emptiness and dissolution, right from the age of infancy and childhood, man exhibits the desire to understand the nature, degrees and connections of existing physical and metaphysical realities, then generates an explanation about what the existence is all about. Besides the nature and degrees of existing realities, man also seeks to understand the origins of life and where it all comes from, as well as the ends of life and what happens in the future. On top of that, in an attempt to act with consistency and in a rational way, man seeks to understand the values of life, the meaning of the absolute truth and the ultimate happiness in life. The answers we give to these concerns form the basis of our basic thoughts, the fundamental commitments, through which we view and judge given realities and circumstances in life.

Though human beings share the concerns and the tendency to seek answers for such concerns, yet the answers given in this regard vary, and as a result our conceptions about the reality of life also vary time and again. This is evident from the fact that, in the process of answering these concerns, there are those who prefer logical speculations and argumentations over other means of understanding basic realities of life, and thus

formulate their answers to basic questions of life on philosophical grounds. Unlike those who take a philosophical approach, there are those whose conception of reality is constructed by scientism,[1] which is the contention that limits obtaining true knowledge to the methods of natural science. In contrast to philosophical and scientific worldviews, approaches which are marked by materialism and trust in human rationality, or humanism, there are approaches persuaded others whose beliefs about the fundamental realities of life are founded on divine revelations; a tendency that is observable, though at different levels, in major world religious traditions. Hence, as priorities and approaches to answering the fundamental questions of life are varied, worldviews and conceptions about the reality of life too are varied. For instance, there are some whose belief systems are marked by monism; the doctrine that reality is one, one supreme existence, whereby everything that exists is a manifestation of that reality. Some monists such as materialists have said that reality is one and it is material, while others contend for one real existence, which according to them is immaterial. Some have argued for monism on religious grounds, while others have accepted monism on rational and philosophical grounds. Likewise, there are those whose conception of life is marked by atheism; denial of the existence of God, while others have interpreted life

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[1] Definitions of the terminologies like "*scientism*", "*materialism*", "*philosophical worldview*", "*scientific worldview*", "*monism*" are addressed in chapter 2 and chapter 3 of this book.

through and within belief in the existence of God. Those who denied the existence of God, did so for different reasons, while theistic belief systems also vary in their conceptions of God. Among theists are polytheists, who based their worldview not on a belief in one God, but incorporate a multiplicity of lordships, in a way that entails belief in the existence of more than one God or more than one deity. Closely related to this conception is pantheism, the doctrine that identifies God with nature, as if the universe and the divinity are the same and thus form only one entity; in this belief, God is nature and nature is God. In short, both polytheism and pantheism hold a belief in the existence of God, however the former tends to a belief in a number of divinities, while the later fails to distinguish God from the natural world. Polytheistic and pantheistic conceptions of life are contrasted to that of monotheism, the belief in the existence of one God, who is the Creator of everything and everyone; a position held, though in different ways, by major world religions. In addition, although monotheism is generally held by major world religious traditions, there is diversity in their belief in the existence of one God, particularly in the area of the universality of God and divisibility of the essence of God. Hence world religious faiths offer Ethno-centric, Trinitarian and *Tawhidic* conceptions of God, which primarily share belief in the existence of God, but differ in ways of conceiving God.[1]

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[1] Ethno-centrism or monoletry, in which God is one, without denying other communities' right to worship other gods, is

Since belief systems differ in conceptions of God, conceptions of ethics and social order too differ from one another. For instance, given the fact that scientific and atheistic philosophical worldviews deny the existence of God and the truth of Divine revelations, proponents of these worldviews focus on human means for comprehending the reality of life. These belief systems promote human rationality over divine revelations, therefore their conception of morality and social order are founded on humanism that is the trust in human goodness and values, rather than belief in God or in divine revelations, in all matters of life.[1] Social orders

attributed to Judaism. In addition, the belief in the existence of one God, but three godheads is attributed to the Christian concept of God, Trinity, and the Hinduism conception of God, Trimurty. *Tawhidic* conception of God, in which God is one and only One, and for all and for everybody, is attributed to Islamic faith. Further details on this topic is found in Hashi, Addurezak A., *Between Monotheism and Tawhid: A Comparative Analysis*, Revelation and Science, Research Management Center, International Islamic University Malaysia, v.3, no.2, 23-29

[1] Literally, humanism is the devotion to the humanities. Conceptually, this term has various interrelated meanings depending the field and school of thought. For instance, in his online article "*What is Humanism*", Fred Edwords, lists down various conceptions of humanism such as Renaissance humanism, Western cultural humanism, Philosophical humanism, Modern humanism, Secular humanism and Religious humanism, which more or less exhibit different levels of trust in human made values over divine revelations. Though humanism is expressed in different ways, in the general outlook, humanism is a system of thought that emphasizes goodness of human beings, and attaching prime importance to human affairs rather than divine. Further details are found in: Fred

offered by atheistic worldviews are often marked by secularism and communistic attitudes, theories of governance, which are derived from humanism,[1] not from any divine sources. In contrast, religious worldviews present an understanding that is contrastable to that of atheistic humanism. This is so because, unlike humanistic philosophy, which is founded on disbelief in the existence of God, religious worldviews are generally founded on belief in the existence of a universal spirit, god or divine entity, which has established an eternal order. Furthermore, unlike humanism in which good in life is sought without belief in God or without guidance from a divine order, in religious traditions, the universal spirit, deity or God, unveils his character and plan through revelations or inspirations. This divine code addresses both spiritual as well as material aspects of life, and demands that men and women obey its teachings. Based on this divine order, a man's conduct is judged and evaluated; an evaluation which has implications in this life and beyond. Though in the general outlook, religious worldviews share this

Edwords, "What is Humanism", in *American Humanist Association*, available at: http://americanhumanist.org/Humanism/What_is_Humanism, retrieved on 13th October, 2015.

[1] Humanism is a system of thought that gives priority to human thoughts and ideas presumably over divine sources in answering basic questions of life. In a rejection of the authority of revelation, which is generally the source of religious beliefs and traditions, proponents of humanism seek to understand human thoughts and beliefs on notions that are primarily derived from human rationality.

common notion, religious traditions hold different perspectives on the conception of God, the understanding of revelation, and teachings that are founded therein.

This book uses analytical and comparative methods, and intends to highlight the foundations and conceptions of dominant belief systems and philosophies of life. This book seeks to address the fundamental ideals and thoughts of given worldviews in a descriptive and comparative manner, however it does not intend to present a normative account, nor does it aim to produce any judgments of right and wrong. It explains the meaning and implications of the leading thoughts and ideals of given philosophies of life, and illustrates the differences and similarities among such belief systems.

Apart from the introduction which highlights the rationale and the method used in this book, as well as the conclusion, which constitutes a summary of the ideas and thoughts presented in this work, this book includes seven chapters. The first chapter highlights basic concepts, understandings, functions and contents of the term "worldview". The second chapter explains types of worldview, such as the scientific worldview, philosophical worldview and religious worldview, as well as ideologies and leading schools of thought. Foundations and concepts of conventional approaches to life such as materialism, modernism, positivism, secularism and postmodernism are highlighted in chapter three. Chapter four illustrates types and forms of religious belief systems and faiths such as polytheism, pantheism, monism, deism and monotheism. Theories

and conceptions about religiosity, particularly the criterion of true religion, its functions in life, as well as scholastic debates about the evolution or origin of religious faiths are addressed in chapter five. Chapter six forms a concise exposition of the Islamic worldview, its scope and principles, with particular emphases on its definition, essential teachings and distinguishing attributes, while chapter seven presents a comparative overview of belief systems with regard to ontology, theology, the origin of life, eschatology, epistemology, axiology, and anthropology.

The central idea of this work is to offer, for the beginners in this field, an opportunity to read about different perspectives on these subjects. With this comparative account of the foundations and attributes of worldviews, the writer hopes that this book will serve as an introduction to the philosophies of life for beginners, new students and learners in this important and challenging field. Because the book aims to introduce the subjects of this field to beginners and new learners, the writer emphasizes technical and conceptual definitions as well as the philosophical implications of given concepts and thoughts.

In addition, it is true that the study of belief systems and fundamental commitments of life of given societies and communities is very sensitive and sometimes a delicate task, but given the fact that today we are living in a globalized village, whereby no man is an island, and in which people of different faiths and beliefs are rubbing shoulders in all levels of life, today we have no choice but to study worldviews and belief

systems, the foundations of cultures and traditions, so that our understanding of each other is improved and enriched, and the potential and real tensions among communities are eased. It is this effort, the desire to form mutual understanding and contribute to peaceful co-existence among global societies, which this book seeks to serve. Hence the subjects and discussions of this book are written to assist those who wish to read and understand the spirit and foundations of belief systems and worldviews in a comparative manner.

All praises and gratitude are, above all, due to Allah (*s. w. t.*), the Almighty, the Most Compassionate and the Most Merciful, for His grace and guidance at all times, particularly during the course of this work. I also wish to express my appreciation and thanks to those, staff and students of the International Islamic University Malaysia, especially the staff and students of the Faculty of Science, IIUM, whose comments and discussions have enriched the subject matter of this book. Indeed, without their support and encouragement, the publication of this work would probably have never been achieved. I am also deeply grateful to my wife, the rock of our family, Idil Isse Jama, whose support and understanding contributed significantly, not only to the completion of this work, but also to the progress of my academic career. My appreciations are also extended to my children, Rahmo, Mohd Amiin, Usama, Badar and Ramla, who are the delights of the eye and a source of inspiration. May Allah (*s. w. t.*), reward them all, and accept our good deeds.

May the Almighty Allah (*s. w. t.*), the Most Forgiving and Most Compassionate, accept this work as a humble contribution to the field of knowledge, and forgive me for all my shortcomings.

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