

The First Intellect In Kirmānī's Thought

IBRAHIM ABU BAKAR

ABSTRAK

Artikel ringkas ini mengemukakan pemikiran Kirmānī terhadap Akal Pertama. Dalam pemikirannya, Akal Pertama adalah juga Maujud Pertama dan Prinsip Pertama. Ia menjadi makhluk pertama ciptaan Tuhan. Makhluk-makhluk lain mempunyai hubungan langsung atau tidak langsung dengan Akal Pertama. Dalam kosmologinya, Kirmani memper-tahankan kreasi Akal Pertama dan menolak emanasi Akal Pertama.

ABSTRACT

This short article presents Kirmānī's thought of the First Intellect. In his thought, the First Intellect is also the First Existent and the First Principle. It is God's first created being. Other created beings have direct or indirect links with the First Intellect. In his cosmology, Kirmānī defended the creation of the First Intellect and refuted the emanation of the First Intellect.

INTRODUCTION

The article discusses Kirmānī's thought of the First Intellect and its place in his cosmology. The discussion is based on his work the *Rāhat al-'aql* which was introduced and edited by Mustafā Ghālib and published in Beirut in 1967.

Kirmānī's full name is Sayyid Hamīd al-Dīn Ahmad bin Abd Allah al-Kirmānī. He lived during the Fatimid caliphate in particular during the reign of the caliph Iman al-Hākīm who ruled the caliphate from 386 A.H/ 996 A.D. to 411./1021. Kirmānī died in 410/1019 (Ivanow 1936, 10).

Kirmānī's philosophical writings especially the *Rāhat al-'aql* were influenced by the philosophical writings of Aristotle, Plato and the Neo-Platonists. About the influence of the Greek philosophy upon Kirmānī's work, Bayard Dodge says: "As al-Kirmānī knew the writings of Aristotle, Plato, and the Neo-Platonists, his work [the *Rāhat al-'aql*] was accepted by his contemporaries as an authoritative statement" (Dodge 1960, 187).

The *Rāhat al-'aql* contains seven chapters and each chapter has seven subtitles except the seventh chapter which has fourteen subtitles. Thus, the work has altogether fifty-six subtitles. The work uses the Arabic word

“al-sūr” for the chapter and the Arabic word “al-mashra” for the subtitle.

THE FIRST INTELLECT

The discussion of the First Intellect (*al-'aql al-awwal*) is found in the third chapter which has seven subtitles. The chapter begins with the discussion about the existence of the First Existent (*al-mawjūd al-awwal*) whose existence is not by itself and neither a body nor a faculty in the body. It exists outside or beyond the bodily world and become a final cause for all other existents (Kirmānī 1967, 157). In Kirmānī's thought the First Existent is the First Intellect or the First Principle (*al-mabda' al-awwal*) created by Allah (Kirmānī 1967, 158).

Why did Kirmānī establish the existence of the First Intellect with such characteristics? The answer can be exclusively derived from his idea or concept of Allah. For him, Allah is beyond all ranks, grades, and degrees (*marātib*) and transcends perfection and imperfection, unity and plurality. Therefore, to understand or to perceive Allah either by negation, by using the negation letter *lā*, or by attribution is not proper because human intellect does not have a clear guide on the true nature of Allah. Human intellect is able to grasp and conceive what exists through the *ikhṭira'* (invention). Human intellect is able to understand, describe and elaborate the invented beings because they have forms and attributes. The First Intellect is the formed being brought into existence from non-existence by Allah through His *ibda'* (creation) and invention (Kirmānī 1967, 57).

The importance of the First Intellect in Kirmānī's cosmology is related to his perception of Allah. Kirmānī holds that Allah is the unknowable One. He created and invented the First Intellect as the First Existent or the First Principle to be known by human intellect since human intellect can grasp the formed beings and the First Intellect is the first formed being. In other words, Kirmānī does not approve the method of negation or attribution as mean to comprehend Allah. The method of negation is popular among the anti-attributists and anti-anthropomorphists such as the Jahmites and the Mu'tazilites. The method of attribution is popular among the attributists such as the Sunnites, the Traditionists and the Antropomorphists (*mujassimah* or *mushabbihah*).

The idea that Allah is the unknowable One has same similarity with the idea of God in Neoplatonism. A.H. Armstrong described the One or Good in Plotinus's thought in the following words.

Plotinus.. places the One or Good beyond Mind and beyond Being. It is the source of the Divine Mind and the World of Forms which is its content, but the

One Itself is neither a Mind nor a Form.... Its excellence goes beyond the resources of our thought and language. (Armstrong 1965, 180-181)

The existence of the First Intellect on the First Existent is important in Kirmānī's cosmology because he holds that the existence of other created beings depends on the existence of the First Intellect. Kirmānī demonstrates that by virtue of its existence, the first Intellect is the First Cause and the Final End for other existents like the first number, number one, which is the first cause and the final end for other numbers. Other numbers such as two, three and four proceed from the first number, and similarly, other existents proceed from the First Intellect or the First Existent. In the Proceeding or originating process, the First Intellect is the First Cause and in the returning process, the First Intellect becomes the Final End for other existents. Hence, the existence of the First Intellect is necessary for the existence of other created beings (Kirmānī 1967, 157 – 158).

It is clear that Kirmānī's cosmology begins with the creation of the First Intellect which is also the First Existent. Other existents have their origins in the First Intellect. By thinking of the First Intellect as the first created being, Kirmānī, as I see it, attempts to explain how the created beings are connected with Allah. They are connected with Allah through the First Intellect. In other words, the First Intellect is intermediary between Allah and His other created beings.

Although Kirmānī thinks that the First Intellect is the source for all other created beings, he posits only one way relationship between the First Intellect and the other created beings. The First Intellect is not affected by other created beings but they are affected by the First Intellect since their existence proceeds from it. In this particular issue, I think that Kirmānī attempts to solve the problem of the infinite regress because all other existents find their sources or origins in the First Intellect which is first created by Allah to be source and origin for all other existents.

The infinite regress is one of the very important philosophical and theological problems. Kirmānī tries to solve the same problem through his idea of the First Intellect whose function is the First Cause and the Final End. All other created beings proceed from the First Intellect and they finally end up with it. The first Intellect is a first being created by Allah.

In the Greek philosophical tradition, Aristotle (384 – 322 B.C.) reflected on the problem of the infinite regress of motions or movements in the universe. His concept of the Unmoved Mover is his attempt to solve the problem of the infinite regress because he considered the Unmoved Mover as the originator of all movers which produce motions and movements. The Unmoved Mover is not affected by all movers but

they are affected by the Unmoved Mover since it is their source. Regarding the nature and function of the Unmoved Mover in Aristotle's philosophy, Armstrong writes: And in so far as all movements and changes in the universe depend on this first movement, they are all ultimately caused by the desire inspired by the pure and perfect actuality of the Unmoved Mover, the Divine Mind or God;...." (Armstrong 1965, 89). According to G.B. Kerferd, Aristotle believed that the existence of the Unmoved Mover was necessary because other movers depend on the Unmoved Mover for their motions or movements. The Unmoved Mover must be immaterial because its functions is to actualize the potential movements or motions in the material world (Kerferd 1972).

In Kirmānī's cosmology, the First Intellect is also immaterial. He affirms that the First Intellect actually exists and its existence is not by itself. It is an act, an actor, and an acted act or effect by itself. It is neither a body nor a faculty in the body. The First Intellect exists beyond or outside the bodily world (Kirmānī 1967, 159 dan 167).

Although the First Intellect is immaterial, it does not emanate from Allah. It is created by Allah. Kirmānī goes on to prove the createdness of the First Intellect and to refute the notion of emanation of the First Intellect. He writes that the existence of the First Intellect is not through the emanation as said by the philosophers, but rather through the creation of the Most High, Allah. However, searching for a complete knowledge on how the First Intellect exists is impossible (Kirmānī 1967, 171).

According to P. Merlan, the philosophy of emanationism was made clear by Plotinus who thought that the supreme principle or the supreme reality which was the One must emanate from it the First Intellect or the First Intelligence. The Soul emanates from the First Intellect and matter emanates from the Soul (Merlan 1972). To elaborate how the First Intellect proceeds from the One, Plotinus often uses sensory objects such as the sun and its ray, and fire and its heat. In a sense that the emanation of the First Intellect from the one is comparable to the radiation of ray from the sun or of heat from fire (Armstrong 1967, 230 – 240).

Kirmānī advanced three main arguments to dispute the concept of emanation. First, the nature of emanation requires the same genus between the emanator and those emanated from it. There is a similarity, for example, between the sun and its ray. The essence of the ray which emanates from the sun retains the essence of the sun i.e. heat or hotness. Therefore, the essence of any emanator consists of two things: one thing is shared by both the emanator and the emanated, and another thing distinguishes the emanator from the emanated. Since there is something which differentiates between the emanator and the emanated, both have two different essences. Thus, a plurality of essences exists. If the Most High, i.e. Allah, were the emanator, He would have plurality because His

essence would consist of two things. Since the Most High exalts from the *kathrah* (much or many) and *gillah* (less or few), His essence cannot comprise two things. Hence, the supposition that He is the emanator is void (Kirmānī 1967, 171 – 172).

The second argument proposed by Kirmānī to refute the concept of emanation is related to the nature of human mind. He said that the principles and rules in human mind dictate that the simpler and less pluralistic is the more noble and eminent. It follows that the emanator is more eminent than the emanated because the former is simpler than the latter. If the Most High were the emanator, He would be more eminent than the emanated. This necessitates a comparison of the two. Since the Most High is incomparable, He is not the emanator (Kirmānī 1967, 172).

Kirmānī's third argument is related to Allah's essence. He said that the emanator must be, in its essence, complete and perfect before the emanated emanates. The emanated shares some completion and perfection of the emanator. Since the essence of the Most High is the most complete and perfect, His essence is not shared by any being. Thus the First Intellect cannot emanate from the Most High. Moreover, the essence of the Most High is incomparable with all other essences. His essence has no qualities and attributes like the essence of the First Intellect. Therefore, the First Intellect does not emanate from the Most High (Kirmānī 1967, 172 – 173).

Kirmānī's first argument is very much similar to that of Balinus who wrote, "God cannot be the cause of created beings since the cause of anything must in one respect resemble that of which it is a cause and in another respect be different from it. But there is no resemblance whatever between God and created beings." (Affifi 1955, 848). In Kirmānī's thought, the Most High cannot be the emanator of the First Intellect because it indicated resemblance between the emanator and the emanated.

Although Kirmānī proposed that the Most High created the First Intellect, he did not explain how Most High did it. He just said that human intellect cannot comprehend how the First Intellect was created because the former was not created to comprehend the latter. In addition, the First Intellect caused human intellect to exist. As the effect of the First Intellect, human intellect cannot comprehend its cause. If human intellect completely knew the First Intellect, it would become the First Intellect and would be able to perform the function of the First Intellect. Similarly, if a student knew everything like his teacher, he would become the teacher (Kirmānī 1967, 174 – 175).

Kirmānī went on to explain some qualities or attributes of the First Intellect. He said that the First Intellect is a real creation, created and real oneness and one. The First Intellect is not anteceded by anything and

other existents do not precede it. The First Intellect is the first created being. Since creation is an act, it has a real existence which differentiates it from other existents. The existence of the First Intellect is different from the existence of other created beings because it does not depend on any intermediary, matter, instrument or other things while the other beings depend on the existence of the First Intellect. Since the First Intellect is the act of creation it is the acted and the acted is the act of its actor. Hence, the First Intellect is the acted and the created being. The Most High created it (Kirmānī 1967, 176).

Based on what has been explained above, Kirmānī's cosmology begins with the First Intellect as it is the first created being created by the Most High. However, S.N. Makaren did not see Kirmānī's concept of the First Intellect as the first created being. Makaren thought that Kirmānī did not differentiate between God, the First Intellect, and the act of the Origination. Makaren wrote about Kirmānī's thought of the First Intellect in the following words:

the Originator, i.e. God, the Originated, i.e. the First Intellect, and the act of Origination are one. Thus, we have three hypostases of a trinity, three real and distinct subsistences in one undivided essence of God. This is obviously very close to the Christian belief in trinity... (Makaren 1967, 46)

Makaren probably does not read about Kirmānī's rejection of emanation in his *Rāhat al-'aql*. If he reads it, he probably does not accept Kirmānī arguments refuting the concept of emanation. As stated above, this article refers to Kirmānī's arguments disputing the philosophical idea stating that the First Intellect emanates from God. Kirmānī's three arguments listed above are intended to reject that emanationist idea and to prove his thought that the First Intellect was created by the Most High. Furthermore, in his *Rāhat al-'aql* Kirmānī uses the words and expressions which are pointing to the differences between the Most High and the First Intellect such as *al-muta'āli*, *al-ibda'*, *al-ikhtira'*, *al-mubda'*, *al-mawjūd al-awwal*; and *al-mabada' al-awwal*.

In conclusion, Kirmānī's cosmology begins with the First Intellect, the first created being or existent. His idea of the First Intellect is closely tied with his idea of the Most High. Since the Most High is unknowable and incomprehensible like the One in the philosophy of Plotinus, the First Intellect is the first knowable and comprehensible being. The existence of the First Intellect is indispensable to other existents or beings because they have their origins in the First Intellect. Had Kirmānī thought of the Most High as conceivable and comprehensible, his idea of the First Intellect might have been different.

REFERENCES

- Affifi, A.E. 1955. The Influence of Hermetic Literature on Moslem Thought. *The Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 13: 848.
- Armstrong, A.H. 1965. *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy* London: Methuen & Company.
- _____ 1967 Plotinus. In *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, edited by A.H. Armstrong. Cambridge: The University Press.
- Dodge, Bayard. 1960. Aspects of the Fatimid Philosophy. *The Muslim World* 50: 187
- Ghālib, Musttafā. 1964. *A'alām al-Ismā'iliyyah*. Beirut: Dār al-Yaqzatal-'Arabiyyah.
- Ivanow, W 1936. *A Creed of the Fatimid*. Bombay: Qayyimah Press.
- Kerferd, G.B. 1972. Aristotle In *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
- Kirmānī, Ahmad Hamid al-Dīn. 1967 *Rāhat al-'aql*. Introduced and edited by Musttafā Ghālib. Beirut: Dār al-Andalūs.
- Makaren, Sami M. 1967 The Philosophical Significance of the Iman in Isma'ilism. *Studia Islamica* 27:46.
- Merlan, Philip. 1972. Emanationism In *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Jabatan Usuluddin dan Falsafah
Fakulti Pengajian Islam
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor D.E.
Malaysia

