

THE TAWHĪDĪ PARADIGM AND THE “MORAL MARKET” FROM NURSI’S PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The paper argues that crises of capitalism are rooted in its secular paradigm. Therefore, it is not possible to overcome social, economic, moral, environmental crises of modern societies through some modification of free market capitalism. We need an alternative model based on a new paradigm. The paper presents “moral market” as an alternative economic model to free market capitalism. This is taken from the writings of Said Nursi. It argues that the moral market differs from free market capitalism because while the former relies on the Tawhīdī paradigm, the latter on secular paradigm with corresponding ontology, epistemology, anthropology, and teleology. The paper provides extensive discussion of the Tawhīdī paradigm from Nursi’s perspective. It also attempts to redefine maqāsid-i sharīa and maqāsid-i iqtisād based on the Tawhīdī paradigm. It concludes with a comparison of the moral market and free market capitalism in terms of their guiding principles, which are derived from their corresponding paradigm.

Keywords: *Tawhīdī* paradigm, Said Nursi, market capitalism, moral market.

I. Introduction

Economics is not about money. It is about the human being. Money is merely a means to serve human beings by providing goods and services. Economists are supposed to help us find the best answers to the following core questions: What, how and for whom should we produce? These questions are quite complicated even though they seem quite simple. Indeed, even sophisticated models might not be sufficient to answer them, as was the case in the 2008 financial crisis. This is because we need to first address the underlying assumptions of these core questions. In other words, we need to provide a sound ontological, epistemological, and anthropological foundation. This is exactly what Said Nursi does in his writings. Said Nursi was a great Muslim scholar of the previous century who had a very brief formal religious education. He pursued knowledge through self-education by reading and even memorizing both religious and scientific books. Unlike his peers, he was interested in revealed as well as scientific knowledge. He did not accept the dichotomy between the two. Indeed, he attempted to unite them. From his writings and activities, it is quite clear that he also paid great attention to economic issues. He did not offer any micro- or macro-economic models. He embraced certain economic concepts and ideas as a means to convey his theological message. He offered quite thoughtful criticism of capitalist and socialist economic systems. Most importantly, he redefined economics and offered an alternative system based on the *Tawhīdī* paradigm, with its ontological, epistemological, anthropological, and teleological perspectives. First, this paper will cover the secular paradigm behind the capitalist free market economy and its crises. Second, it will present the *Tawhīdī* paradigm with its unique perspectives from Nursi's perspective. Third, it will define the "moral market" as an alternative based on the *Tawhīdī* paradigm and compare it with the "free market" system.

II. The Secular-Materialist Paradigm and Crises of Capitalism

In order to understand conventional capitalist economics, it is imperative to understand the underlying secular paradigm shaped by thinkers of the Enlightenment period, with its secular ontological, epistemological, anthropological, and teleological worldviews. The

Enlightenment evolved in Western Europe to release human minds from the chains of churches in the Dark Ages. In his famous essay, "What is Enlightenment?" Immanuel Kant¹ described the Enlightenment simply as freedom to use one's own intelligence. The thinkers of the Enlightenment period believed that humans are generally good and perfectly rational. Therefore, humans should shape their own destiny, not the dogmas of churches. The thinkers ultimately succeeded in removing the darkness in Europe and replacing it with the "light" of human minds. They did not stop there. They expanded their wars against all religions, assuming that none were different from Christianity in the Dark Ages. Indeed, they labeled religions as myths. Of course, in the Age of Reason, there was no room for myths. Ironically, even though they fought against the ancient mythos, they created modern ones.

The capitalist economic system relies on the secular paradigm of the Enlightenment to answer core questions in economics. The ultimate goal of economics is to fulfill the needs and desires of human beings; therefore, we need to first define human needs and desires. Since resources are scarce, we also need to prioritize needs and desires. What are the essential needs of the human being? What are the most important desires for human satisfaction? How can we reach the highest personal and social well-being? The answers to these questions ultimately depend on ontological and epistemological worldviews.

Epistemologically speaking, the secular paradigm is shaped by two views of epistemology: objective and subjective ones. The objective epistemology, as posited by Johnson and Duberley², and Hindess³, presupposes the existence of independent and objective knowledge of reality and argues that the only way to access this reality is through our sensory experience. In contrast, the subjective epistemology rejects the existence of objective truth. It argues that

¹ Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

² Phil Johnson and Joanne Duberley, "Reflexivity in Management Research," *Journal of Management Studies* 40, No. 5 (07) (2003): 1279-303.

³ Barry Hindess, *Philosophy and Methodology in the Social Sciences / Barry Hindess* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J: Humanities Press, 1976).

truth is subjectively constructed through language games,⁴ discourses,⁵ interests,⁶ traditions⁷ and worldviews. The Enlightenment was a project of truth-seeking without revelation. For the thinkers of the Enlightenment human minds were the only source of knowledge. There was no need to seek guidance from divinely-guided individuals because in reality there is no evidence for any Divine Being. Most of these thinkers had difficulty embracing the logically inconsistent Trinitarian idea. They came up with an alternative explanation. (I call it “secular trinity” because it mimics the Christian trinity to a large extent.) It consists of causation, nature, and chance. In other words, rather than explaining the reality as the work of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, these thinkers offer deterministic cause-effect chains, Mother Nature, and chance as the determining forces behind the reality of the universe.

Ontologically speaking, the secular paradigm is also built upon two versions of ontology: realist and subjectivist. The realist view of ontology assumes that social and physical reality exists independent of human perception. In other words, we are not experiencing illusion. There is something real no matter how we perceive it. On the other hand, subjective ontology denies the existence of objective reality and argues that reality is just the product of human perception.⁸ Even though secular thinkers do not agree on the existence of objective reality of material dimension, they agree on the non-existence of immaterial dimension. In Schuurman’s terms, “the Enlightenment represents the religion of the closed material world that is blind to the non-material dimensions of reality.”⁹

⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Remarks* / Ludwig Wittgenstein, ed. Rush Rhees and trans. Raymond Hargreaves and Roger White (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1975).

⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* / Michel Foucault, trans. Alan Sheridan, 1st ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

⁶ Jü Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 2nd [English] ed. (London: Heinemann Educational, 1978).

⁷ H. G. Gadamer, “Hermeneutics and Social Science,” *Philosophy Social Criticism / Cultural Hermeneutics* 2 (1975): 307-316.

⁸ Johnson and Duberley.

⁹ Egbert Schuurman, “The Challenge of Islam’s Critique of Technology,” *The Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 60, no. 2 (2008): 75.

From the secular worldview, both objective and subjective epistemology agrees that knowledge of the existence of God is not real, but man-made. Likewise, both realist and subjectivist ontology agree that God does not really exist, but is socially constructed by human cognition. Therefore, the secular paradigm does not see any role for God in defining human needs and desires. The human being was not created by God for a certain purpose, but randomly emerged as a result of cause-effect chains and interactive natural forces through 13 billion years of an evolutionary process. In other words, the human being owes his existence to material causes, nature, and chance. These trio are the ultimate explanation for our existence and the existence of the universe. The human mind is the sole determiner of ontology, epistemology, anthropology, and teleology.

The anthropological and teleological aspects of the secular paradigm leave no room for God. The human is defined as a social animal randomly emerging within the evolutionary process. Indeed, the Enlightenment project redefined the purpose and meaning of life for individuals. It asked individuals to act free from the restrictions of churches and do whatever they consider is best for their interests. The main purpose is not to please God anymore, but to please the desires of animal souls. These thinkers reject the idea of being a servant to God. Instead, they turn humans into the masters of the universe.¹⁰ The ultimate purpose is to gain control over nature,¹¹ rather than living with her in harmony. It sets the goal of conquering and mastering the universe by defeating, controlling or stealing from nature. The measure for morality is not Divine revelation anymore. It is the internal compass of pain and pleasure or pure reason. Indeed, Jeremy Bentham suggests that a utility calculation should be the yardstick for everything, including what is good and what is bad.¹² In Horkheimer and Adorno’s terms, “The system the Enlightenment has in mind is the form of knowledge which copes more proficiently

¹⁰ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, (Place Continuum International Publishing Group, 1976).

¹¹ Francis Bacon, *The Major Works*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹² Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation [electronic resource]*(2007). Jeremy Bentham’s works (Dover Publications, 1983), 14.