



Re-Envisioning Islamic Scholarship: Maqasid Methodology as A New Approach: A Book Review

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Professor Jasser Auda's work entitled *Re-envisioning Islamic scholarship: Maqasid Methodology as a New Approach*, published in 2022 is arguably one of the most innovative approaches in contemporary Islamic scholarship and, in my personal opinion, it somehow contributes significantly and uniquely to the project of Islamisation of knowledge or, as some have termed it, knowledge integration. In this work, Auda arguably has managed to lay the foundation for knowledge integration in the form of a unified scheme which combines both a deep and holistic understanding of the revelation and the reality.

In my quest of learning and researching on the topic of maqasid al-shari'ah, a recurring question that always comes to mind is how a simple theoretical structure of traditional maqasid would be able to address the complexity of the current realities. The traditional maqasid framework, with its simplistic three-tiered levels and five main elements, appears insufficient in tackling the complex issues prevalent in contemporary societies. Another question that arises is how the maqasid discourse could play the role of a platform that may facilitate the knowledge integration process in order to overcome the conundrums of modern and postmodern knowledge. It seems that Auda's work manages to successfully offer answers to these questions.

Despite the central role of revelation in Auda's maqasid methodology, it is noteworthy that his proposed approach is notably influenced by systems thinking, which is one of his areas of expertise. This influence becomes evident when examining the terms and concepts employed by Auda to describe the presentation of meanings and ideas in the revelation, which he portrays as a web-like structure. The utilization of concepts such as connectivity, holism, emergence, complexity and web pattern is consistently employed by Auda to elucidate both natural and societal realities. However, in his work, Auda resorts to these concepts to analyze Quranic verses in specific patterns, aiming to uncover their accurate meanings and the intended goals and functions they seek to achieve. This observation highlights the intriguing aspect of the approach, namely the recognition that laws identifiable in nature can be applied to analyze the Quranic phenomenon as a written revelation. Auda highlights this in his statement:

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“The higher objectives (maqasid) of Revelation are therefore one of the manifestations of the universal laws (sunan) of interconnectivity and wholism that results from an integration or synthesis of the parts,”

Auda’s exposition of the challenges within contemporary Islamic scholarship not only serves as a thought-provoking observation, but also brings the modern discourse on maqasid into the limelight. Auda identifies five predicaments afflicting Islamic scholarship in general, as well as the maqasid discourse in particular, which encompass issues of imitation, partiality, apologism, contradiction and deconstructionism. In his earlier work *Maqasid al-Shariah As The Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach*, Auda examines various contemporary streams of Islamic legal thought without explicitly stating his position on these trends. However, in this updated analysis, Auda unequivocally expresses his stance, considering these trends as crises within Islamic scholarship. He laments that the contemporary maqasid discourse is not immune to these challenges. Failing to effectively address these issues could undermine the fundamental purpose of the maqasid discourse, which is to translate the divinely revealed guidelines into practical implementation

Another important aim of Auda’s work is to reorient the worldview of Islam in order to establish the epistemological pillar for his proposed methodology. The project aims to redefine three spheres in the Islamic scholarship which include knowledge, reality and scholarship. Auda interestingly argues that it is both the entry point to understand the methodology and the end result of it. With regard to knowledge, the maqasid methodology attempts to put revelation at its central focus and it should reign over other kinds of knowledge. Another important aspect of knowledge is that the revelation presents meanings in web fashion that relate to each other. In relation to that, Auda also introduces a logic scheme which is purpose-oriented and based on the interrelated web of meanings. In other words, purposes in the Quran are also connected to each other while each and every purpose also relates to its corresponding concept, value, universal law, command, categorisation and proof. This also involves the authoritative revealed Arabic names and concepts which reign over those of other traditions or worldviews. This somehow reminds me of Ismail Al-Faruqi’s emphasis on the importance of language, particularly Arabic, as a fundamental component of Islamic thought and expression. He believed that the Arabic language possessed unique qualities that made it a powerful tool for understanding and articulating Islamic concepts as it is intricately tied to the Qur’an.

Auda presents a reformative scholarship project that outlines five essential steps for researchers and educationists. These steps include purpose, cycles of reflection, composite framework, critical studies of literature and reality, and formative theories and principles. The project emphasizes the purpose-oriented approach of the maqasid methodology, which goes beyond mere research problems. Researchers engage in cycles of reflection on revelation, employing connectivity and holism to develop a composite framework. The reliance on revelation and the

understanding of hadith are crucial in this process. Constructive criticism of scholarship from diverse cultures and consideration of lived realities contribute to the development of theories and principles. The maqasid approach incorporates the concept of emergence in reasoning and emphasizes a holistic Islamic composite framework composed of concepts, objectives, values, commands, universal laws, groups and proofs.

Auda's attempts to broaden the scopes and outcomes of the Islamic scholarship which show his deep awareness of the unified (*tawhid*) and connectivity of knowledge. That is the reason he proposes that the Quranic classification of *fuqaha'* should not only engulf those who master the revelation but also include experts who delve into different specialisations i.e. the polymath. Auda's consistency in the systems approach also motivates him to postulate that research initiatives and education agenda should transcend specialisation boundaries. With such an approach, the maqasid methodology would become a fertile platform for the knowledge integration process that may result in a holistic analysis of phenomena and comprehensive solutions for social issues.

In the contemporary context, the pervasive interconnectivity of human societies, facilitated by rapid technological advancements, has become a prevailing norm. Moreover, the exponential growth of the global population has led to an escalation in the complexity of our daily socio-economic challenges. While a compartmentalized disciplinary approach in education and research still holds some relevance, it is no longer sufficient to effectively address these intricacies. Hence, adopting the maqasid methodology provides an appropriate framework for cultivating scholars who possess multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary expertise. These scholars not only possess the ability to generate legal opinions (*fatwas*), but more importantly, they are proficient in formulating comprehensive policies, plans, designs, laws, strategies and artistic expressions. This approach aligns with the Qur'anic perspective, as argued by Auda: "The revelation does not address reality through disciplinary boundaries or specializations."

Such a novel approach would have an immense impact that may revolutionize the way Muslim researchers and academics conduct their works, educational institutions operating in producing holistic students, and how fatwa organisations should function in dealing with rapid social change. For instance, in a fatwa regarding complex phenomena such as poverty, environmental degradation and others, Auda argues that it is important to address these issues thoroughly, and to consider them beyond the simple dichotomy of what is permissible or forbidden. Fatwa bodies should rethink the approach of inviting experts who specialise in the 'scientific' field to explain to the fatwa members these matters in brief sessions. Such an approach, according to Auda, lacks thorough scrutiny of the methods and underlying worldview of these experts. The only viable solution is for Islamic scholars to enhance their ability to tackle these intricate issues using a multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary approach.

However, developing multidisciplinary experts both in the revealed knowledge and of the current realities necessitates a renewed Islamic education system. This needs to begin by examining how Islamic classical scholarship classified different branches of knowledge and to be cognizant of the influence of foreign worldviews on those classifications. Moreover, the Islamic study should also avoid the way modern western scholarship categorizes knowledge into humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and applied sciences. Instead, Auda proposes, after examining drawbacks in the contemporary Islamic studies, that it should be classified according to the integrated nature of knowledge in Islam that necessitates systematic approaches to combine disciplines instead of treating them as separate entities. Therefore he classifies an education system into fundamental (*usuli*) studies, disciplinary studies, phenomenon studies and strategic studies.

Working in the field of think tanks, one of the application aspects of the maqasid methodology that intrigued me, as proposed by Auda, is in strategic studies. Compared to normal academics, the foremost abilities that a strategic scholar must cultivate is the aptitude to navigate complexity according to Auda. The strategist realizes that reality is not haphazard or randomly disorganized, but rather intricately interconnected and governed by divine universal laws. Therefore, a web-based logic is a necessity to adopt a comprehensive approach when analyzing the lived reality. The outcome of the initial analysis should result in a multifaceted web of interpretations, derived from the Cycles of Reflection. In strategic studies, these cycles differ according to Auda, as the Quran and Sunnah are examined through a strategic lens, giving rise to a distinct framework.

In this strategic framework, Maqasid aligns organizational objectives at all levels, emphasizing a comprehensive and pragmatic evaluation of success. This requires a reorientation of vision, mission, objectives and structures to achieve broader *ummah*-level goals. Concepts within this framework serve as the language to describe reality. Strategic scholars must redefine these concepts from an Islamic perspective, incorporating familiar terms and narratives from the Revelation to gain deeper insights into current realities. Understanding history is crucial for comprehending reality and applying universal laws to cyclical changes, but caution is needed to avoid overgeneralizations and uncertain predictions. History teaches that victorious parties may not embody justice, as distortions are often employed to manipulate perceptions. The Quran, preserved and reigning above all sources, provides an exception. A nuanced understanding of universal laws and drawing lessons from history through Cycles of Reflection upon the Revelation is essential.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that Auda does not specifically address an important aspect of systems thinking, which is the concept of unintended consequences. Systems thinking recognizes that ignorance of the complexity of reality and the interconnectedness of systems can result in unforeseen outcomes. Even small changes within a system can lead to cascading effects, producing unintended consequences that may have significant impacts. However, it is worth noting that the omission of unintended consequences in Auda's analysis may stem

from the fact that he did not identify this concept or universal law in the Quran or find it aligned with the Islamic belief system. This may be due to the principle that he suggests, that the Quranic concepts should reign over other concepts, not the other way round. Nonetheless, a thorough discussion on this particular topic may warrant serious attention.

To conclude, I would argue that Auda's attempt is not merely a theoretical exposition on the topic of maqasid al-shariah, but it is actually an all-encompassing project that presents a unique contribution to the revival of Islamic education system as well as a revolution in the research culture in the Muslim academia. It is in fact a renewed commitment and perspective for such a pursuit that started from the 1977 First World Conference on Muslim Education in Mecca. With the aims and scopes of renewal that it aims to achieve, this seminal work warrants attention and should be seriously discussed by the authorities especially those who manage educational affairs and institutions throughout the Muslim world. Whereas, for the academics, it is an opportune moment for them to engage with this new idea, and try to adopt it in their work as it offers an alternative research framework to the conventional methodology. Maqasid Institute, an organization led by Professor Auda himself offers this opportunity in the form of training and networking.

Before I end, it is important to acknowledge that this brief review may not fully capture the profound depth and wealth of Professor Auda's work. I would like to express my sincere thanks to him as I am greatly indebted to his scholarship and it has contributed immensely to shaping my perspective and career as a researcher on maqasid, the systems approach, and Islamic studies generally.

