

THE 5D THINKING NEWSLETTER

A UNIQUE APPROACH TO READ THE UNIVERSE



Special read: An Interview with Dr.Colin Turner by Bilal Malik

SNEAK PEAK OF WHAT'S INSIDE:

- *5D Thinking on the Carbon Cycle*
- *"A Product of the Little Ones" by Dr.Colin Turner*
- *"The Surreal Snow" by Saba Irshad Ansari*
- *Existence and Meaning Review by Malik Bilal*

Book Review:

Charles Taylor's book, *A Secular Age*
by Dr. Necati Aydin



Welcome to the sixteenth edition of
The 5D Thinking Newsletter!

Dear Subscriber,

Welcome to the sixteenth edition of the 5D Thinking newsletter!

In this issue, you can read Dr. Colin Turner's article "A Product of the Little Ones" and Saba Irshad's inspiring 5DT article "the surreal snow".

Be sure to take the time to reflect on Dr. Necati Aydin's review of Charles Taylor's "A Secular Age" and read Bilal Malik's interview with Dr. Colin Turner, who is scheduled to teach "God's Divine Names" course at the upcoming "Existence and Meaning" program in Spring 2022.

In this edition, you can also read the survey-based review article of the Existence and Meaning program in Fall 2021 showing the transformational impact on most participants.

Remember, you can unsubscribe at any time by clicking on the link at the end of the newsletter. We hope to continue to inspire you with the Five Dimensional (5D) Thinking Approach to education.

On behalf of the 5D Thinking Team,

Nadine Kamal



5D Thinking Approach to the Carbon Cycle

In this chapter, we follow a Carbon atom in its incredible journey from the atmosphere to the body of a little rabbit. In the process, we learn how the Carbon cycle has been designed to regulate Earth's temperature, provide sustenance for living beings, build oceanic infrastructure and remove waste.

In the **first** dimension, Analytical Thinking, we explore the eight allotropes of carbon and their practical uses. We then delve into the intricacies of the Carbon cycle by exploring how respiration and photosynthesis play key roles in the cycling of carbon between the atmosphere, organisms, and environment. We also highlight some fascinating facts about carbon.

Next, in the **second** dimension, Analogical Thinking, to better appreciate the Carbon Cycle on Earth, we reflect on two analogies of the carbon cycle: a man thermostat and negative emission technologies. We learn how it took a deep level of knowledge, will, and power to come up with these technologies which mimic some works of the carbon cycle..

Then, in the **third** dimension, Critical Thinking, we conclude that it does not make sense to ascribe those wise and beneficial acts of carbons to them since they do not have any consciousness. They do not know what they do though they seem to act as if they know living beings and care about their life. We know for sure from human experience, it takes the cumulative knowledge, will, and effort of many people over many years to come up with these highly advanced systems. Then, we urge readers to think about the origin of the Carbon Cycle system.

In the **fourth** dimension, Meditative Thinking, we reflect on the sun, the force of gravity, atmosphere, plants, decomposing bacteria, and many other organisms collaborate like a team with millions of other members to partake in the Carbon Cycle process. Thus, means that the One who creates the Carbon Cycle must be the One who creates and sustains the entire universe. We conclude that converting poisonous gases into pleasant food points to Him as All-Powerful, The Most-Kind, and The Most-Merciful.

Finally, in the **fifth** dimension, the Moral Thinking dimension, we invite readers to reflect on the true value of the Carbon Cycle as a special gift and offer their appreciation through good words and acts.

To read more about the 5DT approach to the carbon cycle, please click [here](#).

A Product of the Little Ones?

Dr. Colin Turner

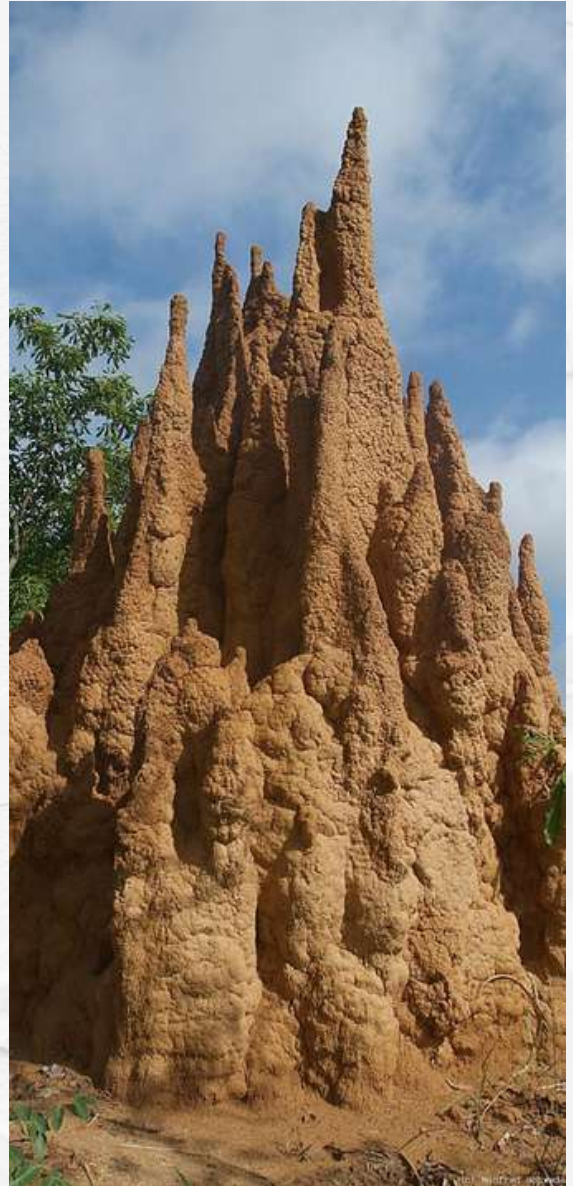
The termite tower or ‘palace’ is one of the marvels of the insect world, a feat of engineering and forward planning that betokens knowledge, wisdom and a sense of purpose and equilibrium that naturalists cannot explain. And so they explain it away as ‘instinct’ – as though ‘instinct’ really explains anything at all. It doesn’t. It is just a catch-all answer designed to shut down the conversation. “Oh,” they say, “You don’t need to invoke God as the power behind these things: a termite ‘palace’ is just a work of nature. It’s natural: there’s no need to attribute any of it to God.” Which means that instead of attributing such a marvel to One, Singular Possessor of absolute power, absolute knowledge and absolute wisdom, they attribute it to some vague, shadowy, ethereal entity called ‘nature’, which they reify into a ‘mother’ (“Mother Nature did it!”), regardless of the fact that nature is as substantial an entity as the tooth fairy or Santa Claus. If we do not ascribe absolute attributes of perfection to One, Singular Creator, we have to ascribe them to material causes. And material causes are deaf, dumb, blind and totally devoid of purpose – even by the admission of the naturalists themselves. Which is easier? For a single omniscient, omnipotent Creator to provide the whole of the universe with what it needs to exist? Or for each of the beings in the universe to create, independently, all of the things it needs for its existence? I’ll put it another way. Is it easier for just one factory to produce the uniforms, weapons and provisions of the whole army? Or is it easier for each of the hundred thousand soldiers in that army to create his own uniforms, weapons and provisions by building his own personal factory, with all that such an undertaking entails? Clearly, common sense is on the side of unity rather than multiplicity in this example.



A Product of the Little Ones?

Dr. Colin Turner

But back to the termites and their wonderful palaces. Now as amazing as termites are, the stark fact is that if anteaters and pangolins didn't hunt and eat termites, these insects would overrun the world. If termites had no predators, within a few weeks, the whole of Africa would be knee-deep in termites. This is why God uses one species to control another. He does the same with human beings. "And if it were not for God checking [some] people by means of others, the earth would have been corrupted, but God is full of bounty to the worlds" (Quran, 2:251). Whenever there is conflict or warfare, this verse comes to mind. And it came to mind yesterday when I read that in Japan, scientists are claiming that they are 'one step closer' to the goal of creating a vaccine that would enable human beings to live forever. This is, of course, a ridiculous idea, and is interesting only because it shows how desperate all human beings are for eternity and immortality.



But if humans never died, and continued to exist on earth indefinitely, there would inevitably come a time when the world would be so full of human beings that life would no longer be viable. Resources would dry up and people would, without doubt, end up killing both themselves and each other, simply to make space for new generations. Immortality is a wonderful idea, but not for this limited, transient world. For immortality, we need a hereafter, which is another story altogether, and not one which most naturalists appear to be interested in...

The Surreal Snow

Saba Irshad Ansari

Thousands of tourists visit the mountains every year, not only to explore the scenic beauty that high altitudes have to offer but also to experience snowfall. Just like rain and hailstones, snow too falls from the sky; but unlike the former, snow is more appealing to people mostly because of the element of fun associated with it, be it through the social activities of building a snow man, having a snowball fight, sliding down the hill on a sled, etc.



Even more fascinating is the feel of fresh, cotton-like flurries falling onto your skin. Snowflakes are so light that they feel almost weightless.

But have you ever wondered what snow is made up of? What causes the formation of snowflakes? How is ice different from snow?

Snow actually forms when water in clouds directly freezes up due to very low temperatures and falls to the ground in a solid-state. But, due to its lightweight, unlike hailstones, snow does not hurt while falling. It falls only at higher altitudes where temperatures are below freezing point. At temperatures around or below -40°C , snowfalls in the form of crystals called snowflakes. Sometimes, snowflakes resemble snow-balls when they get stuck together. Microscopic images show that each snowflake is hexagonal in shape and is uniquely distinct from the other.[1] Each snowflake is like a work of art- so elegantly and intricately designed that it is unbelievable to acknowledge that it is real.

The humidity, temperature, air currents, and dust particles present in the air affect the appearance and size of a snowflake. Apart from the heavenly and surreal experience of the snowfall, snow is of the utmost benefit for the environment. "Snow cover has a significant effect on climate and on plant, animal, and human life. By increasing the reflection of solar radiation and interfering with the conduction of heat from the ground, it induces a cold climate. The low heat conduction protects small plants from the effects of the lowest winter temperatures; on the other hand, the late disappearance of snow in the spring delays the growth of plants. When the snow melts in the spring, the resulting runoff feeds rivers and supplies water for irrigation and other human enterprises."[2]

The Surreal Snow

Saba Irshad Ansari

Let us compare snow to artificial or man-made snow which was invented to give people a brief escape from hot temperatures and a chance to have fun experiences at ski resorts. Over the years humans have come up with different ways to make snow artificially.

Earlier, shavings from the ice were used to produce the effects which resemble snow but the idea was dropped because the ice melted quickly. In 1934, Louis Geib, a technical director at Warner Bros. was the first person who “conjured a cold and wet blizzard on a sunny backlot in Burbank. He invented the first known snowmaking machine which consisted of three rotating blades that shaved ice from a 400-pound block and a high-powered fan that blew the resulting particles into the air”.^[3] Geib’s idea spurred the invention of snowmaking guns which can crystallize water. Snowmaking guns produce snow by forcing water and pressurized air at very high speed through a snow cannon. They are used at ski resorts as a substitute for real snow and to let people have the same experience.

This method of producing artificial snow has been in high demand lately. The Winter Olympics of 2014 and 2018 used snowmaking guns to provide participants with the best conditions for competitions. “To start a snowmaking system a wet-bulb temperature of $-2.5\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ ($27.5\text{ }^{\circ}\text{F}$) is required. If the atmospheric humidity is very low, this level can be reached at temperatures slightly above $0\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ ($32\text{ }^{\circ}\text{F}$), but if the air humidity is high, colder temperatures are required. Temperatures around the freezing point are referred to as borderline temperatures or limit temperatures. If the wet-bulb temperature drops, more snow can be produced faster and more efficiently.”^[4] But this snowmaking technique is highly expensive and requires a lot of energy to produce a limited amount of snow.

Dr. Peter Wasilewsk, a scientist from NASA, viewed both real and artificial snow under a microscope. He found that real snow was more fluffy, light, and delicate because it has less moisture in it while the snow produced by the snowmaking machine resembled clumps of iced water-packed together. The latter was denser due to the high content of water. ^[5] In short, the differences lie in overall efficacy, art, weight, and the actual content. One is comprised of just small packs of ice while the other is an artifact of flakes made out of ice water.



The Surreal Snow

Saba Irshad Ansari

Snowmaking plants require huge water pumps and air compressors which are very costly. So, one can imagine how difficult it is to make snow artificially. If technicians and engineers with a tremendous wealth of knowledge and ability are required to build a single snowmaking plant, can you imagine how many technicians are required to build several of them so that increased demand can be met? The snow guns are very expensive and require high voltage electricity to function. So, both money and electricity act as the source of just a single snowmaking plant.

Now that we have learned the amount of effort, knowledge, money, etc. humans put into the construction of a snowmaking plant or cannon, we can recognize that there is a maker of the snow plant or snow gun.

Do you think that the falling of the snow from the sky is a random phenomenon?

Do you think that nature knows by itself how and when to release snow so that the seasonal change occurs on time? Absolutely not.

Just like a snow plant has a maker and a controller who ensures its smooth functioning, is it not reasonable to say that real snow must have a Maker too?

Imagine the amount of knowledge that the Maker of real snow has who knows how much snow is needed in a certain region. The Maker of real snow must have the Will, Wisdom, and utmost Love for all creatures because He caters to the needs of every single being on this earth. In fact, where on the one hand real snow is extremely beneficial for the environment, artificial snow causes severe damage to the ecosystem. So, does it not make you wonder how Wise and Loving the Creator of real snow is?

Elegant snowflakes speak of their Creator who is the Best of Fashioners. The fact that each snowflake out of millions of snowflakes is different from the rest yet the same in its hexagonal symmetry proves that its Creator can only be One (and not many) because the Maker of one snowflake is the Maker of all snowflakes.

In fact, each snowflake is unique like a fingerprint. It requires both immense knowledge and a perfect memory to make each snowflake different from the millions of other snowflakes. This is because, in order to make each snowflake unique in its design, its Creator must remember the designs of all the snowflakes which have fallen since the beginning of time until the present day. For sure, the Maker must be the First and the Everlasting One and He should have the Will and Power to do that. Just think about it- what would it take for humanity to replicate the countless snowflakes from just one snowfall, let alone an entire year's snowfall.

Furthermore, all the creatures upon whom the snowfalls are dependent on their existence. This creates a sense of inter-dependence and inter-connectivity between the living and non-living elements of creation, proving that all creatures are created by Ever-Present One. The wise purpose manifested in the falling of the snow indicates the presence of its Maker who is Omniscient, Omnipotent and has Absolute Wisdom.

The Surreal Snow

Saba Irshad Ansari

So, the scientific facts about the snow we have learned above actually lead us to its Creator- the One Almighty. The Divine Names that are manifested in the snow take us a step beyond the apparent scientific facts, which is the acknowledgment of its Maker. They compel us to meditate on the hidden Divine Attributes which the snow reflects as if the falling snow is bringing down with it a message for mankind – a message of acknowledging its Creator, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful. In short, snowfall is clearly pointing to its Maker who is All-Knowledgeable, All-Powerful, the Most Gracious, and the Most Compassionate. He is Generous and Kind enough to let his creatures experience and benefit from the surreal snowfall and that is also completely free of cost.

This brings us to the conclusion that snowfall is indeed a precious gift from God- not just for humanity but for all the creatures upon whom the snowfalls. We should never take it for granted.

But have you ever wondered what does God, the Most Gracious, and the Most Merciful want in return for this precious gift?

All that He wants in return is remembrance (dhikr), thankfulness (shukr), and reflection (fikir). And why would He want us to remember Him, thank Him, or reflect on His creation? Is it to increase His praise? Does He even need our praise? The answer is no.

He only wants us to remember and thank Him by reflecting on the things around us so that we as humans can liberate ourselves from the worldly gods so that we bow down to the Greatest Power of this universe so that we can become kinder and more compassionate to our fellow creatures.

The distinct design of each snowflake teaches us to do something different and unique in life. “One small particle of dust turns into this; a work of art, each a little bit different than the next. And to think, these individual masterpieces go unnoticed by the majority. What an awesome reminder of the amazing Creator we serve. God is in the details. A beautiful object lesson He literally placed in our path.”[6]

The white snow-covered land also acts as a reminder. It reminds us of our finite life on earth, of the white shroud we shall be wrapped in one day. The thought of death is enough to inculcate humility in us. Hence, the snow is actually helping us become more humble.

So, the next time we are wasting energy for mere fun on a ski resort, think of the harm we are causing to the ecosystem. This way, we can refine our moral values and help this world become a better, greener place for all.

[1] To learn some amazing scientific facts about snowflakes, please watch these videos available on YouTube- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6zr2eLpduI>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUot7XSX8uA>

[2] Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Snow." Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/science/snow-weather> (Accessed Nov 11, 2021).

[3] April White, How Artificial Snow Was Invented. (Smithsonian Magazine, Nov 2019) <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/how-artificial-snow-was-invented-180973334/> (Accessed Nov 11, 2021).

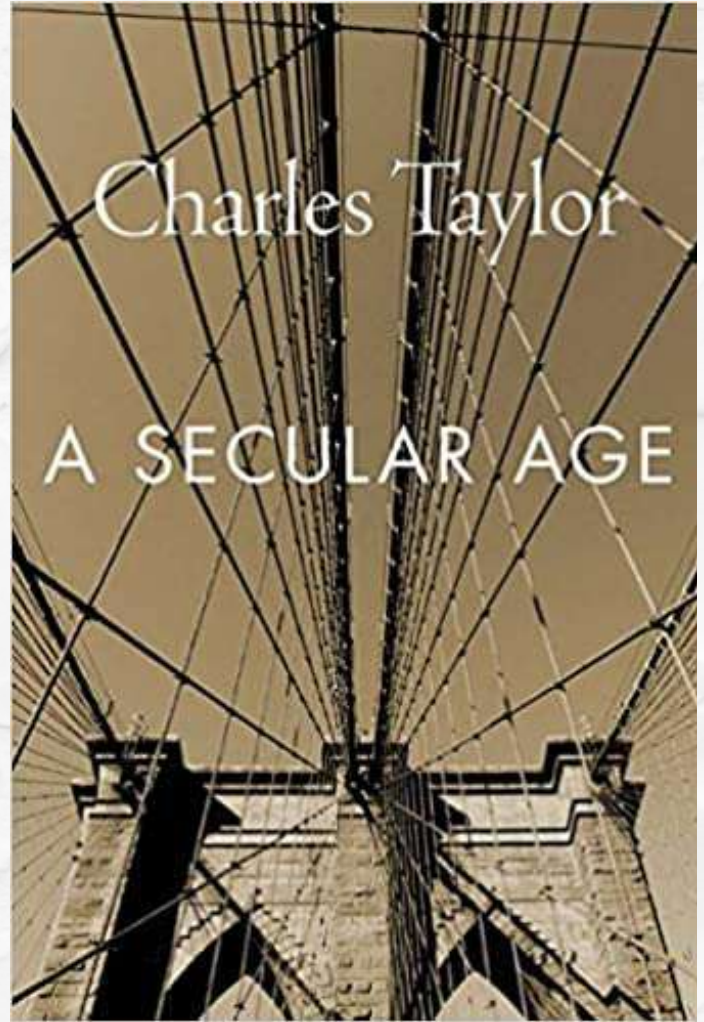
[4] Wikipedia contributors, "Snowmaking," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopaedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Snowmaking&oldid=1056589162> (Accessed Nov 15, 2021).

[5] Simon Naylor, Difference Between Man-made Vs Natural Snow? (New to Ski: April 27, 2020) <https://newtoski.com/snowmachine-vs-natural-snow/> (Accessed Nov 26, 2021). [6] Heidi Joy, Life Lessons from a Snowflake. <https://www.withheidijoy.com/blog/life-lessons-from-snowflake> (Accessed Nov 26, 2021)

Book Review: A Secular Age by Charles Taylor

by Dr Necati Aydin

Secular comes from the Latin word “saeculum,” meaning a century or age. In his masterpiece, *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor (2007) provides an in-depth analysis of secularization. He defines secular as aiming to live the life of ordinary time rather than aiming for eternity. In other words, being secular is being worldly and seeking satisfaction in this world. Taylor puts secularization in three forms: (1) secularization of public spaces in which we see the diminishing impact of God in social and political arenas, (2) secularization of people in terms of declining belief in God and practice; and (3) secularization of religious people in terms of pursuing fulfillment in this world. In the third form, Taylor defines secularization (worldliness) as fulfillment in worldly experiences rather than otherworldliness. In this sense, religious people are not exempt from the plague of worldliness. They can be worldly as well in terms of making worldly satisfaction as their primary objective.



In Taylor’s terms, “secularity is a condition in which our experience of and search for fulness occurs; this is something we all share, believers and unbelievers alike. Modernity brings about secularity, in all its three forms” (Taylor, 2007, Introduction).

Secularization changes the way we perceive the world. According to Taylor, for centuries, the West perceived the world within the prism of an ordered Aristotelian Cosmos of Aquinas. To secular minds, the world is “no longer a matter of admiring, normative order, in which God has revealed himself through signs and symbols” (Taylor, 2007, Chapter 2). Thus, the purpose is not to derive any meaning while studying the world. Rather, it is to bring the world under “the instrumental control of reason” (Taylor, 2007, Chapter 2). It is to disconnect any experienced phenomena from transcendent sources and consider them “purely natural.” It is a purification of nature from any sacred or transcendent meaning. Thus, we end up with “the natural order, the universe, purged of enchantment, and freed from miraculous interventions and special providences from God, operating by universal, unrespondent causal laws” (Taylor, 2007, Chapter 7).

Book Review: A Secular Age by Charles Taylor

by Dr Necati Aydin

As nature loses its sacred value, human also is degraded. Charles Taylor describes the degradation of the human being from the secular scientific perspective in the following terms: “the universe which this science reveals is very different from the centred hierarchic cosmos which our civilization grew up within; it hardly suggests to us that humans have any kind of special place in its story, whose temporal and spatial dimensions are mind-numbing” (Taylor, 2007, Chapter 14).

With the dominance of secularization, science becomes a new religion dominating the mind and life of people. It is not “just one road to truth but becomes the paradigm of all roads” (Taylor, 2007, Chapter 14). Thus, as people believe in science, they give up on God. “The modern sciences, mainly physics and biology, have weakened belief in God by assuming that the universe can be explained by a collection of laws that can be expressed in logical and mathematic forms” (Altaie, 2016, p. 32). The increasing percentage of educated people who define themselves as atheist or agnostic is clear evidence that embedded ideology in modern science destroys faith in God. Indeed, in some European countries, nearly half of people have no belief in God.

In modern times, the dominant worldview is the secular one. It almost completely blinds us to any possible alternative. As Charles Taylor puts it: “we are in fact all acting, thinking, and feeling out of backgrounds and frameworks which we do not fully understand” (Taylor, 2007, Chapter 14). Indeed, since the Enlightenment, materialism has become the dominant scientific ideology. Reality has been reduced to matter with no meaning. However, as argued by Taylor, “materialism itself is an ontological thesis: everything which is based on ‘matter,’ whatever that means. But the argument here is ultimately epistemological, in that the ontological thesis appeals to the successes of science” (Taylor, 2007, Chapter 15). The driving force for materialism is not the truth. It is power and pleasure. The overarching goal is to gain control over matter and manipulate it for greater pleasure. This eliminates any sacred meaning from matter. It removes God from a scientific understanding of the universe and then replaces Him with material causes, nature, and chance. It formats the mind with a secular worldview, which leads to secular aspirations and the secularization of life.

In short, *A Secular Age* is an excellent book to rightly diagnose the root causes and impacts of secularization- though it fails to provide any cure. The book offers compelling evidence for the secularization of the mind and life in terms of pursuing a largely hedonic state of happiness in this world. The book helps to understand how our minds have been shaped through secular ideology since the enlightenment and how, in reality, everyone including the most religious/spiritual people gives priority to worldly satisfaction over life beyond death.

References:

1) Altaie, M. B. 1952. (2016). *God, Nature and the Cause: Essays on Islam and science*. Dubai: Kalam Research & Media. 2) Taylor, C. (2007). *A secular age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

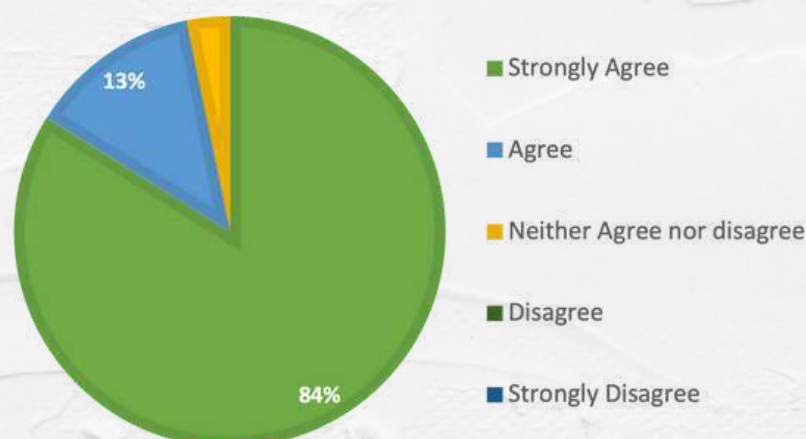
Brief Review of the Fall-2021 “Existence and Meaning” Certificate Program

Review Report Prepared by: Bilal Ahmad Malik

The Fall 2021 certificate program entitled “Existence and Meaning” successfully came to an end. The program was organized by the Institute of Integrated Knowledge, USA, in collaboration with Uskudar University, Turkey. The program was attended by more than thirty participants from around the world. The participants were mostly post-graduate students and early career researchers. Some academicians also participated in the program. The program presented three different courses to view existence through an integrative perspective as inspired by Turkish Muslim scholar Said Nursi’s mana-i harfi or ‘other-indicative’ method of a new understanding of scientific knowledge and reading the book of the universe. At the end of the program, participants were asked to submit their feedback through an anonymous survey which consisted of three parts. The first two parts relate to measuring the effectiveness of teaching strategies, tools, and the instructor, while the third part evaluates the outcome of the course. Thirty-one participants filled the survey. This brief report is based on the assessment of the responses submitted by the participants.

The classes were held online through the Zoom platform. More than 75% of participants attended 70-100% of classes. Most of them watched recorded lectures when they missed a class. 91% of participants agreed with the statement “Zoom to be an efficient platform for learning”. The survey results tell us that 80% of participants “strongly agreed” while 20% of them “agreed” that they ‘enjoyed and benefited from the Zoom lecture and power-point slides which speak volumes about the advanced teaching methods applied by the instructors. More than 84% of participants ‘strongly agreed’ that they were fully satisfied with the program. The overall responses, based on eighteen questions, profoundly suggest that participants were satisfied with all the means of teaching and learning such as lectures, interactions, assignments, and materials used in the program.

OVERALL, I AM COMPLETELY SATISFIED WITH THE PROGRAM.



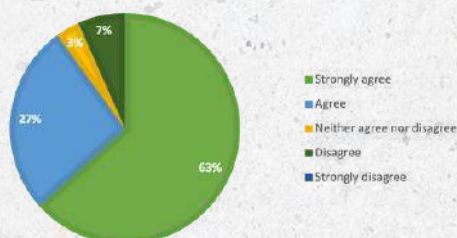
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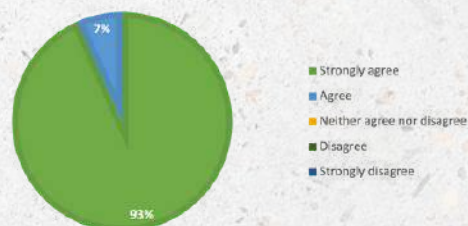
The responses to “Instructors Assessment” section affirm that all the instructors, namely Dr. Alparslan Acikgenc, an expert in history of science and civilization, Dr. Colin Turner, an expert in Nursian thought and method, and Dr. Necati Aydin, economist and founder of 5D-thinking approach, were ‘well knowledgeable and experienced’. It must be mentioned here that all three instructors delivered lectures using organized and attractive PPT designs. They divided each lecture into two parts and each part was followed by questions and reflections from the participants. This would turn the online Zoom class into a vibrant, dynamic and all-connected discussion. 100% participants “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement that they were completely satisfied with their course instructors.

In the last section of the survey- the “Outcome Assessment”- participants expressed their thoughts on their individual experiences and developments throughout the course. They were asked to answer questions like why and what changed before and after joining the course. The results developed here are practically more significant since they determine whether the objectives of the program have been achieved or not. Moreover, they determine if the program, in general, and the 5D-thinking approach, in particular, were capable of proposing an alternative method of learning science and universal phenomena. Such an overwhelming positive response suggests two things: first, the program has largely achieved its objectives, and, second, participants have been effectively engaged in the process of “change the approach”; from mana-i ismi (self-referential) to mana-i harfi (other-indicative), to read the universe and scientific theories. The four charts below clearly reveal the transformational outcomes of the program and its potential:

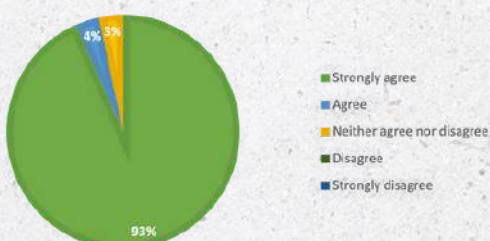
I NOW THINK THAT WE CAN DERIVE MORAL/CHARACTER LESSONS FROM SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE OF THE UNIVERSE.



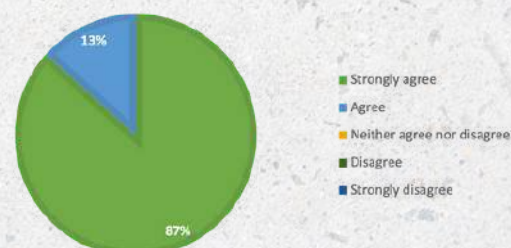
I NOW THINK THAT EXISTENCE AND MEANING PROGRAM OFFERS UNIQUE APPROACHES TO PROBLEMS OF MODERN SOCIETIES.



I NOW THINK THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO LEARN/TEACH SCIENCE THROUGH A HOLISTIC AND INTEGRATIVE APPROACH SUCH AS THE MANA-I HARFI.



I BELIEVE THE MANA-I HARFI APPROACH HAS A POTENTIAL TO RECONSTRUCT THE MINDS OF MUSLIM BASED ON ISLAMIC WORLDVIEW.



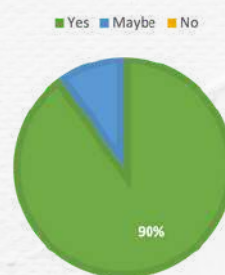
Brief Review of the Fall-2021 “Existence and Meaning” Certificate Program

Review Report Prepared by: Bilal Ahmad Malik

This change is further affirmed by the participants by answering the question: “Which one of the statements below could be the description of the program benefits for you?” More than 73% of the respondents stated that the program “ignited an intellectual awakening” while 66% of participants confirmed that “It introduced me to a new approach to which I am willing to dedicate my life”. Similarly, more than 90% participants agreed to use 5D-thinking approach in teaching/research activities.

Although the overall results are positive, nevertheless, it doesn't mean there is no scope for further improvement. The survey solicited anonymous feedback to improve the program in the upcoming Spring-2022 semester. In the end, let's share some amazing reflections from the participants:

I PLAN TO USE 5D THINKING APPROACH IN TEACHING/RESEARCH ACTIVITIES.



"To know the meaning, purpose, and interconnectedness of human life, it is really important to change our approach. Meaning and Existence Program is providing an integrated method to inculcate that required "change in approach".

"I feel closer to God. The course really changed the way I view the 'ordinary' thing in this world. Everything is something valuable, everything is a message for me to know God, glorify Him, and thank Him. Thank you so much."

"The new approach of thinking about the self, universe and Ultimate Reality"

"The program showed me that the strong messages are manifested in our daily lives yet mostly hidden to secular eyes. During classes, we had an opportunity to question our perspectives in this regard."

"It was a paradigm shift for me in the field of education."

"It gave me a new perspective to view life and reading the universe like a book"

"The three courses offered altogether were like essential puzzle pieces that not only gave me answers but also inspired me to think in a new way." (Aisha Alowais)

"I benefited from this program in terms of seeing the world from a different and unique perspective (which I think is the closest thing to the right perspective). I appreciate how the instructors did not really push us to agree with them on this perspective and yet we, as learners, realized that is it actually a very truthful approach to view this world." (Afra)

"The program has consolidated my understanding of the meaning of understanding everything in connection to the creator and to all His other creations"

"It changed the way I see the world and my relationship with God. Thank you so much. God bless all of you!"

An Online Course on God's Beautiful Names by Dr. Colin Turner

Interview by Bilal Ahmad Malik

Dr Colin Turner is a retired Reader in Islamic Thought at Durham University. Dr Turner is also the director of International Foundation for Muslim Theology, Durham, United Kingdom. Dr Turner has a wide range of research interests across the field of Islamic Studies, including Qur'anic Studies as well as Muslim theology and philosophy, Muslim political thought, Sufi spirituality and Shi'ism. His recent publication "The Quran Revealed" is a landmark publication in the history of Islamic studies, providing for the first time a comprehensive critical analysis of Nursi's 6000-page work of Quranic exegesis, The Epistles of Light. In the upcoming certificate programme Spring-2022 "Existence and Meaning", Dr. Turner will be teaching a course titled, "God's Beautiful Names: Meaning and Relevance". In this interview brief Bilal Malik, on behalf of the 5D-thinking platform, we spoke with Dr. Turner to learn more about the course.

Bilal Malik: You have taught a course on "Reading Said Nursi, Reading the Creation" under the Existence and Meaning program. You are now planning to teach a second course titled as God's Beautiful Names. What are the main objectives of the course and what are the key topics that you will cover in the coming course?

Dr. Colin: As we know, the beautiful names of God are known to majority of the Muslims through the popular Hadith (the Prophetic narration) of "God's beautiful names." But, for most, it doesn't really or it rarely transcends the level of the theoretical or the ritual level. The Hadith is understood in the light of another Hadith, apart from the Hadith of 99 names, which says that anyone who recites the names of God will enter the heaven. Of course, this is grossly misconstrued understanding of God's names. God's names are not just there as, how should we say, items to be recollected or items to be recited in a pious way in order to achieve salvation. Let me say that, the names of God, according to Ali Ibn Talib (r.a) are the pillars which hold up the universe.

Now, this is a very huge claim. It is a strong proposition telling us to stop treating the names of God as though they are just another item on a theological 'tick list'. You know, like a list of boxes that we have to tick on a document checklist. Yes, God is one, tick it. Yes, there are angels, tick it. Yes, there are prophets, tick it. Yes, God has 99 names, tick it. After putting a tick, never think about it again. The fact is that we are immersed in a universe which is constructed as a reflection of the God's divine names. There are, examples, or you could say samples even, or reflections or manifestations of the attributes of perfection everywhere. So if we talk in very simple terms about, knowledge or wisdom or justice or any of the divine names, we have to be mindful of the facet these are qualities and values that we can actually experience; i.e. we can see, feel, and taste and touch the divine names of God everywhere. Everything that we engage with in the creation is a reflection of a particular name or a particular combination or a particular constellation of names or, if you wish to name it, a particular configuration of names. Precisely, the divine names are everywhere and we have dealings with them on everyday basis.

An Online Course on God's Beautiful Names by Dr. Colin Turner

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Dr. Colin (cont.): Let's not forget, name is something which characterizes the owner of that name. Everything that we see in creation, we know from the Qur'an is a sign pointing to Him. And those signs come in the form of reflected names. And I usually give the example, as you know, yourself, the cherry tree example, you can look at the cherry tree and you can see hundreds of divine names there. If you look hard enough and if you listen with the intellect of your heart, you can discern the existence of attributes of perfection. The cherry tree is created by someone that has knowledge, otherwise, how can it be brought into being if there is no knowledge involved? Secondly, there is determination, will and vision. There is, in the case of the cherry tree, generosity involved, there is wisdom involved. There is a perfect order involved. There is a system of justice involved. All of these names, one can understand by looking at any simple created entity, such as a cherry tree. We know that the creation is full of signs. As I already mentioned that the creation is it the divine names of God which act as the pillars that hold up the creation. We are connected to those pillars. We have to understand that communing with God doesn't mean communing with some distant or absent creator. It means communing with a creator who is present with all of His names and all of His attributes and perfections at all times. And so this course, to cut a very long story, is an attempt to put people in touch with this very idea basic.

Bilal Malik: Ok. This brings me to my second question: why do you think that there is need to study such a topic for the full semester?

Dr. Colin: Well, first of all, a whole lifetime is not enough to appreciate the divine names of God. This is why there is such a thing as a because all of the names of God in all of their plenitude, all of their fullness, and all of their absoluteness can only be appreciated by people who are eternally guided. So a semester is nothing.

A semester is not even scratching the surface of the importance of this notion of the "universe as a gallery of names." And that's how we start off the module. The module starts off by trying to reacquaint the students with the notion of a universe that is a gallery of divine names, a gallery of divine artistry. That is the starting point. So we'll be looking at the names and we'll be looking at what it means for names to be manifested in creation. And it is from where you start to become a little bit more specific.

For example, we look at the seven essential names, which characterize all things such as Will, Knowledge, Vision, Hearing, Speaking, and Life. Have I missed out on one? Similarly, we'll be looking at different kinds of names. God's names, according to the scholars are divided into two types or two categories. One is a category of names that is known as Jamali or beautiful names. And the other is a category known as Jalali names or names of glory. The names of glory are usually pertaining to that side of God, which is unfathomable and unknowable. Now, the importance of understanding why there are two categories is because the interplay of the category of Jamal and Jalal brings about differentiation and diversity. There is diversity in the creation because of the interplay between Jamal and Jalal.

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Dr. Colin (cont.): In the course, we will look at the two ways of exploring creation, the self-referential way and the other-indicative way. This is something that we will do in the other modules. In some modules we will be looking at some particular names of God in isolation. For example, we will be looking at the name “EVER-LIVING”. We will take questions such as: What does it mean to say that the universe has life? What does life mean? And, what does it mean that life being a reflection of God's attribute of “EVER-LIVING”. There will be a unit in this module on the practical applicability of the divine names. It is a very broad module with 14 units. And really, as I said, we are just scratching the surface. We're not going into it at any great depth. Basically, it doesn't take one semester to understand the divine names. Rather, it takes a lifetime.

Bilal Malik: Thanks for the detailed description. Now, I will move to the other question: how does your coverage of the topics differ from a traditional discussion on divine names?

Dr. Colin: I think that most of the traditional discussions on divine names are very short. They are more theoretical in nature. They are real descriptions of God that are there for us to acquire a surface understanding of what it means. For example, if I've got to be wise, everyone understands what wisdom is, but how does this pertain to us? How do we understand wisdom on a personal level? How do we see the wisdom in creation? I think the way we will engage with divine names in this module is as live and dynamic currents in the universe. The whole of the motion of the universe depends on these currents, which are reflections of the divine names. You won't find this treatment of the divine names in the traditional Muslim scholarship.

Bilal Malik: Who do you think should take this course?

Dr. Colin: Anyone who is interested in knowing his or her creator better and also knowing himself or herself better. This is not technically an academic course in the sense. This course is for anyone interested to understand the universal phenomena through the divine names. It could also attract someone who thinks they know the divine names, but comes from a very traditional background and hasn't really thought of the practical ramifications of God having 99 names.

Bilal Malik: Thanks for giving your time out of your busy schedule.



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