

## **Reference:.**

**Salama, Yousef, (1999), "The rational inclination of Mohammad Abduh", philosophy and current epoch, no.1, 1999.**

## **The rational inclination of Mohammad Abduh**

**By: Yousef Salama,**

### **Review**

**Yousef Salama a Syrian philosophy professor at Damascus University presents in this essay a reading of the works of the well-known Nineteenth century Egyptian thinker and reformist Al-Sheikh Mohammad Abduh. Mohammad Abduh is widely known as an Islamic rational thinker who placed much effort toward renewal of the classical traditional Islamic thought on the basis of rational thinking. His project has been founded on establishing some form of a new understanding of the essential traditional concepts, hence, it has been usually classified as a combinatory view. In this essay Salama classifies Mohammad Abduh's thought as a fully rational one. He justifies his classification on analyzing Abduh's project and deducing the central concepts upon which this project is established. Moreover, he proves through this analysis that such central concepts are completely rational in the modernist sense. In Salama's view asserting the rational nature of Mohammad Abduh's project is important because he is an Islamic traditional Sheikh and a modernist thinker at the same time. This double-sided classification makes Abduh's thought important in supporting contemporary Arab modernization project for it helps in weakening conservative Islamic resistance to such a project.**

**In his introduction to the essay Salama presents his statement of the concept of "Rationality" as follows'**

**By "Rationality" we mean that "Reason" is the final authority and the last reference in legislating to reality, in such a way that it is the only measure for every thing else, and that its thoughts enjoy absolute authority on reality, without any need for any outside source upon which reason builds its legitimacy, whether such a source is Deist or humanist.**

However, reason cannot form such a legislative authority unless it is free. Freedom is an essential condition for rationality, for, human action without freedom cannot be a rational one. In addition, human volition cannot be free unless it is rational. For, rationality of volition is a result of its freedom.

In light of such a definition, rationality is compelled to be critic and negative. It is negative in the sense that negation is a refusal and denial of what already exists, for, every thing carries within it the factors of its rejection and revolution against it. And it is critical because criticism struggles against every established situation and takes from it a rejecting and denying stance.

On this basis reason can undertake a revolutionary role. This is because of the relation between the inherent tendency of philosophy toward rationalism and the fact that all the irrational movements (either essentialists or fundamentalists in all its forms) do not lead at the end except at keeping the status as it is. (P. 37)

Following his introduction of the concept of "Rationalism", Salama introduces his own reading of Mohammad Abduh's thought. He first states his own interpretation of the concept "Rationality" in Abduh's works as follows,

Rationality for "Mohammad Abduh" is an endeavor to deduce an "Islamic self", or a new "Islamic thought" that alleviates the status of "Al-Shari'aa" (means Islamic traditional legislative system) to be capable of meeting the intellectual challenges that has been introduced at that time. Moreover, Mohammad Abduh's aim was to build a modern system that can undertake an essential role in overcoming different types of 'alienation' that was prevailing, at that time, and separating between man and his world.

However, the alliance between foreign occupation forces and local rulers in Egypt at that time has turned such a system into a paralyzed one, so that it became unable to fulfill its aims in changing reality. (P. 38)

Salama stresses on his view that "Arab intellectuals in the nineteenth century has been open to the basic principles that has been defended by the French revolution. And that they new that the most important accomplishment of this revolution is represented by the concept of 'dependence of human being on his mind and subjugating reality to reason'. (P. 38)

Salama then introduces his interpretation to the motives of Mohammad Abduh to undertake his project. This motive was, in Salama's view, is that the Islamic legislative system (Al-Shari'aa) has been in need to reconstruction due to

centuries of stagnation. This task has forced Abduh, according to Salama, to acknowledge two basic things that complement each other. First is to depend absolutely on reason, second is to stop depending on previous thought; this is justified for Abduh from the verses of Al-Qur'an (the book of Islam) itself. Fulfilling these two basic conditions leads, according to Salama, to establishing the concept of "Rationality".

On this basis, Salama introduces his reading to the five basic concepts on which Mohammad Abduh constructs his project, as follows:

**1- Rational thinking as a means for acquiring belief.**

Belief, for Abduh, should be a result of rational thought not an adduced compelling thought from any outside source. In addition, the first duty for any one before being a Muslim is to depend on reason in order to reach the status of believing in God, in order to move forward to believe in his messengers.

**2- Priority for reason upon Al-Shari'aa (Islamic legislation) in case of contradiction**

Here Abduh states that it is almost a consensus in Islamic thought that "if reason and traditional thought has been in contradiction, then we should follow reason".

**3- Eliminating expiation**

This basis enforces the authority of reason, according to Salama, from one side, and asserts unlimited freedom in expressing reality in the way reason sees it without being subject to any restriction of any kind, from the other.

**4- Following God's laws in his creation.**

In this basis, according to Salama, Abduh purports to stress on the natural system which is controlled by its inherent laws. In addition Abduh sees that if humanity seeks for happiness then such happiness lies in following laws of nature. For human live does not go within chaos but there is a law organizes it in some way.

**5- To overturn the theist authority.**

This fifth basis, in view of Salama, represents the peak of the "Rational" disposition of Abduh's thought. For, Abduh raises reason to the status of a self sufficient power on the whole world, and sees that Islam has essentially overturned the religious authority before it and made for no one else after the Prophet Mohammad an authority over Muslim's beliefs and societies. Moreover,

**Human mind is fully capable of dealing directly without an intermediate authority with the basic texts of the Islamic belief and its legislating system.**

**Finally, Salama sees that there is an organic relation between these five basis of Abduh's thought, and that it all together expresses his conception of the authority of 'reason'. Accordingly Abduh redefines the function of the concept of 'prophecy' in Islam. The heart of the 'prophecy', according to Abduh, is not based on dealing with the changing reality but with deriving for living in accordance to higher values. Salama also concludes from his analysis that Mohammad Abduh has taken a deeply rational position from the relation between the religious and the profane authorities. This position, in Salama's view in secular in essence, albeit Abduh has been able to establish such a secular understanding through his own interpretation of Islamic texts and from the 'Soul' of Islamic religion as a whole. This position at the end uncovers the civil nature of the Islamic societies, in Abduh's renewal project.**

**(P. 39-41)**