

PRINCIPLES OF COMPASSION IN THE WORLD RELIGIONS FOR COEXISTENCE AMONG RELIGIONS IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF KAREN ARMSTRONG

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Abstract

Sociologically, the face of human life on this earth is pluralistic, not only in culture, language, ethnicity, customs, skin color and ethnicity, but also in aspects of religious beliefs. The problem is, the plurality of religious beliefs colored by clash after clash between various adherents of different religions. In modern history, there have been so many violent conflicts and acts of terrorism that have occurred in the name of faith in various parts of the world. Although various motives other than religion can be sought, the perpetrators of modern terrorism claim to be inspired and motivated by a certain understanding of religion. Karen Armstrong presents a brilliant offer to the conflict that must be sought for a common platform that is fundamental and lies at the heart of every tradition of the world's major religions such as Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Hindi, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Karen found a fundamental principle that could become a common platform among world religions, namely the principle of compassion. This article will discuss Karen Armstrong's thoughts on the principles of compassion in the world's religious traditions for inter-religious coexistence using a historical and philosophical critical approach in depth.

Keywords: *Compassion, World religion, coexistence, Karen Armstrong*

Abstrak

Secara sosiologis, wajah kehidupan umat manusia di muka bumi ini berbentuk pluralistik bukan hanya dalam budaya, bahasa, etnis, adat, warna kulit dan suku bangsa, melainkan juga dalam aspek keyakinan agama. Persoalannya, pluralitas keyakinan agama tersebut tidak jarang diwarnai dengan benturan demi benturan antara pelbagai penganut agama yang berbeda satu sama lain. Dalam sejarah modern ini, terdapat begitu banyak konflik kekerasan dan tindakan terorisme yang terjadi atas nama keyakinan diberbagai belahan dunia. Meskipun bisa dicari pelbagai motif-motif selain agama, para pelaku terorisme modern tersebut mengaku diilhami dan dimotivasi oleh pemahaman tertentu atas agama. Karen Armstrong menyuguhkan sebuah tawaran brilian terhadap konflik tersebut bahwa harus dicari sebuah common flatform (pijakan bersama) yang bersifat fundamental dan terletak dalam jantung setiap tradisi agama-agama besar dunia seperti Islam, Yahudi, Kristen, Hindi, Buddha, dan Kong Hu Cu. Karen menemukan sebuah prinsip fundamental yang bisa menjadi common flatform antar agama-agama dunia yakni prinsip belas kasih (compassion). Artikel ini akan mendiskusikan pemikiran Karen Armstrong tentang prinsip-prinsip belas

kasih dalam tradisi agama-agama dunia bagi koeksistensi antar umat beragama dengan menggunakan pendekatan historis dan kritis filosofis secara mendalam.

Kata Kunci: Belas kasih, Agama dunia, koeksistensi, Karen Armstrong

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A. Introduction

Sociologically, the face of human life on this earth is pluralistic. This plurality is not only related to the plurality of culture, language, ethnicity, customs, skin color and ethnicity, but also plurality in the aspect of their beliefs, namely religion. Moreover, in the post-industrial era or the era of informatics, the geographical distance between different countries and nations in terms of culture, ethnicity, customs, language, skin color, and even religion is no longer a problem.¹

Through a global communication network that touches most of the world's people, this technology has compressed the world into a global village and broke the isolation caused by distance and time.² Consequently, every adherent of a religion cannot help but come into contact with adherents of other religions. Today, almost no one is religious without interacting with other religious communities in various aspects of life.

In every region of a nation, it is almost certain that there is no society without plurality, which consists of adherents of various different religions, except in certain exclusive cities, such as the Vatican, Makkah, and Madinah. Even Middle Eastern Islamic countries, which are former centers of Christianity and Judaism, still have these Christian and Jewish minority groups. So apart from the Mecca and Medina (Hijaz) complexes where there are no permanent residents of religions other than Islam, all Islamic countries to this day have Jewish and Christian minorities.³

Similarly, other countries where the majority of the population is Christian, such as the United States and Hindus such as India, still have minorities of other religions such as Islam, Judaism, Buddhism or Confucianism. This fact shows the meaning of a brief formulation expressed by a famous scholar Abraham Heschel, No Religion is an Island, namely that no religion is an island for itself anymore.⁴

When it comes to inter-religious interdependence, according to Heschel, world religions are no longer independent, and no longer isolated from other individuals and

¹ The term post-industrial era was adopted from Kuntowijoyo which divides the development of society into three phases: agrarian, industrial, and post-industrial. Kuntowijoyo, *Muslim Tanpa Masjid* (Bandung: Mizan, 2001), p. 141 & 219.

² In Covey's paradigm, this era is called the era of wisdom. Stephen Covey, *The 8th Habit From Effectiveness to Greatness* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), p. 14-15.

³ Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam Doktrin and Peradaban* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1995), p. 178.

⁴ Charles Kimball, *When Religion Become Evil* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), p. 35.

nations. The energies, experiences, and ideas that begin to live outside the boundaries of a particular religion or all religions continue to challenge and influence every religion, so there is no separate religion. All need each other.⁵

The problem is, the plurality of beliefs specifically in the various religions is not infrequently colored with a pattern of hatred for the sake of hatred, even clash after clash between adherents of different religions. The tone of hatred, even worse, is supported by scholars, academics, and government officials against different religious views. The British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, for example, used negative provocations to justify the invasion of Iraq by stating that the new world faces new threats: "disruption and chaos spawned by barbaric countries like Iraq, armed with mass destruction; or by extreme terrorist groups. Both hate our way of life, our freedom, our democracy."⁶

In modern history, there have been so many conflicts that have occurred in the name of faith in various parts of the world. The phenomenon of conflict in the name of religion can also be seen in other parts of the world: Egypt, Germany, Italy, France, England, Peru, Japan, and Palestine⁷, Riyadh, Chechnya, and Casablanca.⁸ Even religious conflicts have also occurred massively in several countries in the Southeast Asia region, including Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, and including Indonesia.⁹ This tone of hatred was also followed by preachers such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Rod Parsley, and John Hagge to name a small number of copies.¹⁰

At the beginning of the third millennium, the tragedy culminated with the annihilation of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the United States which claimed so many innocent victims. Although various motives other than religion can be sought, the perpetrators of modern terrorism claim to be inspired and motivated by a certain understanding of religion.¹¹ In reality, the causes of conflict are usually greed, hatred, and ambition, but in an attempt to sterilize them, these self-serving emotions are often shrouded in religious rhetoric.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, *Saatnya Muslim Bicara* (Bandung: Mizan, 2008), p. 54.

⁷ Alwi Shihab, *Membedah Islam Di Barat* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 2011), p. 5.

⁸ Zuhairi Misrawi, *Pandangan Muslim Moderat* (Jakarta: Kompas, 2010), p. 109.

⁹ Zaki Mubarak, *Genealogi Islam Radikal di Indonesia* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 2008), p. 2.

¹⁰ John L. Esposito, *Masa Depan Islam* (Bandung: Mizan, 2010), p. 249-250.

¹¹ Kimball, *When Religion ...*, p. 2.

In the context of Indonesia, various clashes and various phenomena of conflicts between various beliefs surfaced towards the beginning of the third millennium until today.¹² Not to mention the negative frictions or small explosions that occur between the internal members of various beliefs of Muslims in Indonesia. This disharmony occurs not only at the verbal level, but has also penetrated the area of physical conflict between internal Muslims.¹³

Witnessing this reality that pierces humanity, some contemporary scientists and scholars seek to offer solutions to these various human tragedies. Some scientists have tried to offer the principle of pluralism based on the doctrines of their respective religions.¹⁴ However, the formulation of pluralism is still partial-instrumental, which has not touched the fundamental principles of each religion. That is the reason why most of the concepts of pluralism introduced by these scientists and clergy have not been able to be fully appreciated by interfaith people.

In this context, one of the scientists who seeks to provide a creative response to the variety of conflicts that occur between religious communities is Karen Armstrong. Karen Armstrong presents a brilliant proposition that a common platform must be found that is fundamental and must lie at the heart of every tradition of the world's major religions such as Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Hindi, Buddhism, and Confucianism. With a comprehensive search of the world's major religions, Karen found a fundamental principle that can become a common platform among world religions is compassion.

In Islam, according to Karen, the Qur'an places great emphasis on Muslims to start their every activity in the name of God, the Most Merciful. This message indicates that every Muslim must spread compassion and peace, not only to fellow Muslims but also to all communities outside of them.¹⁵ This ideal example of compassion for Karen can be seen in the paradigmatic figure (ideal example) of Muhammad Saw who made compassion as the principle of his life.¹⁶

¹² Zaki Mubarak, *Genealogi Islam Radikal di Indonesia*, p. 3-4.

¹³ See Endang Turmudi & Riza Sihbudi (eds.), *Islam and Radikalisme di Indonesia* (Jakarta: LIPI, 2005); and Imdadun Rahmat, *Arus Baru Islam Radikal* (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2009).

¹⁴ See Komaruddin Hidayat & Wahyuni Nafis, *Agama masa Depan* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 2003).

¹⁵ Karen Armstrong, *Islam Sejarah Singkat*, Funky Kusnaendy (Yogyakarta: Jendela, 2003).

¹⁶ Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad Prophet For Our Time* (Bandung: Mizan, 2007), p. 52-53. See Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad A Biography of The Prophet* (London: Phoenix Paperback, 1991).

At the heart of Judaism breathes the same spirit of compassion: Whoever destroys one human life is equivalent to destroying the entire world, while saving one life saves the entire human race.¹⁷ Meanwhile, Christianity also voices a similar principle of compassion that compassion must be the basis of behavior for every believer, not only towards their neighbors but also to people of different faiths, even to their enemies.¹⁸

Likewise for other religions such as Hinduism which carries the message of *ahimsa*: the spirit of non-violence and spreads compassionate behavior to every human being, even to all creatures¹⁹; Buddhism which echoes the principle of compassion as immeasurables that reaches to the ends of the earth without excluding a single being from this radius of compassionate concern²⁰, and Confucian teachings which declare altruistic compassion: Anyone who wants to help himself, he should try to help others; Whoever wants to expand himself must expand others; And don't do to others what you don't like them doing to you.²¹

Based on these principle facts, for Karen, the principle of compassion that resides in the heart of all religions, ethics, and spiritual traditions, calls on all religious people to always treat everyone as they would like to be treated. The principle of compassion encourages all interfaith people to work tirelessly to eliminate the suffering of their fellow human beings, remove their own egos from the center of attention and put others there, and respect the sanctity of every other human being, treat everyone without exception, with justice, equality, and justice. absolute honor.²²

In Karen's view, all components of religious communities need to immediately make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force, in today's polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to overcome selfishness, compassion can transcend political, dogmatic, ideological, and religious boundaries. Born out of humanity's deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to

¹⁷ Karen Armstrong, *Twelve Steps to A Compassionate Life* (London: The Bodley Head, 2011), p. 47.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁹ Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), p. 241.

²⁰ Karen Armstrong, *Buddha* (Great Britain: Phoenix Paperback, 2002), p. 136-137.

²¹ Armstrong, *The Great*, p. 207.

²² Armstrong, *Twelve Steps*, p. 4.

the fullness of humanity. The principle of compassion is the path of enlightenment and is indispensable for the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.²³

According to Karen, in today's global village, every religious community can no longer survive with a parochial or exclusive vision. They must learn to live and behave as if the people living in the countries farthest from theirs are as important as themselves. Therefore, the spirit of compassion is very much needed in today's world atmosphere which is being torn apart by violence for the sake of violence. Even emphatically, Karen stated that, compassion was the test of true spirituality.²⁴

From this background, this article will explore Karen Armstrong's thoughts on the principles of compassion in the world's religious traditions for inter-religious coexistence by using an in-depth historical and critical philosophical approach.²⁵

B. The Principles of Compassion in Karen Armstrong's Perspective

In fact, Karen Armstrong outlines quite a number of the principles that underlie acts of compassion. But here, only six aspects will be described because some of these elements are similar even though they are expressed in different languages. The principles of compassion that will be explored here include: learning about compassion, compassion for oneself, empathy, knowledge, dialogue with others, and concern for all.

First, learn about compassion. In Karen Armstrong's observation, the term compassion is often equated with "pity" and is associated with uncritical sentimental virtue. The Oxford English Dictionary, for example, defines "compassionate" as "pitigious" or "pitiable". This perception of compassion is not only widespread, but has been ingrained.²⁶

However, in Karen's perspective, compassion is partly derived from Latin *patiri* and Greek *pathein*, which means "to suffer, to live, or to experience". So compassion means "to bear (something) with others", to put oneself in someone else's shoes, to feel one's suffering as if it were one's own suffering, and to enter generously into one's point of view. That is why compassion is aptly summarized in the Golden Rule, which asks a person to look into his own heart, discover what is causing him pain,

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁵ Bakker, *Metodologi*; and Kaelan, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif bidang Filsafat* (Yogyakarta: Paradigma, 2005).

²⁶ Karen Armstrong, *Compassion*. Ter. Yuliani Liputo (Bandung: Mizan, 2012), p. 14.

and then refuse, under any circumstances, to inflict that pain on another. Compassion, therefore, can be defined as an attitude of principled consistent altruism.²⁷

In Karen's research, the first person to formulate the Golden Rule was the Chinese sage Confucius. He teaches his students to practice a principle teaching: "never do to others what you would not like them to do to you".²⁸ Therefore, compassion is inseparable from humanity; rather than being motivated by self-interest, a truly human person is consistently oriented towards others.²⁹

Likewise the Buddha developed a specific form of teaching to increase the natural drive for empathy and compassion. The Buddha instructs the teaching of the "four thoughts of immeasurable love" which makes him realize that "that great, expansive, and immeasurable feeling knows no hatred", and directs it to the furthest corner of the world, not excluding a single being within his radius of concern. First, he will awaken maitri ("love"), igniting in his mind a friendly attitude towards all people; next he contemplates the gift of ("compassion"), desiring all beings to be free from pain; third, he will bring forth in his mind the pure "joy" that he once experienced under the guava tree and which he now desires for all beings, and finally he will try to free himself from all personal attachments and partialities by loving all beings with compassion, *upeksha*, impartial just mind.

Over time, thanks to diligent practice, Gautama found that his mind was freed from the prism of selfishness and felt "broadness, boundless, increasing, without petty hatred or malice". He had come to understand that envy, hate, and ungratefulness would shrink one's horizons and limit anyone's creativity, while the emotions of love had very different effects: gratitude, compassion, and altruism broaden one's perspective and break down barriers one establishes between oneself and others in a futile attempt to protect a fearful, greedy, insecure ego.³⁰

Furthermore, the three monotheistic religions also emphasize the importance of compassion. One of the classical Jewish sages Hillel declared: "What you do not like for

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14-15.

²⁸ Karen Armstrong, *Twelve Step to a Compassionate Life* (London: The Bodley Head, 2011), p. 6.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

yourself, do not do to your neighbor".³¹ The great Rabbi Akiba also taught that the commandment "Love your neighbor as yourself" is a central tenet of the Torah.³²

In the rabbinic interpretation of the biblical teaching on creation, the rabbis focused on the fact that all of humanity was created in the image of God. Showing disrespect to anyone is therefore considered a denial of God himself and tantamount to atheism, and murder is not just a crime against humanity, it is blasphemy. God only created one person at the beginning of time to teach everyone that destroying one life is equivalent to destroying the world, while saving one life is saving the entire human race. Shaming someone—even slaves or non-Jews—means, like murder, sacrilegious blasphemy against the image of God, and spreading slanderous stories tantamount to denying the existence of God. So generosity is the final test of faith. A person cannot not worship God, unless he himself respects his fellow human beings, whoever they are.³³

Compassion also seems to be at the heart of the Christian ethos from the start. Like Hillel, Jesus taught the Golden Rule—but in its positive formula. Like the rabbis, Jesus believed that the commandments to love God with all your heart and soul and to love your neighbor as yourself are the noblest commandments of the Torah. The Gospels show Jesus showing "concern for all", approaching "sinners": prostitutes, lepers, epilepsy, and those accused of being traitors for collecting Roman taxes. His followers must refrain from judging others. Those who are accepted into the Kingdom of God, where rich and poor will sit together at the same table, are people who practice acts of love, feeds the hungry, and visits those who are sick or in prison. His most loyal disciples had to give all their possessions to the poor. Jesus is also shown as a supporter of *ahimsa*. "You have heard the word of God: an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," he said to the crowd. "But I say to you, do not fight against those who do evil to you, but whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him also your left cheek."³⁴

Saint Paul, the earliest Christian writer whose work is still extant, expresses the Christian principle of mercy from Corinth in an impressive tone:

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 58-59.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 61-62.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

If I have all the eloquence of a human or an angel, but speak without love, I am like a pounding gong or a clashing cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, understand all the mysteries that exist, and know everything, and if I have faith in all its fullness, to move mountains, but without love, then I am nothing. If I give everything I have, piece by piece, and if I even let them take my body to burn, but I'm without love, it won't do me any good.³⁵

Finally, Islam is very focused on the principle of compassion in the religious practice of its people. In Karen's view, to replace the aggressive Jahili ethos, the Qur'an advocates hilm ("forgiveness"), another traditional but less popular Arabic policy. Hilm men and women are patient, steadfast, and forgiving; instead of venting their rage, they will remain calm even in the most upsetting of situations; they do not hit back when injured, but leave the vengeance to Allah. Those who practice hilm love the poor, the less fortunate, orphans and widows, feeding the poor even when they are hungry themselves. They will always be gentle and polite. They are men and women of peace, who "walk slowly on the earth, and whenever an ignorant person greets them (with contempt), they respond by saying 'salam'".³⁶ The Prophet Muhammad also pledged that none of you can be said to be a believer, said Muhammad, in an oft-quoted phrase (hadith), "unless he wills for his neighbor what he wills for himself".³⁷

Furthermore, every recitation of the Qur'an begins with a prayer asking for Allah's mercy and mercy. And, the relatively few verses dealing with the conduct of battle are offset by far more verses that speak of gentleness, forgiveness, kindness, courtesy, friendship, and patience.³⁸ Based on the above discourse, it is quite clear that compassion is a very fundamental principle and is at the heart of all the world's major religions.

Second, self-compassion. In Karen Armstrong's paradigm, until one can be compassionate to oneself, one cannot be compassionate to others. This brilliant idea Karen got from Rabbi Albert Friedlander who stated explicitly: if you cannot love yourself, you cannot love other people either;³⁹ "If you can't love yourself, you can't love anyone else." The Golden Rule as a principle of acts of compassion requires self-

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63-64.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.68.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ See Zuhairi Misrawi, *Al-Quran Kitab Toleransi* (Jakarta: Fitrah, 2007).

³⁹ Armstrong, *Compassionate Life*, p. 67.

knowledge, i.e. asking a person to use his own feelings as a guide for his behavior towards others. If he treats himself harshly, this is how he tends to treat others. So everyone needs to gain a healthier and more balanced knowledge of their own strengths and weaknesses.⁴⁰

It is important to be aware of one's own vices and take responsibility for them. However, everyone should also realize that the anger, fear, hatred, and greed that make him behave badly stems from the brain he inherited from the ancestors of the classical reptiles. Everyone has more or less these primitive instincts and their job is to train their minds so that they don't overwhelm everyone's potential for good. There's no point in punishing yourself for jealousy, anger, and humiliation. It will only lead to self-hatred. Instead, calmly but firmly everyone should refuse to identify with those feelings, and say as the Buddha commanded: "This is not mine; this is not the real me; this is not me."⁴¹

Fear is fundamental and makes us hate what it perceives to be dangerous. That fear causes him to be wary and suspicious: instead of reaching out to others, we sink back into ourselves, fending off an impending threat. When we feel we have reached a dead end, we may retaliate fiercely. Everyone is afraid of something. What scares you? Spiders, loneliness, cancer, death, senile old age, failure or poverty? Instead of hating yourself for this anxiety and accusing yourself of cowardice, have compassion on yourself and remember that fear is a human characteristic. It is something that connects us to other people. if we cannot accept the reality of our own fears, we tend to ignore and even ridicule the fears of others.⁴²

According to Karen, part of human character is the result of circumstances beyond their control. So many things in life are "predetermined": everyone doesn't choose their parents, the genes they inherit, or the upbringing or education they receive. They cannot choose the economic circumstances or society in which they are born. Everyone should work hard to reduce whatever adverse environmental factors affect their personality, but they should not think that they have made them incapable of compassion. If they think so, they tend to look down on others because of their

⁴⁰ Armstrong, *Compassion*, p. 85.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 86

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 87.

weaknesses, instead of reflecting that it wasn't them who chose their circumstances, heredity, or genetic makeup.

However, it is important to recognize that everyone has a dark side. Jungian psychologists speak of "shadows," a mechanism that allows people to disguise from their conscious self-motives, desires, and unpleasant tendencies that influence thoughts and behavior, which sometimes surface in dreams. A person needs to take ownership of this lower realm of the soul so that he is not overwhelmed by the horror of discovering that he is fascinated by cruelty, has strange sexual fantasies, or suddenly has a desire for revenge.

Because if everyone can't accept their dark side, they tend to take a hard view of other people's dark side. When people angrily denounce sexual violence, depravity, or cruelty, it can be a sign that they have failed to come to terms with their own natural tendencies and believe that only other people are evil and disgusting. "We often attack others precisely because of the qualities we least like in ourselves", writes Karen.⁴³

Thus, in this second step, a person must understand himself in a balanced way that in him there are various dark sides and there are a number of characters that can be an extension of human life. Everyone's constructive task is to sow and develop the seeds of goodness, such as caring, caring, generosity, and compassion that are within them, so that they can truly love themselves and have the confidence (wholeness and authenticity of self) to love someone else.

Third, empathy. The feeling of empathy is based on a view that there is so much suffering out there that requires care, concern, compassion and action to help those who are suffering. For Karen, suffering is a law of life, so that suffering always surrounds the life of every human being. Humans cannot forget their sufferings: even in sleep, memories of past sorrows incessantly trickle into their hearts. Humans may try to resist the law of suffering, but wisdom (in classical stories symbolized by the gods) has proclaimed that the reflective power of suffering will put humans on the path to wisdom, maturity, and blessing.⁴⁴

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 87-88.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

The sufferings of life or tragedy, some philosophers believe, can educate emotions and teach people to experience them properly. As the drama unfolds, the narrow-minded person will see his own difficulties in perspective and the proud person will learn to feel sorry for the unfortunate. Once purified and drained of their potential harm, these emotions can then be of benefit to the community.⁴⁵ Because the suffering that a person experiences in his own life can also help him to appreciate the depths of the unhappiness of others. When a person feels and experiences firsthand the suffering of himself and others, that is the moment to share empathy or become an entry point for empathy.

For this reason, in Karen's view, tragic drama reminds everyone of the role art can play in expanding their sympathies. Dramas, films, and novels allow everyone to enter imaginatively into the lives of others and make empathetic identification with people whose experiences are completely different from their own. Dramas, films, and novels can provide everyone with moments of compassionate ecstasy and, in this third step, everyone must be determined to let art disturb their composure and make them question ingrained prejudices.

The big screen (in drama or film) brings everyone close to the characters; Everyone can find themselves in tears, their nervous system being activated when they witness the suffering of others, even though their rational mind tells them that other people's suffering is just an invention. When they have been affected in this way, they should not be in too much of a hurry to forget the experience as they are when they leave the theater or put a novel back on the shelf. Everyone must allow the pathos to dwell permanently in their minds, in the same way that the Athenians provided a home for both Oedipus and Eumenides.

Imagination is essential to a compassionate life. Imagination is a quality unique to humans, enabling artists to create entirely new worlds and imparting a strong semblance of reality to events that never happened and people who never existed. Compassion and ego-release are both important to art: it's easy to find a poem, novel, or film weak or fragile because of a cruel wit. "When a movie makes us cry", writes Karen, it's often because it touches a hidden memory or longing that we don't

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

acknowledge. Art invites us to recognize our pains and aspirations, and opens our minds to others. art helps us—just as it helped the Greeks—to realize that we are not alone. Other people suffer too.”⁴⁶

Fourth, knowledge. In this step, a person must realize that there is actually very little he knows about other people, people different from himself, different traditions, unfamiliar beliefs, and other events.

According to Karen, how rarely do people “make room for others” in social interactions. How often one imposes one's own experiences and beliefs about people and events, and curt judgments that are painful, inaccurate, and uncaring not only about individuals, but about entire cultures. It is often obvious, when they are asked further, that their true knowledge of the topic under discussion can fit in just a small postcard.⁴⁷

The great achievements of modern science can lead everyone to believe that they are pushing back the frontiers of ignorance and will soon unravel the last secrets of the universe. Science is progressive by nature: it is constantly venturing into new realms, and once a theory is disproved and transcended, it becomes obsolete. However, the knowledge one gains through the humanities and arts does not advance in that way. Here everyone keeps asking the same question—what is happiness? What is the truth? How do humans live with mortality?—and rarely come to a definite answer because there is no definite answer to this eternal question. Each generation must start from scratch and find solutions that speak directly to their particular circumstances. Philosophers today are still discussing issues that once preoccupied Plato.⁴⁸

The pursuit of knowledge is exciting, and science, medicine, and technology have dramatically improved the lives of millions of people. However, ignorance remains an essential part of the human condition. Religion is at its best when it helps everyone to ask questions and maintain their awe—and arguably at its worst when it tries to answer the question authoritatively and dogmatically. Everyone can never understand the transcendence which they call God, Nirvana, Brahman, or Dao, precisely because it is transcendent: it lies beyond the reach of the senses and therefore cannot be

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 108-109.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁴⁸ See Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1975), p. 101-217.

definitively proven. Certainty about such matters is, therefore, misplaced and constitutes a rigid dogmatism which rejects the views of others as incongruous. If someone said that he knew exactly what “God” was, he would at best be talking about an idol, a God that he created in his own image.⁴⁹

This appreciation of the limits of one's knowledge also lies at the heart of the Western rational tradition, one of the founders of which was Socrates (c. 470-399 BC). Socrates believed that wisdom is not a matter of gathering information and reaching definite and quick conclusions. Until his final days, he insisted that the only reason he could be considered wise was because he knew that he knew nothing. When he was attacked by a prominent Athenian politician, he said to himself:

I am wiser than this man; probably none of us knows anything of value, but he thinks he knows something when he doesn't, whereas if I don't, I don't think I know either; so I'm probably a little wiser than him so I don't think about what I don't know.

People who come to visit Socrates usually think they know what they are talking about, but after half an hour of endless interrogation, they find that they know nothing of basic things like justice or courage. They were very confused, like bewildered children; the intellectual and moral foundations of their lives are radically dismantled, and they experience fearful and dizzying doubts (*aporia*). According to Socrates, it is then that a person becomes a philosopher—“a lover of wisdom”—because he has become aware that he longs for greater insight, knows that he does not have it, but from this moment on will seek it with zeal as a lover pursues his beloved.⁵⁰

The Chinese philosopher and mystic Zhuangzi (c. 370-311 BC), one of the foremost sages of the Axial era, agrees that the only thing worth saying is the question that plunges his listeners into numinous doubt and uncertainty. As a Daoist, Zhuangzi tries to harmonize his life with the Path (*dao*), by which he means all the various patterns, forms, and potentials that make nature what it is. However, even though nature is in constant change, many people are always going against the grain and trying to freeze their ideas and experiences and make them absolute. It's the egoism that makes them identify with one opinion instead of the other, become contentious and unfriendly,

⁴⁹ See Karen Armstrong, *History of God* (London: Vintage Books. 2001); M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan Al-Quran*, (Bandung: Mizan, 1997), p. 14-40.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 130-132.

say this can't mean that, and think they're in charge of changing other people to suit themselves.

When many people cling to their certainties, their likes and dislikes, considering them important to their sense of self, they are distancing themselves from the "great transformation" of the Way because of the fact that everyone is constantly in change, moving from one state to another. An unenlightened person, Zhuangzi explained, is like a frog in a well who mistakenly thinks of a small patch of sky that he can see as a whole; but as soon as he saw the immensity of the sky, his perspective changed forever.

If they are determined to stay stuck in their current perspective, their understanding remains "short-sighted... narrow and busy". However, the sage, who has left his ego behind, has attained what Zhuangzi calls "Great Knowledge", which is "broad and unhurried". A wise man gets there only when he learns to "sit still and forget" one by one until he finally forgets about himself. Their heart would then be "empty" of the frenzy of self-interest and, without a distorting lens of self-interest, their heart would reflect other things and other people like a mirror. This "emptiness" naturally gives rise to empathy.

Zhuangzi firmly stated: "The loving person has no self. The wise person takes no credit. The holy person desires no praise"⁵¹, "A loving person has no self. Wise people do not crave respect. A pure man does not desire praise."⁵² Even the greatest scientist of the 20th century, Albert Einstein admits that something is still a mystery when it comes to unveiling the veil of the universe.

The most beautiful feeling we can feel is mysterious. It is a fundamental feeling that is the pillar of all true art and science. To those who are unfamiliar with this feeling, who are never surprised and stand in awe, are as dead as a candle that goes out. Understanding that behind all that we can experience there is something that our mind cannot comprehend, whose beauty and majesty touches us indirectly, this is what is

⁵¹ Robert Van De Weyer, *366 Readings from Taoism and Confucianism* (Mumbai: Jaico Publishing House, 2003), p. 3/6.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 134-135.

called being religious. In this sense, and only in this sense, I can be called a devout religious person.⁵³

Fifth, dialogue with others. Dialogue is one of the buzzwords of the contemporary era. There is a widespread belief that if people are willing to dialogue, peace will be achieved. However, there is very little Socratic dialogue in today's world. Contemporary public discourse tends to be aggressive, a tradition inherited from ancient Greece. In Athens' democratic assembly, citizens learned to argue competitively, construct arguments logically and effectively, and support their case to win. They practice theoretical techniques to weaken the opponent's position and have no qualms about discrediting the opponent and what they stand for in order to corner them. The goal is to beat the opponent: no one is expected to change their mind, cross over to the other side, or enter empathically into the opponent's point of view.⁵⁴

But the type of Socratic dialogue is very different from today's dialogue. In Socratic dialogue, participants "must answer in a softer and more appropriate manner for discussion". Socratic dialogue is a spiritual exercise designed to produce profound psychological changes in its participants—and since the goal is for each person to understand the depths of his or her own stupidity, no one can win.

Plato describes dialogue as communal meditation which is hard work, requiring "a lot of time and hassle", but like his teachers, he insists that it should be done well, lovingly. Dialogue will not bring transcendent insight, unless "questions and answers are exchanged in good faith and without malice". No one should be forced into a position about which he or she feels uncomfortable. Each participant must "make room for the other" in his mind, listen carefully and sympathetically to his dialogue partner's ideas, and allow them to shake their own beliefs. In return, they will allow their minds to be influenced and changed by his contributions.

Both Buddha and Confucius seem to have conducted the discussion in the same way. Confucius always developed his insight into conversation because, in his view, we need this friendly interaction to reach maturity. In Chinese characters, *ren* has two elements: a simple ideogram depicting a human being and two should be horizontal

⁵³ Walter Isaacson, *Einstein*, trans Mursid Wijanarko (Yogyakarta: Bentang, 2012), p. 413.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

showing human relationships. *Ren*, therefore, could be translated as “together-humanity”. Cooperation requires “tenderness” and “flexibility” of *ren*, and Confucius would probably appreciate the ritual of Socratic dialogue, which requires participants to “surrender” to one another, rather than to rigidly hold on to their own opinions. In the *Analects*, we see him scolding his students with his mouth, pushing them to their limits, but never mocking them. Confucius was gentle, friendly, and calm, listened carefully and was always ready to admit their point of view. He was not a wise teacher, he protested; his only talent is “relentless effort to learn and unflagging patience in teaching others”.⁵⁵

According to Karen, people today don't get much involved in that kind of dialogue today. Debates within parliaments, the media, academia, and contemporary law courts are inherently competitive. It was not enough for them to seek the truth, they also wanted defeat and even humiliated their opponents. The hatred and tactics of suppressing the opponent that Socrates denounces are enthusiastically embraced as part of the fun. This kind of discourse is largely a show of ego.

Certainly no one admits that he doesn't know the answer or has any doubts about the validity of his opinion—even on complex issues for which there are no easy answers. Admitting that their opponent might have a valid opinion seemed unthinkable. Especially to change your mind. But, while aggressive debate may be useful in politics, it is unlikely to change hearts and minds—especially when an issue evokes bitter, entrenched emotions.⁵⁶

Sixth, concern for all. In this regard, Karen explores the teachings of Mozi (Master Mo; 480-390) on *jian ai*, concern for all people, namely the principled and practically oriented recognition of the absolute welfare of mankind. For Mozi, everyone should feel for everyone else exactly as he feels for his own people. Other people must be considered like oneself, so that caring even though it embraces all and excludes no one.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 145-146.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁵⁷ Karen Armstrong, *the Great Transformation*. Trans Yuliani Liputo, (Bandung: Mizan, 2007), p. 326.

Jian ai is based on a sense of equality, justice, and impartial care for all human beings without exception. "Respect other countries as you respect your own country, other families as your own family, and others as yourself," said Mo. "If the country's masters cared for one another, they would not go to war." If brothers do not respect each other, they will fight; if the gentlemen don't have *jian ai*, they muster their armies. "In any event, the reason why calamity, expulsion, malice, and hatred occurs is the absence of *jian ai*."⁵⁸

Even with *jian ai*, Mozi asks anyone to love his family naturally. Instead of seeing family as a place to learn to love others, Mozi argues on the contrary, "Concern for everyone" in *jian ai* allows us to love our family and country properly. If people do not instill compassion for all of humanity, family love and patriotism will collapse into mere collective egoism.⁵⁹

If people do not reach beyond their own family or nation, they are potentially infected with the selfish attitude that is the cause of the world's ills. *Jian ai* leads directly to nonviolence.⁶⁰ For Mozi, the war destroyed crops, killed many civilians, consumed weapons and horses, and deprived many ancestors of the descendants who would make offerings on their behalf. The rulers said that the conquests benefited the state, but the annexation of small towns could result in thousands of casualties when people were desperately needed to farm the fields.⁶¹

In Karen's view, Mozi's ethical vision is purely utilitarian. An action is considered good if it enriches the poor, prevents unnecessary deaths, increases the population, and contributes to public order. People must be consulted in order to abandon selfishness; humans are egotistical by nature, so they must be convinced by irrefutable arguments that their well-being is wholly dependent on the well-being of all human beings and that "concern for all" is equally important to prosperity, peace and security. The Mohists had to convince the rulers that aggression was not in their best interest. War makes their own people suffer; destroy the economy; whereas victory provokes hatred and jealousy. They will find the wealth, happiness, and success they

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 327-328.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

desire only if everyone is fair to others and unselfish. Rulers must “learn not to think only of themselves”.⁶²

If everyone could be persuaded to respect others as they respect themselves, there would be peace and harmony throughout the world. No one could destroy a city or massacre the inhabitants of a village if he practiced *jian ai*. At this point, it is quite interesting to note Mozi's eloquence in proclaiming his universal hope:

“Now if we wish to do good to the world by setting *jian ai* as our standard, those with sharp ears and clear eyes will see and hear for others, those with stature will work for others, and those with knowledge of the Way will try to teach it to others. Those who are old but without wives and children will find a way to find support and be able to go about their days; children and fatherless orphans will find someone to care for them and provide for their needs.”⁶³

The teaching of caring for all is also seen to be very transparent in Buddhist doctrines. The Buddha taught a meditation called *appamana*, "immeasurable". On each of his meditation journeys deep into the depths of his mind, one should purposefully arouse the emotion of love i.e. a vast and immeasurable feeling that does not recognize hatred, and direct it to the four corners of the world, without excluding a single plant, animal, friend, or foe from the radius of sympathy. this.

These noble values are enshrined in the following early Buddhist poem which is still held by Buddhists:

Let all beings be happy!

Weak or strong, high, middle or low,
small or large, visible or invisible, near or far,
live or be born—

May they be perfectly happy!

Don't lie to anyone or insult anyone anywhere.

May no one wish harm to others out of anger or hatred!

Let us cherish all beings, like a mother to her only child!

May loving thoughts fill the whole world, above, below, everywhere—without limits; love knows no barriers—goodwill without limits to the whole world, unhindered, free from hatred and enmity.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 329.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

Whether we are standing or walking, sitting or lying down, as long as we are awake we must develop this love in our hearts.

This is the noblest way of life.⁶⁴

C. Conclusion

Based on the comprehensive discussion on the principles of compassion for inter-religious coexistence in Karen Armstrong's perspective, the following conclusions can be drawn:

In Karen Armstrong's perspective, there are at least six components that become the principles of compassion in every heart of the world's religious traditions, including: First, learning about compassion, namely understanding the nature of universal compassion for humanity that is free from selfish motives and consistently oriented to others. Second, compassion for yourself. In Karen Armstrong's paradigm, until one can be compassionate to oneself, one cannot be compassionate to others. Third, empathy. The feeling of empathy is based on a view that there is so much suffering out there that requires care, concern, compassion and action to help those who are suffering.

Fourth, knowledge. In this step, a person must realize that there is actually very little he knows about other people, people different from himself, different traditions, unfamiliar beliefs, and other events. Fifth, dialogue with others. Socratic dialogue is needed, which is not to bring down the opponents of the discussion, but is willing to share insights that enrich each other's perspectives. Sixth, concern for all. Concern for all, namely the principled and practically oriented recognition of the absolute welfare of mankind; Everyone must be considered as oneself, so that concern even though it embraces all and excludes no one.

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⁶⁴ Karen Armstrong, *Buddha* (USA: Viking/Penguin, 2000), p. 136.

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