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All correspondence should be addressed to:
AJIS, PO Box 669, Herndon, VA 20172-0669 USA
Phone: 703-230-2847 • Fax: 703-471-3922
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Contents

EDITORIAL

Editorial Note

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OVAMIR ANJUM

This issue of the *American Journal of Islam and Society* comprises four main research articles, each shedding light on the diverse ways in which the Islamic legal and theological tradition has shaped and intersected with premodern and modern societies. To start closer to home: Sam Houston's contribution entitled "The "Metaphysical Monster" and Muslim Theology: William James, Sherman Jackson, and the Problem of Black Suffering" places American Muslim scholar Sherman A. Jackson's important monograph *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering* in conversation with the work of American pragmatist philosopher William James and suggests that Jackson's account parallels James's account of religion in that it speaks of the "practical effectiveness" of the "web of beliefs" constituting Islamic doctrines of God. Theology, therefore, becomes not only an account of the revealed truth but also a praxis of inculcating certain habits of seeing and acting in the world. For Jackson, the monumental theodical challenge of black suffering becomes a site to explore, and teach, the wide and diverse terrain of Islamic theological reflection. This exploration allows Houston to meditate on the category of "experience" itself and its role in the verification of belief. In Houston's estimation, Jackson exposes the uncritical role played by "experience" in Black philosopher of religion William R. Jones's thought. This critique,

incidentally, can be extended to the thought of James as well. This allows Houston to highlight the theoretical as well as practical dimensions of the work of an American Muslim theologian.

Our next article explores the practical engagement of the official ulama as spokespersons of the Islamic legal and theological tradition in a different field: post-2011 Egypt. In his article entitled, "Ideals and Interests in Intellectuals' Political Deliberations: The Arab Spring and the Divergent Paths of Egypt's Shaykh al-Azhar Ahmad al-Tayyib and Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa," Muhammad Amasha calls into question the common-place generalizations about the ulama as being either pro-revolution or pro-regime by examining the politics of two prominent members of the pro-establishment ulama class. Whereas Ali Gomaa's Arab Spring politics, Amasha argues, "can be seen as an effort to cater to those in power to protect his religious authority, either through struggles to attain official religious positions or by obstructing revealing information harmful to his religious legitimacy," by contrast the Shaykh al-Azhar's Ahmad al-Tayyib's politics "fluctuated between accepting the status quo and being critical of those in power."

Syamsuddin Arif in his "Rethinking the Concept of *Fiṭra*: Natural Disposition, Reason and Conscience," turns our attention to an under-studied dimension of Islamic psychology: the role of innate human nature, or *fiṭra*, in the motivation behind human action. Drawing on recent Western as well as Islamicate scholarship, it attends to the bio-logical, epistemological, and ethical dimensions of this Qur'anic concept, suggesting that it be treated not only as the natural tendency for humans to act or think in a particular way, but specifically as the religious, ethical, and rational instinct.

Finally, Fateh Saeidi's "The Early Sufi Tradition in Hamadān, Nahāwand, and Abhar: Stories of Devotion, Mystical Experiences, and Sufi Texts" explores the history of the development of early Sufism in Hamadān, Nahāwand, and Abhar through an analysis of three significant but understudied early Sufi texts: *Karāmāt Sheikh abī ʿalī al-Qūmsānī* by Ibn Zīrak al-Nahāwandī (d. 471/1078), *Ādāb al-fuqarā'* by Bābā Jaʿfar al-Abharī (d. 428/1036), and *Rawḍat al-murīdīn* by Ibn Yazdānyār

al-Hamadānī (d. 472/1079). This study thus makes valuable contribution to our knowledge of the development of Iraqi Sufism from the third/ninth to the fifth/eleventh century.

Ovamir Anjum
Imam Khattab Endowed Chair of Islamic Studies
Professor, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies,
University of Toledo, Ohio
Editor, American Journal of Islam and Society

ARTICLES

The "Metaphysical Monster" and Muslim Theology: William James, Sherman Jackson, and the Problem of Black Suffering

SAM HOUSTON

Abstract

By placing Blackamerican Muslim theologian Sherman A. Jackson's work, especially his *Islam and the Problem of Black*

Sam Houston, PhD, is an assistant professor of religious studies at Stetson University. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in history from Baylor University, a master of divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary and a master of arts degree in philosophy from Boston College. He earned his doctoral degree from Florida State University, specializing in Muslim ethics and comparative religious ethics. Prior to pursuing his doctorate, he lived for two years in Abu Dhabi, UAE, teaching English at Zayed University and traveling throughout the Middle East/North Africa region. While a graduate student at FSU, he was awarded a U.S. State Department-sponsored Critical Language Scholarship to study Arabic in Morocco. He is a member of the American Academy of Religion and the Society for the Study of Muslim Ethics.

Suffering, in conversation with the work of American pragmatist William James, I explore the pragmatic dimensions of Islamic thought through an examination of Jackson's account of classical Islamic theology put forward in response to the problem of Black suffering. In doing so, I argue that Jackson's account both parallels and challenges a Jamesian account of religion. It parallels James in that it speaks of the "practical effectiveness" of the "web of beliefs" constituting Islamic doctrines of God in inculcating certain habits of seeing and acting in the world that best deal with the challenges of "black experience"; however, in this process, the category of "experience" itself and its role in the verification of belief is thoroughly interrogated. In his critical engagement with Black philosopher of religion William R. Jones, Jackson exposes the uncritical role played by "experience" in Jones' thought, a charge which will be made of James as well. In making this argument about Jackson, I hope to provide an example of a Muslim theologian who makes explicit the pragmatic dimensions of religious doctrine, demonstrating that thick theological discourse can be practical.

There are some people—and I am one of them—who think that the most practical and important thing about a man is still his view of the universe.

—G.K. Chesterton, "Heretics"

In his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, American pragmatist William James does not look fondly upon "dogmatic theology." In fact, he refers to the "God" produced by debates within Christian theology about such topics as the divine attributes as a "metaphysical monster" which he candidly describes as "an absolutely worthless invention of the scholarly mind."[1] This is because such debates are in reality only abstractions, which distract us from the "feeling" that is "the deeper source of religion."[2] Therefore, time spent on esoteric theological topics such as Christology or the nature of the Trinity is a waste of time.[3] Moreover,

such speculation is to be avoided because these doctrines make no difference in terms of one's conduct, a *sine qua non* of legitimate belief.

Thus, it would seem that a pragmatic justification of a Jamesian kind for second-order theological discourse is not possible. However, I argue that in Blackamerican Muslim theologian Sherman A. Jackson's *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering*, we find just this. That is, he provides a pragmatic account of classical Islamic theology in response to the problem of Black suffering. Although he does not describe his account in this way, there are both remarkable parallels and telling disjunctures with James' own discussions of religion. While pragmatic conceptions of God that highlight the inextricable nature of thought and praxis are a well-documented characteristic of Black theologies in the Christian tradition that confront the challenges of Black theodicy, little has been done to explore examples of this in Blackamerican forms of Islam.[4] This paper attempts to fill this gap by examining Jackson's account of classical Islamic theology, and especially the tradition's doctrines of God, in light of the pragmatism of William James. In doing so, I argue that Jackson's discussion of this topic in relation to the problem of Black suffering both parallels and challenges a Jamesian account of religion. It parallels James in that it speaks of the "practical effectiveness" of the "web of beliefs" constituting Islamic doctrines of God in inculcating certain habits of seeing and acting in the world that best deal with the challenges of "black experience." However, in this process, the category of "experience" itself and its role in the verification of belief is thoroughly interrogated. In his engagement with Black philosopher of religion William R. Jones, Jackson exposes the uncritical role played by "experience" in Jones' thought, a charge which will be made of James as well.[5] In making this argument about Jackson, I hope to provide an example of a Muslim theologian who makes explicit the pragmatic dimensions of religious doctrine, demonstrating that thick theological discourse can be practical.

I begin by presenting James' arguments for the dismissal of "dogmatic theology" along with the insights afforded by Christian theologian and ethicist Stanley Hauerwas' critical engagement with these arguments. Second, with a proper understanding of a Jamesian pragmatic account of "dogmatic theology" attained, I will examine some of the Jamesian

elements of Jackson's discussion of the relationship between divine omnibenevolence and omnipotence in Muʿtazilism and Māturīdism, two schools of classical Islamic theology. Thirdly, I will explore some of the issues raised by Jackson's analysis of Jones' reliance on "experience" in his book, *Is God a White Racist?*, a critique that can also be applied to James' uncritical use of "experience" in the process of verification. I will then conclude by presenting Jackson's comments on "experiential knowledge" and the limits of theology, comments that bear some resemblance to James' own belief that "*as soon as we deal with private and personal phenomena as such, we deal with realities in the completest sense of the term.*"[6]

James and the Possibility of a Pragmatic Doctrine of God

In his discussion of the possibility of a pragmatic justification of "dogmatic theology," James at times is inconsistent and at other times dismissive. In reference to the general task of theology, he writes, "I do believe that feeling is the deeper source of religion, and that philosophic and theological formulas are secondary products, like translations of a text into another tongue."[7] This privileging of the emotive at the expense of the rational is made even more explicit when he states that "our passions or our mystical intuitions fix our beliefs beforehand. [Logical reason] finds arguments for our convictions, for indeed it *has* to find them."[8] For James then, it is in our "feeling" and "our passions" that the true origins of the religious impulse are to be located, and the attempt to mask this reality behind claims of rational certainty or deductive universality only leads to confusion and futile debate.

In the passages of the *Varieties* dealing with "dogmatic theology," the doctrine most thoroughly discussed is that of the divine attributes as found in the Catholic theology of John Henry Newman. After excerpting a substantial portion of Newman's thoughts on the subject, James proceeds to engage in some philosophical therapy using the "pragmatism" of Charles Sanders Peirce as a curative. Specifically, he points to Peirce's claim that "[b]eliefs in short, are rules for action; and the whole function of thinking is but one step in the production of active habits."

Consequently, a belief's "meaning" is to be ascertained by "determin[ing] what conduct it is fitted to produce...To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, we need then only consider what sensations, immediate or remote, we are conceivably to expect from it, and what conduct we must prepare in case the object should be true."[9] In other words, a belief is to be considered valued and meaningful to the degree that it produces a certain sensation and behavior, and if one cannot point to any such consequent sensations or behaviors following from such beliefs, then they are to be deemed as "after-effects, secondary accretions upon those phenomena of vital conversation with the unseen divine..."[10]

At this point, James assesses Newman's discussion of the divine attributes in light of Peirce's pragmatic account of belief. Beginning with what he refers to as the "metaphysical attributes" of God such as aseity, immateriality, indivisibility, and the divine relationship to evil (or theodicy), he asserts that their truth or untruth holds not the smallest consequence for individual action and being in the world. Not leaving it at that, he goes on to write that "the deduction of metaphysical attributes [is] but a shuffling and matching of pedantic dictionary-adjectives, aloof from morals, aloof from human needs..."[11] James has no patience for theological discourse dealing with divine attributes that have no apparent bearing on human behavior. However, he looks more favorably on the "moral attributes" of God, examples of which include holiness, omnipotence, lovingness, or unalterableness. James assigns a higher value to these types of attributes because they "positively determine fear and hope and expectation, and are the foundation for the saintly life."[12] That is, these attributes make an existential and practical difference in the lives of religious individuals.

Of interest in this distinction between the "metaphysical" and "moral" attributes of God is the arbitrary and somewhat haphazard way that James categorizes the divine attributes into one class or the other. If being "unalterable" is to be considered a "moral" attribute with consequences in human life because it leads one to believe that "we can count on [God] securely," why cannot God's aseity, or "necessariness," also be looked to as grounds for consolation in a world full of contingencies? And more obviously, how could one not consider the possibility that God's

relationship to evil might determine in substantial ways human behavior when confronting issues related to justice on a societal scale? Regardless, however, of his privileging the "moral" over the "metaphysical" in his discussion of "dogmatic theology" in the *Varieties*, James claims that in the end, one must "bid [it] a definitive good-by."[13] Interestingly enough, he cites as justification for this categorical dismissal not the lack of pragmatic elements in what he has discussed, but rather the fact that the laborious theological discussions of the existence of God or the divine attributes "never have converted anyone who has found in the moral complexion of the world, as he experienced it, reasons for doubting that a good God can have framed it."[14]

In light of the above, it would seem as if a Jamesian pragmatic justification of "dogmatic theology" is indeed untenable. However, in his critical engagement with James, Christian theologian and ethicist Stanley Hauerwas argues for this very thing in regards to such theological topics as Christology, the Trinity, or ecclesiology. He does so first by pointing to a passage in James' 1907 lectures on pragmatism where he states that the truth of some ideas "will depend entirely on their relation to other truths that also have to be acknowledged." Hauerwas uses this insight to argue that Christian ideas about God and the world exist as an interdependent "web of beliefs."[15] This emphasis on an interdependent "web of beliefs" is important to Hauerwas because it provides a response to the claims made by James that theological ideas have value only if they possess immediate pragmatic significance or "cash-value." As was mentioned above, James dismisses Newman's theological discussion of the divine attributes because they do not meet Peirce's pragmatic criteria for legitimate belief. That is, if beliefs are "rules for action," then how can discourse on the nature of the Christian Godhead be pragmatically justified when it apparently has no direct impact on human behavior? For Hauerwas however, theological doctrines about Christology and the Trinity that might not seem to function as "rules for action" are intimately tied to Christian beliefs about love, justice, and forgiveness, which do have immediate pragmatic significance. Using James' recognition of the necessary interdependence of some ideas, Hauerwas argues that all of these ideas hang together and thus cannot be disentangled

from one another.[16] Or rather, to put it a more Hauerwasian way, one cannot separate Christian talk about God from the Christian moral life.

It is interesting to note the ease of tone found in some of James' later discussions of theology. At the conclusion of his second lecture in *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*, he writes:

> [Pragmatism's] only test of probable truth is what works best in the way of leading us, what fits every part of life best and combines with the collectivity of experience's demands, nothing being omitted. If theological ideas should do this, if the notion of God, in particular, should prove to do it, how could pragmatism possibly deny God's existence?[17]

While James acknowledges here that "theological ideas" might lead one well through life and thus prove to be true, the question still remains as to what types of theological ideas he would consider as viable candidates for such a distinction.[18] In other words, the statement above does not necessarily indicate that James would take a different view in regard to such theological topics as the attributes of God. However, in the same lectures he writes that "in every genuine metaphysical debate some practical issue, however conjectural or remote, is involved."[19] Again, one should not take such statements as proof that James eventually came to view all "dogmatic theology" as pragmatic; however, the change in tone from the *Varieties* is undeniable. Here he does seem to go further in admitting that metaphysical debates, about possibly even such "conjectural or remote" topics as the attributes of God, have practical consequences.

Using these passages, it seems an even stronger case could be made within the Jamesian corpus for a pragmatic justification of "dogmatic theology." That is, on James' own reading, a pragmatic justification for thick theological discourse is possible because such discourse creates an interdependent "web of beliefs" which informs and directs the social practices of religious communities by inculcating certain habits of seeing and acting in the world. In his discussion of Islamic theology in relation to the problem of Black suffering, Sherman Jackson provides such a

pragmatic model of theological discourse. In doing so, he not only makes explicit the ways in which beliefs about the attributes of God inculcate certain ways of being and acting in the world which are advantageous to the "Blackamerican community," he also interrogates the uncritical use of "experience" to verify and assess theological claims about God and the world, namely William R. Jones' use of this category in his discussion of "black liberation." I will discuss these issues in turn, and begin by introducing Jackson's general theological project.

Jackson, Muʿtazilism, and Black Suffering

Sherman A. Jackson's work might best be described as the attempt to construct a form of Sunni Islam indebted both to its classical forms as well as those of what he terms a "Blackamerican" tradition.[20] In this process, Jackson calls for a "Third Resurrection" whereby "Blackamerican Muslims" seek to "reconcile blackness, Americanness, and adherence to Islam."[21] This concern is made manifest in a focused and sustained manner in Jackson's *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering* wherein he uses Islamic theological discourse to address the modern debate over Black theodicy, a *sine qua non* of any successful African American theological project.[22] Comparing the need in Black religious communities to address questions of Black suffering with the need in white ones to reconcile religion and science, Jackson writes, "[j]ust as no religious movement that fails to come to terms with modern science can hope to perpetuate itself among American whites, no religious movement that fails to speak convincingly to the problem of black theodicy can hope to enjoy a durable tenure among Blackamericans."[23] When discussing black theodicy, Jackson admits that contemporary instances of Black suffering and racial injustice take many forms, some overt and others perhaps more subtle and elusive. He refers to these more understated though still pernicious forms as "postmodern black suffering" that he characterizes as "[t]he elusive quest for autonomous authenticity, the frustrating recognition of the all-pervasiveness of European thought, [and] the absence of avenues to self-validation and public respect over which white Westerners do not ultimately preside as owners..."[24]

While attempts to address Black suffering are replete in Christian black theology, Jackson notes that "Islamic theology itself has had no say in the matter," and so Jackson's *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering* serves as "an attempt to fill this gap."[25] However, rather than attempting to look to the Sunni tradition's past for perfectly corresponding precedents to confront the challenges of Black theodicy, Jackson argues that the "Blackamerican Muslim" must place her or his views "in dialogue with the accumulated wisdom of Islam's ongoing conversation with itself." In other words, "in negotiating its future, Blackamerican Sunni Islam will look to Sunni Tradition not as the end but as the *beginning* of religious deliberation."[26] Thus, Jackson places the four classical schools of Sunni Islamic theology (Muʿtazilism, Ashʿarism, Māturīdism, and Traditionalism) in conversation with Blackamerican philosopher and theologian William R. Jones in order to explicate and assess the theological responses offered by these schools to Jones' criticisms.

Jones' criticisms found their ultimate incarnation in his book, *Is God a White Racist?* Written in 1973, Jones' book was a virtual bomb lobbed at the attempts by the Black church to reconcile belief in an all all-powerful and loving God with the realities of institutionalized racism. In the book, Jones argues that the doctrines of God found in the Black theologies of individuals such as James Cone, Joseph A. Washington, Jr., and others are guilty either of divine racism or the encouragement of human quietism. That is, when faced with propositions that claim both divine omnipotence *and* omnibenevolence in the face of the mass suffering experienced by the Black community at the hands of white domination, something has to give.[27] If God is omnipotent, God must also possess the power to eradicate black suffering, and so the continued existence of racial injustice can only lead to the conclusion that God has refused to alleviate the plight of Black men and women, hence the charge of divine racism. Or if God is held to be both all-powerful and loving, any suffering experienced by the Black community must in some way be for its ultimate good, meaning that those in the community should accept this suffering as beneficial in the end and therefore not oppose it. This leads then to the charge of quietism. However, Jackson believes that classical Islamic theology offers a compelling response to Jones' accusations, and

his book serves as an attempt to argue that each theological paradigm put forth by these schools manages to uphold both divine omnipotence and human agency in such a way that none of them would permit the attribution of any unjust quality such as racism to God nor would any of them maintain a view of divine omnipotence which binds individuals to a piety of quietism.[28]

Rather than attempting to foreground the pragmatic elements of each account of the four classical schools of Islamic theology provided by Jackson, I will focus on his discussion of two schools in relation to what Jackson takes to be the key issue. This issue, perhaps more than any other, spurred early theological debate: the relationship between God's omnibenevolence and omnipotence. According to Jackson, it was how the theological schools characterized this relationship that was primarily responsible for the fault lines that came to define them. From these characterizations stemmed other debates about such topics as the attributes of God and free will.[29] While the Muʿtazilites privileged divine omnibenevolence over omnipotence so that God's actions necessarily conformed to the norms of goodness and justice, the Ashʿarites, Māturīdites, and Traditionalists placed divine omnipotence above omnibenevolence in order to secure God's power and sovereignty.[30] My discussion will focus on Jackson's presentation of Muʿtazilism and Māturīdism, each of which offer different perspectives on this relationship. I will begin with the Muʿtazilism which, as just noted, valued divine goodness over divine power.

Muʿtazilites took omnibenevolence not only to be the most important of the divine characteristics, they believed it was *the* characteristic with which all else about God had to be reconciled.[31] Their conception of divine omnibenevolence was "humanocentric" in that it was predicated on the belief that one could gain knowledge of God by analogically applying to God what was known of the world from human experience (*al-shāhid*). Consequently, the Muʿtazilites argued that the same axiological logic and criteria that applied to humans also applied to God.[32] This view was further anchored in the primacy of reason found in Muʿtazilism's theological paradigm. Reason was treated as the true ground of religious knowledge because it was the only basis on which revelation could itself

be established and its content understood, and as a result, reason was to be ranked first among the sources of religious knowledge in Islam.[33] This position is well summarized by Muʿtazilite theologian al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1024) who wrote that "[b]ecause God can be known through neither a priori nor sentient apprehension, systematic, formal reason [*al-tafakkur wa-al-naẓar*] is the means by which we must seek to follow Him."[34]

The Muʿtazilite emphasis on omnibenevolence meant that God was exonerated of all moral evil. This view held that God was the God of nature but not of history, and as such, while God might be responsible for natural disasters and other destructive forces not of human origin, God was in no way responsible for moral evil and human injustice. Such a perspective required that humans possess not only freedom of choice (*ikhtiyār*) but also the power (*qudrah*) to translate their choices into physical reality, a claim opposed by the other three schools, albeit in differing ways.[35] As a result, no evil committed by humans could be attributed to God, and God could consequently hold humans accountable for their decisions and actions.[36] In the end, it was its stance on free will and the power to actualize that will that came to characterize Muʿtazilism more than any other single article of belief, especially in contradistinction to Ashʿarite and Traditionalist positions which denied humans the ability to create their own actions (*khalq afʿāl al-ʿibād*).

Thus, while Muʿtazilites held God's power to be complete, superior, and efficient, they also insisted that this did not necessarily translate into an understanding of omnipotence as an exclusive monopoly on *all* power. This was so because humans possess autonomous volition and the power to create their own acts; however, such a conception of human agency, the Muʿtazilites claimed, did not necessarily threaten God's omnipotence. Moreover, God's power was further qualified by the fact that it was to be exercised according to certain norms. As a result, the Muʿtazilite conception of divine omnibenevolence precluded them from asserting that God possesses an unqualified right to do as God pleases, such that all of God's actions are to be considered good and just regardless of how they might be evaluated by human norms. Rather, Muʿtazilites insisted that God "*must*, from the standpoint of wisdom [*ḥikmah*], act in the interest of humanity."[37]

With its characterization of the relationship between divine omnibenevolence and omnipotence and the consequent emphasis on human agency, the Muʿtazilite doctrine of God, argues Jackson, offers a compelling response to Jones' claims that the affirmation of both God's goodness and power ineluctably leads to either quietism or a racist deity. In fact, as Jackson points out, Muʿtazilism has much in common with Jones' own "humanocentric theism" which he proposed as an alternative to the orthodox Christian theologies defended by much of the Black church.[38] This paradigm asserts that humans are both the authors of their own deeds and the ultimate agents of human history, and as such, the biblical conception of God as true creator and sovereign judge of human history must be discarded.[39] Put another way, God becomes the God, not of history, but of nature, and so while God might be omnipotent with regard to nature, when it comes to the realm of human meaning and action, divine power takes the form, not of coercion, but of *persuasion*. To assign to God a power beyond this would be to expose such a conception of God to the charge of racism for, according to "humanocentric theism," an omnipotent God who chooses not to bring an end to black suffering in the form of institutionalized prejudice can only be construed as racist. Moreover, viewing Black suffering as resulting from *human* and *not* divine action enables Blackamericans to oppose all suffering as evil, thus preventing them from lapsing into quietistic forms of obedience to the status quo.[40]

As Jackson argues, the Muʿtazilite doctrine of God necessitates neither a conception of God as racist nor does it encourage quietism. As a result of Muʿtazilism's privileging of God's omnibenevolence over God's omnipotence, God can in no way be thought of as the author of black suffering because it is humans, not God, who are responsible for the creation of sociopolitical evil.[41] Additionally, God's sovereignty and power are not absolute for God's actions must benefit humankind by conforming to standards of goodness, justice, and wisdom (*ḥikmah*). Along with the accusation of divine racism, the charge of quietism is repudiated as a result of the Muʿtazilite claim that all evil understood as undeserved physical or psychological suffering is of human origin and therefore to be opposed. This position is further strengthened by the seriousness with which Muʿtazilism takes the Qurʾānic injunction

to "command right and forbid wrong" (*al-amr bi-al-maʿrūf wa-al-nahy ʿan al-munkar*).[42] With this principle, not only are Blackamerican (or any other) Muslims justified in opposing oppression, in some instances it is their religious duty to do so.

In addition to adequately responding to Jones' critique, Jackson states that Muʿtazilism even significantly parallels Jones' own proposed "humanocentric theism" which attempts to reconcile divine omnipotence with human agency. That is, both conceive God as the God of nature rather than of human history. As a result, if Jones argues that the value of his "humanocentric theism" resides in its ability to navigate between the Scylla of divine racism and the Charybdis of quietism, then it would seem that Muʿtazilism too is able to meet the challenge.

Moreover, Jackson argues that, in fact, Muʿtazilism offers significant benefits beyond those of Jones' "humanocentric theism." This is so because in Jones' efforts to secularize Black theodicy, he fails to recognize the power of symbol and ritual in the formation of human virtue and community. In discussing this insight, Jackson approvingly cites Reinhold Niebuhr's observation that "contending factions in a social struggle require morale; and morale is created by the right dogmas, symbols and emotionally potent oversimplifications."[43] With its claim to the Qurʾān and Sunna along with the narratives, symbols, and institutions that have characterized Islamic history, Muʿtazilism is able to create a powerfully motivating ethos in a way that far supersedes Jones' proposed theistic paradigm. Jackson writes, "[g]iven the odds with which they are invariably confronted, Blackamericans would seem to have a far greater need for incentives and motivators that are potent and death-defying than they have for handsome doctrines that are rationally defensible..."[44] That is, the Qurʾān, perceived as a medium of divine speech, and the Sunna, with its examples of the Prophet Muḥammad and the earliest generations seeking to create a just community (*umma*) that honors God, are both capable of serving as resources which are more effective in cultivating individuals who strive for social justice than the rationally stream lined "humanocentric theism" of Jones. This point resonates well with that made above regarding the interdependency of concepts that constitute a "web of beliefs." This is because not only may some ideas

exist in a logical relationship of mutual dependence, but also because some beliefs (e.g. that the Qurʾān contains the speech of God) may better and more effectively contribute to the formation of other beliefs (e.g., the duty enshrined in the Qurʾān to "command right and forbid wrong").

As briefly noted above, for Jackson, reliance on a set of powerful narratives and symbols as found in Islam generally, and Muʿtazilism specifically, is vital because Blackamericans face enormous challenges in combating black suffering. In his rush to place all earthly authority in human hands to avoid the sin of quietism, Jackson fears that Jones in fact "denies the most vulnerable members of society the psychological advantage of being able to appeal to a God of great power and influence, despite the paucity of their resources relative to those of the people identified as their oppressors."[45] It is crucial in such scenarios that faith be encouraged and maintained in an all-powerful and benevolent God who either comes to the aid of the marginalized in this life or guarantees one's just reward in the one to come. Otherwise, what would enable one to resist oppression when the aggressors possess far greater numbers and resources?

With such comments, Jackson demonstrates his own faith in the power of belief, a faith shared by James. Not only did James think that when it came to belief in God or anything at all, the "only test of probable truth is what works best in the way of leading us." James also believed that because "[t]here are…cases where a fact cannot come at all unless a preliminary faith exists in its coming…," there are instances when "*faith in a fact can help create the fact*…"[46] To be sure, James did not intend to apply this claim to all phenomena but only to "truths dependent on personal action."[47] As an example, he refers to the enhanced likelihood that an entire train car will rise up in opposition to a robber if action is instigated by a single brave individual. The "will to believe" found in such situations possesses the power to create new realities where, as James writes, "[i]n one sense you create it, and in another sense you *find* it…," and as such, it is not some irrational effort to make the world what it is not, but the rational acknowledgment that human beings are inevitably part of that which creates the world itself.[48] That is, beliefs are not only "rules for action" which are true to the degree that they possess for us

"cash-value," they also inculcate certain habits of seeing and imagining both the seen and unseen world. Referring to this capacity for vision engendered by the "will to believe," James writes that "[a] man's religious faith...[is] essentially his faith in the existence of an unseen order of some kind in which the riddles of the natural order may be found explained."[49]

It is this power located within the "will to believe" to fashion new and alternative realities that Jackson believes Muʿtazilism, and classical Islamic theology more generally, generates. This is vital for Jackson because as a minority group who still suffers from both overt and more subtle forms of racism, Blackamericans require a powerful set of beliefs and symbols to face an opposition with the advantage of numbers and resources. Jackson believes that Muʿtazilism, in contradistinction to Jones' "humanocentric theism," offers the tools to achieve a complete liberation not only from ontological suffering in the form of legal or sociocultural forms of racism, but also from the universe of meanings and norms constituted by those who control society's cultural capital. While Jackson would appear to share James' faith in the power of belief to create new realities where none had previously existed, he would also seem to part ways with James in his assertion that the symbols and narratives provided by the Muʿtazilite doctrine of God are necessary to generate and sustain such belief. Thus, Jackson argues that the "web of beliefs" about God's omnibenevolence and omnipotence which constitute Muʿtazilism more effectively equips marginalized groups such as Blackamericans to courageously face the forces arrayed against them by the dominant group(s) than the "humanocentric theism" offered by Jones.

Jackson, Māturīdism, and Black Suffering

While Muʿtazilism privileges God's omnibenevolence over God's omnipotence, Māturīdism reverses the order, believing it essential to do so in order to protect God's power and sovereignty. Māturīdites feared that if God's unrestricted prerogative and absolute monopoly on power were attenuated in any way, God would be forced into a negotiated relationship with humanity. As a result, many came to see Muʿtazilism as a

contaminating force which encouraged a set of sensibilities, including an emphasis on human agency, which threatened to undermine religion itself. Some Māturīdites went even so far as to refer to Muʿtazilites as polytheists (*mushrikīn*) because they ascribed secondary power to human agents to create their own actions.[50] Māturīdite omnipotence, like that of the Ashʿarites and Traditionalists, places God in complete control over nature *and* history. As a result, when it came to human agency, Māturīdites relied on their own unique version of *kasb*, or Acquisition, which held that God, who was responsible for all causation in the world, created each and every human act, while human agents, still retaining their freedom of choice, were considered responsible for their decisions of which the divinely created acts were an instantiation.[51] The Māturīdite theologian Abū al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī described it in this way: "God has established as the normal order [*ʿādah*] that whenever a person who enjoys sound means and members intends [*qaṣada*] an act, God grants him the capacity [*qudrah*] with which to perform that act."[52]

This construal of God as possessing a monopoly on all power and causation raises a problematic issue that Muʿtazilism was able to avoid: the divine authorship of evil. The Māturīdites however have a number of responses to this challenge. First, while Māturīdism places great emphasis on divine omnipotence, it does also assert that there is one attribute which acts as a check on God's power, wisdom (*ḥikmah*).[53] Consequently, God's power always acts coordinately with God's wisdom, which is defined as "placing everything in its proper place" (*waḍʿu kulli shayʾin mawḍiʿah*) or "that which promotes a praiseworthy result" (*kullu mā lahu ʿāqibah ḥamīdah*). Wisdom in this sense is teleological and thus not immediately accessible to practical reason. In other words, while events in the world may bring about suffering and pain in the near term, and therefore be considered evil, those same events must also serve some ultimately good and wise purpose.[54] Māturīdites mention as concrete examples the suffering of children, the slaughtering of animals, and allowing minors to reach the age of accountability when it is known that they will not believe. Though these events may count as evil, God is still viewed as being responsible for all of them; however, what God *cannot* do is sponsor evil that serves no wise end.

Second, as a result of their teleological nature, the wisdom of God's actions may not be discernible to human faculties. And because Māturīdites did not tie wisdom to any human logic or criteria, they often singled out Muʿtazilism for criticism for taking human experience as the basis for assessing divine acts. In other words, wisdom in the Māturīdite sense contrasts with how goodness (*ḥusn*) and justice (*ʿadl*) were understood by Muʿtazilism because it is *theocentric* rather than humanocentric. Thus, even if events lie beyond the human ability to morally assess, they must be understood as wise for they emanate from God. However, the Māturīdites reject the position (held by the Ashʿarites) that humans are incapable of making any objective moral judgments. Such a position, they argue, would threaten the foundations of revealed religion for if humans could not know by way of reason the evil of lying, for example, then they would have no basis for accepting the truthfulness of the prophets and likewise the message of Islam. And this, Jackson points out, is a wholly rational a priori judgment which people must possess prior to and independent of any revelation. This leads Jackson to describe Māturīdism's moral philosophy as having a "soft" moral ontology wherein human access to fundamental a priori judgments is recognized; however, some judgments are to be considered provisional for moral acts are assessed, not according to their immediate or practical effects, but according to their ultimate effects.[55]

In his discussion of Māturīdism in light of Jones, Jackson argues that it manages to avoid both construing God as racist and inducing a quietism among its followers. On the basis of the distinction between God's ontological decree and normative preference, the existence of Black suffering cannot serve as proof of any divine ill-intention or suggest in any way that God approves of the suppression of African Americans. Moreover, Māturīdism cannot be said to encourage quietism for although its "soft" moral ontology renders moral judgments provisional, there is still a certain legitimacy to those moral judgments. Additionally, for the Māturīdites, the basis of human knowledge about God's pleasure is scripture, not the ontological reality that God sustains, and thus all that is needed to promote Black opposition to oppression is a scriptural mandate to resist – found in such Qurʾānic verses as "[f]ight them until there

is no oppression..." – regardless of whether evil is believed to originate with God or not. [56] Because such evil does not reflect God's preference, there is no reason why anyone resisting that evil should think she or he is resisting God.

According to Jackson, while Māturīdism is able to satisfy Jones' concerns by avoiding the charges of both divine racism and quietism, it comes into direct conflict with Jones' belief in the categorical evil of all unearned suffering.[57] That is, Jones refuses to consider the possibility that suffering might serve *any* positive function for Blackamericans. For him, all suffering should be regarded as an evil to be eliminated at all costs, otherwise he fears "the oppressed will not regard their suffering as oppressive and will not be motivated to attack it."[58] He likewise is extremely critical of those theories, such as the conception of "vicarious suffering" defended by Joseph R. Washington, Jr., which assert that the wisdom behind suffering might lie beyond human apprehension. In considering the extent to which the Māturīdite notion of wisdom (*ḥikmah*) is truly just another "pie-in-the-sky theodicy," Jackson notes that one's assessment will necessarily depend on the teleological assumptions which drive the assessment.[59] As Jackson points out, Jones argues that God's goodness and sovereignty can only be sustained to the extent that they result in Black liberation defined in terms of concrete, immediate effects.

However, Jackson asserts that in this particular understanding of "black liberation" lies an undergirding set of goods dictating what counts as "liberation" and "flourishing." According to Jackson, these terms are conceived by Jones according to ideals and possibilities that emanate from the universe of meanings and norms produced by the gatekeepers of white culture. "We know, in other words," Jackson states, "that blacks have achieved liberation when they arrive at the point where they enjoy the same social, economic, and political status, prerogatives, and presumptions as whites, not potentially but actually, here, now, today."[60] Interestingly, Jackson notes that Jones is occasionally ambiguous in his understanding of Black liberation, sometimes conceiving it according to the norms of the dominant white culture while at other times speaking of the need "to abandon the partial frame of reference of our oppressor

and to create...concepts that release our reality..."[61] And it is on this latter understanding of "black liberation" that Jackson focuses, asserting that true liberation lies not only in freedom from overt forms of institutionalized racism, but also in freedom from the universe of values and meanings that sustain not only the social, economic, and political status quo, but, more importantly, the psychological and emotional status quo as well.[62]

It is at this point, Jackson argues, that the Māturīdite notion of *ḥikmah* is most valuable because if the aim of Black liberation is to free Blackamericans from the "partial frame of reference" that contributes to their suppression, then anything that facilitates this process must be recognized as ultimately good. In other words, Black suffering may be accurately regarded as immediately evil, but if Blackamericans' ultimate good lies in forestalling the normalization of ways of thinking that render their domination beyond critique, then one must recognize the wisdom behind the suffering that prevents them from adopting the worldview and norms of those who dominate them.[63] Jackson writes that "[i]n this light—and perhaps only in this light—while the blackness that condemns Blackamericans to suffering and oppression may be considered a curse, it may ultimately constitute a 'blessed curse.'"[64]

Moreover, the conception of *ḥikmah* as found in Māturīdism creates conditions for the recognition of a type of consciousness that is engendered by the experience of suffering and oppression. Such persecution, Jackson states while citing Indian social theorist Ashis Nandy, can have the effect of reinforcing one's humanity and fortifying it against moral corruption.[65] Additionally, such a consciousness can equip one with a reality, a way of imagining and being in the world, which overcomes the anesthetizing effects of wealth, power, and privilege. In support of these claims, Jackson quotes Qur'ān 2:183 which speaks of the benefits of suffering and self-denial, "O you who believe, fasting has been prescribed for you as it was for those before you that you might attain God-consciousness."[66] Such experiences and practices, Jackson maintains, aid in the prevention of suffering from the effects of wealth and privilege which often threaten to obscure the realities of connectedness with others and dependence on one's Creator.

For Jackson, just as Muʿtazilism demonstrated its ability, not only to parry the critiques of traditional theisms put forth by Jones, but also to supersede Jones' "humanocentric theism" as a result of its attention to the role of narrative and symbol in sustaining certain beliefs about God, so too does Māturīdism perform in the same manner. As a result, it provides, Jackson argues, an interdependent "web of beliefs" including, among other things, a doctrine of God which plays a crucial role in inculcating certain habits of seeing and acting in the world which are advantageous to the Blackamerican community. Perhaps the most significant way it does this is with its emphasis on God's omnipotence and its concomitant notion of *ḥikmah* by which all of God's actions are viewed as serving an ultimately wise end. This account of Māturīdite *ḥikmah* and the insights brought out by Jackson into the complex and myriad ways that one's presuppositions determine what counts and does not count as "black liberation" raises a crucial question. That is, what is the role of the category of "experience" in the process of measuring and verifying the attainment of Black liberation? As has been observed in Jackson's critical engagement with Jones, this category, far from being a neutral signifier, can in fact be determined by any number of concepts and norms which give it a teleological flavor of one sort or another. And, as we will discover, this not only has repercussions for Jones' claims about Black liberation. It also has repercussions for the role of "experience" in James' conception of verification, a topic to which we now turn.

Jackson, Verification, and the Interrogation of "Experience"

When speaking of true ideas, James states that they "*are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot.*"[67] This move from a correspondence theory of truth to a pragmatic one depends likewise on a paradigm shift wherein truth comes to be thought of, not as a property inherent in an idea, but as a status an idea comes to possess. In other words, truth is an event, not a property. Or as James puts it, "[t]ruth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events. Its verity *is* in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself, its veri-*fication*."[68] But what does it mean to "verify"

something? How is such a thing accomplished? For James, an idea or set of ideas are verified and thus receive pragmatic justification if they "lead us, namely, through the acts and other ideas which they instigate, into or up to, or towards, other parts of our experience with which we feel all the while—such feeling being among our potentialities—that the original ideas remain in agreement."[69] In other words, there exists a dialectic of idea and experience in which an idea receives the status of "truth" and "agreement with reality" to the degree that it successfully leads one through one's experience of whatever reality it is describing. The dialectical process describes the way in which the idea, when not successful in leading one through some experience, is then either revised or discarded altogether in an attempt to find the one that best "fits."

This account also leads to truth being understood as prospective because in helping one navigate experience, an idea may also "lead us towards other moments which it will be worthwhile to have been led to."[70] And the degree to which an idea succeeds in leading one to future worthwhile moments, and, what's more, the degree to which the idea prepares one to know when such a moment will occur, determines the "truth" of that idea. However, often the process of verification of the multiplicity of ideas that constitute one's worldview takes time, and as a result, James speaks of truth as living "for the most part on a credit system."[71] That is, because it is impossible to verify every aspect of one's reality (such an endeavor would take more than one life time), individuals must proceed in faith on the "credit" of those ideas they have good reason to believe are true.

As can be observed in this account of verification, the truth of an idea is determined according to whether or not it aids in negotiating the challenges posed by "experience." If one finds that such an idea does in fact agree with one's "experience" of "reality," then that idea may be regarded as "true." James also puts it this way when he writes that "[t]he only real guarantee we have against licentious thinking is the circumpressure of experience itself, which gets us sick of concrete errors, whether there be a trans-empirical reality or not."[72] "Experience," it would seem, plays a crucial role in the process of verification yet, as we have seen in Jackson's discussion of Jones' understanding of "black liberation," the category of

"experience" is not a neutral one. It is shaped by and filled with a host of concepts and norms which give it a teleological flavor of one sort or another. Interestingly enough, James provides indications throughout his corpus that he understands this such as when he declares that, "[h]uman motives sharpen all our questions, human satisfactions lurk in all our answers, all our formulas have a human twist."[73]

As we have already observed, Jackson questioned the degree to which Jones' definition of "black liberation" succumbed to the norms of those in control of white culture such that "liberation" came to be understood as being achieved when Blackamericans arrived at the point where they could "enjoy the same social, economic, and political status, prerogatives, and presumptions as whites, not potentially but actually, here, now, today." Concerned with the possibility of normalized domination wherein marginalized groups adopt as their own the norms and values of the dominant group, Jackson believes that the classical schools of Islamic theology, especially those of Ashʿarism, Māturīdism, and Traditionalism, offer a universe of alternative symbols and meanings which are more effective in preventing such subjugation.[74]

Apart from what we have already discussed, another way these schools are more effective at sustaining an alternative universe of meanings is the way in which they provide conceptual tools with which to expose the illusory nature of the claims to moral objectivity made by the dominant white culture. For instance, the Ashʿarite theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) argued that all moral judgments that are not based on scripture are unavoidably relativistic and determined by the motivations and perspectives of the agents or groups who make them. Ultimately, what people habitually identify as "good" (ḥasan) or "evil" (qabīḥ) is only what they deem to be contrary to their interests (gharaḍ/pl. aghrāḍ).[75] Thus an act will turn out to be "good" to one group or individual and "evil" to another.

Consequently, in al-Ghazālī's view, all moral judgments claiming an objective, ontological status that are not grounded in scripture are guilty of the fallacy of "universalizing the particular." Even the judgments anchored in scripture are universal only in the sense that God has declared them to be so. As a result, moral judgments are assessed

according to their conformity to the divine command ethic found in the Qurʾān and Sunna rather than according to some ontological index of right and wrong.[76] To al-Ghazālī, this "theistic subjectivism" and its concomitant rejection of moral objectivity best represent "Islamic morality" and offer themselves as compelling accounts of morality to all fair-minded, reasonable people who recognize the human tendency to abstract personal preferences into false universals or ignore the power of socialization to lead one to regard what is routinely considered right or wrong as *always* right or wrong. True moral judgments are ahistorical and attainable only to those who are able to transcend personal and group interests, a capability possessed only by God and likewise the revelation God chooses to impart to humankind.[77]

Using al-Ghazālī's insight into the human tendency to "universalize the particular," Jackson points to the way in which the secular humanism which characterizes much of Jones' thought determines both his understanding of "black liberation" and the philosophical tools with which to achieve it. Noting the "bourgeois character of the existentialist thought [of Camus and Sartre]" which Jones draws on in his work, Jackson writes that, "[i]n this context, the greatest threat to the individual becomes neither suffering nor oppression but the threat to individual autonomy represented by the heteronomous character and authority of religion."[78] In other words, Jones' secular existentialist thinkers do not oppose religion because it does not possess the requisite qualities to resist oppression; they oppose it because they believe it "challenges subjectivism (read humanism) and threatens the hedonism implied by (bourgeois) autonomy—the very autonomy, incidentally, that is denied to oppressed blacks not by religion but by the unchecked exercise of autonomy on the part of whites."[79] Jackson thinks it interesting that Jones seems to recognize the "fatal residue of the oppressor's worldview" in the Black theology he so fervently criticizes yet he fails to demonstrate an awareness of the anti-religious and secular biases which characterize the thinkers from whom he borrows "who also happen to hail from the ranks of the oppressor."[80]

For Jackson, Jones' proposed strategies of either "black humanism" or "humanocentric theism" are not conducive to the achievement of

"black liberation" because these paradigms of thought from which he uncritically borrows are informed by a universe of secular norms and meanings. That is, the way in which Jones argues that "black liberation" is verified is thoroughly informed by the assumptions undergirding the secular existentialist thought that informs so much of his work. The question then becomes whether such a way of being and acting in the world offers itself as the one best suited for securing such an objective. Jackson argues that the proposals put forth by Jones fail in this regard when compared to the universe of meanings provided by classical Islamic theology understood in light of the plight of Black suffering. On a deeper level, Jackson exposes the ways in which the meanings of the categories of "black liberation" and "black suffering" are far from being self-evident and neutral because of the degree to which they are determined by one's worldview and its corresponding presuppositions.

The Limits of Theology and Concluding Thoughts

Having read Jackson's critical comments about the understanding and role of "experience" and verification in Jones' account of "black liberation," one may be left wondering what, if anything, Jackson might have to say about the evidentiary nature of his own claims. That is, does his conception of the theological task place his claims beyond critique? In addressing these issues, Jackson first states that what he has *not* done is present a doctrine of God that empirically proves God's power and goodness in an objective manner which definitively refutes the charge of divine malevolence toward African Americans. As he puts it, "[w]hat I have presented in this book—and all that can be asked of any *theological* tradition—is a *theological* response."[81] However, rather than concede that theology is then an arbitrary or solipsistic enterprise, Jackson goes on to provide an account of what he believes it to be.

"Theology is ultimately a negotiated product, the medium through which religious communities conceptualize and talk about God *in the public space*, where the only valid form of knowledge is objective knowledge to which everyone has ostensibly equal access."[82] Betraying some of his own presuppositions here, we find Jackson describing theology as

a dialogical and public practice for religious communities that enables those communities to settle on a conceptual framework, or "web of beliefs," about God and the world that successfully creates a common religious identity. Moreover, the systematic and logical rigor which typify the theological endeavor bring a rational element to the religious tradition which Jackson believes is crucial in helping to "retard the drift of superstition and unwarranted syncretism."[83] For all of these reasons then, theology plays an indispensable role in forming and sustaining religious communities.

However, Jackson admits that while theology can play a positive role for religious communities, it poses significant dangers as well. It does so by "freezing" doctrines and descriptions of God into strict and static categories such as omnipotent, benevolent, merciful, severe, etc. Though such descriptions have the advantage of generating stability by sustaining intergenerational and cross-cultural consensus, they are ultimately limited because "as public property with universal pretensions, theology is almost bound to indulge the subtle fiction that it is transcendent and speaks from beyond the pale of human history and the perspective of *any* particular group."[84] Of course, by describing the theological task and its limits in this way, Jackson is forced to acknowledge that his own claims too are closely tied to his own historically and culturally conditioned set of concerns. However, as Jackson indicates throughout his work, he has no problem with such an observation. This is because it then frees him to reconceive the theological task as one in which the objective is to address the challenges faced by one's community, and in his case, the Blackamerican one.

In addition to its tendency to indulge in the fallacy of "universalizing the particular," theology encounters a further limitation in its claim to engender knowledge about God. Or at least, there is another type of knowledge about God which it cannot provide: experiential knowledge. According to Jackson, this "highly subjective, private, and hopelessly contingent" form of knowledge need not be viewed as a hostile competitor to theology's "public reason." However, it differs from "public reason" in that it depends on "a live and personal *relationship*."[85] Experiential knowledge's difference from "public reason" lies in the difference between

being aware of someone's generosity as a "conceptual *fact*," and know-
ing that such a person will share his or her wealth *with me.* Knowing
in this sense is contingent on the kind of relationship one possesses
with the object of knowledge in question. It is this type of knowledge,
Jackson asserts, that best facilitates knowledge of God. That is, "[i]t is
God's *relationship* with Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Pharaoh, the Children of
Israel—even Satan—that informs God's actions toward them, not a fixed
list of names and attributes, even if such a list might rightfully apply to
God."[86] And while some knowledge produced from such an encounter
may be expressed through the written or spoken word, "some of what
one learns may simply reduce one to a calm and speechless knowing."[87]
Thus, Jackson states, although theology strives to achieve *understanding*
without lapsing into *superstition,* such an endeavor does not require the
dismissal of *mystery,* a quality which tends to be viewed with suspicion
in contemporary society.[88]

Interestingly enough, James would find much that is compelling in
Jackson's discussion of experiential knowledge. In the *Varieties,* James
expresses skepticism toward science's claims to best capture the world
through its identification of the laws by which the world functions. He
writes that:

> To describe the world with all the various feelings of the indi-
> vidual pinch of destiny, all the various spiritual attitudes, left
> out from the description—they being as describable as anything
> else—would be something like offering a printed bill of fare as
> the equivalent of a solid meal. Religion makes no such blunder.[89]

Religion makes no such blunder because it does not describe the
world in universal and impersonal terms which, because they deal in
abstractions, keep one at arm's length from personal experience of the
world. Thus, for James, the knowledge engendered by science which
is communicated using symbols deals only with realities of the most
general kind; however, "*as soon as we deal with private and personal
phenomena as such, we deal with realities in the completest sense of the
term.*"[90] As is the case with Jackson, James too asserts that knowledge of

a personal type holds a higher epistemological status because it traffics in particulars as opposed to the universals of "public reason" or scientific forms of knowledge. And, for James, it is in the particulars of religious "feeling" and "experience" that one is granted the greatest access, not to God as Jackson believes, but to a higher reality that is mediated by the human subconscious.[91] While James refuses to go to great lengths to identify this reality, he admits that "God is the natural appellation, for us Christians at least, for [this] supreme reality..."[92] Thus, both James and Jackson assign a greater level of authority to relational forms of knowledge because, it would seem, both deem the personally experienced dimensions of reality to hold a higher status. While the object of this personal knowledge differs for the two men in that James identifies it as the human subconscious while for Jackson it is God, both agree in favoring experiential and personal knowledge of particulars over abstract and general knowledge of universals. However, it is important to note that while James believes that this personal experience provides one with unmediated access to that higher reality in the form of the human subconscious, Jackson harbors no such illusions. Still, his acknowledgement of the mediated character of all knowledge does not prevent him from placing a high value on experiential forms of it.

It is both in his account of "experiential knowledge" as well as in the "practical effectiveness" of the "web of beliefs" constituting classical Islamic theology, which are drawn out by Jackson in response to the problem of Black suffering that we are able to find Jamesian elements. That is, Jackson believes not only that both the Muʿtazilite and Māturīdite (along with the Ashʿarite and Traditionalist) accounts of divine omnipotence and omnibenevolence are able to evade the charges of divine racism and quietism laid out by Jones. Jackson also believes that they offer a universe of meanings which supersedes that presupposed by Jones' "humanocentric theism" in being able to achieve Black liberation. This is so for numerous reasons, perhaps the most important being the ability of both schools of classical Islamic theology to provide resources that encourage the Blackamerican community to resist white domination in all its forms despite the lack of resources and numbers available to them. In this way, Jackson argues that the doctrines of God found

in both Muʿtazilism and the Māturīdism constitute a "web of beliefs" that inculcate certain habits of seeing and acting in the world, which best deal with the challenges of Black experience. However, Jackson's account of Māturīdite *ḥikmah* along with the concern he raises about "universalizing the particular" pushes back against the uncritical reliance on "experience" in both Jones' conception of "black liberation" and in James' doctrine of verification. As the above claims make clear, Jackson's thought both parallels and challenges aspects of James' account of religion throughout his writings, and as a result, Jackson demonstrates that despite James' dismissive attitude, it is possible for "dogmatic theology" to be pragmatic.[93]

Endnotes

1   William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, (New York, NY: Random House, Inc., 1994), 487.

2   Ibid., 470.

3   After presenting Cardinal John Henry Newman's discussions of the attributes of God, James concludes by writing, "I will not weary you by pursuing these metaphysical determinations farther, into the mysteries of God's Trinity, for example." Ibid., 482.

4   See James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1970); James Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971); Major Jones, *The Color of God: The Concept of God in Afro-American Thought*, (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1987); Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993); Dwight N. Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999); J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), just to name a few.

5   It is important to note that Jackson's interpretation of Jones is a contested one. For example, scholar of Blackamerican religious thought William David Hart has challenged Jackson's reading of Jones, claiming that Jackson takes "humanocentric theism" to be Jones' normative position (as opposed to the "secular humanism" which Jones in fact prefers) as well as challenging Jackson's argument that Jones uncritically valorized secular Euro-centric conceptions of autonomy in his critiques of Black Christian theodicies. The former critique may be found in Hart, "'One Percenters': Black Atheists, Secular Humanists, and Naturalists," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 112/4 (2013), 681-82, while the latter critique was made at a panel at the 2014 American Academy of Religion conference. There, Hart specifically referenced Jones' concept of "multievidentiality" to demonstrate that his notion of experience was anything but uncritical. More will be said about both charges in what follows, but I should state that my primary objective in this article is the analysis of *how* Jackson draws on classical Islamic theology to address issues around Black theodicy raised by Jones rather than the assessment of Jackson's critical engagement with Jones. Such an adjudication lies beyond the purview of this article.

6   James, 542.

7   Ibid., 470. In the distinction between experience and language which seems to undergird this claim, James parts ways with the pragmatism of Charles Sanders Peirce. Louis Menand captures well this aspect of Peirce's thought when he writes that for Peirce, "[t]here are no prerepresentational objects out there. Things are themselves signs: their being signs is a condition of their being things at all....For

Peirce, knowing was inseparable from what he called semiosis, the making of signs, and of the making of signs there is no end....There is no exit from the dictionary. Peirce didn't simply think that language is like that. He thought that the universe is like that." Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2001), 364.

8   Ibid., 475.

9   Ibid., 484-485. It was in this passage that James first introduced the "pragmatic" thought of Peirce to wider audiences, and this mention along with other references to Peirce's work, ignited an interest in the thought of Peirce which had heretofore not existed. Although James gave his Gifford lectures, later to be published as the *Varieties*, in 1902, this quoted passage from Peirce's writings was taken from his 1878 essay, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" published in *Popular Science Monthly.*

10   Ibid., 487. As will be discussed later in the paper, that "vital conversation with the unseen divine" for James takes the form of personal, mystical experience.

11   Ibid., 486.

12   Ibid., 487.

13   Ibid., 488.

14   Ibid.

15   In making this point, Hauerwas admits that he is not claiming that James would have had such an example in mind when making such a statement. Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001), 67. Quoted from James "Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking," *Pragmatism and Other Writings,* edited with an introduction and notes by Giles Gunn, (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 36.

16   Also key to Hauerwas' engagement with James is his critique of the implicit dualism found in the primacy of "feeling" found in James' account of religion which fails to adequately recognize the linguistic dimensions of thought and experience. It is this emphasis on "feeling" as the deepest source of religion that leads James to pronounce much philosophical and theological discourse a series of "formulas" or "over-beliefs" which are "secondary products." James, *Varieties*, 559. Although James admits that "over-beliefs" are "the most interesting and valuable things" about an individual, he still believes them to be unnecessary accretions that prevent one from grasping the true heart of religion which is grounded in "feeling." The dualism Hauerwas detects lies in this emphasis on "feeling" which leads to his attempts to extrapolate "kernels" of emotional experience from religious systems' socio-linguistically derived categories. Such a practice presents issues because this "distinction between religious experience and 'over-beliefs'...depends on a problematic distinction between 'experience' and language." Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology*, 55.

17   James, *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, 40.

18 We will return to this topic below in the discussion of the relationship between truth and "verification" in James' thought. For James, an idea can be deemed true to the extent that harmonizes with one's experience of the world and aids in the navigation of that world. As will be discussed, this raises the question of the status and nature of the category of "experience" itself, a category that is far from neutral.

19 Ibid., 47.

20 Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 17.

21 Ibid., 19.

22 Jackson distinguishes "traditional (white) theodicy" in which "suffering has been thought of in highly individualistic (if impersonal) terms and as being almost senselessly random" from "black theodicy" which "rejects this impersonal…random framework as being oblivious to and incapable of accommodating the reality of 'ethnic suffering,' where a 'discrete and insular' group is singled out for suffering that is at once 'enormous, mal-distributed and transgenerational.'" Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., 23.

25 Ibid., 6.

26 Ibid., 4.

27 Ibid., 13-14.

28 Ibid., 14-15; 158.

29 Ibid., 52.

30 Although Jackson places Ashʿarites, Māturīdites, and Traditionalists in the same category as privileging divine omnipotence over divine omnibenevolence, it should be noted that both Māturīdites and Traditionalists, each in their own manners, affirmed elements of both in their doctrines of God, a point even affirmed by Jackson in his discussion of both schools (Māturīdites, 109-13; Traditionalists, 143-47). I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for bringing my attention to this point.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 In this discussion of Muʿtazilite "reason," Jackson subverts its claims to universal rationality by pointing out that "[t]o be sure, 'reason' did not refer to the plain dictates of the human faculties. It included a battery of assumptions, premises and circumscriptions fashioned out of the legacy of late antiquity, especially Aristotle, alongside various 'Middle Eastern' and Central Asian complements and competitors." Ibid., 49.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid., 53.

36 Ibid., 52.

37 Ibid., 55.

38 Jones also offers "secular humanism" as another alternative for what he believes to be a viable black theodicy of liberation. While he prefers this model, he admits that theism is so heavily anchored in the Black community that a purely secular approach is futile. Thus, his belief that "humanocentric theism" is the next best option. Ibid., 14.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., 15.

41 Ibid., 64.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., 71. Quoted from Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. It should also be noted that Niebuhr's own thought was greatly influenced by pragmatism. See Mark L. Haas, "Reinhold Niebuhr's 'Christian Pragmatism': A Principled Alternative to Consequentialism," *The Review of Politics*, 61/4 (1999), 605–36 and Mark Douglas, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Two Pragmatisms," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy*, 22/3 (2001), 221–40.

44 Ibid.

45 Jackson, *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering*, 71.

46 William James, "The Will to Believe," *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, edited with an introduction and notes by Giles Gunn, (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 214.

47 Ibid. James also writes, "[b]ut in our dealings with objective nature we obviously are recorders, not makers, of the truth; and decisions for the mere sake of deciding promptly and getting on to the next business would be wholly out of place. Throughout the breadth of physical nature facts are what they are quite independently of us, and seldom is there any such hurry about them that the risks of being duped by believing a premature theory need be faced" Ibid., 211.

48 James, "Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking," 164.

49 James, "The Will to Believe," 233.

50 Jackson, *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering*, 105.

51 Ibid., 106.

52 Ibid., 107.

53 Ibid., 109.

54 Ibid., 110.

55 Ibid., 115.

56 Ibid., 118. Quote from Qurʾān 2:193.

57   Ibid., 120.

58   Ibid. Jackson quoting Jones.

59   Ibid., 121.

60   Ibid.

61   Ibid.

62   Ibid.

63   Ibid., 122.

64   Ibid.

65   Ibid., 123. Nandy even goes so far as to defend a preference for a consciousness produced by oppression over one produced by power. Jackson quotes him as stating, "[b]etween the modern master and the non-modern slave, one must choose the slave, not because one should voluntarily choose poverty or admit the superiority of suffering, not only because the slave is oppressed, not even because he works (which Marx said made him less alienated than the master). One must choose the slave because he represents a higher-order cognition which perforce includes the master as human, whereas the master's cognition has to exclude the slave except as 'thing.'" Quote taken from Nandy's *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), xv-xvi.

66   Ibid.

67   James, "Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking," 88.

68   Ibid.

69   Ibid., 89.

70   Ibid., 90.

71   Ibid., 91.

72   James, "The Meaning of Truth," 155. He also writes that "[a]ll the *sanctions* of a law of truth lie in the very texture of experience. Absolute or no absolute, the concrete truth for *us* will always be that way of thinking in which our various experiences most profitably combine."

73   James, "Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking," 106. Elsewhere in his "Pragmatism" lectures, James writes that, "[t]emperaments with their cravings and refusals do determine men in their philosophies, and always will" and "[w]e measure the total character of the universe as we feel it, against the flavor of the philosophy proffered us, and one word is enough." Ibid., 21. Of course this recognition of the role of "feeling" in the philosophic enterprise by James led him to develop strong sympathies for the "humanistic" conception of truth advocated by F.C.S. Schiller and John Dewey which thought of the "true" as the more "satisfactory." James, "The Meaning of Truth," 148.

74   Jackson, *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering*, 91.

75   Ibid., 95.

76   Ibid., 96.

77   Ibid., 96-7.

78   Ibid., 66.

79   Ibid.

80   Ibid.

81   Ibid., 161.

82   Ibid., 161-62. This conception of theology as a publicly negotiated discourse resonates in interesting ways with Jackson's more recent discussions of what he terms the "Islamic secular." Jackson defines the "Islamic secular" as those forms of knowledge not grounded in "*the scriptural sources of Sharia nor their proper extension via the tools enshrined by Islamic legal methodology* (uṣūl al-fiqh)." Drawing on the Sunni intellectual tradition generally, and Egyptian Maliki jurist Shihab al-Din al-Qarafi (d. 684/1285) specifically, he distinguishes the *sharʿī* realm governed by legal rulings (*aḥkām*) from the non-*sharʿī* realm where legitimate judgments may be made according to a variety of epistemologies, from public administration to modern medicine to cultural production. This latter sphere is considered "secular" in the sense that its norms are not derived from incontrovertible legal rulings; however, this does not mean that it lies beyond the purview of Islam itself. Rather it means that judgments made in this "secular" sphere rely on Islamic or non-Islamic epistemologies and norms which may be contested. Thus, when it comes to public matters, non-*sharʿī* judgments may be challenged by the community (*ummah*) if they are not deemed to serve the common good. In highlighting this resonance, I do not intend to conflate Jackson's description of Muslim theology and his conception of the "Islamic secular," as if the latter were a form of theological discourse. I make this observation only to foreground the degree to which both may be characterized as public, dialogical, and within an Islamic framework, epistemically open. Sherman A. Jackson, "The Islamic Secular," *American Journal of Islam and Society*, 34/2 (2017), 1–38.

83   Ibid., 162.

84   Ibid.

85   Ibid.

86   Ibid.

87   Ibid., 163.

88   Ibid.

89   James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 543.

90   Ibid., 542.

91   Ibid., 557. In his identification of the role played by the subconscious, James writes, "[l]et me then propose, as an hypothesis, that whatever it may be on its *farther* side,

the 'more' with which in religious experience we feel ourselves connected is on its *hither* side the subconscious continuation of our conscious life." Here the subconscious mediates the "more" with which one feels connected in religious experiences by acting as the arena, psychological in this case, in which the "more" produces its effects.

92 Ibid., 561.

93 I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their encouraging words and insightful comments. As a result of implementing their recommended revisions, my article has been undoubtedly improved.

Ideals and Interests in Intellectuals' Political Deliberations: The Arab Spring and the Divergent Paths of Egypt's Shaykh al-Azhar Ahmad al-Tayyib and Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa

MUHAMMAD AMASHA

Abstract

The academic literature equates the Arab Spring politics of Egypt's two highest official religious figures – the Shaykh

Muhammad Amasha is a Sociology PhD student at Yale University with academic interests in the sociology of culture, politics, intellectuals, religion, and music. He obtained a BA in political science from Istanbul Şehir University (ŞEHİR) and an MA in sociology at ŞEHİR and Marmara University. Some of his works have appeared in *Jadaliyya, Maydan,* and *Middle East Eye.*

al-Azhar Ahmad al-Tayyib and Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa—as "anti-revolutionary." This article argues that al-Tayyib and Gomaa's politics are fundamentally different. While Gomaa's politics are submissive to the state, al-Tayyib's politics are a negotation without confrontation. I explain the former by Gomaa's struggle for religious authority either by seeking official positions or obstructing the revealing of information harmful to his religious legitimacy. The *statist legitimacy threat* against Gomaa is central to understanding his politics. Defending al-Azhar, on the other hand, is what explains al-Tayyib's fluctuating politics. Theoretically, I advocate that explaining intellectuals' politics requires focusing on their *political deliberation*. Only with a methodologically rigorous reconstruction of the intellectuals' political deliberation and its context, can we decide the relative relevance of factors like ideals, interests, and structures (e.g., the state). I establish this with more than a thousand chronologically ordered primary sources and twenty interviews with people in Gomaa and al-Tayyib's circles.

Keywords: Sociology of intellectuals, cultural sociology, Islam and politics, Arab Spring, Egypt, Ulama, al-Azhar

Introduction

One day before the outbreak of the 2011 Egyptian Uprising, the newly appointed Shaykh al-Azhar Ahmad al-Tayyib held a conference titled "Sunni Islam: A Call for Unity and Tolerance …."[1] Ironically, this call for unity would be immediately followed by bitter disputes and divergence among the attending ʿulamaʾ (religious scholars of Islam) regarding the Egyptian Uprising. These divides would only grow deeper over the course of the rest of the 2011 Arab Uprisings and the July 2013 Egyptian Coup against the democratically elected president Mohamed Morsi, who was affiliated with the Muslim Brothers (MB).[2]

The ʿulamaʾ's active role during the Arab Spring affirmed research countering once prevailing assumptions about ʿulamaʾ's irrelevance

to modern life.[3] With that active role, the last decade has witnessed a growing literature attempting to make sense of the ʿulamaʾ's divergent politics.[4] The Egyptian ʿulamaʾ were at the heart of this debate, especially their stances on the Egyptian Coup.[5] More specifically, the debate centered on comparing the "Global Mufti" Yusuf al-Qaradawi's "pro-revolutionary stances" and the "anti-revolutionary approach" of the former Grand Mufti of Egypt (2003-2013), Ali Gomaa, given his puzzling support for the military's massacres.[6] The Shaykh al-Azhar (since 2010), former Rector of al-Azhar University (2003-2010), and former Grand Mufti (2002-2003), Ahmed Al-Tayyib was not totally absent from these accounts, but he was treated as a secondary example of Gomaa's politics. This article submits that comparing al-Tayyib and Gomaa is as fruitful for understanding ʿulamaʾ's politics as comparing Gomaa and al-Qaradawi, arguing that al-Tayyib's politics are qualitatively different from Gomaa's.

Theoretically, unlike macro structuralist approaches, this article argues that understanding intellectuals' politics requires due attention to their *political deliberations*. Only then, we can appreciate the complexity and contingency of their eventual political stances, since their deliberations navigate among morally compelling ideals and powerful pressures and threats to their interests. Only after undertaking a detailed empirical examination of their deliberations, can we construct theories of when intellectuals' interests or ideals play greater roles. The cases here suggest that intellectuals concentrate more on interest (especially potential harm) in threatening political environments. But, while al-Tayyib's stances merged idealist and (for him) morally approved interest-oriented actions, Gomaa's politics were puzzlingly self-seeking. An important aspect of why this was the case, I will argue, is the kind of political threat to which Gomaa was subject: a *statist legitimacy threat* that could have destroyed his credibility as an *ʿālim* (singular of ʿulamaʾ). In the concluding section of the paper, therefore, I contend that Gomaa's politics should be understood as strategies to attain higher religious authority or avoid statist threats that might destroy his moral legitimacy by revealing private information. On the other hand, protecting al-Azhar and its traditionalism was the central concern that consistently explains al-Tayyib's politics.

In what follows, I first present my theoretical and methodological approach to studying intellectuals' politics, followed by a brief overview of Islam and politics in Egypt. The following two sections provide empirical evidence that problematizes the dominant explanations of the ʿulamaʾ's Arab Spring politics. The first argues that political theology is not sufficient for understanding Gomaa and al-Tayyib's politics. This section will also establish a clear difference between al-Tayyib and Gomaa in their relation to the state and its violence. Next, I show that the argument that both ʿulamaʾ's political stances stem from a moral urge to protect "True Islam" (what each ʿālim believes to be the true interpretation of Islam) is not true for Gomaa, whose competitive stance extends to those adopting the same interpretation. This is in contrast to al-Tayyib, for whom defending al-Azhar traditionalism is central, yet who generally maintains a tolerant approach to others holding competing interpretations.

Intellectuals' Politics: Theory and Methods

Some sociologists of intellectuals take a resolutely macro view of intellectuals' actions, emphasizing the role of structural conditions (e.g., market relations and government type) on intellectuals' politics.[7] A similar structuralist approach is adopted by an account that explains the different politics of Gomaa and al-Tayyib by state manipulation: by making prominent ʿulamaʾ like Gomaa take extreme pro-regime positions, the state ensures the Shaykh al-Azhar's (al-Tayyib's) popular moral legitimacy, which is necessary for the regime's own legitimacy.[8] Such an approach, however, disregards a core aspect of intellectuals' lives: deliberation.

This is not to say that social structures "predict neither the content of intellectual ideas nor the process of intellectual action."[9] Indeed, both cases under examination show how changes in the political structure (from authoritarianism to a revolutionary democratic transition to bloody counter-revolutionary authoritarianism) led to changes in the ʿulamaʾ's political ideas and actions. However, when it comes to state manipulation, I do not consider it to be the case that intellectuals have

no agency or autonomy except "within a framework whose limits are defined ultimately by the state."[10] Instead, I adopt a cultural interpretive approach that attends to the intellectuals' political deliberation, where intellectuals interpret the changing political circumstances before acting: thinking about which course of action to follow, consulting ideals, and calculating interests (potential threats and benefits).

Many sociologists argue that interests, conscious or not, are central to intellectuals' politics.[11] Yet, others insist that ideals, not interests, motivate intellectuals' acts.[12] Most accounts of the ʿulamaʾ share the latter's idealist conception, as seen in their emphasis on political theology and "true Islam." Such dichotomous generalizations, as I show below, are not empirically accurate, for both ideals and interests were relevant to al-Tayyib, while Gomaa's politics were more interest-oriented. The relevance of ideals and interests is to be determined empirically, case by case. Hence, the fact that Hasan al-Shafiʿi—the senior Azharite *ʿālim* and al-Tayyib's senior advisor then—had no interest in opposing the Coup does not mean that all ʿulamaʾ have no interest in their political stances, as some argue.[13] Only with such empirical rigor can we develop cultural theories on "when interest-oriented action dominates nonstrategic action orientations."[14]

The cases below suggest that intellectuals' idealist deliberation and actions are curtailed in threatening environments like authoritarian regimes. Living under statist threats, intellectuals' deliberation becomes occupied with how to navigate the potentially serious harms they expect if they act idealistically, including in defiance of the state. Interest calculation becomes more salient in their deliberation. But statist threats and interest calculation do not necessitate eventual submission to the state, as intellectuals may decide to hold on to their ideals and resist despite the cost.[15] Indeed, al-Tayyib never legitimized state violence and vocally criticized it during the Coup. However, he also did not abide by his revolutionary democratic ideals when the Coup made them very costly. But while al-Tayyib was primarily occupied by al-Azhar's interest (an interest approved by his ideals), Gomaa was occupied by his own interest with no trace of idealism. I argue that the statist threat to Gomaa appeared to be so strong that he

eventually decided to submit to it. The statist threat here was not one generally understood in political sociology—a *security threat* to one's body, wealth, or family.[16] Rather it was a *legitimacy threat*—a threat to one's moral authority as an intellectual. The state surveils intellectuals to find in their private lives issues that would destroy their credibility if revealed, and uses them to bring intellectuals to their knees. My analysis shows that Gomaa was a target of such a state legitimacy threat, which nudged Gomaa to prefer legitimizing massacres, and therefore losing only some legitimacy, over exposing what might well have caused a complete loss of legitimacy.

Unlike the assertion that "it is too easy to dismiss [Gomaa's] pro-military position as simply that of a sycophant or a hypocrite ready to exploit religious doctrine to support his political master,"[17] such an argument requires a diligent study that exhausts all possibilities of moral motivations, especially when talking about ʿulamaʾ immersed in moral education. Methodologically, I study patterns in the ʿulamaʾ's politics to capture the moral dimension: Is there any moral principle that seems consistently present in the intellectual's most political stances? Another strategy I employ is critical discourse analysis[18] via a close reading of how intellectuals talk about politics, reply to accusations, and navigate pressures: Do they, for example, contradict themselves, turn red when asked hard questions, feel like faking a reaction, take time to think in a way suggesting strategizing, give ambiguous answers, or frequently lie? These cultural signs of "authenticity" or "sincerity" are inevitably subject to researchers' interpretations. Researchers' bias can be countered by empirical saturation, which can be judged through empirical evidence.

My findings are based on more than a thousand (chronologically ordered) primary sources (e.g., news reports, official statements, books, memoirs, and videos) about al-Tayyib, Gomaa, the Egyptian religious field, and a careful reconstruction of the political context. These sources encompass almost all that is publicly available online on these ʿulamaʾ until the end of August 2013, the month of the massacre at Rabaa that came to signify the end of the Arab Spring in Egypt. To ensure that I had as complete a picture as possible about these ʿulamaʾ, I also interviewed twenty people who were close to them or in their circles.

Islam and Politics in Egypt: An Overview

The efforts to centralize the Egyptian state that began in the early nineteenth century partially stripped al-Azhar, the Islamic scholarly institution founded in the tenth century, of its economic independence by putting part of its endowment under state control. This reduced al-Azhar graduates' employment prospects by establishing separate secular education and judiciary systems. The state tightened its control over al-Azhar even more in the second half of the twentieth century with the Nasser regime's religious policies that placed all endowments under state control, ended the religious judiciary system, made the Shaykh al-Azhar a position presidentially appointed, restructured al-Azhar to increase government representatives in its administration, gradually purged most Azharite faculty that voiced any opposition, and increased state control over mosques by replacing local economic support and appointing imams.[19] Yet, these policies also granted al-Azhar financial, human, and symbolic resources as the government increased al-Azhar's budget, opened new non-religious departments in al-Azhar University, increased its pre-college education institutions, and considered al-Azhar the only legitimate representative of Islam.[20]

However, as al-Azhar functioned as a religious legitimizer of an oppressive regime that was eventually defeated in the 1967 War (*al-naksa*), al-Azhar's legitimacy eroded for many Egyptians, who found their way to the few apolitical Salafi groups tolerated under Nasser. The 1970s witnessed the Islamic Revival, with a Salafi orientation and a strong presence in universities. This was coupled with the new president Anwar al-Sadat's political opening. Political prisoners were released, allowing the MB to return to public life and recruit many of those university students. The MB integrated democratic principles into its discourse and ran syndicate and parliament elections, becoming the strongest political opposition group in pre-Uprising Egypt. Meanwhile, other Salafi student groups and religious activists either preferred to stay away from politics or to turn to armed insurgency against the regime.

To grant al-Azhar legitimacy vis-à-vis radical opponents, the regime allowed al-Azhar a larger margin of freedom, an opportunity that al-Azhar took advantage of, opposing some state policies. This

relative independence ended with the appointment of Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi as Shaykh al-Azhar in 1996 until his death in 2010, to be replaced by Ahmad al-Tayyib. In the context of the 1970s Islamic Revival's critical stance in relation to the regime, a scholarly milieu known as Civilizational Islam emerged to provide democratic, anti-authoritarian, and non-violent Islamic interpretations, presenting itself as a moderate Islam – an interpretation the MB came to adopt. Ali Gomaa was part of this milieu until he became Egypt's Grand Mufti in 2003, an office that brought him a transnational following.

As the Egyptian Uprising erupted, Civilizational Islam scholars, the MB, and activist Salafis supported the uprising. Al-Tayyib tried to take a balanced position that was more on the side of the regime, while Gomaa was unequivocal in its pro-regime rhetoric. With the regime's fall, al-Tayyib and Gomaa were criticized by the revolutionaries. Al-Tayyib adopted a revolutionary line and presented al-Azhar as an impartial political actor. Gomaa also tried to navigate pressures with ambivalent messages. Meanwhile, the MB and the Salafis dominated all elections and referenda, including the MB-won presidential election. After a year in power, anti-MB campaigns culminated in wide protests, followed by a bloody military coup that was strongly endorsed by Gomaa, and less so by al-Tayyib.

Political Theology is Not Enough

The current literature on Gomaa and al-Tayyib mainly focuses on why they supported Egypt's 2013 Military Coup. One explanation is their adoption of medieval political theology, where "it is prudent to give loyalty to whoever commands overwhelming authority (*shawka*)."[21] This theology built political legitimacy on the effective ability to rule and forbade rebellion, as the traumas of violence in early Islamic history persuaded medieval jurists to privilege stability over other sociopolitical values. This view is captured in al-Tayyib's coup statement, where he considered intra-Egyptian clashes and bloodshed the "lesser of two evils," and in Gomaa's remark that Morsi is a "detained ruler" (*imām maḥjūr*) who had lost the ability to rule.[22]

But this reading does not capture the complexity of these ʿulamaʾʾs politics. There are instances where these same people disregarded that pragmatic medieval theology for a revolutionary political theology. Namely, in 2011, al-Tayyib supported the Libyan, Yemeni, and Syrian Uprisings and considered a regime's use of violence against peaceful protestors sufficient to end its legitimacy "despite the pretexts made for stability or confronting disturbance and conspiracy."[23] Gomaa even signed a statement in support of the Syrian Free Army against Assad's regime, leaving no space for medieval theology, which some contemporary ʿulamaʾ argue forbids only militant rebellion, not peaceful protests.[24]

More importantly for Gomaa, Muhamad Muzakkir notes that "it is clear that the logic behind the classical jurists' discourse is avoiding bloodshed (*fitnah*) at the expense of having an accountable political system … In contrast, [Gomaa] neither avoided *fitnah* nor built a system. He even formulated a discourse that sanctioned massacre and human rights violations by the Egyptian government."[25] During the anti-Mubarak Uprising, Gomaa cited a hadith that prescribes the killing of whomever rebels (*yakhruj*) against a ruler accepted by all, though he followed, "we do not want to prescribe [the killing of rebels] in these times of turmoil (*fitan*) because [the prophet] also forbade us to kill."[26] This caveat was missing in his leaked lectures to the military during the Coup, in which his legitimization of the state's violence against protestors was blunt and unprecedented.[27] While Gomaa inserted a few ethical boundaries for killing (e.g., gradual violence, not to kill the wounded but to arrest them after being treated), such boundaries were neither emphasized nor clarified. They remained mostly lip service and were lost within more emphasized generalizations of the Egyptian army's religious virtue and the permissibility of killing the anti-military "Kharijites." These remarks were so extreme that he, when the videos were leaked, claimed they were only referring to militants in Sinai, not anti-Coup protestors.[28] Yet his direct references to anti-Coup protests make this claim hard to sustain. This adoption of bloodshed sets Gomaa in stark contrast to al-Tayyib's consistent criticism of bloodshed, discussed below, which seemed more in line with medieval jurists' concerns.

Usaama al-Azami does not consider that contrast stark enough, however: "With [al-Tayyib], while his support had its limits, we saw his commitment to autocratic Islam in his legitimation of the military coup—an armed rebellion against a Muslim ruler that he and Gomaa actively legitimated rather than simply acquiesced to, as might be expected in premodern Sunnism."[29] For him, both ʿulamaʾ supported the Coup because they adopted "autocratic Islam" where absolute fealty to modern authoritarian states is central. But again, how to reconcile these ʿulamaʾ's "autocratic Islam" with their support of some other Arab uprisings against authoritarian regimes? Even if we limit the discussion to Egypt, Gomaa asserted, a few months after the revolution, that *shūra* (consultation, as practiced in parliamentarian elections) and enjoining the ruler to do good and forbidding him to do bad (speaking truth to power) are "political rights in Islam."[30] Also during anti-Morsi protests in November 2012, he issued a fatwa permitting protests and sit-ins.[31] That said, I agree with al-Azami's observation on Gomaa's commitment to the Egyptian army. Overall, I found no single public remark explicitly criticizing anyone in power, including Morsi. During Morsi's year, for example, his only public comment on a particular political event, rather than general remarks, was a statement that Islamically legitimized Morsi's plan to take IMF loans that some Islamically-minded parties deemed forbidden.[32] To be sure, Gomaa implicitly and privately was not supporting Morsi, as seen in his above-mentioned fatwa allowing protest during his reign or in his students' remarks critical of Morsi. But Gomaa never expressed that publicly and did not criticize Morsi for anything he did.

In contrast, al-Tayyib's stance toward the state is generally ambiguous, not submissive, but never confrontational. He grants those in power discursive legitimacy while keeping a distance from (and sometimes criticizing) that of which he does not approve. His politics may be termed a *negotiation without confrontation.* For example, though al-Tayyib's critical stance toward the regime was less before the Uprising, he threatened to resign from the al-Azhar University Rectorate during Mubarak's reign when the State Security wanted to interrogate al-Qaradawi, whom al-Tayyib had invited for an event.[33] He similarly threatened to resign

from the al-Azhar Shaykhdom if Morsi's government did not approve of the names he assigned as deputies of the al-Azhar University Rector.[34] Even in post-Coup Egypt, where any deviation from the state's line is punished, al-Tayyib's resistance to some of al-Sisi's demands is evident.[35] These negotiations, however, are always foiled with a public discourse that addresses those in power (Mubarak, the military, Morsi, or al-Sisi) with the utmost respect and never challenges their sincerity and legitimacy when in power.

That does not mean that al-Tayyib never vocally criticized those in power. He did do so, especially with respect to bloodshed. During the Egyptian Uprising, while he was asserting that maintaining order has priority over freedom of speech, he considered the protestors' call for "freedom, justice, and fighting poverty, unemployment, and economic recession" as "just demands," expressing his "extreme sorrow and pain for the bloodshed and the violations committed by elements that do not fear God nor preserve the homeland's sanctity."[36] Indeed, al-Tayyib's critique of the Coup's human rights violations was notable. Between July 4-August 17, al-Azhar issued almost twenty statements engaging with the events, most of which are overlooked in the English-language literature on the topic.

Overall, al-Tayyib seemed dissatisfied with the post-Coup developments, which he implicitly considered to be in contradiction with why he joined the July 3 meeting.[37] Condemning bloodshed was the most insistent and consistent message from al-Tayyib, threatening to home-isolate in protest and calling to immediately punish the "criminals" committing these "bloody acts" after the July 27 (*al-minaṣṣa*) massacre.[38] Three days after the Coup, he openly called on the state to protect the right to peaceful protests, release political prisoners, and shorten and clarify the transitory period leading to a democratic election.[39] In that statement, al-Tayyib implicitly threatened the new regime that they should keep in mind that "our Revolution broke the fear barrier" in the pursuit of freedom and democracy and hinted that the military should stay away from politics. Meanwhile, he always addressed the military (and police) very respectfully. Pressured by both camps, al-Azhar's discourse seemed very carefully crafted to

preserve an impartial image, refusing to name June 30 as a "coup" or "revolution," criticizing anti-Coup critics of al-Tayyib and the coupists' attempts to "politicize" or instrumentalize al-Azhar in the conflict.[40]

The stark difference between al-Tayyib and Gomaa sheds doubt on the sufficiency of David Warren's account of Gomaa. For Warren, the support given to the Coup's massacres by Gomaa, who is part of the state's bureaucracy, should be read as a result of his authoritarian nationalist worldview in which the impersonal nature of state-bureau-cratic logic deems "massacres … necessary for the good of the nation."[41] Warren's argument is not necessarily wrong, but it is insufficient: it is built on the fact that Gomaa has a nationalist imagination and is part of the bureaucracy, two characteristics shared by al-Tayyib, who took a divergent path on bloodshed.

To summarize, it is hard to maintain that the politics of al-Tayyib or Gomaa consistently follow one political theology (pragmatic, auto-cratic, or nationalist), especially considering their positions on other Arab uprisings. Al-Tayyib's politics within Egypt, however, seem more aligned with medieval pragmatic theology, unlike Gomaa. Both ʿulamaʾ diverge in their stances toward bloodshed and the state significantly. Gomaa showed little restraint when it came to supporting bloodshed, while al-Tayyib never did and, sometimes, vocally criticized it. Also, while Gomaa never publicly criticized those in power (at least) since he became Grand Mufti, al-Tayyib's approach ambiguously mixes legiti-mation and criticism.

Defending "True Islam"? Not Gomaa

To explain al-Tayyib and Gomaa's support for the Coup, some accounts refer to ideological competition with the MB or secularists in the Egyptian public sphere. Many of these accounts stress that this competition is not merely egoistic but seeks to protect what the ʿulamaʾ's view as "True Islam." For Mohammad Fadel, the religious pluralism resulting from the post-Uprising intellectual freedom has alarmed the "authoritarian ʿulamaʾ" who, drawing on medieval jurists, emphasized the state's role

in preserving the religious "orthodoxy." [42] Hence, Gomaa and other traditionalist 'ulama' supported the Coup to protect the Azharite "orthodoxy" from the "chaos in religious discourse." Masooda Bano also suggests that contestation over the interpretation of Islam partially got al-Azhar (including al-Tayyib and Gomaa) to take a position against the MB that holds a different interpretation. [43]

It is hard to know exactly the content of the "orthodoxy," or "True Islam" suggested in these accounts, which is necessary to study whether the 'ulama' are really committed to such ideals. What is clear in these accounts is that al-Tayyib and Gomaa share the same version of an Azharite, traditionalist "True Islam." But what if we know that Gomaa's competition extends to those who share the same interpretation of this orthodoxy? The tension between Gomaa and al-Tayyib is well-known in al-Azhar circles. Elston captures this in passing in her ethnography, and many of my interviewees confirm this. [44] Indeed, after the Coup, when Gomaa defended al-Tayyib against international anti-Coup critics, one of Gomaa's close students who was disappointed by his politics wrote on social media about how inappropriately Gomaa speaks of al-Tayyib in private settings. [45]

Though I initially found such reports hard to believe, different data sources triangulate the possibility of such extremity in Gomaa's practice. Another similar example is Gomaa's remarks regarding Emad Effat, his student that became a revolutionary icon after being killed by the military while in protest. In public, Gomaa spoke very highly of Effat whom he called "his son," led his funeral prayer, and expressed deep sorrow at his loss (though without criticizing the military). [46] Yet, Elston writes that Effat's murder was a turning point that made many of Gomaa's students become disillusioned with him. [47] Interviewees in these circles told me this happened because Gomaa's students "realized this person is double-faced. In public, 'they killed my son;' but in private, [they] found his estrangement from Shaykh Emad."

But if we return to whether defending "True Islam" is the real motivation of these 'ulama''s politics, al-Azami provides what he means by "True Islam" for Gomaa and al-Tayyib—"autocratic Islam." I have established above that al-Tayyib can hardly fit this category. I have also shown

that Gomaa took positions that contradicted this view. But there is stronger evidence that "autocratic Islam" is not really a morally compelling intellectual position for Gomaa.

A day after the July 8, 2013 (*al-ḥaras al-jumhūrī*) massacre, Gomaa participated in a reconciliation initiative, asserting the permissibility of peaceful protests and the sanctity of blood.[48] At the same time, Gomaa was recording his first leaked lecture to the military. In this leak, however, he considers protestors' praying in the streets or protesting in front of military institutions outside the scope of "peacefulness" and, therefore, must be dealt with by force.[49] In other words, Gomaa's public or private discourse assumed the legitimacy of peaceful protests during the Coup, despite what is suggested by "autocratic Islam." Gomaa legitimized massacres by stripping the "peacefulness" from the anti-Coup protestors and recast them as Kharijites deserving of death. As the military consolidated its power, though, Gomaa gave more weight to absolute obedience to oppressive rulers.[50]

Along with the accounts discussed above, Basma Abdel Aziz holds that al-Tayyib's decision to join the Coup was to monopolize the right to speak in the name of Islam, which was contested by the MB and Salafis.[51] While partially true, the issue of "monopoly" is doubtful, given al-Tayyib's insistence on these groups' political rights after the Coup. He consistently insisted that only inclusive dialogue—his second most repeated message during the Coup—could be the solution, asserting that the MB should not be excluded from political life. "Al-Azhar condemns shutting down some TV channels, religious [Salafi] and others [MB], despite our disagreement with their discourse," al-Tayyib wrote three days after the Coup.[52]

Overall, al-Tayyib seems tolerant of those holding different views. He refused to accept the resignation of al-Azhar's spokesperson, Muhammad al-Tahtawi, when the latter publicly declared his participation in the Uprising against Mubarak.[53] Al-Tayyib also defended his colleagues who publicly opposed the Coup, like Hasan al-Shafiʿi and Muhammad ʿImara, who continued to be part of al-Azhar's leadership (Al-Azhar Senior Scholars Authority [ASSA]).[54] Despite al-Qaradawi's criticism of al-Tayyib during and after the Uprising, al-Tayyib did not

openly respond and still included al-Qaradawi, his senior colleague, in the ASSA. Only after al-Qaradawi's harsh criticism of al-Tayyib's Coup stance, did al-Azhar issue a statement considering al-Qaradawi's remarks unfair.[55] A month later, al-Tayyib refused demands to strip al-Qaradawi from the ASSA's membership.[56] After al-Qaradawi's public resignation from the ASSA, demands to officially dismiss al-Qaradawi continued. While al-Tayyib refused to vote for or against, Gomaa, an ASSA member, actively advocated dismissing al-Qaradawi.[57] Indeed, since the Coup, Gomaa has been using degrading language while talking about al-Qaradawi and claimed that al-Qaradawi ordered his assassination.[58]

Gomaa had already considered al-Qaradawi a seeker of fake heroism when the latter harshly criticized the former's endorsement of Mubarak's last Prime Minister, Ahmad Shafiq, against Morsi in the 2012 presidential election.[59] This seems in line with Gomaa's truculent engagements with his critics, like journalists with whom he had a history of tensions under Mubarak.[60] His quarrels with the Salafis are also well known.[61] But such aggressive reactions were also directed at his close fellows, who took different political stances. Saif Abdelfattah, the political theorist who was close to Gomaa and co-authored books with him, reports that when he sent Gomaa an SMS criticizing his leaked remarks, Gomaa's reply was, "You accepted [for yourself] to be from the Kharijite dogs."[62] When I asked another person about Gomaa's reaction to his students' political criticism, he said that Gomaa did not care and considered them misguided. As for the MB, Gomaa avoided openly criticizing the MB directly after the Coup, refusing to equate them to the "extremist" Salafis.[63] Yet, as al-Azami shows, Gomaa was engaging in double-dealing as he harshly criticized them in private sermons.[64] After the Coup consolidated its power, the MB and its leaders took their place on Gomaa's list of those that he ridicules and lambasts in his sermons and TV shows.[65] Gomaa even gloats over the military oppression of the MB-minded ʿulamaʾ, who had criticized him before.[66]

Observing this difference in al-Tayyib and Gomaa's politics, Bano and Benadi explain al-Tayyib's moderation by the state's manipulation

of the three state religious institutions (al-Azhar, Dar al-Iftaʾ, and the Ministry of Awqaf). The Dar al-Iftaʾ and Ministry of Awqaf were pushed to take extreme positions to help al-Azhar retain its legitimacy and moderate image.[67] The state is definitely an important actor, but I find no empirical evidence that the state is happy with al-Tayyib's criticism for the sake of retaining al-Azhar's legitimacy. Al-Sisi's government is doing its best to limit al-Tayyib's power by taking back the right to choose the Grand Mufti from al-Azhar and refusing to renew the tenure of some of his associates.[68] Also, deemphasizing the ʿulamaʾ's agency here does not help explain, for example, Gomaa's extremeness compared to his students aligned with him politically, like al-Habib Ali al-Jifri. Though al-Jifri openly supports the Egyptian army and opposes the MB, his comments on the military massacres were less inciting and more reconciliatory and nuanced.[69] Indeed, he insisted that Gomaa did not mean peaceful protestors by his remarks, probably because that extreme position is hard to justify as stemming from a scholar as erudite as his teacher, Gomaa.[70] Below, I provide an explanation of why Gomaa took such extreme positions.

To summarize, the stark contradictions between Gomaa's private and public political stances suggest that these were strategies carefully crafted rather than morally compelling intellectual positions. His competition with other ʿulamaʾ holding to the same "True Islam" also makes the moral explanation less likely. This is not the case for al-Tayyib, as I show below. Here, I showed that al-Tayyib is even politically tolerant of his competitors who hold different interpretations of Islam. Compared to al-Tayyib, Gomaa seems more discursively aggressive against his competitors and content with their political suppression.

Alternative Account: The ʿUlamaʾ's Politics Explained

Gomaa: Whatever it Takes for Religious Authority

Just as the strong academic interest in explaining Gomaa's puzzlingly extreme support for the military massacres against anti-Coup protestors, answering that question concerned many of his colleagues who worked

with him for decades. There was a central theme in these accounts, which aligned with my own analysis of his political history: Gomaa's extreme commitment to the Coup is a self-seeking strategy, not an idealist position. In the previous sections, I established this by showing that Gomaa's political stances have no consistent intellectual or moral backing, even that of "autocratic Islam." This conclusion was also supported by the contradictions between his public and private remarks, which can be hardly interpreted but as conscious strategies. The question that is to be answered here, however, is: *why did he need to be that extreme in supporting those in power, given that many other state-supporting 'ulama' did not need to be that extreme, including some of his followers?* There are two explanations: he deeply wanted something that only the state could provide, or he was afraid that departing from the state line would immensely harm him.

The first explanation is present in the public remarks of two of Gomaa's colleagues: Muhammad ʿImara and Nadia Mustafa, whose close relationship with Gomaa goes back at least to the mid-1980s. They were part of the same scholarly milieu of Civilizational Islam, with strong connections to the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) and its associated centers, the Center for Epistemological Studies that Gomaa managed for a while, and Civilization Center headed by Mustafa, the political science professor at Cairo University. In that milieu, Gomaa was part of cooperative research projects with these scholars and, as a mufti, he had the Civilization Center's social scientists train Dar al-Ifta's religiously educated researchers.[71]

Commenting on Gomaa's first leak for Al-Jazeera, ʿImara, also an ASSA member, says,

I call upon *those who aspire for positions, those attached to positions, those attached to the shoes of those in power* to be careful about their religion by fearing God and not to get people in this dark tunnel of dark and unfair fatwas. I don't know whether Dr. Ali Gomaa said these remarks or not, or that X or Y person said that or not, but I am speaking in general. Dr. Ali Gomaa is an erudite *ʿālim* and I have a strong friendship with him. But

I am speaking objectively about the current conflict that is going on now in Egypt.[72] (emphasis added)

Similarly, in her essay commenting on Gomaa's coup remarks and leaks, Mustafa writes,

[Gomaa's religious cover for his political position] led to condemning reactions from many scholars that he came to clash with, to the extent of insulting and offending some of them... Regardless of [Gomaa's] intentions and position currently, he recalls religion to take a partisan position. The erudite scholar and the former mufti *with an ever-lasting aspiration for the al-Azhar Shaykhdom* presents political opinions instead of professional fatwas ... What is terrifying in Dr. Ali Gomaa's recent remarks is not just the content but also the manner that contrasts with all that I knew of the values and etiquette of Dr. Ali Gomaa with whom I studied for an extended period between 1986 and 2002. Manners lacking mercy and tolerance and full of mutter and foul language... I apologize to God Almighty for saying this about one of Egypt's leading imams and ʿulamaʾ, who was my teacher, but this is not Dr. Ali Gomaa I knew, or I thought I knew.[73] (emphasis added)

These two colleagues of Gomaa seem to suggest that Gomaa's politics is an egoist strategy to attain lofty positions, especially the al-Azhar Shaykhdom. It is important to see how reluctant they were about making these remarks. They did not do that because they hated Gomaa or even because they had nothing to lose by criticizing him. These people always spoke very highly of Gomaa.[74]

Aspiring to the al-Azhar Shaykhdom was also iterated by two other interviewees who were as close to Gomaa. One of them mentioned that it is known within Gomaa's circle that he is (mystically) promised by his teachers to be the Shaykh al-Azhar. Gomaa's "clinging to positions" was brought up in my interviews also in the context of Dar al-Iftaʾ. An interviewee from Gomaa's inner circle said that Gomaa, through a mediator,

asked Morsi to renew his post in the office when his retirement age came. Interestingly, Gomaa's students campaigned for that online, sharing pictures of Gomaa's friendly visit to MB leaders after Mubarak's fall.[75] Another interviewee, an official in Morsi's government, interpreted his firsthand observation of Gomaa's "sycophancy" toward Morsi to be about Gomaa's desire to continue as a mufti. This witness recalled an incident where he, Gomaa, and other officials were at an event with President Morsi. While waiting for Morsi to come, no one talked except Gomaa, who praised Morsi to a shocking extent for my interviewee. But the real shock happened when Morsi arrived: Gomaa attempted to kiss Morsi's hand, but Morsi did not accept. Regardless of the narration's validity, after hearing this, I found it easier to accept another interviewee's report that Gomaa said that Morsi was a friend of God (*waliyy*). Despite all this, Morsi deferred the decision of choosing the Grand Mufti to al-Azhar's ASSA, which eventually elected another mufti. Gomaa's later establishment of a Sufi order he heads can be interpreted in line with this "clinging to positions" explanation.[76] With that, he institutionalized his Sufi spiritual authority among his followers, some of whom see him as *the* saint of our time (*quṭb*), as I was told by an interviewee.

Even though this "clinging to positions" seems to have significant explanatory power, given the diversity and quality of empirical evidence, I still find it hard to accept that Gomaa supported killing people merely to attain a higher position, especially if that support can destroy his legitimacy among many of his collogues and followers—a legitimacy necessary to be a successful Shaykh of al-Azhar. In other words, Gomaa's anti-Coup Civilizational Islam circle must have made it hard for him to support the massacres, given that this circle had granted him a necessary extra-state legitimacy in the cultural field. Most intellectuals in this milieu are known for their criticism of the regime and opposition to the Coup: ʿImara, Mustafa, al-Shafiʿi, Muhammad Salim al-ʿAwwa, Tariq al-Bishri, and Saif Abdelfattah, among others. Indeed, Gomaa was aware of that and denied the accusations that he legitimized killing the protestors.[77] It is only with the leaks that Gomaa started publicly expressing that the protestors were not peaceful and deserved killing, even if he still stressed that he meant violent protestors and "terrorists in Sinai."[78]

This leads to the second explanation that can complement the first one: Gomaa did what he did because the state holds that which could destroy his legitimacy for everyone, not just opponents of the Coup. Two issues are relevant here: his multiple secret marriages and his past with Islamist political groups. I came across the former in an interview with a close associate of Gomaa, who expressed how he was shocked when a first-hand witness confirmed this information. Gomaa's marriages were widely discussed in newspapers when revolutionaries broke into the State Security headquarters after Mubarak's fall, leaking many secret documents about many Egyptian public figures.[79] One leaked "top secret" document, dated in 2006, confirms rumors that Gomaa had multiple polygamous relationships by finding the civil servant who made the marriage contract (*ma'dhūn*) and one of his former secret wives who also reported about ten other secret marriages that Gomaa had; State Security could find a few of these marriages in the Civil Status Authority's archives, dating to the 1990s.[80]

When asked by journalists, Gomaa said, "I absolutely do not pay attention to this as long as I did my duty in a way pleasing God and His Prophet. Thus, every morning, I forgive those who make accusations about my chastity"—an ambiguous answer that condemns the leaks but without denying it.[81] Note that this leak does not speak of any act contradicting Islamic or Egyptian law formally. Gomaa approves of non-conventional (*'urfī* or *misyār*) marriages.[82] Still, "ten secret marriages" could be a serious blow to Gomaa's moral legitimacy as a religious scholar, but especially as a Sufi (ascetic) shaykh or modern religious intellectual, the two images his legitimacy depended on for many of his followers. While multiple polygamous marriages might be normatively approved in certain communities, there are examples showing that this is not the case among many Egyptians.[83]

Other interviewees talked about another issue regarding Gomaa's past. His early connections with "extremists" might be another issue that the state can use against Gomaa, whose career is built on countering "extremism," which, for him, includes the Jihadis, Salafis, and, after the Coup, the MB. Almost all interviewees in Gomaa's circles spoke of Gomaa's intellectual transformation to the "Azharite way" (*al-manhaj*

al-Azharī) after being with a political Islamist group: Jihadis, Salafis, Hizb al-Tahrir, or the MB. The fact that he was arrested during that time is also widely reported. Some of my interviewees interpret these facts in a conspiratorial way: Gomaa became an agent working for Egyptian intelligence at that time. There is no way to verify these claims, however. But Gomaa himself reported, in his 2015 "The Extremists" TV program, that he knew Shukri Mustafa, the head of the jihadist group pejoratively known as al-Takfir wa-l-Hijra.[84] While Gomaa frames his talks with Mustafa as a debate between opponents, an interviewee told me that Gomaa had told them that he advised Mustafa to escape when the security services were searching for Mustafa and that a journalist published Gomaa's name with a list of people described as terrorists or extremists.

Gomaa's narrations from his youth also show his sincere engagement with the thought of Sayyid Qutb, the MB intellectual generally accused of providing the intellectual basis of modern jihadism. Gomaa asked his teachers about Qutb, and he met Qutb's disciples who embraced his ideas.[85] But Gomaa's association with the MB, beyond Qutb, is also well documented. The best example is his intimate connection with IIIT, which "was established under the tent of the MB," as Gomaa states, because some of its active members in Egypt were associated with the MB.[86] Gomaa was brought to IIIT by Jamal al-Din ʿAtiyya, an MB intellectual, while Muhammad al-Ghazali, the former MB member and senior Azharite *ʿālim*, was central to IIIT in Egypt. Gomaa is currently the editor of *Al-Muslim Al-Muʿāṣir*, the journal that ʿAtiyya started in the 1970s and had many MB-minded authors, like al-Qaradawi.[87]

Gomaa also edited a book written by the MB's Supreme Guide, ʿUmar al-Tilmisani, in the early 1970s; he also met another Supreme Guide, Mustafa Mashhur.[88] More telling, a non-Egyptian student of Gomaa in the late 1980s told me that Gomaa used to talk to them about Hasan al-Banna, the MB founder whom Gomaa currently rebukes, to the extent that Gomaa took them to visit his grave. While post-Coup Gomaa frames his connection with senior MB members in a way that denies any sympathy, Gomaa's official biography still lists MB-affiliated ʿulamaʾ as Gomaa's teachers like Abd al-Fattah Abu Ghudda, a Syrian MB leader, who is at the top of the list along with Gomaa's Sufi Shaykh,

and Abdullah ibn al-Siddiq al-Ghumari, the Moroccan scholar who spent eleven years in Nasser's prisons during the crackdown on the MB.[89] Gomaa also used to speak with fascination about Abdulhamid Kishk, the preacher famous for his anti-regime rhetoric.[90]

Given this history, it is possible that Gomaa, after the Coup, did not want the state to use his past against him at a time when the military took no-tolerance measures against its opponents, using the "terrorism" trope. It is possible that Gomaa is aware of other sensitive information that the state holds against him. Indeed, when Gomaa's remarks deviated from the Coup by denying his legitimization of killing the protestors, the state probably warned him by leaking his video directly the following day.[91] When he insisted that his remarks in the first leak were not about peaceful protests, his post-Rabaa lecture was also leaked, leaving no room for him to distance himself from the coup. He probably had two choices: either to support the Coup or openly oppose it.

All in all, two issues seem central to explaining Gomaa's pro-bloodshed extremism: his aspiration for religious leadership and his fear of the state's ability to destroy his religious legitimacy, both of which are connected. Gomaa's colleagues' repeated assertions regarding his dream to become the Shaykh al-Azahr can explain why Gomaa would side with the military, which renewed his post as a mufti in 2012, over the MB, many of whose members were critical of him, protested to depose him, and finally did not accept renewing his post as a mufti.[92] Gomaa's extreme pro-state stances, including supporting its massacres, could be understood as strategies to avoid revealing what could threaten his religious reputation.

Al-Tayyib: Defending al-Azhar

An emphasis on "Competing for True Islam" in the literature is relevant to al-Tayyib's politics. I argue that al-Tayyib's defense of al-Azhar and its traditionalism, his "True Islam," influences his political theology and practice. I have shown that al-Tayyib sometimes prioritized order and pragmatism over justice and speaking truth to power, and other times vice versa. This is understandable given Islamic law's diversity

of opinions on these political issues, a manifestation of its culture of ambiguity.[93] The question, then, is: *What made him choose one position over the other?* Two issues are relevant: his assessment of his ability to influence those in power to abide by ideals of justice and freedom and his political stances' potential impact on al-Azhar.

The fluctuation in al-Tayyib's critical tone toward the state seems to depend on his experience-based assessment of his own power: a very conservative "sense of limits" under Mubarak, a very broad "sense of limits" after the Uprising, and an increasingly tighter "sense of limits" after the Coup. Before becoming Shaykh al-Azhar, al-Tayyib was aware that al-Azhar was weak, not just vis-à-vis other religious currents but also the state. He knows this first-hand since his student years under Nasser and his experiences under Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, who seemed weak vis-à-vis the regime.[94] When al-Tayyib was asked whether al-Azhar or Mubarak's party was more important for Egypt, al-Tayyib refused to prioritize any of them, "for both can benefit each other," considering al-Azhar was the main beneficiary from its relationship with the party.[95] Mubarak's fall and the military's initial strategy to adopt a revolutionary facade was a real surprise for many actors, including al-Tayyib, whose experiences considered this unlikely, as seen in his remarks during the Uprising.

The Uprising granted al-Azhar unprecedented power in modern times, given that all parties supported al-Azhar for different reasons: support from the military against the revolutionaries (including the MB) and by secularists and Islamists against each other—an equation al-Tayyib utilized to the maximum for al-Azhar's independence.[96] Such experience of power can help us read al-Tayyib's highly critical tone during the Coup's early days. However, this conviction regarding his influence over those in power gradually waned as his reconciliation initiatives failed and massacres continued, especially the Rabaa Massacre, to which his response was less aggressive despite the rise in brutality.[97]

Al-Tayyib's concern for preserving and maximizing al-Azhar's power seems to be at the core of his political deliberation and stances. This claim is not just based on al-Tayyib's repeated emphasis on reviving al-Azhar's authority domestically and globally, but also on his

performance throughout the years.[98] Before the Uprising, al-Tayyib's strategy was to improve al-Azhar's education and establish a global Azharite network (like the World Association for al-Azhar Graduates). After the Uprising, al-Tayyib utilized the abovementioned centrality of al-Azhar to all political actors. Reviving the ASSA and electing the Shaykh al-Azhar was not absent in al-Tayyib's pre-Uprising discourse, but the Uprising seemed a perfect opportunity to implement it assertively.[99] Al-Tayyib revived the ASSA, chose its members, granted it the right to elect the Shaykh al-Azhar and the Grand Mufti, and got the 2012 Constitution to mention al-Azhar in the preamble, protect the Shaykh al-Azhar from dismissal, and grant al-Azhar the authority over religious affairs. This concern over al-Azhar's power is probably crucial to understanding al-Tayyib's ambivalent politics: antagonizing the state jeopardizes al-Azhar's resources, while complicity in the state's crimes jeopardizes al-Azhar's moral authority.[100]

Joining the Coup, in contradiction to the al-Azhar Declaration's emphasis on the ballot box, was a difficult decision. This is especially the case in light of al-Tayyib's anti-Coup colleagues' arguments during the deliberation process, and the fatwa al-Tayyib had just released forbidding militant revolts against a legitimate ruler.[101] Al-Tayyib, however, most probably believed that the Coup would succeed, given the military's backing, regional support, participation of representatives of diverse sectors of the society, and the rising anti-MB public opinion encouraged by all those actors. Antagonizing the Coup (self-described as a revolution), he might have reasoned, could result in aggressive measures against al-Azhar, similar to the reforms introduced by Nasser's 1952 Coup/Revolution, curtailing al-Azhar's resources and independence.[102] Indeed, al-Tayyib repeatedly attributed al-Azhar's weakness to Nasser's reforms.[103]

In addition to al-Tayyib's old tensions with the Salafis and MB, al-Azhar's conditions under the 2011-2012 interim military rule and 2012-2013 Morsi's year might have prompted him to prefer the Coup over Morsi's camp.[104] That is because al-Tayyib perceived the MB and Salafis as competitors who tried to infiltrate al-Azhar. Indeed, a few weeks after Mubarak's fall, al-Tayyib created a group of Azharites to

counter the anticipated "rise of Islamists," according to an interviewee invited to join the initial phase of these efforts. These efforts mostly culminated in creating the Office of al-Azhar Message, which aimed to create an Azharite network across Egypt and reach all sectors of society.[105]

On the other hand, the military was willing to grant al-Azhar all the independence it wanted to counter the new rising political power, the MB. One day before the first convening of the MB- and Salafi-dominated 2012 Parliament, the military issued the new al-Azhar Law that revived the ASSA.[106] The ASSA members that al-Tayyib chose were approved by the government one day before declaring Morsi a president.[107] Al-Azhar also had gained support from the pro-Coup secularists whose anti-MB orientation caused them to view al-Azhar as representing "moderate Islam" vis-à-vis the "extremist" MB or Salafis.[108]

To be sure, the MB- and Salafi-dominated (second) constituent assembly consolidated the gains of al-Azhar by considering it "an encompassing independent Islamic institution, with exclusive competence over its own affairs" and protecting its Shaykh from dismissal.[109] However, that was after heated discussions where al-Azhar representatives were assertive and refused to compromise.[110] Al-Azhar was actually granted only one seat in the first constituent assembly, which caused al-Azhar's withdrawal in protest.[111] The al-Tayyib-Morsi tensions are also relevant here (e.g., Morsi's plan to choose an Azharite Salafi as the Minister of Awqaf, the ṣukūk controversy, and the Rector Deputies dispute).[112] Dismissing al-Tayyib himself was even on the agenda of some Salafi and MB ʿulamaʾ —a demand that was strongly voiced after an incident in al-Azhar University two months before the Coup.[113] Also, two weeks before the Coup, a heated quarrel erupted between al-Tayyib and the pro-Morsi ʿālim Safwat Hijazi, who considered al-Tayyib's fatwa permitting peaceful protests in the context of anti-Morsi June 30 protests proof of al-Tayyib's allegiance to Mubarak's regime.[114]

Finally, al-Tayyib's support for other Arab uprisings should be read from the same perspective. He probably believed that since the Tunisian and the Egyptian Uprisings succeeded, other uprisings could too. In a context where al-Azhar's moral authority was questioned because

of al-Tayyib's remarks during the Egyptian Uprising, supporting these Uprisings consolidates al-Tayyib's claims that al-Azhar supports the people and, therefore, ensures its legitimacy at home and beyond. To summarize, al-Tayyib's political stances primarily depended on his assessment of different political stances' impact on al-Azhar's power.

Conclusion

Accounts of Egyptian ʿulamaʾ rightly recognize the stark difference between the Arab Spring politics of al-Qaradawi and Gomaa. Yet many internalized a categorical reading of the ʿulamaʾ's positions (either pro-revolution or pro-regime) rather than a continuum of political stances, and al-Tayyib's politics were equated with Gomaa's. This article establishes a critical qualitative difference between al-Tayyib and Gomaa regarding their relation to the state, non-state competitors, bloodshed, and moral motivation. Gomaa's Arab Spring politics can be seen as an effort to cater to those in power to protect his religious authority, either through struggles to attain official religious positions or by obstructing revealing information harmful to his religious legitimacy. On the other hand, protecting al-Azhar seemed central to al-Tayyib's Arab Spring politics, which fluctuated between accepting the status quo and being critical of those in power.

These conclusions are based on a careful reconstruction of the religiopolitical context to which the ʿulamaʾ were responding, chronologically recording their stances day by day during the Revolution's two years. Only with such meticulous empirical reconstruction can we appreciate the indeterminacy and critical nature of intellectuals' political deliberation, avoiding macrostructuralist explanations that reduce intellectuals' politics to structures (like the state) or inaccurate generalizations that deem intellectuals necessarily either idealist or interest-seeking beings. The two cases show how oppressive regimes infuse intellectuals' political deliberations with risk assessment. Yet responding to this risk (or *statist threat*) depends on each intellectual's moral conclusions. Al-Tayyib's response was more idealistic in its commitment against state violence and in defending his "True Islam" (al-Azhar's traditionalism),

which led him to compromise his political ideals of freedom and resistance. Gomaa's response, on the other hand, was interest-oriented. Understanding this, I have argued, requires knowing the type of statist threats on which Gomaa has been deliberating: rather than a security threat (e.g., arrest), he faced a *statist legitimacy threat* that could destroy his credibility as an *ʿālim*. Gomaa eventually followed the state line.

My findings regarding Gomaa may appear extreme, as extreme as his politics have proved to be. Yet these "extreme" findings are characteristic of politically oppressive contexts in which everyday threats are imposed on intellectuals. The contemporary Egyptian state is accustomed to using people's private lives to "control" them, like punishing the Egyptian director Khaled Youssef's critical stance on the 2019 constitutional amendments by leaking videos regarding his private life.[115] The makers of the recent Cairo Conspiracy movie, which tackles al-Azhar-state relations, reached a similar conclusion.

Detailing such findings concerning Gomaa is not an easy task, however. Politically, an author or filmmaker can be subject to serious state repression transnationally or within borders by the regimes with which Gomaa allies himself. The ethical dilemmas are also challenging since an honest explanation of some intellectuals' politics requires discussing information about their private lives that will never be empty of contradictions—contradictions that should have remained private without having been weaponized against them by the state in the first place. Intellectuals are under serious threats, which prompts us to consider the state of freedom of speech in our times. The threats are both security threats, like Jamal Khashoggi's assasination, and legitimacy threats, that may lead to a a moral assasination likened to social death.[116]

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Rethinking the Concept of *Fiṭra:* Natural Disposition, Reason and Conscience

SYAMSUDDIN ARIF

Abstract

Little attention has been given to the role of innate human nature or *fiṭra* in the motivation behind human action. This

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Syamsuddin Arif is Associate Professor of Islamic Philosophy at Darussalam University (UNIDA) Gontor Ponorogo Indonesia. He has served as Executive Director of INSISTS Jakarta (2015-2017) and Associate Professor in the Center for Advanced Studies on Islam, Science and Civilisation at the University of Technology Malaysia (2012-2015). He has previously taught at the International Islamic University Malaysia (2007-2012), and held Visiting Research Fellowship at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, UK (2017-2018). He received his M.A. (1999) and Ph.D. (2004) from the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) Kuala Lumpur, and has spent four years (2003-2007) at the Orientalisches Seminar, Johann Wolfgang-Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany.

article examines the views of contemporary Western thinkers to creatively rethink the concept of *fiṭra*, not only from a theological perspective but also a scientific perspective. Drawing upon Islamic scholarship and previous research on the subject that explore the wide spectrum of connotations couched in the Islamic term *fiṭra* in comparison with Western perspectives, this study offers a fresh look at, and approach to, the concept of human disposition or primordial nature, giving special attention to the biological, epistemological, and ethical dimensions, while most studies of *fiṭra* focus mainly on the theological and spiritual sides. It is hoped that this conceptual analysis will serve as a stepping stone towards a more nuanced understanding of *fiṭra* not only as (i) a natural tendency to act or think in a particular way, but also as (ii) the religious instinct, (iii) the power of the mind to think and understand in a logical way, and (iv) the inner voice or conscience of what is right and wrong in one's conduct or motives that drives the individual towards right action.

Contemporary philosophers of action discussing human agency have usually focused on what distinguishes action from event, exploring how different notions of agency, intention, and volition have affected our understanding of mental causation, moral responsibility, decision theory, and criminal liability, to name but a few.[1] Little attention, if any, has been given to the importance of human natural disposition, reason, and conscience, let alone the role each of these plays in motivating or preventing an action. This article suggests that the Islamic concept of *fiṭra* offers contemporary philosophers of action valuable resources to creatively rethink current conceptions of human nature within the theory of human agency. Drawing upon Islamic scholarship and previous research on the subject,[2] it seeks to reveal not only the wide spectrum of connotations couched in the Arabic term *fiṭra* in comparison with Western perspectives but also the conceptual content and explanatory

significance of the multi-layered notion of *fiṭra* bearing upon the nature and scope of human agency.

Specifically, this article submits that (a) there is an inextricable link between human *fiṭra* and human agency; (b) *fiṭra* is natural disposition with multiple dimensions: biological (physical), theological (spiritual), ethical (moral), and intellectual (epistemological); and (c) a comprehensive account of *fiṭra* will contribute to a better understanding of human agency. It is hoped that this article will serve as a stepping stone towards a more nuanced understanding of *fiṭra* not only as (i) a natural tendency to act or behave in a particular way, but also as (ii) the religious instinct, (iii) the power of the mind to think and understand in a logical way, and (iv) the inner voice or conscience of what is right and wrong in one's conduct or motives that drives an individual human being towards right action.

Etymology of *Fiṭra*

The Arabic term *fiṭra* is one of the most frequently discussed subjects in Islamic thought and has been variously translated as 'human nature', 'natural disposition', 'natural reason', or simply as 'instinct'.[3] Muslim authorities on Qur'anic exegesis (*mufassirūn*), scholars of Islamic law (*fuqahā'*), philosophers (*falāsifah*), theologians (*mutakallimūn*), and Sufis have all associated different terminologies with *fiṭra* and specified the use of the term differently depending on context. Arabic lexicographers present quite a wide-ranging and interrelated meaning of its triliteral root *f-ṭ-r* namely, to split, to cleave, to crack, and bring forth, to produce, and to create. When applied to objects such as camel, clay or dough, the verb *faṭara* signifies milking, pressing and squeezing in order to release or bring out something. In the Holy Qur'an, it appears eight times in the sense of "create" or "constitute" (e.g., 6:79 and 17:51), while its active participle form is used six times to describe God as the "creator" (*fāṭir*) of the heavens and the earth (e.g., 6:14 and 12:101). Al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī defines *fiṭra* as the natural disposition to accept religion, knowledge and morality (*al-jibillah al-mutahayyi'ah li-qabūl al-dīn wa-al-ʿilm wa-al-akhlāq*), while his predecessor al-Ghazālī talks of some "initial

original disposition" (*al-fiṭra al-aṣliyya*) of human beings that is universal and common to all, regardless of race, gender, or culture.[4]

In Islamic legal (*fiqh*) literature, the term *fiṭra* is used in two senses. First, it is used to signify the set of practices observed by the earlier prophets and their people, which the Prophet Muḥammad followed and prescribed for his community as well. A widely known tradition transmitted by Muslim mentions no less than ten recommended habits, namely, (i) trimming the moustache, (ii) keeping the beard, (iii) using the tooth-stick (*siwāk*), (iv) snuffing water in the nose, (v) pairing the nails, (vi) washing the finger joints, (vii) pulling out the hairs of the armpits, (viii) shaving the pubic hair, (ix) cleaning the private parts, and (x) rinsing the mouth.[5] All these practices, called *sunan al-fiṭra* ('practices of the natural state of man') should be observed because the Devil is believed to take up his abode in the dirty areas of human body. According to one ḥadīth, these observances are enjoined every forty days, while another ḥadīth says it should be performed every two weeks. It is reported that the Prophet used to pair his nails on Friday before going out to perform the Friday prayer and Abraham is said to have been the first person in humanity who pared his nails.[6] In the second sense, the term *fiṭra* is used to denote the mandatory charity at the end of Ramaḍān imposed on every Muslim, whether freeman or slave, male or female.[7]

1. Biological *Fiṭra*

In spite of its varying and seemingly unrelated meanings, the Arab philologists agree on the usage of *fiṭra* as a technical term in the context of Islamic religious discourse to mean "the natural constitution with which a child is created in his mother's womb" (*al-khilqah allatī yukhlaqu ʿalayhā al-mawlūd fī baṭni ummihi*).[8] This is what I call the 'biological *fiṭra*', which comprises not only anatomical features but also the physiological and psychological traits, instincts and impulses, appetites and lust, needs and abilities common to all human beings, although we do not concur with the Darwinists' claim about the evolution of *homo sapiens* (the 'knowing man') and other related species from the allegedly last common ancestor with chimpanzees and other great apes.[9] Without a

biological *fiṭra* that readies them for the world, living beings would not stand as good a chance of surviving. An animal that was unable, for example, to grasp critical cause-effect relationships in its environment would fare poorly in life's tough competition. In this view, the human mind at birth is neither a blank slate, as some radical empiricists want us to believe, nor is it filled with knowledge as Plato imagined. The truth lies somewhere in between; we are born ready to explore the world with a mind equipped with basic instincts and skills necessary for survival.

Biological *fiṭra* refers to the physical constitution of the human being with all the components (i.e. body parts such as the blood, heart, brain, etc.) that enables them to act or behave 'mechanically', as it were, but also imposes some limitations upon them. It is what Muslim scholars like al-Fīrūzābādī and al-Jurjānī refer to as *khilqah* and *jibillah* in Arabic, meaning something so ingrained and firmly fixed in the self that it cannot be altered, resisted or eliminated without adverse effects (damage, dysfunction, tension, impairment, failure etc.). Thus, for example, delaying the call of one's biological *fiṭra* for too long or making a habit of not relieving oneself in the toilet often enough may lead to a urinary tract infection. The God-created biological *fiṭra* manifests itself in the endocrine system which controls our body chemistry, releases and sends hormones through the bloodstream, and the nervous system responsible for monitoring the outside world, governing our movements, sense perception, memory and cognition, consciousness and emotions. It is part of our biological *fiṭra* to be curious, to experience hunger (whether due to an empty stomach or a high level of glucose in the blood), to feel sleepy, to forget, or to seek attention, to love and enjoy the company of others. Biological *fiṭra* also sets limits to what we can and cannot do, take or bear. For example, we can only hear sounds ranging from 20 to 20,000 Hz (*herz*), so that all sounds below the limit of human ears cannot be heard except with some hearing equipment or audio amplifier, while any loud sound above the audible range can cause irritation and even damage to the ears.[10]

Biological *fiṭra* corresponds to what modern psychology calls 'instinct', defined as "the inherent tendency of a living organism to exhibit a particular complex pattern of behavior".[11] According to psychologist

Granville Stanley Hall, basic instincts such as the will to live or survive, love of offspring, fear and anger, jealousy, attachments, memory, attention, senses, knowledge of locality and home-making instincts are common across animals and humans alike. Instincts are said to be nature's solutions to particular survival challenges and reproductive problems, which explains why animals and humans alike tend to flock and cooperate, seek pleasure, mate and beget.[12] Instinctive behaviors are manifestations of innate biological factors, based neither upon learning nor prior experience. It is the human instinct of love and compassion that accounts for parenting care, voluntary social service and solidarity as well as attraction to another individual of the opposite sex. In the same vein, the instinct of pugnacity provides protection against threats and dangers, and thereby produces a variety of self-assertive impulses, such as revenge, rivalry, warfare and moral indignation, which, in turn, lead to the emergence of morality and law. Researchers have also associated instinct with language development, decision making, patterning, numbers, music and even computing.[13] Instinct is acknowledged as a driving force of civilization in human and non-human animals.[14]

2. Theological *Fiṭra*

Most scholarly discussions of *fiṭra* take as their point of departure the Qur'anic verse (30:30), which reads: "So set your face toward the true religion, as you incline naturally towards Truth in accordance with the natural constitution of God (*fiṭra Allāh*) in which He created humans (*faṭara al-nās 'alayhā*); there is no alteration in God's creation" (30:30). Many of the early Muslim commentators argue that the term *fiṭra* in this verse denotes the sound nature of human being, by which an individual is inclined towards belief in the existence of a Supreme Being that is controlling the destiny of man. It is interpreted as meaning that all types of created beings have their own nature that is permanent and all the same in all parts of the world.

The fifth century linguist al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī asserts that the phrase *fiṭra Allāh* in this context refers to the innate potential for faith which God has implanted in the souls of all individuals (*mā rakaza fīhi min*

quwwatihi ʿalā maʿrifat al-īmān).[15] We call this 'theological *fiṭra*', which enables all living beings to know God, their Creator. It is the spiritual intelligence instilled in all creatures that allows them to recognize God as the true Maker, Controller and Sustainer of all that exists in the universe, who alone deserves worship, obedience and glorification. Consequently, 'theological *fiṭra'* is none other than the natural tendency to embrace *islām* or become *muslim* in the sense of submitting oneself to the will and law of God, as explicitly stated in the Qur'an (3:83): "All creatures in the heavens and on earth have, willingly or unwillingly, submitted (*aslama*) to Him, and to Him shall they all be returned".

This scriptural base has been enriched by a well-known Prophetic tradition which appears in several variants in the Sunnī ḥadīth collections, stating that everyone is born a Muslim and that Islam is the universal religion of birth. The variants state: (i) "Every child is born in the natural state (*kullu mawlūd yūladu ʿalā al-fiṭra*); (ii) "Every human being is given birth to by his mother according to the original disposition (*kullu insān taliduhu ummuhu ʿalā al-fiṭra*). It is his parents who later turn him into a Jew, a Christian, or a Zoroastrian" (*wa abawāhu baʿdu yuhawwidānihi wa yunaṣṣirānihi wa yumajjisānihi*); (iii) "There is no child born except that he is born with the natural constitution (*mā min mawlūd illā yūladu ʿalā al-fiṭra),* then his parents make him into a Jew or a Christian—just as camels normally beget sound calves (*kamā tuntiju al-ibil jamʿāʾ*); do you find any among them that are maimed?" [16] That *fiṭra* in this theological sense refers to the religion of Islam is attested in another tradition in which it is related that the Prophet taught a man to repeat certain words when lying down to sleep, and said: "Then if you die that same night, you die upon the true religion (*fa-in mitta, mitta ʿalā al-fiṭra*)."[17]

Drawing on these resources, Muslim writers developed the notion of *fiṭra* as a base disposition for religious belief, or indeed, as some would argue the point more thickly, for the Islamic faith. The religious *fiṭra* in the sense of natural faith in God was exemplified in the figure of the Prophet Abraham who, in his search for God, gazed at the stars, the moon, and the sun, wondering which one of these was God, and when he saw that all of them set, he said, "I do not adore things that set". So,

he looked beyond the created order and concluded that God cannot be one of those transient things. Abraham was guided from the idol worship of his people to the knowledge of God by his innate human capacity (*fiṭra*) to know God, saying that "I turn my face to Him who created the heavens and the earth, being righteous, I am not positing any deities besides Him" (6: 77-79). In other words, he was able to see, through the "light of reason" (*lumen rationis*), that there must be a God, a Supreme Being who is eternal, all-powerful, and different from this visible world. Abraham's natural renunciation of false gods and his turning away (i.e., being *ḥanīf*) from false religions is an expression of *fiṭra*. Indeed, the majority of Muslim exegetes interpret the word *ḥanīf* as someone who lived according to rules and convictions that are similar to the religion of all prophets. Thus, the Qur'an calls Abraham *ḥanīfan musliman* (3:67), a righteous person who submitted to the true God.

Despite the atheists' dismissal of religion as a mere psychological invention –born out of fear and confusion – to help us cope with the struggles of life and comfort us in the wake of misfortune, or give us strength in facing the certainty of death, belief in God has never vanished. All human societies are known to possess recognizably religious beliefs and practices. Even today religion continues to hold sway in societies not only in Asia but also in North America. Many sociologists are compelled to abandon the so-called 'secularization thesis' that predicted the decline, and eventual disappearance, of religion with the onset of modernity. By contrast, many contemporary biologists assert without qualm that a religious instinct is embedded as much in our genes as in our culture. For example, geneticist Francis Collins, the former director of the National Institutes of Health and leader of the Human Genome Project, as well as neurologist Andrew Newberg, contend that "the need for God" is implanted in the structure of the human brain, which explains why we have always longed to connect with something larger than ourselves. A similar conclusion was reached by Barbara Hagerty whose interviews with numerous neuroscientists and geneticists have revealed that an orientation towards spiritual transcendence is somehow hard-wired into the human brain.[18] Elsewhere, Huston Smith, a theist, and Henry Rosemont, an atheist, in a recent dialogue have come to

a concurring statement that religious instinct is present in all human societies all over the world in the same way that "universal grammar" is found in all humans, although they disagree about its ontological implications, that is, whether it constitutes a proof for the existence of God.[19] From this vantage point, it is safe to say that *fiṭra* can be understood as the innate psychological impulse for religion existing within the human spirit.[20]

In the Islamic intellectual tradition, several thinkers are known to have used *fiṭra* as an argument in their proof for the existence of God. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, for example, argues that God's existence needs no further proofs because belief in God is already instilled in the human nature and attested in the numerous verses of the Qurʾān *(fī fiṭrat al-insān wa-shawāhid al-Qurʾān mā yughnī ʿan iqāmat al-burhān).*[21] In a similar fashion, Ibn Taymiyyah considers human nature as a sufficient proof of God's existence. "The acknowledgement and recognition of God, the Creator," he declares, "is placed in the hearts of all humans and jinn" *(aṣl al-iqrār bi-al-ṣāniʿ wa-al-iʿtirāf bi-hi mustaqirr fī qulūb jamīʿ al-ins wa-al-jinn).*[22] In his view, rational arguments for God such as those adduced by theologians and philosophers are unnecessary, since the best method for proving the existence of God and the creation of the world is the natural method (*al-tarīqah al-fiṭriyyah*) of the Qurʾan. Human knowledge of God is primarily through, and because of, their predisposition to faith which is the result of their primordial covenant with God as mentioned in the Qurʾan 7: 172, "And when thy Lord brings forth their offspring from the loins of the children of Adam, He calls upon them to bear witnesses about themselves: 'Am I not your Lord?', they said in reply, 'Yea, indeed we do bear witness thereto.' Lest you would say on the day of resurrection, 'Verily we were unaware of this.'"[23]

It is worth noting in this context, for the sake of comparison, that the innate ability of humans to recognize their Creator was also pointed out by a number of Western thinkers. The American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce maintains that a vague belief in God is instinctive for human beings, and an "argument for the reality of God" is not impossible to construct.[24] In the early modern era, the leading Christian Reformist Martin Luther and his contemporary Johannes Calvin also had a similar opinion. Luther posits

knowledge of God's existence as innate to human nature, and he rejects rational philosophical proofs for the existence of God as unnecessary and misguided. Belief in God, in his view, is inscribed in humans spiritually: *die natürliche Erkenntnis Gottes sind in des Menschen Herz eingeprägt; de Deo notitiae sunt naturaliter inscriptae in prima creatione.*[25] Since God has rightly placed beliefs in human hearts, there is no need for rational argumentation and logical deductions in order to prove the existence of God.[26] Luther distinguishes between two kinds of knowledge about God: the general and the specific. General knowledge of God is innate and therefore possessed by all humans, whereas the specific knowledge of God is acquired through piety.[27] By the same token Calvin maintains that "there is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God Himself has instilled in all men a certain understanding of His Divine Majesty."[28]

3. Epistemological *Fiṭra*

The third dimension of *fiṭra* has to do with cognition and reasoning. Muslim thinkers across disciplines seem to agree on the epistemological significance of *fiṭra*. Ibn Sīnā, for instance, says that primary concepts (*al-maʿqūlāt al-badīhiyyah*) such as 'being' or existence and unity are understood immediately because their meanings are imprinted in the soul (*maʿānīhā tartasimu fī al-nafs*).[29] The same holds true for axioms such as 'the whole is bigger than the part' and 'one and the same thing cannot be both affirmed and denied at the same time', the truth of which is known by nature (*gharīziyyan*). He also speaks about a class of premises such as 'every four is an even number' which relies on a syllogism whose middle term is known through natural intelligence (*fiṭra*) and not acquired by means of learning or instruction.[30] In his psychology, *fiṭra* is said to consist of necessary judgements that are known through sense perception and shared by all human beings, regardless of race, culture or religion. Even though the judgements of *fiṭra* cannot be doubted within the realm of sense perception, they are, in Ibn Sīnā's view, not all true. This is so because of limitations in the estimative faculty (*wahm*), an

internal sense of the animal soul that perceives connotations in things not apparent merely from their physical forms. Thus, when a sheep perceives danger in a wolf, for example, that perception arises apart from the wolf's mere form. Consequently, according to Ibn Sīnā, some judgements of *fiṭra* that derive from the faculty of estimation (*wahm*) are false, in which case the true judgement must be obtained from the intellect. For example, the estimative faculty judges incorrectly that all existent things necessarily occupy space, whereas the intellect judges correctly that some existents do not occupy space (for example, an immaterial being such as God). Thus, the intellect is required to prevent *fiṭra* from making false judgements and corrupting true knowledge.[31] In his own words:

> The meaning of *fiṭra* is that one should imagine oneself as having come to the world all at once as an adult endowed with intellect, except that he has never heard any opinion, never believed in any doctrine, never associated with any religious community, and never known any government, but has experienced the objects of sense and taken from them images. Then he submits something from among them to his mind and raises a doubt about it. If he is able to doubt it, then his *fiṭra* does not attest to it; but if he is not able to doubt it, then it is something which his *fiṭra* imposes. But not everything which the human *fiṭra* imposes is true, but many of them are false. True is only the *fiṭra* of the faculty called 'intellect' … [Sometimes the *fiṭra* of estimation makes wrong judgments] and it is known that this *fiṭra* is false and the reason for it is that this is the natural operation of a faculty (*jibillat quwwatin*) that conceptualizes things only as objects of sensation (*ʿalā naḥw al-maḥsūs).*[32]

Ibn Sīnā employs the notion of *fiṭra* as natural intelligence, not only in connection with the mind's acknowledgment of the truth of primary and axiomatic propositions, but also with those which have their syllogisms built in (*al-qaḍāyā allatī qiyāsātuhā maʿa-hā*) or constructed through the natural operation of the mind (*muqaddamah fiṭriyyat al-qiyās*).[33] Primary propositions are those made necessary by the intellect alone through its

essence and natural disposition (*li-dhātihi wa-li-gharīzatihi*), not through any external cause; for no sooner does the intellect truly form the concept of the terms [of these propositions] than it acknowledges its truth.[34] From the illustration he gives it becomes clear that *fiṭra* is that which a person cannot doubt; it is all that is left in their minds when people are stripped of their knowledge, their eyesight, and their hearing.

A different concept of epistemological *fiṭra* is presented by Ibn Taymiyyah, for whom *fiṭra* is the sound nature by which an individual intuitively knows what is true and what is false. According to him, there exists within human nature the knowledge of truth and its attestation, as well as the recognition of falsehood and its rejection. It is something that God has molded initially (*khalaqa ʿibādahu ʿalā al-fiṭra allatī fī-hā maʿrifat al-ḥaqq wa-al-taṣdīq bi-hi wa-maʿrifat al-bāṭil wa-al-takdhīb bi-hi*), even though it may later be contaminated or spoiled.[35] For Ibn Taymiyyah, this inborn knowledge includes necessary (*ḍarūrī*), primary (*awwalī*), a priori (*badīhī*), and certainly true (*yaqīnī*) propositions, which he describes as knowledge that depends neither on discursive reasoning nor on demonstration; rather, it constitutes the very premises and axioms upon which apodeictic proofs are built.[36] This is why he considers *fiṭra* to be synonymous with *ʿaql* (reason) and *gharīzah* (instinct) by which humans conceive truths.[37] In his view, individuals with a sound *fiṭra* (*al-fiṭra al-salīmah*) can easily discern valid premises and arguments from invalid ones, since God has made the human *fiṭra* predisposed to the apprehension and cognition of the realities of things.[38]

Apart from denoting innate knowledge that comprises primary concepts or mental categories and primary propositions, epistemological *fiṭra* signifies that which Robert T. Pennock calls the human instinct for truth.[39] As Aristotle has noted in the first book of his *Metaphysics*, all human beings by nature desire to know (Πάντες ἄνθρωποι τοῦ εἰδέναι ὀρέγονται φύσει).[40] There exists within us an urge to know the truth, to learn things we did not already know before, or to discover what has been a secret, hidden, missing or shrouded in mystery. Some have labelled it the 'thirst for information', which explains children's natural curiosity and eagerness to explore everything around them, as well as adults' need for news about people, things or events around them.[41]

Epistemological *fiṭra* therefore accounts for curiosity which, according to Pennock, is the most idiosyncratic and the most characteristic of the scientific virtues, since science is better characterized as a series of questions pursued by inquisitive minds that just cannot stop wondering what or why.[42] An instructive case in point is that of Charles Darwin who wrote that he felt within himself "an instinct for truth, or knowledge or discovery" that was "of the same nature as the instinct of virtue", and that "our having such an instinct is reason enough for scientific researches without any practical results ever ensuing from them."[43]

Moreover, the instinct for truth also predisposes human beings to favor honesty and truthfulness over hypocrisy and deceit. Even liars hate liars, and certainly do not like to be fooled or cheated. Interestingly, due to this epistemological *fiṭra,* humans are gullible and prone to deception. Most of us tend to trust others and believe they are telling the truth. We can be so cognitively overwhelmed, and then irrationally convinced, by emotional displays and logically fallacious arguments. However, this *fiṭra* also enables us to detect falsehood, uncover scams, fraud, and cover-ups of all kinds. This natural inclination for truth explains why children are sensitive to lying and deception, while adults despise lies. Researchers have found that although children are capable of lying, many fail to conceal their lies or maintain consistency between the lie and subsequent statements. Their natural tendency (*fiṭra*) to speak the truth overrides the pressure to tell lies regardless of risk or benefit, causing them to revert to the original predisposition to answer truthfully when they are interrogated—a phenomenon referred to by psychologists as the breakdown or loss of 'semantic leakage control'.[44] One of the reasons why they revert to honesty is that telling lies, whether to avoid punishment, to gain some profit, or just to bolster their status, actually makes them internally uncomfortable. Deep down, we all know and understand that lying is wrong. This brings us to the next aspect human *fiṭra*: conscience.

4. Ethical or Moral *Fiṭra*

Perhaps the most important of all is what we might call the ethical or moral *fiṭra*, by which human beings know what is right and wrong, good

and evil. It is something within us that acts as an internal judge of the worth of all our actions, and influences how we behave by making us experience guilt and shame when we do wrong. This moral *fiṭra* is analogous to the Greek concept of *suneídēsis* (**συνείδησις**) and the medieval Latin *conscientia* in many respects, both of which carry a double meaning of apprehension and awareness, which are still preserved in the French *conscience* and the German *Bewußtsein.* Indeed, in the Middle Ages, conscience was regarded less as a faculty than as an aspect of practical reason closely linked to ethical virtues. It was not until the early modern period that conscience came to be increasingly viewed as an aspect of the soul that functioned as the God-given guide and judge for distinguishing between what is morally good and bad, prompting the individual to choose the former and avoid the latter, commending the one, condemning the other. In our times, with the rise of professional psychology, conscience come to be regarded as a faculty of the human mind on a par with the intellect, will, and memory. Its principal functions are to represent to the individual the universal laws of moral behavior, apply them in specific cases, and punish the individual for going against them. Conscience serves as a whistle blower when humans cross moral lines. Contemporary psychologists label it the 'moral punishment instinct'.[45]

In the Islamic tradition, there is a saying attributed to the Prophet concerning ethical or moral *fiṭra.* As reported by al-Nawwās ibn Samʿān, the Prophet once said, "Piety is good manners, and sin is that which causes discomfort in your innerself (*al-ithmu mā ḥāka fī nafsika*) and you do not want people to know it (*wa-karihta an yaṭṭaliʿa ʿalayhi al-nās*)".[46] In another ḥadīth, Wābiṣah ibn Maʿbad reported that during his visit he was asked by the Prophet, "Have you come to inquire about piety?", to which he replied in the affirmative. Then the Prophet said, "Ask your heart regarding it. Piety is that which contents the soul and comforts the heart (*al-birr mā iṭmaʾannat ilayhi al-nafs wa-iṭmaʾanna ilayhi al-qalb*), and sin is that which raises doubts and disturbs the heart (*taraddada fī al-ṣadr*), even if people pronounce it lawful and give you verdicts on such matters again and again".[47] From these Prophetic traditions we can infer that apart from being a breach of the laws and norms laid down by religion, there is a psychological aspect of sin as wrongdoing. Sin is that

which is done against one's conscience, resulting in disorder, disharmony and disturbance in the soul of its perpetrator. Besides being a violation of the rights of others (i.e., that of fellow creatures and the rights of God), sin is a moral evil. Sin is wrongdoing and injustice against oneself. On the verge of doing it, the individual normally shakes as he hesitates and suspects it may not be the right thing to do. In the aftermath of it, a deep sense of guilt, shame and regret emerge, thereby inflicting psychological pain and suffering. This is why no sinner is happy on the inside and in the Afterlife, no matter how hard they may try to conceal their misery.

Furthermore, ethical *fiṭra* explains so-called 'altruistic behavior', whereby people choose to help others simply out of a desire to help, not because they feel obligated to out of duty, loyalty, or religious reasons. Sometimes they do so at a cost to themselves or at the expense of their own lives. Altruistic behavior is common throughout the animal kingdom. Unselfish behavior by an animal that may be to its disadvantage but that benefits others of its species is an outward manifestation of ethical *fiṭra.* Indeed, many human beings are willing to make sacrifices for the happiness and welfare of other people, not because of, but in spite of, rewards and punishments. We show concern and give help not only to relatives and friends, but also to strangers. All this is driven by the guiding force in human behavior which Sigmund Freud calls the *Super Ego,* otherwise labelled in contemporary psychology as the 'compassionate instinct' as well as the 'forgiveness instinct'.[48]

According to Freud, human personality (i.e., soul or psyche) is comprised of three forces or energies, each of which responsible for specific functions: the *id,* the *ego,* and the *superego.* The *id* consists of the basic urges for food, water, affection and sex. The *id* is the biological *fiṭra* of human beings, comprising both the instinct for life *(Eros)* and the instinct of death *(Thanatos).* The life instinct is said to be responsible for the need for food, love and sex, which are necessary for survival, cooperation and reproduction, whereas the death instinct is a subconscious drive towards aggression, violence and destruction. The *id* always seeks gratification and operates on a 'pleasure principle'. When the *id* is not satisfied, tension occurs. It is the task of the second force, the *ego,* to advise the *id* not indulge its craving for everything, as it may not be the effective way of

maintaining life. The *ego* thus operates on the 'reality principle', mediating between the demands of reality and the desires of the *id*. The *ego* corresponds to what is called the rational *fiṭra*, which enables a person to ponder carefully before making any decision, inference or judgment. Allegorically, the *ego* may be compared to a rider on the horse that is the *id*. While it derives its energies from the *id*, the *ego* must control and direct the *id*. Finally, there is the *superego* which carries society's moral values, and acts like a supervisor to both the *id* and *the ego*. It is the one which makes us feel uncomfortable when we do other than we should. The *superego* produces in us the painful feelings of disgrace or worthlessness and remorse when we have done something improper, offensive, immoral or illegal, or when we fail to do something that we are responsible for.[49] Thus the *superego* is equivalent to conscience, which in turn is identical to 'moral *fiṭra*', a little voice inside a person reminding oneself what is right and wrong.

5. Corruption of Natural Disposition (*Fasād al-Fiṭra*)

No one is born a liar or murderer, saint or sinner, joker or philosopher. As declared by the Prophet in the famous ḥadīth, every child is born in the natural state of *fiṭra*. In their initial, natural state, all children are innocent and naïve, unbiased and indifferent to virtues and vices. It is the environment and society – including parents, relatives, friends, teachers and associates (human as well as nonhuman satans), that turn them into good or bad persons, exert their influence on human thoughts and actions, and therefore alter or spoil their *fiṭra*. Although there is disagreement among Muslim scholars concerning the mutability of *fiṭra*,[50] there is no dispute regarding the role of Satan in obstructing the acts of human beings or interfering in their daily affairs.

Indeed, in the Islamic as well as the Judeo-Christian tradition, the role of the Devil (*Iblīs*) or Satan (*Shayṭān*) in inciting human beings to disobedience, wickedness and all sorts of evil is always underscored. The Devil or Satan is said to be the first creature to disobey God, and therefore he was cursed and expelled from Paradise. Although he was condemned to eternal punishment in Hell, he was set free until Judgment Day as a

result of his double plea for the postponement of his punishment and for license to lead humans astray (7: 16-22). Satan is said to be the force of malevolence which partly contributes to the corruption of human *fiṭra*.[51] Various sins and crimes committed by humans are the result of following in Satan's footsteps (*ittabaʿū khuṭuwāt al-Shayṭān*) and their falling prey to his whisperings (*waswās*) and temptations. Satan incites humans to heresy, apostasy, and idolatry; he urges avarice, enmity, and conflict;[52] he leads them to ignore their duty to God and to break His law. For his antagonistic role Satan is described in the Qur'an as the 'plain enemy' of humanity (7:22, 17:53 and 43:62). Nevertheless, even though Satan was given permission by God to tempt and deceive human beings, and he vowed to do so by all means available, human beings remain free to choose between good and evil. Satan himself admits that he has no authority over them, and that his job is simply to seduce them as he did with Adam, and they have the ability to resist his insinuations. Thus, no one can excuse himself by arguing that Satan made him do it, for Satan has the power only to tempt and invite, never to compel and coerce.[53]

The close association of Satan with human beings and his impact on human thought and behavior is attested in a well-known ḥadīth of the Prophet which says that Satan runs through the blood vessels of human beings (*inna al-Shayṭān yajrī majrā al-dam*).[54] Even the Prophet, whose interior has been cleansed, is not exempt from such attachment; his only advantage is that, with God's help, the Satan attached to his body was converted to Islam and therefore was a force only for good in his life. In other words, the Prophet was immune to Satanic interference. As he reportedly declared, "There is no one among you who does not have a spirit (*jinn)* as his companion placed in charge of him." They said, 'What about you, O messenger of God?' He said, 'Even me, except that God came to my assistance against him and he has become Muslim. Now he only urges me to good."[55] In the case of ordinary people like ourselves, therefore, it is even harder to resist the Satanic forces that some have mistaken for what is otherwise called the 'killer instinct'.[56]

Besides affecting one's moral integrity, corruption of one's *fiṭra* also leads to cognitive failure. As noted by Ibn Sīnā in his treatise on logic, while most human beings would have no difficulty grasping rational

truths such as axiomatic propositions or first principles, some people cannot apprehend, or simply reject the truth of such propositions because of their underdeveloped intelligence, defective nature (*naqṣ fī fiṭratihi*), mental disability, and old age, or due to confusion with contrary views and certain misconceptions in their minds.[57] Along the same lines, Ibn Taymiyyah mentions a number of factors that often lead to the contamination, corruption or distortion of *fiṭra:* (i) following one's personal whims (*hawā*), (ii) harboring personal interests (*gharaḍ*), biases or prejudices; (iii) blind imitation (*taqlīd*) or uncritical acceptance of inherited beliefs (*iʿtiqādāt mawrūthah*); and (iv) entertaining conjecture (*ẓann*) and doubts (*shubuhāt*).[58] Unless one's *fiṭra* is purged of these deficiencies it cannot function properly. Error and confusion, as well as misjudgment and misconduct are due to these factors, apart from Satanic influences. Ibn Taymiyyah compares human nature to a newborn's instinct for its mother's milk. The newborn will drink it if unimpeded; that is, it will actualize the potentiality of its instinct to drink.[59]

In Ibn Taymiyyah's view, human nature, if it is in sound condition (*al-fiṭra al-salīmah*),[60] will "necessarily give witness, due to its very essence and by the necessity of its natural reasoning, to the existence of a Creator who is ever-knowing, omnipotent, and wise", as pointed out in many Qur'anic verses such as 14:10, "Can there be any doubt about God, the Originator of the heavens and the earth?", and 43:87, "And if you ask them as to who it is that has created them, they are sure to answer, 'God!'. How perverted then are their minds." Moreover, even if human *fiṭra* were not sensitive to God's existence during happy times, it would certainly be sensitive during difficult times. Thus, the Qur'anic verse, 17:67, "And when danger befalls you at sea, all those that you are wont to invoke forsake you, except Him." If human *fiṭra* is not spoiled, man would certainly find in it the love of God, since the source of knowledge of God is the *fiṭra*-based love of God *(maḥabbat Allāh).*[61] It is the distorted *fiṭra* that leads a person to error and unbelief. Only when *fiṭra* is cleansed of its carnal desires (*shahawāt*) and intellectual doubts (*shubuhāt*), can it actualize knowledge, love, and worship of God.

The indisputable role of Satan in perverting humans' rational, moral, and religious *fiṭra* and interfering in their psychic life is accentuated in

another famous tradition of the Prophet, which relates that God said, "I have created all of my servants inclined to worship, but satans come to them who turn them away from their religion *(atathum al-shayāṭīn fa-ijtālathum ʿan dīnihim)*; they ban what has been made lawful for them, and they command them to associate partners with me for which no authority has been revealed".[62] As a result, many humans, when they grow up, become atheists – who deny the existence of God and reject all religious belief, agnostics or skeptics – who question the existence of God, afterlife, etc., in the absence of material proof, deists – who believe in God as a creative, moving force but who otherwise reject formal religion and its doctrines of revelation, divine authority, etc., and pluralists – who assert that all religions are equally true and valid paths to God. Others become villains and criminals who can lie all day, commit theft, violence, murder, etc., without feeling the slightest bit of shame, guilt or remorse. So corrupted is their *fiṭra* that no amount of counsel and guidance can restore it. The Qurʾan describes some humans whose rational, moral, and religious *fiṭra* has been spoiled as those who "have minds but they don't understand; who have eyes but they don't see; who have ears but they don't hear; who are like animals, or even below them" (7:179). They are the unwary souls whom satans have ensnared and distracted from the path of God, whose reason has been contaminated, and whose conscience blinded or totally debilitated. Indeed, many culprits who end up in jail for a violent crime do not feel sorry at all; some of them appear as if they do not understand that what they did was wrong, or do not believe that what they did was a crime, which was what led them to act in the first place.

Concluding Remarks

The subject of human nature stands at the crossroads of a number of related disciplines. On the one hand, it belongs to the domain of theology and epistemology. On the other hand, it is part and parcel of psychology and moral philosophy. From the foregoing discussion it becomes clear that the Islamic concept of human natural disposition couched within the word *fiṭra* with its wide-ranging meaning is a useful explanatory term

for understanding the complexity of human action and the interplay of its various determinant. Apart from its biological function, *fiṭra* underpins not only the human cognitive and moral faculties but also forms the basis of religious faith and justice. Unlike previous interpretations, the conception of *fiṭra* delineated in the preceding pages provides for a richer and more nuanced account of human action, cognition, conscience, and religion.

Endnotes

1 See, for example, Stuart Hampshire, *Thought and Action* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1959); Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980; A. Mele (ed.), *The Philosophy of Action* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997); John Hyman and Helen Steward (eds.), *Agency and Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004).

2 One may, inter alia, refer to M. J. Kister, "Pare Your Nails: A Study of an Early Tradition," in *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 11 (1979): 63-70; Yasien Mohamed, *Fiṭra: The Islamic Concept of Human Nature* (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1996); id., "The Interpretations of *Fiṭra*," in *Islamic Studies*, vol. 34, no. 2 (1995): 129–51; Geneviève Gobillot, *La Fiṭra: la conception originelle, ses interpretations et functions chez les penseurs musulmans* (Damascus: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2000); Camilla Adang, "Islam as the inborn religion of mankind: the concept of *fiṭra* in the works of Ibn Hazm," in *Al-Qantara* vol. 21 (2000): 391-410; Frank Griffel, "Al-Ghazālī's use of "original human disposition" *(fiṭra)* and its background in the teachings of al-Fārābī and Avicenna," in *The Muslim World* 102 (2012): 1–32; Jon Hoover, "Fiṭra", in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd Ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2016); and Raissa A. von Doetinchem de Rande, "Is the *fiṭra* mutable? A reformist conception of human perfection in Shāh Walī Allāh's Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bāligha," in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 33/1 (2023): 87-109.

3 There is no consensus among scholars on how to translate *fiṭra,* which has been rendered as 'primordial nature' (by Oliver Leaman), 'natural disposition' (Camilla Adang), 'natural intelligence' (Anke von Kugelgen), 'original human disposition' (Frank Griffel), 'original normative disposition' (Carl El-Tobgui), 'innate inclination' (Andrew March), *'la disposition originelle'* (Guy Monnot), *'l'authentique prédisposition'* (Marie-Th. Urvoy), *'la conception originelle'* (Geneviève Gobillot), , *'tendance naturelle humaine bonne'* (Olivier Carré), *'élan originel'* (Paul Valadier), *'un état naturellement pur'* (Géraldine Mossière), *'nature religieuse naturelle ou innée'* (Yves Gonzalez-Quijano), *'der Stand der Unschuld'* (Josef van Ess), *'natürliche Bestimmung'* (Mathias Rohe), *'die gottgegebene Ordnung'* (Joachim Langner).

4 See al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *al-Taʿrīfāt* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1357/1938), p. 147 and al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*, in *Majmūʿat Rasāʾil al-Imām al-Ghazālī*, ed. Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn, 7 parts (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2007), p. 26.

5 Muslim (1: 223). Another ḥadīth transmitted by al-Bukhārī tells us that five practices belong to the *sunan al-fiṭra,* namely, (i) circumcision, (ii) keeping the nails pared, (iii) trimming the moustache, (iv) letting the beard grow, and (v) removing underarm hair.

6 For further discussion, see M. J. Kister, "Pare Your Nails: A Study of an Early Tradition," in *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 11 (1979): 63-70.

7   See the relevant entry in *al-Mawsūʿah al-Fiqhiyyah* (Kuwait: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Shuʾūn al-Islāmiyyah, 1415/1995), vol. 32, p. 182: "*wa-al-fiṭra bi-kasr al-fāʾ jāʾat ayḍan bi-maʿnā ṣadaqat al-fiṭr*".

8   Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab* (Būlāq: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Amīriyyah, 1300/1882), vol. 5, p. 363; cf. Edward W. Lane, *Arabic English Lexicon* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1968), vol. 6, p. 2416.

9   For example, a Darwinist science popularizer writes: "Up to 10 million years after the appearance of our earliest ancestors, Homo Sapiens not only look, move and breathe like an ape, they also think like one." See Dr Hwa A. Lim, PhD, *Multiplicity Yours: Cloning, Stem Cell Research, and Regenerative Medicine* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2006), pp. 53-54.

10   It has been reported that college students who frequently listen to loud rock bands suffer some hearing loss. See D.M. Lipscomb, "Ear Damage from Exposure to Rock and Roll Music," in *Archives of Otolaryngology*, 90 (1969): 545-555.

11   Kostas N. Fountoulakis et al., *Psychobiology of Behaviour* (New York: Springer Verlag, 2019), 88. For a comparative discussion, see William James, "Instinct" [originally published in 1890], in *Psychology: The Briefer Course*, ed. Gordon Allport (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 258–281; C.L. Morgan, "Some Definitions of Instinct," in *Natural Sciences*, vol. 7 (1895): 321-329; Paul Baker, "Is the Instinct Theory Reliable as an Explanation of Human Behavior?" in *Social Science*, vol. 2, no. 4 (1927): 341–348; Mark S. Blumberg, *Basic Instinct: The Genesis of Behavior* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2006); Robert M. Winston, *Human Instinct: How Our Primeval Impulses Shape Our Modern Lives* (London: Bantam Books, 2008); and Kenneth R. Miller, *The Human Instinct: How We Evolved to Have Reason, Consciousness, and Free Will* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018).

12   See Nichola Raihani, *The Social Instinct: How Cooperation Shaped the World* (London: St. Martin's Press, 2021); Amy Chua, *Political Tribes: Group Instinct and the Fate of Nations* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018); Bernd Heinrich, *The Homing Instinct: Meaning and Mystery in Animal Migration* (Boston: H.M. Harcourt, 2014); Gene Wallenstein, *The Pleasure Instinct: Why We Crave Adventure, Chocolate, Pheromones, and Music* (New York: Wiley, 2008).

13   Steven Pinker, *The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language* (New York: Harper/Perennial, 2007); Namhee Lee et al., *The Interactional Instinct: The Evolution and Acquisition of Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Kevin Warwick et al., *Computing with Instinct: Rediscovering Artificial Intelligence* (Berlin: Springer, 2011); Andreas Nieder, *A Brain for Numbers: The Biology of the Number Instinct* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2019); Philip Ball, *The Music Instinct: How Music Works and Why We Can't Do without It* (London: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Francis Cholle, *The Intuitive Compass: Why the Best Decisions Balance Reason and Instinct* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2011).

14   Edward O. Wilson and Bert Hölldobler, *The Leafcutter Ants: Civilization by Instinct* (New York: Norton, 2011).

15   Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Mufradāt Alfāẓ al-Qurʾān,* ed. (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1412/1992), s.v. "f-ṭ-r".

16   The ḥadīth in its various versions as cited above is transmitted in Mālik ibn Anas, *al-Muwaṭṭaʾ,* ed. M. Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī. 2 vols. (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1406/1985), 1: 241; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1423/2002), 327-328 and 334; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, 1421/2000), 1157-1158; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, ed. Shuʿayb al-Arnaʾūṭ and Muḥammad Kāmil Qurabillī. 7 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Risālah al-ʿĀlamiyyah, 1430/2009), 7: 97.

17   Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* ḥadīth no. 6089 (kitāb al-Daʿawāt – bāb idhā bāta ṭāhiran).

18   See Francis Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006) and Andre Newberg, *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief* (2002).

19   Henry Rosemont and Huston Smith, *Is There a Universal Grammar for Religion?* (2008).

20   For further illumination, see Frank Milton Bristol, *The Religious Instinct of Man* (Cincinnati: Jennings & Pye 1904); Thomas John Hardy, *The Religious Instinct* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1913); William K. Wright, "Instinct and Sentiment in Religion", in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Jan., 1916), pp. 28-44; Jay Schulkin, "An Instinct for Spiritual Quests: Quiet Religion," in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, vol. 21, no. 4 (2007): 307–320; Nicholas Wade, *The Faith Instinct: How Religion Evolved and Why It Endures* (New York: Penguin, 2009); Howard P. Kainz, *The Existence of God and the Faith-Instinct* (New Jersey: Rosemont Publishing, 2010); Jesse Bering, *The Belief Instinct* (New York: Norton, 2011); Jesse Bering, *The God Instinct: The Psychology of Souls, Destiny and the Meaning of Life* (London: Nicholas Brealey, 2013); Justin L. Barrett, *Born Believers: The Science of Children's Religious Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2012).

21   Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* (Cairo: Al-Maṭbaʿah al-ʿUthmāniyyah al-Miṣriyyah, 1352/1933), vol. 1, pp. 93–94.

22   Ibn Taymiyyah, *Darʾ Taʿāruḍ al-ʿAql wa-al-Naql*, ed. M. Rashād Sālim (Riyadh, 1399–1400/1979–1980), vol. 8, p. 482. Henri Laoust calls it *l'innéisme et l'univer-salité de notre croyance en lui* ('innate and universal belief in Him') in his *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques de Takī-d-dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taimīya* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1939), p. 153, n. 1.

23   Ibn Taymiyyah, *Minhāj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah fī Naqd Kalām al-Shīʿah wa-al-Qadariyyah,* 4 vols. (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Amīriyyah, 1321/1903), vol. 3, pp. 100-101. For further discussion, see Wael B. Hallaq, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God," in *Acta Orientalia* 52 (1991), pp. 49-69.

24 See Michael Raposa, "Instinct and Inquiry: A Reconsideration of Peirce's Mature Religious Naturalism," in *Pragmatism and Naturalism: Scientific and Social Inquiry After Representationalism*, ed. Matthew Bagger (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), pp. 27–43.

25 See Martin Luther, *Consilia Theologica Witebergensia* (Frankfurt am Main: Wust, 1664), p. 866; and *Luther und Melanchthon: Referate und Berichte des Zweiten Internationalen Kongresses für Lutherforschung*, ed. Vilmos Vajta (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961), p. 59.

26 Martin Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), pp. 13–20, cited by M. Sait Özervarli, "Divine Wisdom, Human Agency and the *Fiṭra* in Ibn Taymiyya's Thought," in *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya*, ed. Birgit Krawietz and Georges Tamer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), p. 53.

27 *Martini Lutheri theologia pura et sincera ex viri divini scriptis universis*, ed. Johannes Henricus May (Frankfurt am Main: Maximilianus a Sande, 1709), p. 129: *"Duplex est cognitio Dei, generalis et propria. Generalem habent omnes homines, scilicet quod Deus sit, quod creaverit coelum et terram, quod sit Justus … Deinde satis testantur etiam cultus et religions, quae fuerunt et manserunt apud omnes gentes, quod omnes homines habuerunt generalem quondam notitiam Dei. Hoc lumen in omnium hominum cordibus est."*

28 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, tr. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), vol. 1, pp. 43–44.

29 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifāʾ fī al-Ilāhiyyāt*, ed. G.C. Anawati and Said Zayed (Cairo: al-Hayʾah al-ʿĀmmah li-Shuʾūn al-Maṭābiʿ al-Amīriyyah, 1380/1960), p. 29.

30 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifāʾ: al-Manṭiq: al-Burhān*, ed. A.E. Afifi et al. (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Amīriyyah, 1956), p. 64.

31 See Asad Q. Ahmed, *Avicenna's Deliverance: Logic* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 3–5 and 89–93; Frank Griffel, "Al-Ghazālī's Use of "Original Human Disposition" *(fiṭra)* and Its Background in the Teachings of al-Fārābī and Avicenna," in *the Muslim World*, vol. 102 (2012), pp. 11–25; and Jon Hoover, "Fiṭra", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd Edition (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

32 Ibn Sīnā, *Kitab an-Najāt*. ed. Mājid Fakhrī (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīdah, 1405/1985), pp. 99; translation in Dimitri Gutas, "The Empiricism of Avicenna," in *Oriens*, vol.40, no.2 (2012), pp. 408-409, and Deborah Black, "Estimation *(Wahm)* in Avicenna: The Logical and Psychological Dimensions," in *Dialogue*, vol. 31, no. 2 (1993), p. 233. For the other references to *fiṭra* in Ibn Sīnā's works, see A.-M. Goichon, *Lexique de la langue philosophique d'Ibn Sīnā* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer), p. 19.

33 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt wa-al-Tanbīhāt*, ed. J. Forget (Leiden: Brill, 1892), vol. 1, p. 58 and Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifāʾ: al-Manṭiq: al-Burhān*, ed. A.E. Afifi and I. Madkour (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Amīriyyah, 1956), p. 64.

34 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt,* vol. 1, p. 56.

35 Ibn Taymiyyah, *Naqḍ al-Manṭiq,* ed. M. Ḥāmid al-Fiqī et al. (Cairo, 1370/1951), p. 29. Ibn Taymiyyah's extensive treatment of *fiṭra* is found in his *Darʾ Taʿāruḍ*, vol. 8, pp. 359-535; as well as in his "Risālah fī al-kalām ʿalā al-Fiṭra" in *Majmūʿat al-Rasāʾil al-Kubrā*, vol. 2, pp. 332-349 and his *al-Radd ʿalā al-Manṭiqiyyīn*, pp. 420-432.

36 Carl Sharif El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 255-256.

37 Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Furqān bayna Awliyāʾ al-Raḥmān wa-Awliyāʾ al-Shayṭān* (Damascus: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1382/1962), pp. 88-89.

38 See Ibn Taymiyyah, *Darʾ Taʿāruḍ,* vol. 7, pp. 37-38. According to Sophia Vasalou, Ibn Taymiyyah was trying to disavow the binary opposition of Muʿtazilism and Ashʿarism on moral philosophy; he called for a new position that would be neither one but something in between which is both rooted in the scripture and explained in rationalist terms. "Right and wrong, he claimed, are known by reason *[ʿaql].* And while the language of reason would indeed be deployed in couching this claim, Ibn Taymiyya in many places replaced it with another—that of *fiṭra.* The claim then became: We know what is right and wrong by the human *fiṭra.*" See S. Vasalou, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theological Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 3-4.

39 Robert T. Pennock, *An Instinct for Truth: Curiosity and the Moral Character of Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019).

40 Aristotle, *Metaphysics,* ed. and tr. Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), 980a 22, vol. 1, p. 2.

41 See Kenneth R. Hammond, *Beyond Rationality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 30. Cf. Amanda Spink, *Information Behavior: An Evolutionary Instinct* (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2010)

42 Robert T. Pennock, *An Instinct for Truth: Curiosity and the Moral Character of Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), p. 2.

43 Charles Darwin, "Letter to John Stephens Henslow," April 1, 1848. *Darwin Correspondence Project*, "Letter no. 1167," http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/DCP-LETT-1167.

44 Victoria Talwar et al., "Children's conception knowledge of lie-telling and its relation to their actual behaviors: implications for court competence examination," in *Law and Human Behavior* 26 (2002), pp. 395–415 and Salman Akhtar et al., *Lying, Cheating, and Carrying On: Developmental, Clinical, and Sociocultural Aspects of Dishonesty and Deceit* (Lanham: J. Aronson, 2009), pp. 34-35.

45 See Jan-Willem van Prooijen, *Perspectives on Justice and Morality: The Moral Punishment Instinct* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) and Patricia S. Churchland, *Conscience: The Origins of Moral Intuition* (New York: Norton, 2019). There was a debate in the 1960s over whether human nature is primordially good or evil. The claim that human beings were instinctually aggressive found its most

articulate spokesmen in Lorenz and Ardrey, while the claim to the contrary was expressed in Montagu's writings that humans were naturally cooperative. Aside from their basic disagreement about the inherent tendency of human behavior, both camps actually agreed that there was such a thing as "human nature", possessing a definable essence and grounded in biological tendencies evident throughout the natural and animal worlds. See Nadine Weidman, *Killer Instinct: The Popular Science of Human Nature in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021), p. 142.

46   The ḥadīth is considered authentic and transmitted in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim, 32: 6195 and 32: 6196.

47   Transmitted by Aḥmad in his *Musnad*, al-Dārimī in his *Sunan*, and al-Ṭaḥāwī in his *Sharḥ Mushkil al-Āthār*.

48   See Dacher Keltner et al., *The Compassionate Instinct: The Science of Human Goodness* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010) and Michael McCullough, *Beyond Revenge: The Evolution of the Forgiveness Instinct* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2008).

49   See Arnold M. Rothstein, "Shame and the Superego," in *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 49/1 (1994), pp. 263-277. Cf. Hisham Abu-Raiya, "Western Psychology and Muslim Psychology in Dialogue: Comparisons Between a Qura'nic Theory of Personality and Freud's and Jung's Ideas," in *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 53, no. 2 (2014), pp. 326-338.

50   For a recent discussion on this issue, see Raissa A. von Doetinchem de Rande, "Is the *fiṭra* mutable? A reformist conception of human perfection in Shāh Walī Allāh's Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bāligha," in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 33/1 (2023): 87-109, who argues against the interpretation of *fiṭra* as human perfection that can fit different ages without essentially changing.

51   For an extensive discussion, see Peter J. Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption: Iblīs in Sufi Psychology* (Leiden: Brill, 1983), especially pp. 18-56; and Edmund Beck, "Iblis und Mensch, Satan und Adam: Der Werdegang einer koranischen Erzahlung," in *Muséon* 89 (1976), pp. 195-244.

52   See the Qur'an 2:36; 3:155, 4:60, 5:91, 6:68, 12:42, 18:63, 7:27, 47:25, and 17:53.

53   The Qur'an 14:22 relates: "And Satan will say to his followers after the judgment has been passed, "Indeed, God has made you a true promise. I too made you a promise, but I failed you. I did not have any authority over you. I only called you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me; blame yourselves. I cannot save you, nor can you save me. Indeed, I denounce your previous association of me with Allah in loyalty. Surely the wrongdoers will suffer a painful punishment."

54   The ḥadīth is transmitted in varying word by al-Bukhārī and Muslim in their *Ṣaḥīḥ*s, Aḥmad in his *Musnad*, al-Tirmidhī in his *Sunan*, as well as al-Dārimī and al-Ṭaḥāwī in their respective collections.

55   See Muslim, *al-Jāmiʿ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 8: 139.

56   See, for example, Nadine Weidman, *Killer Instinct: The Popular Science of Human Nature in Twentieth Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021); Jonathan H. Pincus, *Base Instincts: What Makes Killers Kill?* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002) and Charles Stewart, *Dire Emotions and Lethal Behaviours: Eclipse of the Life Instinct* (London: Routledge, 2007).

57   Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifāʾ: al-Manṭiq: al-Burhān*, ed. A.E. Afifi (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-ʿArabī, 1955), p. 111.

58   See Carl Sharif El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 263-264.

59   Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 42. The analogy is based on a ḥadīth reporting the incident in which the angel Gabriel, on the occasion of the Night Journey (*isrāʾ*) to Jerusalem and Ascent (*miʿrāj*) to the heaven, presented the Prophet with a cup of milk and a cup of wine, then told him to choose between the two. When the Prophet instinctively preferred the milk over the wine, the angel Gabriel responded, "You have chosen the *fiṭra*; had you chosen the wine, your community *(ummah)* would have gone astray." See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 852; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 87; and al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmiʿ*, 5:201–202.

60   For further discussion on *fiṭra* according to her, see Livnat Holtzman, "Human Choice, Divine Guidance and the *Fiṭra* Tradition: The Use of Hadith in Theological Treatises by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya," in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Y. Rapoport and S. Ahmed (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 163–188; Nurcholish Madjid, *Ibn Taymiyya on Kalām and Falsafa*, PhD diss. University of Chicago, 1984, pp. 65-76; Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 39-44; and Carl Sharif El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 260-264.

61   See Ibn Taymiyyah, *Minhaj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah fī Naqd Kalām al-Shīʿah wa-al-Qadariyyah*, 4 vols. (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Amīriyyah, 1321/1903), vol. 3, pp. 100-101; id., *Bayān Muwāfaqat Ṣarīḥ al-Maʿqūl li-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Manqūl*, printed on the margin of the *Minhaj al-Sunnah*, vol. 3, pp. 101-102. For more discussion on Ibn Taymiyyah's argument on human *fiṭra* as the basis for proving God's existence, see Muḥammad al-Sayyid al-Jalayand, *aI-Imam Ibn Taymiyyah wa Mawqifuhu min Qaḍiyyat al-Taʾwīl* (Cairo: al-Maṭābiʿ al-Amīriyyah, 1393/1973), pp. 327-338.

62   Transmitted by Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ (kitab al-jannah wa-ṣifat naʿīmihā wa-ahlihā)* ḥadīth no. 2865.

The Early Sufi Tradition in Hamadān, Nahāwand, and Abhar: Stories of Devotion, Mystical Experiences, and Sufi Texts

FATEH SAEIDI

Abstract

Research on the early Sufis of Hamadān, Nahāwand, and Abhar holds immense significance in comprehending the development of Sufism in the Jibāl region. This article provides an in-depth exploration of the initial stages of Sufism's formation, focusing on the analysis of significant early Sufi texts. Specifically, the study investigates the treatises *Karāmāt Sheikh abī ʿalī al-Qūmsānī*, *Ādāb al-fuqarāʾ*, and *Rawḍat al-murīdīn*, authored by Ibn Zīrak al-Nahāwandī (d. 471/1078), Bābā Jaʿfar al-Abharī

Fateh Saeidi received their PhD in Iranian Studies from the University of Göttingen, and is Lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Soran University.

(d. 428/1036), and Ibn Yazdānyār al-Hamadānī (d. 472/1079), respectively. Despite their profound significance, the role of these texts in shaping Sufism within the Islamic world has received limited attention in Sufi studies. Consequently, this study contributes valuable insights into the development of Iraqi-based Sufism in Hamadān and its neighboring centers, spanning from the third/ninth century to the fifth/eleventh century. Notably, some Sufis in this region were disciples of Abū ʿAlī al-Nahāwandī al-Qūmsānī (d. 387/997), playing a pivotal role in the institutionalization of Sufism through the establishment of *khāneqāhs* in the area.

Keywords: Early Sufism, The Jibāl region, Abū ʿAlī al-Nahāwandī al-Qūmsānī, Bābā Jaʿfar al-Abharī, Ibn Yazdānyār al-Hamadānī

Introduction

Hamadān (or Hamadhān) was located at the crossroads of two significant branches of the Silk Road, granting it a substantial geopolitical advantage and facilitating convenient access from Mesopotamia to the Iranian plateau.[1] During the Islamic era, Hamadān held a crucial socio-cultural position within the Jibāl region and occupied a prominent political role as the capital of influential governments like the Buyid and Seljuk dynasties. The early development of Sufism in Hamadān and its neighboring centers, namely Nahāwand[2] and Abhar,[3] can primarily be attributed to the Sufis from Baghdad.[4] Furthermore, it is noteworthy that al-Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 298/910), a pivotal figure in the spiritual lineage of numerous Sufi orders, was of Nahāwandī descent.[5]

The majority of Jibāl cities, including Hamadān, Nahāwand, and Rayy, were strategically located along the Silk Road, a vital trade route serving as the crossroads between the central hub of the Abbasid Caliphate in Iraq and the Khūrāsān region. Consequently, these cities held significant socio-political importance. Sufis, in particular, actively engaged in social activities through their *ribāṭ*s and *khaneqāh*s, which were prevalent in numerous Jibāl cities. The emergence of Sufism in the major Sufi centers

of Iraq, such as Baghdad and Basra, coincided with the advent of mystical movements in the Jibāl region from the late 3rd/9th century onwards. In the early stages of the formation of Sufism, this region also harbored mystics and ascetics who were not conventionally recognized as Sufis.

Despite the evident significance of Sufism in the Jibāl region, the scholarly discourse has largely overlooked the pivotal role played by the Sufis from this area in the formation of Sufism and its subsequent transmission to Khurāsān. However, there is a substantial amount of evidence regarding Sufism in Jibāl and its Sufis, which has been documented in primary sources, particularly biographical hagiographies. In *al-Bayāḍ wa al-sawwād*, Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Sīrjānī (d. *c.* 470/1077) attempts to classify Sufis using a historical-geographical framework. In the thirty-ninth section of this book, titled *bāb maʿrifat tārīkh al-mashāyikh* ('Understanding the history of Sufi masters'), he categorizes seventy-eight sheikhs/Sufis into eight groups. First, he introduces seven Sufi poles (*al-āḥād min al-awtād*), and subsequently designates seven geographical regions: (1) Ḥijāz, (2) Iraq, (3) Shām, (4) Egypt, (5) Fārs, (6) Khurāsān, and (7) Jibāl.[6]

In *Kitāb al-lumaʿ fī 'l-taṣawwuf*, al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988) enumerates the Sufis of Jibāl, who are primarily recognized for their association with the Sufis of Baghdad. One notable mention is Abū Bakr al-Iṣbahānī, Bakran al-Dīnawarī, ʿĪsā al-Qaṣṣār al-Dīnawarī, and Bundār al-Dīnawarī, all esteemed companions of al-Shiblī (d. 334/946).[7] Additionally, other Sufis, including Abū al-Qāsim ibn Marwān al-Nahawāndī and al-Muẓaffar al-Qaramīsīnī, were connected to Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz (d. *c.* 286/899),[8] whereas Mamshād al-Dīnawarī maintained a close relationship with al-Junayd (d. 298/910), al-Ruwaym (d. 303/915), and al-Nūrī (d. *c.* 295/908).[9] Evidently, it can be argued that during the era of al-Junayd, al-Nūrī, and al-Kharrāz, the Sufis of Baghdad served as instructors to numerous students hailing from various regions within the Abbasid empire. Subsequently, these students disseminated the distinct teachings and practices imparted by their respective Sufi mentors.[10]

The significant point to note is that Sufis, *Ḥajj* pilgrims and *ḥadīth* seekers from Khurāsān had to traverse the Jibāl region in order to reach Mecca and Baghdad. The local *khāneqāh*s (Sufi lodges) in the Jibāl region served as suitable resting places for these individuals, facilitating their

interactions with other Sufis. During their pursuit of Islamic sciences in renowned academic centers such as the *Niẓāmiyya* of Iṣfahān and Hamadān, it is likely that they would have resided in Jibāl for extended periods, possibly spanning several months. We now appreciate the unique attributes of the Jibāl region, including its proximity to the major governmental and cultural hubs of Baghdad and Basra in Iraq, its strategic location along the Silk Road, and its status as home to large cities and villages nestled at the foot of the Zagros Mountains. These distinctive features bestowed the region with significant potential for the development of intellectual centers.

Early Indications of Sufism and its Associations with Iraqi Sufi Tradition

In the contemporary historiography of Sufism, the historical trajectory of Sufism in the Jibāl region, despite its strong roots, has often been overlooked.[11] However, it can be argued that Sufism in this area developed alongside the mystical practices of the Sufis in Baghdad, particularly in the cities of Hamadān, Nahāwand, and Abhar. Initially, during the formative period of Sufism in this region, the prevailing spiritual ethos primarily revolved around renunciant piety.[12]

Over time, the evolution of early Sufism in the Jibāl region can be attributed to several factors, most notably the institutionalization of Sufism through the establishment of Sufi communities within *khāneqāh*s. These communities served as focal points for spiritual activities, providing a platform for Sufis to gather, engage in spiritual practices, and exchange knowledge. Moreover, the political support of Islamic governments played a crucial role in granting popular legitimacy to Sufism, enabling its growth and prominence within the region.

One of the early Sufis from Hamadān is believed to be Aḥnaf al-Hamadānī. Jaʿfar al-Khuldī (d. 348/959), one of al-Junayd's disciples, recounts a story about Aḥnaf, in which the importance of travel etiquette is emphasized.[13] Another Sufi figure, Ziyād al-Kabīr al-Hamadānī, contemporaneous with al-Junayd, remains relatively unknown. However, Kahmas ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Hamadānī reports witnessing Ziyād al-Kabīr

praying in the mosque for rain. Remarkably, Kahmaṣ points out that before prayer concluded, there was such a torrential downpour so that it became impossible for him to return home.[14]

We have additional information about Kahmaṣ. Al-Kalābādhī (d. 380/990) classified him as one of the Sufis of Jibāl,[15] and it is known that he lived during the same period as al-Junayd. Kahmas himself narrates an allegorical tale about his encounter with al-Junayd: "One night, while I was seated in my house in Hamadān, I heard a knock on the door. To my surprise, I discovered that Junayd had come to visit me. The following day, I searched for him throughout the city, but no one knew of his whereabouts. After inquiring about al-Junayd's journey from a group of travelers from Baghdad, I realized that on the same night, he had visited me and promptly returned to Baghdad."[16]

Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038) dedicated a relatively comprehensive entry to Kahmaṣ, referring to him as *Kahmaṣ al-duʿā*. He recounts a tale illustrating Kahmaṣ's deep piety and reverence for God: "One day, I [Kahmaṣ] had a guest and had prepared fish for him. I then procured some soil from my neighbor's wall, intending for my guest to cleanse his hands with it. However, I have spent the last forty years blaming myself and shedding tears over the sin of not obtaining my neighbor's permission."[17] Additionally, Abū Nuʿaym mentions other anecdotes about Kahmaṣ that resemble those of another pious worshiper (*ʿābid*) from Basra named Abū al-Ḥasan al-Tamīmī (d. 149/766), whom al-Dhahabī (d.748/1344) refers to as Kahmaṣ too.[18]

Abū al-Qāsim ibn Marwān al-Nahāwandī al-Sufi, also known as Ibn Mardān, was a Sufi associated with the Sufi circle of Baghdad. He resided in Nahāwand and also spent some time in Baghdad, where he enjoyed the company of al-Kharrāz for fourteen years and met with al-Junayd. Al-Sarrāj mentioned that Ibn Mardān initially believed in *samāʿ* rituals (a Sufi ceremony performed as part of the meditation and prayer practice) but later lost faith in it.[19] However, on one occasion, he happened to be present at a *samāʿ* gathering and was deeply moved by a poem. In a state of ecstasy, he exclaimed, "I am thirsty, and no one offers me water."[20]

Among the other Sufis from Hamadān who resided outside the Jibāl region was Abū al-Ḥasan ibn Jahḍam al-Hamadānī. Ibn Jahdam was a

disciple of al-Kawkabī (d. 347/958) and Jaʿfar Khuldī, a highly respected figure of his time who lived in Mecca. Anṣārī stated that he knew someone who had traveled to Mecca solely to visit Abū al-Ḥasan ibn Jahḍam and returned without performing the *Ḥajj* rituals.[21] Jāmī mentioned that Abu al-Hasan ibn Jahdam authored a book on Sufism titled *Bihjat al-asrār*.[22]

Abū Bakr ibn ʿAbdullāh ibn Ṭāhir al-Abharī (d. 330/941-42) was considered a close associate of al-Shiblī, a prominent figure in Sufism. In the works of al-Sulamī, Anṣārī, and al-Sīrjānī, al-Abharī is categorized as one of the revered Jibāl Sufis, acknowledged for his numerous virtues.[23] His connections to two other notable Jibāl Sufis are well-documented. He was a devoted follower of Yūsuf ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī (d. 304/916-7)[24] and a companion of Muẓaffar al-Qarmīsīnī (d. *c*. 330/942). Al-Mustawfī (d. 750/1340) reports about his tomb in Abhar in the eighth/fourteenth century.[25]

The available historical records offer limited insight into the scope of his influence. Nevertheless, a testimony provided by Abū Muḥammad Muhallab ibn Aḥmad ibn Marzūq Miṣrī sheds light on the profound impact Abharī had on individuals seeking spiritual guidance. Mohallab openly acknowledged that no other spiritual mentor had benefited him as greatly as Abharī did.[26] Abharī's religious knowledge and practice of *waraʿ* (pious abstinence) earned him high praise. Notably, he did not view knowledge as separate from spiritual truth and mystical experiences, thereby emphasizing their interconnectedness.[27]

There is no evidence of al-Abharī's authorship of any written works, thus leaving some uncertainty with regard to the nature of his nearly ninety comments on verses from the Qur'ān as documented by al-Sulamī in *Ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr*. It remains unclear whether these comments stem from a comprehensive *tafsīr* or are merely isolated observations. Nevertheless, the understanding of Abharī's personality and teachings relies upon the analysis of these comments along with other preserved sayings attributed to him.[28]

In the definition of the two mystical concepts of *jamʿ* (unity) and *tafriqat* (separation), after pointing out from the Qur'ān that "God bears witness that there is no god but Him, as do the angels and those who have knowledge,"[29] al-Sarrāj refers to Abharī's opinion, who believed that

unity is the coming together of all in the presence of Adam, and separation is in his children. Al-Sarrāj asserts that unity is the fundamental principle, with separation being a secondary concept. The understanding of the principles can only be achieved through the comprehension of the subsidiary concepts, and conversely, the establishment of the subsidiary concepts relies on the principles. According to this perspective, any group that denies the notion of separation is deemed to be outside the bounds of the Islamic faith. Conversely, if a group embraces separation without acknowledging the principle of unity, it abandons the fundamental belief in *tawḥīd* (the oneness of God), which serves as the cornerstone of Islamic belief.[30]

In the explanation of this verse from the Qur'ān, "He admits whoever He wills into His mercy. As for the wrongdoers, He has prepared for them a painful punishment,"[31] al-Abharī believes that "The divine will, not pious action, is the cause of God's mercy upon humankind. This is because mercy is an attribute of God, and His attributes are flawless, whereas human actions are flawed. With imperfect deeds, humans cannot bring forth those attributes that are perfect."[32] Al-Abharī shares a view similar to that of Yaḥyā ibn Muʿādh al-Rāzī (d. 258/872), the mentor of Yūsuf ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī. According to Ibn al-Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī, the *Muʿādhiyya* (the followers of Yaḥyā ibn Muʿādh al-Razī) preached that God, by His grace and forgiveness, would not punish anyone for the sins they had committed unless they were unbelievers.[33]

One notable attribute of Abharī's ethical framework lies in its social dimension. Rather than delineating the faithful (*mu'min*) based on a unique connection with God, Abharī identifies them through their sense of personal security (*amn*) from their own inner self (*nafs*) as well as their ability to ensure the security of others in their presence. Consequently, "everyone who sees him is fond of him; every troubled person rejoices when he sees him; every lonely person feels at home with him; and every perplexed person seeks refuge with him."[34]

Aḥmad ibn Muḥmmad ibn al-Faḍl, also known as Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Nahāwandī, was a renowned Sufi during the late fourth/tenth century. He was a devoted disciple of Jaʿfar al-Khuldī and studied under the

guidance of Abū Khafīf al-Shīrāzī. Al-Nahāwandī also had a connection with Bābā Kuhī (Sheikh Abū ʿAbdullāh Bakūyeh of Shīrāz) who lived in the first quarter of the fifth/eleventh century.[35] Most of the accounts we have concerning Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Nahāwandī pertain to his *khāneqāh* in Nahāwand.

One notable story involves a Christian man who sought to assess the intelligence of Muslims. Initially, he visited the *khāneqāh* of Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Qaṣṣāb (d. c.fourth/tenth century) where he was met with somewhat harsh treatment. Al-Qaṣṣāb objected to the Christian's presence as an outsider on the mystical path. Offended, the Christian then proceeded to Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Nahāwandī's *khāneqāh*, where he was received with kindness and hospitality. He joined the Sufis in prayer for four months, and when he decided to depart, Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Nahāwandī invited him to embrace Islam. The Christian converted and subsequently rose to a prominent position in Sufism, eventually becoming the leader of the *khāneqāh* after Abū al-ʿAbbās' passing.[36]

During that time, one distinctive trait of Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Nahāwandī, as described by Anṣārī, was his preference for a simple black dress known as *kheftān* when appearing in public, even though other Sufis wore various garments such as the *qabā*, *khirqa*, *ṭīlsān*, and *gilīm*.[37] He earned a livelihood by sewing hats and deliberately embraced a life of poverty as part of his mystical lifestyle.[38]

In addition to Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Nahāwandī's contributions to early Sufism, two of his students, namely Sheikh ʿAmū (d. 441/1049) and Akhī Faraj al-Zanjānī (d. 457/1065), emerged as influential figures in their own right. Sheikh ʿAmū established a *khāneqāh* in Herat, and among his disciples was Anṣārī.[39] Akhī Faraj al-Zanjānī, on the other hand, founded a *khāneqāh* in Zanjān.[40] While there is a narration from Samarqandī suggesting that Niẓāmī of Ganja (519-587/1141-1209) was a student of Akhī al-Zanjānī, the conflicting information about Akhī al-Zanjānī's year of death casts doubt on this claim.[41]

Another piece of evidence confirming the presence of a *khāneqāh* in this region dates back to the establishment of *ribāṭ* in Hamadān. During the early fourth/tenth century, Abū Ṭālib al-Khazraj ibn ʿAlī al-Baghdādī, faced some unspecified issues with the people in Shīrāz.

The details regarding these issues remain unknown. However, we are aware that during his illness in Shīrāz, Khafif Shīrāzi served Abū Ṭālib.[42] Subsequently, ʿAlī ibn Sahl al-Iṣbahānī (d. 307/919) opposed his stay in Isfahan. Consequently, Abū ʿAlī al-Warājī, the official tax collector in Hamadān, extended an invitation to Abū Ṭālib to relocate to Hamadān and construct a *ribāṭ* there on his behalf.[43] This *ribāṭ* in Hamadān is believed to be one of the earliest Sufi *khāneqāh* establishments in the region. It appears that Abū Ṭālib al-Khazraj deliberately darkened its interior and exterior, designating the *ribāṭ* as a dwelling for those who had experienced affliction and intended for them to remain there for the rest of their lives.[44] In conclusion, this evidence indicates that early Sufism in Hamadān developed in connection with Sufism rooted in Iraq and was influenced by renowned Iraqi Sufis such as al-Junayd and al-Shiblī.

Abū ʿAlī al-Nahāwandī al-Qūmsānī and his *karāma*

More comprehensive information is available regarding the Sufis who emerged in Hamadān, Nahāwand, and Abhar from the fourth/tenth century onward. Among these Sufis, one figure of significance, yet relatively lesser-known in the annals of Sufism, is Abū ʿAlī al-Nahāwandī al-Qūmsānī (also known as Ibn Mazdīn). Born in Nahāwand and passing away in 387/997 in Anbaṭ near Hamadān, his legacy rests on a limited body of information. Primarily, our knowledge about him is derived from two sources: the first being *Ṭabaqāt al-hamadānīn* by Shīrīwiya ibn Shāhrdār al-Daylamī al-Hamadānī (445-509/1054-1116). Although this volume is lost to us, al-Dhahabī and Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī have referenced and quoted fragments from it. According to al-Dhahabī, al-Qūmsānī held a prominent position among the renowned Sufis of Jibāl, and two of his disciples, Jaʿfar Abharī and Muḥammad ibn ʿĪsā al-Hamadānī, subsequently played key roles in propagating Sufism in Hamadān. Al-Dhahabī's writings make it evident that al-Qūmsānī was associated with numerous *karāma* (extraordinary spiritual phenomena) and harbored strong animosity towards the *rāfiḍah* (a broad term referring to Shīʿī Muslims), whom he regarded as being influenced by malevolent

forces. Following his demise, pilgrims from various cities flocked to visit his grave in Anbaṭ.[45]

The second text is *Karāmāt Sheikh Abī ʿAlī al-Qūmsānī*, authored by Abū al-Faḍl Muḥmmad ibn ʿUthmān (commonly known as Ibn Zīrak; d. 471/1078), who happens to be the grandson of al-Qūmsānī.[46] While no original writings from al-Qūmsānī have survived, Ibn Zīrak provides an insight into the social contexts of Sufism in Hamadān by recounting the miracles attributed to him. Al-Dhahabī identifies Ibn Zīrak as Abū al-Faḍl al-Qūmsānī al-Hamdhānī, an Ashʿarī scholar who had the opportunity to meet Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021).[47] Ibn Zīrak's treatise comprises over 45 anecdotes highlighting the *karāmā* associated with al-Qūmsānī. The narrative begins with the story of a Sufi named Abū al-Hayj al-Kurdī, who expressed a desire to visit al-Qūmsānī. However, upon reaching al-Qūmsānī's residence, he is informed that the esteemed figure has fallen ill and passed away.

These stories shed light on al-Qūmsānī's reception of the *muraqqaʾa* (or *khirqa*; Sufi cloak) from Jaʿfar al-Khuldī (d. 348/959), as well as his close relationship with Ibrāhīm ibn Shaybān in Qarmīsīn (d. *c.* 337/948). Despite al-Qūmsānī's impoverished state, his home served as a place of hospitality for the needy. Travelers from Khurāsān, en route to Jerusalem, would often stay in his house for a few days during their stop in Hamadān. Notably, the region housed Zoroastrians, one of whom embraced Islam after witnessing the miracles performed by al-Qūmsānī.[48]

One of these narrations illustrates how al-Qūmsānī received the *muraqqaʾa* from al-Khuldī's hand, which is regarded as one of al-Qūmsānī's *karāma.* Although al-Qūmsānī did not consider himself deserving of wearing such a *muraqqaʾa*, al-Khuldī blessed him with it, and the other students also embraced this gesture. However, a few days later, when al-Qūmsānī heard al-Khuldī discussing the proper etiquette of wearing a *muraqqaʾa*, he became agitated and restless, withdrawing from public view for several days. Subsequently, some fishermen approached al-Khuldī, presenting him with *muraqqaʾa* they had found in the stomach of a Tigris river fish. Upon examining the *muraqqaʾa*, al-Khuldī realized that was exactly the same *muraqqaʾa* he had given to al-Qūmsānī. Drawing a parallel to the story of Prophet Suleiman's

ring, which was retrieved from the belly of a fish, al-Khuldī conveyed to his students that no one could be more deserving of wearing the *muraqqa'a* than al-Qūmsānī. Upon hearing this, al-Qūmsānī promptly departed from Baghdad and returned to the Jibāl region, as he had no desire for fame.[49]

In one of the narratives, the text recounts an episode wherein al-Qūmsānī engages in communication with al-Shiblī during his sojourn in Baghdad. This interaction, however, carries an implicit critique of al-Shiblī. It appears that al-Qūmsānī frequently attended gatherings where the affluent congregated around al-Shiblī. While a pious individual extends an invitation to a select few from al-Qūmsānī, it seems that al-Qūmsānī readily accepted the majority of al-Shiblī's invitations. Despite being invited multiple times by a pious and impoverished individual, it appears that al-Qūmsānī consistently attends gatherings hosted by al-Shiblī, neglecting the invitations extended by the virtuous but financially disadvantaged person. It is only when this destitute individual implores al-Qūmsānī, saying, "Sheikh, pay heed to the plight of the poor as well!" that al-Qūmsānī visits the humble abode of this indigent person and partakes in a frugal meal consisting of barley bread. Subsequently, they embark together towards the banks of the Tigris River. There, the destitute person spreads a mat upon the river's surface and commences prayer, beseeching al-Qūmsānī to join him. Al-Qūmsānī, filled with trepidation due to his lack of experience in such mystical circumstances, doubts his ability to surmount this spiritual test. It is then that the destitute individual asserts, "One who prioritizes the company of the wealthy over the invitation of the impoverished cannot lay a carpet upon the water." Following this esoteric guidance and the illumination of his inner self, al-Qūmsānī is able to offer his prayers atop the river's surface.[50]

Several narratives found within *Karāmāt Sheikh Abī 'Alī al-Qūmsānī* derive from the vivid dreams experienced by al-Qūmsānī. These dreams depict encounters with God, the Prophet Muhammad, and his companions. Such dreams not only signify a sacred connection, and al-Qūmsānī's divine election, but also yield miraculous outcomes upon awakening, manifesting as his *karāma*. An exemplary account from the year 381/991, coinciding with a period of severe famine, involves al-Qūmsānī

encountering God in a dream. During this encounter, God conveys the following message: "You are my family, and your family is also my family." As a result, the entire al-Qūmsānī family and all those who visit him will be safeguarded from the impending famine.[51] This instance highlights the profound impact of al-Qūmsānī's dreams, as they extend divine protection to those connected to him, ensuring their well-being during times of adversity.

Students of al-Qūmsānī, such as Muḥammad ibn ʿĪsā al-Hamadānī, known as Ibn Zaydān or Yazīdān (d. 430 or 431/1038-39), and Bābā Jaʿfar al-Abharī, played a significant role in perpetuating the teachings of their esteemed teacher. Notable Sufis like Ibn Zīrak al-Qūmsānī, Ibn Yazdānyār al-Hamadānī, Bunjīr al-Hamadānī, and ʿAbd al-Wāḥid ibn ʿAlī al-Hamadānī, also known as Ibn Yūga, were among the disciples of Ibn ʿĪsā al-Hamadānī. Ibn ʿĪsā al-Hamadānī dedicated himself to worship day and night, devoting his entire wealth to the *khāneqāh* or distributing it to the needy. Tragically, he met his demise during a Turkish attack on Hamadān.[52] It is plausible that this *khāneqāh* could have been the one constructed by al-Qūmsānī, serving as a residence for his disciples. Historical accounts reveal that Aḥmad Ghazālī (d. c. 520/1126), along with several scholars from Khurāsān, settled in a *khāneqāh* administered by one of Bābā Jaʿfar's students named Bunjīr ibn Manṣūr al-Hamadānī during their visit to Hamadān.[53] Noteworthy disciples of Bunjīr include Shīrīwiya al-Daylamī and Abū ʿAlī Musī al-Ābādī. The latter established a *khāneqāh* in Hamadān and, for a period, maintained another in Qazwīn, where he elucidated the teachings of *Riyāḍat al-nafs* to scholars and Sufis (see below).[54]

Bābā Jaʿfar al-Abharī and *Ādāb al-fuqarāʾ*

One of the most influential disciples of al-Qūmsānī is Jaʿfar ibn Muḥmmad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Abharī,[55] who primarily resided in Hamadān throughout his lifetime, earning him the moniker *al-Hamadānī*. Al-Dhahabī, referring to him as *Sheikh al-zāhid*, cites Shīrīwiya's account, stating that he was born in Abhar in 350/961 and passed away in Hamadān in 428/1036.[56] Renowned for his rigorous asceticism, al-Abharī engaged in extended

fasting periods, abstaining from food for a remarkable span of fifty days.[57] Al-Rāfiʿī, including al-Qūmsānī among his mentors, further adds that he was commonly known as *bābā* within Sufi circles. Additionally, Al-Rāfiʿī asserts that Ibn Zīrak authored a book documenting the miracles of al-Abharī; however, no known copies of this text exist.[58]

Nevertheless, it is plausible that al-Abharī is indeed the renowned Bābā Jaʿfar referenced by Ibn Rāwandī in his semi-legendary account of his encounter with Bābā Ṭāhir and Sheikh Ḥamshā in Hamadān during Ṭughril's reign. Ibn Rāwandī, in a narrative pertaining to the rule of Ṭughril Beg (r. 429-1037/455-1063), the progenitor of the Seljuk dynasty, recounts the following:

> When Sultan Ṭughril Beg came to Hamadān, there were three saints there: Bābā Ṭāhir, Bābā Jaʿfar, and Shaykh Ḥamshā. They were standing on a small mountain called Khiḍr close to the gate of Hamadān. The Sultan saw them. He stopped the army and went to see them on foot accompanied by his vizier Abū Naṣr al-Kundurī. He kissed their hands. Bābā Ṭāhir, the enthralled soul, said to the Sultan: "O Turk! What will you do with God's people?" The Sultan replied: "Whatever you command." Bābā said: "[Rather,] do that which God orders: 'Verily, God commands justice and spiritual excellence.'" [Qurʾān 16: 90] The Sultan wept and said: "I will do so."

> Bābā held his hand and said: "Do you accept this from me?" The Sultan said: "Yes!" Bābā had a broken ewer, which for years he had used for ablutions, and kept its tip on his finger [as a ring]. He took it out and put it on the finger of the Sultan and said: "Thus, I have handed you the dominion over the world. Stand firm on justice." The Sultan kept that ring among his amulets (*taʾwīdh*). Whenever he would go on battle, he would put on this ring.[59]

The potential correlation between Bābā Jaʿfar and Bābā Ṭāhir also captivated the interest of another writer. Al-Nīshāburī (d. 728/1328), in his *tafsīr* on Qurʾānic verses concerning paradise, presented an alternative

narrative. According to his account, Bābā Jaʿfar al-Abharī paid a visit to Bābā Ṭāhir al-Hamadānī on a certain day. Bābā Jaʿfar inquired of Bābā Ṭāhir, "Where have you been? I had an encounter with God last night in the company of some *khawāṣ* (distinguished individuals), but I did not see you among them." In response, Bābā Ṭāhir acknowledged, "Indeed, you are correct! You were accompanied by *khawāṣ*, whereas I was engrossed in the presence of *Akhaṣ* (the supremely special; God). Hence, it is understandable that you did not perceive my presence!"[60]

The writings attributed to Bābā Jaʿfar include *Ādāb al-fuqarā'* (The Etiquette of the Poor) and *Riyāḍat al-nafs* (The Abstinence of the Self). In *Ādāb al-fuqarā'*, the author's biography remains undisclosed, but according to al-Samʿānī, Jaʿfar al-Abharī is considered the author. Moreover, Bābā Jaʿfar is recognized to have been influenced by prominent Sufi masters such as al-Qūmsānī, Khafīf al-Shīrāzi, and ʿAbd al-Ḥasan al-Qazwīnī.[61] The primary objective behind the author's endeavor in composing the book was to address the inquiries of his disciples.[62]

Ādāb al-fuqarā', which encompasses 22 sections, commences with a section titled "The Truth of Poverty." Alongside narratives featuring renowned Sufis, Bābā Jaʿfar endeavors to articulate his own Sufi doctrine. Notably, the book employs a variety of poems interwoven within a labyrinth of mystical anecdotes. Although the majority of these poems are in Arabic, Bābā Jaʿfar incorporates two Persian verses and a *fahlawī* verse centered on the theme of *Majnūn*'s love.

According to *Ādāb al-fuqarā'*, an inference can be drawn suggesting that Bābā Jaʿfar likely harbored intentions of exchanging certain mystical attributes associated with al-Junayd and Bāyazīd al-Basṭāmī (d. 261/874). Alternatively, it can be argued that his perception of these two revered Sufis conflicts with that of al-Hujwīrī. Al-Hujwīrī indicates that al-Junayd's Sufism is characterized by sobriety, whereas Bāyazīd al-Basṭāmī's Sufism is associated with intoxication.[63] In *Ādāb al-fuqarā'*, al-Junayd's figure is prominently portrayed in relation to *samāʿ*, which is frequently depicted as a central mystical aspect of an intoxicated state and often regarded as a hallmark of Sufism in Khurāsān.[64] Additionally, Bāyazīd extensively delves into the science of Sufism in the same text, considering it a discipline in accordance with the *Sharīʿa*. Notably, although

Bābā Jaʿfar himself is a *ḥadīth* scholar, he endorses a critical and sarcastic statement made by al-Junayd concerning the transmitters: "How long do you intend to count the heads of the dead?" Bāyazīd's retort is as follows: "We derive our knowledge from the life of a person who does not die."[65]

One notable aspect of *Ādāb al-fuqarāʾ* revolves around Bābā Jafʾar's defense of Ibn Yazdānyār al-Armawī. Ibn Yazdānyār found himself at odds with the Sufis of Iraq, particularly al-Junayd and al-Shiblī, accusing them of openly discussing Sufi doctrines and divulging the sacred insights of *Ḥaqq*.[66] This animosity, as described by al-Sarrāj, prompted Ibn Yazdānyār to compose letters warning people in other cities about the Sufis in Iraq, denouncing them for their alleged blasphemy and *bidʿa* ("innovation").[67]

Conversely, al-Shiblī derisively labels Ibn Yazdānyār as a "cow,"[68] while al-Sulamī recounts a tale wherein al-Muṣilī dreams that on the Day of Resurrection, God turned away from Ibn Yazdānyār and instructed him to keep his distance due to his treatment of God's cherished offspring, the Sufis, as adversaries.[69] Another dream is relayed by Bābā Jaʿfar in defense of Ibn Yazdānyār: "In this dream, Ibn Yazdānyār encounters the recently deceased Abū Yaḥyā al-Armawī and inquires about the fate of his companions on the Day of Resurrection. Abū Yaḥyā responds by affirming that anyone who associates with them will be a companion of the Almighty."[70] Nevertheless, Bābā Jaʿfar cites Ibn Yazdānyār's statement to defend Sufism, asserting that while he did express concerns about the conduct of certain Sufis who recklessly divulged sacred knowledge to the incompetent, he did not outright reject Sufism.[71]

The section devoted to *samāʿ* in *Ādāb al-fuqarāʾ* holds a prominent position as the lengthiest section within the book, indicating the special attention paid by Bābā Jaʿfar to the significant role of *samāʿ* in Sufism. In order to convey this significance, Bābā Jaʿfar employs various narratives, one of which involves a metaphorical depiction of a house engulfed in flames with a person trapped inside. This metaphor serves to illustrate the experience of an individual immersed in the practice of *samāʿ*. The narrative portrays a scene where the wind howls, intensifying the flames, while the individual continues to scream and shout incessantly without pause or respite. In the midst of this chaotic turmoil, the person urgently

cries out, "Fire! Fire!" However, as soon as anyone attempts to rush forward and rescue the trapped individual or extinguish the fire, they too become engulfed by the flames.[72] This vivid depiction implies that engaging in *samāʻ* ignites a profound fire within the Sufi's soul, a fire of mystical love that cannot easily be quenched or subdued.

Furthermore, Bābā Jaʻfar endeavors to illustrate the transcendence and loftiness of *samāʻ* by recounting a tale from Abū ʻAbdullāh al-Maghribī concerning the creation of beings. According to this account, God fashioned the celestial inhabitants from His own divine light. Among these celestial beings are the eighty thousand angels who perpetually revel in an ecstatic state, adorned in verdant garments as they traverse The Mighty Throne. Bābā Jaʻfar likens these heavenly beings to the Sufis, emphasizing their exalted status and alluding to the sublime nature of *samāʻ*.[73]

By employing such narratives, Bābā Jaʻfar not only underscores the extensive treatment of *samāʻ* in *Ādāb al-fuqarā'* but also seeks to emphasize its profound significance within the context of Sufism. These stories serve to convey the transformative power of *samāʻ*, wherein the practitioner becomes consumed by a fervent love and devotion, akin to a blazing fire, which cannot be easily extinguished. Furthermore, Bābā Jaʻfar draws a parallel between the heavenly beings and Sufis, suggesting that engaging in *samāʻ* grants individuals a glimpse of the divine ecstasy experienced by these celestial entities.

The comparative analysis reveals that *Ādāb al-fuqarā'* surpasses *Riyāḍat al-nafs* in terms of length and content. The initial section of the manuscript employed for this inquiry provides valuable information regarding the origins of *Riyāḍat al-nafs*. According to the scribe, the treatise was penned in 561/1166 and is attributed to Jaʻfar ibn Muḥmmad ibn Ḥusayn al-Abharī, who is acknowledged as its author. The scribe further notes that Sheikh Muḥmmad ibn Benyāmīn (Bunaymān?) Ibn Yūsuf Hamadānī served as an oral source for the writing of this treatise.[74]

Evidently, *Riyāḍat al-nafs* held considerable significance, particularly among the followers of Bābā Jaʻfar. Numerous reports attest to the fact that many Sufis residing in Qazwīn diligently studied this book in the company of Abū ʻAlī Musī Ābādī.[75] It becomes evident that Abharī's work

aimed to address the prevailing decline in abstinence and the waning commitment to abstain from sins during his era. Consequently, he found it necessary to draw upon the *ḥadīth*s of the Prophet and the moral anecdotes derived from the lives of Sufis. The treatise is structured into multiple chapters, encompassing various themes such as 'renunciation,' 'asceticism in this world,' 'loneliness,' 'the characteristics of the soul,' and more. Each chapter delves into these subjects, shedding light on their significance within the context of the treatise and the broader Sufi tradition.

Ibn Yazdānyār al-Hamadānī and *Rawḍat al-murīdīn*

Another student of Bābā Jaʿfar is Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn al-Husayn ibn Yazdānyār al-Hamadānī (380-472/990-1079), and Shīrīwiya has documented his state of poverty.[76] It is important to differentiate between Ibn Yazdānyār and Abū Bakr al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī ibn Yazdānyār al-Armawī (d. c.333/945, see above), who preceded him. Al-Sulamī dedicates a chapter of his book, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, to Ibn Yazdānyār al-Armawī.[77] Moreover, within *Rawḍat al-murīdīn*, Ibn Yazdānyār al-Hamadānī refers to al-Sulamī's statements on multiple occasions. Therefore, in terms of chronology, it is highly likely that Ibn Yazdānyār al-Hamadānī lived subsequent to al-Sulamī.

Furthermore, it should be noted that *Rawḍat al-murīdīn*, the only surviving work of Ibn Yazdānyār al-Hamadānī, contains quotations from Ibn Yazdānyār al-Armawī.[78] However, Williams proposes a possible familial connection between the two individuals,[79] although no evidence substantiates this claim. *Rawḍat al-murīdīn* belongs to a genre of Sufi literature commonly referred to as Sufi manuals. Despite the existence of numerous manuscripts, no critical editions have been published thus far. Nonetheless, Williams has provided a translation based on five manuscripts in his doctoral dissertation.[80] In one of the older manuscripts of *Rawḍat al-murīdīn* (758/1357) housed at Princeton University, the author is explicitly identified as Sheikh Imām Abī Jaʿfar Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn ibn Aḥmad ibn Yazdānyār.

Rawḍat al-murīdīn, composed in Arabic, exhibits a deliberate endeavor by the author to employ a straightforward style, avoiding

intricate and ambiguous terminology.[81] Salamah-Qudsi has thematically categorized the book into four distinct sections: (1) the broader concept of Sufism, distinguished from other adherents of Islam; (2) specific provisions encompassing the regular communal life and interrelations among Sufis; (3) segments dedicated to the practice of *samāʿ*; and (4) sections devoted to various Sufi 'stations' (*maqamāt*) such as love (*maḥabba*), knowledge (*maʿrifa*), trust in God (*tawakkul*), and others.[82]

The lack of familiarity with works such as *Ādāb al-fuqarāʾ* and *Rawḍat al-murīdīn* appears to have led certain writers, like Hujwīrī, to erroneously perceive a dichotomy between *ṣaḥw* ('sobriety') and *sikr* ('intoxication') (as mentioned earlier in the context of al-Junayd/ Bāyazīd). However, in *Rawḍat al-murīdīn*, Junayd's doctrinal framework of Sufism is merged with the *ḥallājian* notion of unity and is also in consonance with Bāyazīd's perspectives on Sufism. The mystical content of *Rawḍat al-murīdīn* possibly does not align with the prevailing classifications in the field of Sufi Studies. Consequently, Salamah-Qudsi posits that "the author of Rawḍa seeks to present a comprehensive umbrella of Sufism under which the teachings of al-Junayd coexist alongside those of al-Ḥallāj."[83] Ibn Yazdānyār takes it a step further by combining Ḥallāj's utterances with Bāyazīd al-Basṭāmī's Sufi attitudes. In section 26, titled 'On the Lovers and their States',[84] one of al-Ḥallāj's renowned ecstatic expressions is ascribed to Bāyazīd al-Basṭāmī: "I am the one that I desire, the one I desire is I; We are two spirits dwelling in a single body. So when you have seen me, you have seen him. And when you have seen him, you have seen us."[85]

It appears that Ibn Yazdānyār was not oblivious to the authorship of this renowned couplet of al-Ḥallāj, nor concerned about its implications of 'incarnation' regarding the divine taking human form. If he had harbored apprehensions about al-Ḥallāj's perspective on the incarnation, which involved expressing mystical union as the convergence of two spirits within one body, he would have refrained from including this well-known poem in his book altogether. Furthermore, elsewhere in *Rawḍat al-murīdīn*, the words of other Sufis are attributed to Bāyazīd al-Basṭāmī.[86] It can be inferred that Ibn Yazdānyār intended to demonstrate that the concept of unity could be conveyed through the language

employed by other Sufis like Bāyazīd al-Basṭāmī. However, this should not be misconstrued as the author's endeavor to reconcile divergent views within Sufism. In *Rawḍat al-murīdīn*, Ibn Yazdānyār not only echoes the teachings of other Sufis but also presents his own interpretation of Sufism.

In *Rawḍat al-murīdīn*, Ibn Yazdānyār al-Hamadānī devoted considerable attention to al-Junayd. Furthermore, his frequent allusions to al-Ḥallāj are noteworthy, as his repetition of al-Ḥallāj's thoughts can be interpreted as an attempt to exonerate him from the charges that led to his execution. This proactive approach can be observed in the following passage:

> When al-Ḥallāj was asked about Sufism, he answered: '[It is] calcinations of humanity and eliminations [that are the concern] of divinity (*ṭawāmīs wa-dawāmīs lāhūtiyya*).' The questioner then said: 'I asked him to explain this statement.' He [al-Ḥallāj] said: 'No explanation is possible.' I said: 'Why did you reveal it to me?' He replied: 'The one who knows it [that is the meaning] will understand, and the one who does not know it will not understand'. I said: 'I beg you to explain it to me.' He then recited [the verse]: 'Do not defame us in public. Here is our finger tainted with the lovers' blood.'[87]

Ibn Yazdānyār al-Hamadānī's approach bears a striking resemblance to Bābā Jaʿfar al-Abharī's perspectives on Sufism. In terms of both content and the significance attributed to certain themes such as *samāʿ* (sections 18-25) and *love* (sections 26-28), *Rawḍat al-murīdīn* appears to exhibit a close affinity with *Ādāb al-fuqarāʾ*. In a similar manner to Abū Manṣūr al-Iṣfahānī (d. 418/1038),[88] Ibn Yazdānyār employs the term *maḥabba*, rather than *ʿishq*, to convey the concept of love. He innovatively classifies love into six categories: 'lustfulness' (*shāhwāniyya*), 'cordiality' (*mawaddatiyya*), 'love that involves with the Divine' (*rabbāniyya*), 'love that engages repentance' (*maḥabba tawbatiyya*), 'earthly' (*ṭīniyya*), and 'love that engages divine providence' (*maḥabba ʿināʾiyya*).[89]

One of the symbolic narratives concerning love recounted in *Rawḍat al-murīdīn* originates from Bashar al-Ḥārith (d. 227/841). According to

the account, "I [al-Ḥārith] found myself strolling through the bustling Bazaar of Baghdad when my attention was drawn to a man being subjected to a severe flogging, enduring a thousand lashes without uttering a single sigh of distress. Intrigued by this spectacle, I pursued him after he was apprehended, and inquired as to the reason behind his torment. He replied, 'It is because I am enamored.' Curious, I further questioned, 'Why did you remain silent?' He responded, 'For my beloved was observing me.' I persisted, 'What if you were to have the chance to encounter him?' Overwhelmed by the mere thought of reuniting with his beloved, he cried out ecstatically and met his demise instantaneously."[90]

The narrative in *Rawḍat al-murīdīn* presents a profound mystical allegory about the nature of love and its transformative power. The central character, who endures severe punishment without flinching, symbolizes the enlightened seeker on the path of divine love. This individual has reached a state of spiritual absorption, where the pain inflicted upon them by the world holds no sway over their inner being. When the protagonist is questioned about the reason for their silence in the face of torment, their response unveils a profound truth. They explain that their silence stems from the awareness that their beloved, representing the Divine, is ever-present and watching over them. In this context, the beloved serves as a metaphor for the ultimate source of love and spiritual union.

The dialogue takes a transformative turn when the protagonist is asked what would happen if they were granted the opportunity to meet their beloved. The overwhelming excitement and longing to unite with the Divine beloved result in their ecstatic cry and immediate demise. This mystical demise represents the annihilation of the seeker's ego and individuality as they merge with the Divine Essence. The story encapsulates the journey of the mystic, who, through unwavering devotion and surrender, transcends the limitations of the worldly realm and experiences the ecstatic union with the Divine. It teaches that true love requires the seeker to endure the trials and tribulations of the path, remaining steadfast in their devotion and awareness of the Divine presence. Ultimately, it is through the annihilation of the self that the mystic attains the sublime ecstasy of oneness with the Beloved.

Undoubtedly, the sections pertaining to *samāʿ* in *Rawḍat al-murīdīn* and *Adab al-mulūk* by Abū Manṣūr al-Iṣfahānī[91] hold immense significance as theoretical texts within the Jibāl region. In the initial portion, Ibn Yazdānyār presents a compelling argument, asserting that *samāʿ* is permissible (*mubāḥ*) within the framework of Islamic law.[92] Moreover, he fortifies his defense of *samāʿ* through an intriguing employment of an allegorical tale that originates from "cosmological-metaphysical sources."[93] It is likely that this allegory had previously surfaced in *Ādāb al-fuqarāʾ*.[94] Similarly, Ibrāhīm ibn al-Shaybān, another Sufi hailing from Jibāl, recounts the same narrative:

> I heard my master Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Maghribī saying: "the people of Heaven were created from God's light of majesty. Seventy thousand of the intimate angels (*al-malāʾika al-muqarrabīn*) are seated between the Divine Throne (*ʿarsh*) and the Divine Seat (*kursī*) in the Yard of Intimacy. Their dress is green wool, and their faces are like the full moon on a clear night. Their hairs are like women's. They are immersed in ecstasy from the day of creation and will remain as such until the Day of Resurrection. The people of the Seven Heavens would hear their cries and moaning. They are Sufis of Heaven. They race from God's Throne to God's Seat while being almost intoxicated by the intensive passion bestowed upon them. The Angel Isrāfīl is their leader and their mouthpiece. Considering their lineage, these are our brothers, and considering their spiritual path, they are 59 of our companions."[95]

This anecdote, narrated in the voice of Adam, serves to underscore the practice of *samāʿ* among the Angels in Heaven. Furthermore, this story provides two justifications for *samāʿ*. Firstly, the narrator designates the Angels as the Sufis of Heaven, drawing a parallel between their celestial existence and the earthly Sufis. Additionally, these ethereal beings are asserted to originate from the divine light, thereby absolving them of any sins. As a result, their dance is not only untainted by sin but also an act of worship. The angelic Sufis embody the eternal pursuit of

divine intimacy and the intoxicating journey toward divine union. Their presence serves as a reminder of the transcendent nature of the spiritual path and the ever-present invitation to embark upon a mystical journey that leads the creatures closer to the Divine.

Another anecdote concerning *samāʿ* is attributed to Abū Bakr ibn Yazdānyār al-Armawī. Ibn Yazdānyār al-Armawī recounts an incident where he participated in a *samāʾ* gathering with his companions. However, during the event, he heard a voice from the Unseen questioning him, "Are you approaching God or simply engaging in frivolity?" This encounter prompted him to immediately leave the gathering, realizing the potential dangers associated with *samāʿ*. He recognized the need to refrain from participating until he familiarized himself with the proper etiquette of the practice.[96]

Similar to the ideas of Yaḥyā ibn Muʿāḏh Rāzī (d. 258/872) concerning the creation,[97] Ibn Yazdānyār acknowledges that during the moment when God posed the question, "Am I not your Lord?" to humankind, they wholeheartedly responded, "Yes, we do testify."[98] This direct exchange transcends any limitations and defies description through conventional attributes. The essence of this divine discourse lingers within humanity. Consequently, when individuals encounter a captivating melody or hear pleasant words during the practice of *samāʿ*, their attention becomes fixated on that original divine address, and they are drawn back to its source. These individuals are the mystics who have perceived God's eternal presence and have developed an intimate connection with the Divine.[99]

Salamah-Qudsi presents an analysis of Ibn Yazdānyār's Sufi text, highlighting its alignment with the pro-*karrāmī* mystical sect. Notably, she asserts that *Rawḍat al-murīdīn* is likely one of the earliest references to Ibn Karrām (d. 255/869), the founder of the *Karrāmiyya* sect, and his conceptualization of trust in God (*tawakkul*).[100] Salamah-Qudsi argues that the disregard of *Rawḍat al-murīdīn* by the "Shāfiʿī-Ashʿarī-Baghdādī-oriented" can be attributed to the prevalent accusations of heresy directed towards the *Karrāmiyya* sect by writers in the 5th/11th century.[101]

To substantiate Ibn Yazdānyār's religious inclination, Salamah-Qudsi suggests that the origin of *Karrāmiyya* can be traced back to the

mountainous region of Ṭabaristān to the north of Hamadān. Additionally, she points out the existence of a *karrāmī madrasa* in Herat, situated in the eastern part of Hamadān. However, it should be noted that these locations are geographically distant from Hamadān. It is plausible that the limited understanding of Sufism in the Jibāl region among contemporary experts has influenced such conclusions. Presently, it is established that other Sufis from Jibāl, namely Yaḥyā ibn Muʿādh al-Rāzī and Abū Bakr ibn ʿAbdullāh ibn Ṭāhir al-Abharī, embraced a *karrāmī* attitude, while Yūsuf ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Rāzī leaned towards a *malāmatī* orientation.[102]

Conclusion

The historical trajectory of Sufism in the Jibāl region has often been overlooked in contemporary historiography. However, it is evident that Sufism in this area developed in parallel with the mystical practices of Sufis in Iraq. Primary sources shed light on the connections between Sufis from Hamadān, Nahāwand, and Abhar and influential figures such as al-Junayd, al-Kharrāz, al-Khuldī, and al-Shiblī highlighting their role in disseminating Sufi teachings and practices. Moreover, the Jibāl region served as a significant route for pilgrims and seekers of knowledge, facilitating interactions with Sufis in local *khāneqāhs*. Various early Sufi figures emerged from the Jibāl region, such as Aḥnaf al-Hamadānī, Ziyād al-Kabīr al-Hamadānī, Kahmaṣ ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Hamadānī, Abū al-Qāsim ibn Marwān al-Nahāwandī al-Sufi, Abū al-Ḥasan ibn Jaḥḍam al-Hamadānī, Abū Bakr ibn ʿAbdullāh ibn Ṭāhir al-Abharī, Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Nahāwandī, and their students.

Abū Bakr al-Abharī's association with prominent Sufis such as al-Shiblī, Yūsuf ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī, and Muẓaffar al-Qarmīsīnī highlights his esteemed status among the Jibāl Sufis. While his authorship of written works remains uncertain, his nearly ninety comments on Qurʾānic verses, as documented by al-Sulamī, provide valuable insights into his teachings. Abharī's belief in unity and the subsequent separation of entities underscores the importance of maintaining a balance between these principles, serving as the cornerstone of the Islamic faith. Al-Abharī, similar to Yaḥyā ibn Muʿādh al-Rāzī, believes that God's mercy is based

on His divine will rather than human actions. Al-Abharī's ethical framework emphasizes social dimensions, identifying the faithful through their personal security and ability to ensure the security of others.

Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Nahāwandī, on the other hand, exemplifies simplicity, humility, and a life of poverty as essential aspects of the mystical path. His *khāneqāh* in Nahāwand became a center of spiritual learning and transformation, attracting followers and students who went on to become influential figures in their own right. The story of the Christian man's conversion underlines al-Nahāwandī's compassion and hospitality, as well as the transformative power of Sufism.

Abū ʿAlī al-Nahāwandī al-Qūmsānī played instrumental roles in the propagation of Sufism in Hamadān. While al-Qūmsānī's own writings have not survived, his grandson, Ibn Zīrak, sheds light on his life and miracles. The anecdotes contained within this text provide insights into the social context of Sufism in Hamadān and highlight the miracles associated with al-Qūmsānī. Notably, his humble home served as a place of hospitality for the needy, and travelers passing through Hamadān found refuge there. Among those who witnessed his miracles was a Zoroastrian who embraced Islam due to the profound impact of al-Qūmsānī's spiritual manifestations. These accounts, alongside others, demonstrate the extraordinary nature of al-Qūmsānī's *karāma* and the deep reverence he commanded among his contemporaries.

Al-Qūmsānī's spiritual journey is further illuminated by narratives recounting his interactions with notable figures such as Jaʿfar al-Khuldī and al-Shiblī. The story of receiving the *muraqqa* from al-Khuldī's hand exemplifies al-Qūmsānī's humility and his ultimate recognition as the deserving recipient of this spiritual symbol. The dreams experienced by al-Qūmsānī hold a special place in his spiritual narrative, as they signify divine connection and election. Through these dreams, he encounters God, the Prophet Muhammad, and his Companions, leading to miraculous outcomes upon awakening. Such stories paint a vivid picture of al-Qūmsānī's spiritual trials and the transformative moments that shaped his journey.

Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Abharī, also known as Bābā Jaʿfar, was a disciple of al-Qūmsānī and a renowned ascetic. He resided

in Hamadān, earning the moniker al-Hamadānī. Known for his extended fasting periods, he engaged in rigorous asceticism. He is mentioned in a semi-legendary encounter with Sultan Ṭughril Beg and other saints in Hamadān. Bābā Jaʿfar authored the books *Ādāb al-fuqarāʾ* and *Riyāḍat al-nafs. Ādāb al-fuqarāʾ* explores Sufi doctrine, incorporating mystical anecdotes and poems. The book suggests Bābā Jaʿfar's connection to the Sufi masters al-Junayd and Bāyazīd al-Basṭāmī. The section on *samāʿ* (spiritual audition) holds a prominent position, emphasizing its transformative power. *Riyāḍat al-nafs* addresses the decline in abstinence and highlights the importance of renunciation and asceticism in the Sufi tradition.

Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn al-Husayn ibn Yazdānyār al-Hamadānī, a student of Bābā Jaʿfar, is discussed, particularly his state of poverty. There is a distinction made between Ibn Yazdānyār al-Hamadānī and a previous figure named Abū Bakr al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī ibn Yazdānyār al-Armawī. Ibn Yazdānyār al-Hamadānī's only surviving work is *Rawḍat al-murīdīn*, a Sufi manual that has not been critically edited or published yet. The book covers various aspects of Sufism and includes teachings from other Sufis like al-Junayd and al-Ḥallāj. Ibn Yazdānyār al-Hamadānī's approach in the book is similar to Bābā Jaʿfar al-Abharī's views on Sufism. The text also includes a mystical allegory about love and the transformative power it holds. Furthermore, the discussion focuses on the sections in *Rawḍat al-murīdīn* related to *samāʿ* (spiritual listening) and their significance within the Jibāl region. Various narratives and anecdotes are presented to support the practice of *samāʿ* in Sufism.

The narratives and anecdotes presented in the primary sources examined throughout this study provide valuable insights into the social context, spiritual journeys, and transformative experiences of Sufis in the Jibāl region. They highlight the profound impact of Sufism on individuals, communities, and society as a whole, emphasizing the significance of spiritual teachings, ethical frameworks, and practices in nurturing a deep connection with the divine. Despite the historical significance of Sufism in the Jibāl region, further research and scholarly attention are needed to fully understand and appreciate its contributions to the broader mystical traditions of Islam. A more comprehensive examination of available

primary sources, critical editions of relevant texts, and interdisciplinary approaches can provide a richer understanding of the development and influence of Sufism in this region.

Endnotes

1 Guy Le Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate: Mesopotamia, Persia, and Central Asia from the Moslem Conquest to the Time of Timur* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905), 185-99.

2 Nahāwand stands as one of the ancient cities within the Jibāl region, situated in the southern part of Hamadān and to the east of Kermānshāh (Qarmīsīn). The Battle of Nahāwand held great significance as a resounding triumph (*fatḥ al-futūḥ*), resulting in the expansion of Muslim governance throughout the Jibāl region. During the initial centuries following the advent of Islam, Nahāwand gained renown as the *Māh al-Basra* (a city in the Media/Jibāl region whose tax revenues were allocated towards the administration of Baṣra). By the 8th/14th century, Nahāwand's populace predominantly comprised ethnically Kurdish individuals, with the majority adhering to the Twelver Shiite sect, see Ḥamd Allāh al-Mustawfī, *Nuzhat al-Qulūb*, ed. Sayyed Muhammad Dabir Syaqi (Tehran: Nashr-e Hadis-e Emruz, 2002), 74; Michael G. Morony, "Māh al-Baṣra," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_4769.

3 Abhar, a town situated in the Jibāl region near Zanjān, was inhabited by Kurds during the 4th/10th century, see Abū al-Qāsim b. ʿAlī l-Naṣībī Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb ṣūrat al-arḍ (Book of the configuration of the land)*, ed. Johannes Hendrik Kramers (Beirut: Dar al-Maktabat al-Hayat, 1992), vol. 2, 360.

4 Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The formative period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 56-60.

5 Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, ed. Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā (Beirut, Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2003), 141; ʿAbdullāh Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, ed. Muhammad Sarwar Mawlayī (Tehran, Intishārāt-i Tūs, 1983),196; ʿAbd al-Rahmān Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt al-Uns min Ḥaḍarāt al-Quds*, ed. Mahmud ʿĀbedī (Tehran Sokhan Publication, 2015), 71 and 79.

6 In this section, al-Sīrjānī employs a linguistic alternation by interchanging the terms *al-mashāyikh* (the plural form of *sheikh*) and, occasionally, *al-sādāt* (the plural form of *sayyid*), rather than using the term *al-mutaṣawwifa* (referring to 'the group of Sufis'), see Abū al-Ḥasan al-Sīrjānī, *Sufism, Black and White: A Critical Edition of Kitāb al-Bayāḍ wa-al-Sawād*, ed. Bilal Orfali and Nada Saab (Leiden, Brill, 2012), *bāb 39*: 248-258.

7 Respectively Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-lumaʿ fī al-taṣawwuf*, ed. Reynold Alleyne Nicholson (London: Luzac & Co. 1914), 210, 148, and 104.

8 Respectively al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, 288, 191.

9 Al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 318; Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 254; Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt*, 92.

10 Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 56.

11 For example, Karamustafa, *Sufism*; Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2010; Nile Green, *Sufism: A Global History* (Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

12 For distinguishing eighth-century renunciation and ninth-century Sufism, see Christopher Melchert, *Before Sufism: Early Islamic Renunciant Piety* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 10-19.

13 Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-qushayriyya*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Mamūd and Maḥmūd ibn al-Sharīf (Cairo: Dār al-Shaʿb, 1989), 479.

14 Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt*, 86.

15 Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Kalābādhī, *al-Taʿarruf li-madhhab ahl al-Taṣawwuf*, ed. Ahmad Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1993), 26.

16 Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt*, 82-3.

17 Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd Allāh Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyāʾ wa-Ṭabaqāt al-Aṣfiyāʾ* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1932-8), vol. 6, 211; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, 214; Ibrāhīm Mustamlī Bukhārī, *Sharḥ al-taʿarruf li-madhhab al-taṣawwuf*, ed. Muhammad Roshan (Tehran: Asatir, 1984), vol. 1, 219.

18 Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, ed. Shuʿayb al-Arnaʾūṭ and et al (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1981-1988), vol. 6, 316-17.

19 Al-Kalābādhī, *al-Taʾarruf*, 288-89.

20 Al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 260; al-Baghdādī, *Ṭāʾrīkh Baghdād*, vol. 16, 577; Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām wa-wafayāt al-mashāhīr wa-al-aʿlām*, ed. Umar Tadmurī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1987–2004), vol. 24, 306-7.

21 Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 602.

22 Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt*, 278.

23 Al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 406-10; al-Sīrjanī, *Sufism*, 559; Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 464.

24 For more information on Yūsuf ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī and other eraly Sufis of Rayy, see Fateh Saeidi, "Yaḥyā Ibn Muʿādh Al-Rāzī and His Disciples: Their Influence on Early Sufism," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 8, no. 1 (2023):42-61.https://doi.org/10.55831/ajis.v8i1.513

25 Al-Mustawfī, *Nuzhat al-Qulūb*, 102.

26 Al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 406; Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 464.

27 Al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 406-10; Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat*, vol. 10, 351-52; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, 113; Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt*, 189

28 Benedikt Reinert, "Abharī, Abū Bakr," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abhari-abu-bakr-sufi-of-persian-eraq-d-941-42.

29 Qurʾān 3:18.

30 Al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, 212. Cf. al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 407 and Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 464.

31 Qurʾān 76:31.

32 Cited by Reinert, "Abharī, Abū Bakr."

33 Al-Muṭahhar ibn Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-bad' wa-al-taʾrīkh* (Cairo: Maktaba al-Saqāf al-Dīnī, n.d.), vol. 5, 144-45. Also, see Saeidi, "Yaḥyā Ibn Muʿādh Al-Rāzī," 48-9.

34 Cited by Reinert, "Abharī, Abū Bakr."

35 Muʿīn al-Dīn Junayd al-Shīrāzī, *Shad al-Ezār fī Khaṭ al-Awzārʿan Zawāe al-Mazār*, ed. Muḥammad Qazwīnī and Muhammad Eqbal (Tehran: Matbaʾeh-e Majles, 1328 [1949]), 557.

36 Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt*, 149-50; Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā*, ed. Muhammad Esteʾlami (Tehran: Zawwār Publication, 2012), 694.

37 Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 236.

38 al-Sīrjanī, *Sufism*, 300 and 313; Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 617; ʿAṭṭār, *Tadhkirat*, 692-93.

39 Anṣārī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 361, 580 and 617; Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt*, 149.

40 Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt*, 150-51.

41 Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tadhkirat al-Shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Edwar Browne (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Asāṭīr, 1382 [2003]), 99.

42 Abū al-Ḥasan al-Daylamī, *Sīrat Sheikh Kabīr Abū ʿAbdūllāh Ibn Khafīf Shīrāzī*, ed. Annemarie Schimmel, tr. Rukn al-Dīn Yahyā ibn Junayd Shīrazī (Tehran: Bābak, 1363 [1984]), 167.

43 al-Daylamī, *Sīrat Sheikh Kabīr*, 167-8; Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt*, 255.

44 Aḥmad ibn Alī al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Madīnat al-Salām* (*Taʾrīkh Baghdād*), ed. Bashar ʾAwad Maʿruf (Beirut: Dar Al-Gharb al-Eslami, 2001), vol. 9, 307.

45 Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-islām wa-wafayāt al-mashāhīr wa-al-aʿlām*, ed. Umar Tadmurī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1987–2004), vol. 27, 133-35; al-Dhahabī, *Sayr*, vol. 16, 469.

46 *Karāmāt Sheikh Abī ʿAlī al-Qūmsānī* was edited by Shafiʾi-Kadkani published with the title *Maqāmāt-e Abū ʿAlī Qumsānī*, see Ibn Zīrak, "Maqāmāt-e Abū ʿAlī Qumsānī," in *Arj Nameh-e Doktor Mohammad Ali Movahed*, ed. Mohammad Reza Shafiʾi-Kadkani, 657-83 (Tabriz: Setudeh, 2014).

47 Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 32, 60-63; al-Dhahabī, *Sayr Aʿlām*, vol. 18, 433-35.

48 *Karāmāt Sheikh Abī ʿAlī al-Qūmsānī*, 677-78.

49 Ibid., 666.

50 Ibid., 678.

51 Ibid., 671

52 Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 29, 298; al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī, *Ṭāʾrīkh Baghdād*, vol. 3, 711-12; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, vol. 17, 563-4.

53 Abū Ṭāhir Silafī, *al-Wajīz fī dhikr al-majāz wa al-majīz* (Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Is-lami, 1991), 154.

54   Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 33, 333.

55   Bābā Jaʿfar, one of al-Qumsānī's students, directly narrated several stories about him, see *Karāmāt Sheikh Abī ʿAlī al-Qūmsānī*, 672-76.

56   Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 29, 215-17.

57   Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, vol. 17, 576-77.

58   ʿAbd al-Karīm ibn Muḥammad Rāfiʿī al-Qazwīnī, *al-Tadwīn fī akhbār Qazwīn*, ed. ʿAzīz Allah ʿAṭārudī Quchānī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1987), vol. 2, 379.

59   Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Rāwandī, *Rāḥat al-ṣudūr wa-āyat al-surūr*, ed. Muhammad Eqbal (Tehran: Asatir, 2006), 98-9; Safi has translated Ibn al-Rāwandī's text, see Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious* Inquiry (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 132-33.

60   Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn Nīshābūrī, *Tafsīr gharāʾib al-qurʾān wa-raghāʾib al-furqān*, ed. Zakariya ʿUmayrat (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1996), vol. 3, 244.

61   ʿAbd al-Karīm Ibn Muḥammad al-Samʿānī, *Kitāb al-Ansāb*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh ʿUmar Bārūdī (Beirut: Dār al-Jinān, 1988), vol. 1, 427.

62   Bābā Jaʿfar al-Abharī, *Ādāb al-fuqaraʾ* (Istanbul: Muhammad Ali Pasha library, Manuscript no. 1395), fol. 1.

63   ʿAlī ibn ʿUthmān al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, ed. Mahmud ʿĀbedī (Tehran: Soroush Publication. 2014), 278-96.

64   Mojtaba Damavandi, "Bābā Jafar Abharī and Ādāb al-fuqara'," *The Journal of Mystical Literature* 2 (2010), 114.

65   Bābā Jaʿfar Abharī, *Ādāb al-fuqaraʾ*, fol. 20.

66   Al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 425-24.

67   Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, *Ṣuḥuf min kitāb al-lumaʿ*, ed. A. J. Arberry (London, 1947), 10-12.

68   Ibid., 11.

69   Al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 424.

70   Bābā Jaʿfar al-Abharī, *Ādāb al-fuqaraʾ*, fol. 14.

71   Ibid., fol. 16.

72   Ibid., fol. 84.

73   Ibid., fol. 89.

74   Bābā Jaʿfar al-Abharī, *Riyāḍat al-nafs* (Qom: Golpaygani Library, Manuscript no. 707-4/107).

75   Rāfiʿī al-Qazwīnī, *al-Tadwīn*, vol. 2, 158, 165, 228, 351, 393, and 489.

76   Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 32, 74; Rāfiʿī al-Qazwīnī, *al-Tadwīn*, vol. 1, 269-70.; Yaqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-buldān* (Beirut: Dār ṣadir, 1977), vol. 4, 280.

77   al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 423-26.

78 Abu Jaʿfar ibn Yazdānyār al-Hamadhānī, *Rawḍat al-murīdīn* (Manuscript, Thomas Fisher Arabic Collection, University of Toronto), fols, 3b and 54a (hereafter, *R-T*); idem., *Rawḍat al-murīdīn* (Princeton: Manuscript in The Garrett Collection of Princeton University), fols. 4b, 43b, and 56a (hearafter, *R-P*).

79 Alden John Williams, *Rawḍat al-Murīdīn of Shaykh Abū Jaʿfar Ibn Yazdānyār* (Unpublished PhD thesis, Princeton University, 1957), iv-v.

80 Ibid.

81 43 sections in *R-P* and 39 sections in *R-T*. To compare five manuscripts of *Rawḍat al-murīdīn*, see Williams, *Rawḍat al-murīdīn*, xliii-xliv.

82 Arin Salamah-Qudsi, "Abū Jaʿfar Ibn Yazdānyār's Rawḍat al-Murīdīn: an Unknown Sufi Manual of the Fifth/Eleventh Century," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (2020), 6.

83 Ibid., 20.

84 *R-P*, fol. 57b; *R-T*, fol. 80.

85 Husayn ibn Mansur Hallaj, *Hallaj: Poems of a Sufi Martyr*, tr. Carl W. Ernst (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2018), poem 107.

86 *R-P*, fol. 19a; *R-T*, fol. 37.

87 *R-P*, fol. 18b; *R-T*, fols. 35-36. For English translation, see Salamah-Qudsi, "Abū JaʿFar Ibn Yazdānyār," 8-9.

88 Maʿmar Abū Manṣūr al-Iṣfahānī, "Nahj al-Khāṣṣ," ed. Nasrollah Pourjavady, *aḥqīqāt-i Islāmī* 5-6 (1987-8): 132-149

89 *R-P*, fols. 60a-60b; *R-T*, fol. 86. Salamah-Qudsi, "Abū JaʿFar Ibn Yazdānyār," 18.

90 *R-P*, fol. 59a, *R-T*, fols. 83-84.

91 Maʿmar Abū Manṣūr al-Iṣfahānī, *Adab al-mulūk: Ein Handbuch zur islamischen Mystik aus dem 4. /10. Jahrhundert*, ed. Bernd Radtke (Beirut: Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft im Kommission bei F. Steiner Verlag Stuttgart, 1991), *bāb* 27, 65-68.

92 *R-P*, fols. 47a-49b; *P-T*, fols. 60-66.

93 Salamah-Qudsi, "Abū JaʿFar Ibn Yazdānyār," 14.

94 It is likely that Salamah-Qudsi was not acquainted with *Ādāb al-fuqarā'*, as she presents the viewpoint that this story is exclusive to *Rawḍat al-murīdīn* and states that it "does not appear in any other work," see Ibid., 13.

95 *R-P*, fols. 48a-49-5; *R-T*, fols. 61-62.

96 *R-P*, fol. 56a. However, in the Toronto manuscript, the reference is made to Abū Bakr al-Abharī, another Sufi from Jibāl, rather than Ibn Yazdānyār, see *R-T*, fol. 78.

97 Abū Tālib Makkī, *ʿIlm al*-qulūb, ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir Aḥmad ʿAṭā. (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 2004), 89.

98 Qur'ān 7:172.

99   *R-P*, fols. 47a-47b and *R-T*, fols. 61a-61b.

100   *R-P*, fol. 67a. *R-T*, fol. 104.

101   Salamah-Qudsi, "Abū JaʿFar Ibn Yazdānyār," 18-19.

102   Saeidi, "Yaḥyā Ibn Muʿādh Al-Rāzī," 54-55.

REVIEW ESSAY

Rethinking the Prophethood of Muhammad in Christian Theology

MEHRAJ DIN

Abstract

In the modern world, there is an incessant amount of research on religions and interfaith interaction. Yet, too much of our theological activities remain shockingly intramural. Instead of allowing an inherent energy to launch us into the larger reality of global religiosity, we insist on protecting our theology from the threat of contamination. Among many points of agreement, the centrality of Muhammad's prophethood remains key among the contentious issues between Islam and Christianity. Anna Bonta Moreland's *Reconsidering Muhammad* takes us on a journey into the reception of Muhammad in Christian Theology. Engaging

Islam from deep within the Christian tradition by addressing the question of the prophethood of Muhammad, Anna Bonta Moreland calls for a retrieval of Thomistic thought on prophecy. Moreland sets the stage for this inquiry through an intertextual reading of the key Vatican II documents on Islam and on Christian revelation. This review will retrace the historical reception of Muhammad in early European tradition and also how Moreland's work is a pathbreaking introduction to one of the least talked about theological puzzles between Islam and the Christian tradition.

Keywords: Christian Theology, Thomas Aquinas, Vatican II, Muhammad

Introduction

The diverse and distinctive landscape of religious discourse between Semitic religions is often fraught with the question of authenticity and acceptability. Navigating the theological puzzles and truth-claims between Abrahamic religions and especially between Christianity and Islam has preoccupied the scholarship of various intellectual giants and movements in both the respective traditions. The theological position of prophets and the inevitable question of prophecy remains the focal point of contestation in the Abrahamic traditions. Part of the puzzle also is how the trans-historical Otherization of Islam has remained a permanent feature in the writings of Christian scholarship. This epistemic categorial demonization in Orientalist literature is what Sophia Rose Arjana identifies as "the Muslim problem" with the particularistic attitude toward the Prophethood of Muhammad often described as an aversion to, or "anxiety of Islam."[1] Considering this recurrent and historical legacy of intimidation and polemic, finding a middle ground remains a challenging task. In the words of Robert Neville, "One of the most important tasks of theology today is to develop strategies for determining how to enter into the meaning system of another tradition, not merely as a temporary member of that tradition, but in such a way as to see how they bear upon

one another."[2] Anna Moreland's recent book *Muhammad Reconsidered: A Christian Perspective on Islamic Prophecy* is a welcome step in this direction and joins an ever-growing body of literature devoted to the assessments of Muhammad's function and identity in Christian theology.

The past fifty years of Christian theologians' engagement with other faith traditions have provided a world of theological resources. In this bold project, Moreland takes a necessary step beyond interreligious encounter to re-examine categories within the Christian tradition. By laying the groundwork for examining the Prophecy of Muhammad, this investigation turns to neglected resources within the Catholic theological tradition and argues that the Church has reasons to be open to the possibility of postbiblical revelations—including those that Muhammad received in Mecca and Medina. Traditionally, postbiblical revelatory events have been captured in the marginal category of "private revelation," most typically expressed in Marian apparitions.[3] Private revelation is a small part of a wider prophetic dimension in the Church. In this pretext, she proposes that, given the Church's understanding of prophecy, Christians can view Muhammad as 'a religious prophet',[4] a recognition that opens a way for the Qur'an to be taken seriously by Christians as a source of knowledge about God. This book is the fruit of the author's decades of work on the history of how European Christians have understood Islam and how they have made sense of its rival claims to the heritage of Abraham. Moreland develops her argument through a carefully plotted structure, moving from the general state of Christian views of Islam in the context of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) to sources for reconsidering his prophethood. In this book she places Muhammad's prophecy within that wider dimension. In sum, the prophetic insights that are documented in the Qur'an, Moreland claims can be viewed through Christian claims to truth, not in spite of them.[5]

Muhammad in Early and later Christian Writings

Before turning to some examples of modern writings on the reception of Muhammad, including the book under review, which will be the main focus of this essay, we will briefly consider some examples from

the pre-modern period. Sophia Rose Arjana in her work *Muslims in the Western Imagination* argues that the earlier studies of the Prophet Muhammad were largely polemical, neglecting to include any Muslim sources and offering little biographical detail.[6] John Tolan in *Faces of Muhammad* also asserts that Muhammad has always been at the center of European discourses on Islam. To medieval Christian communities, Muhammad—the leader of a religious and political community that grew quickly and with relative success-was an enigma. Did God really send him as a prophet with a revelation? Was the political success of the community he founded a divine validation? Or were he and his followers inspired by something evil? Among Christians, it was widely believed that Muslims were idolaters and that they worshipped Muhammad; Muhammad's claims to prophecy were sometimes explained away in terms of epilepsy; much emphasis was placed on his perceived sensuality and violence; there were even stories that Muhammad was "a Roman cardinal or cleric, frustrated in his ambition, who perverted his own converts to spite the Roman Church."[7] Also, in some European biographical literature, the Prophet Muhammad supposedly took on various roles— initially almost exclusively malignant but gradually incorporating a positive assessment as well. Not all European writers on Muhammad show him the admiration and respect that we find in Bonaparte and Goethe, of course. The works of predecessors were integral to these writings, which meant that tropes developed over centuries had a durable quality. Tolan argues that Christian theologians were mostly writing to defend Christianity so the masses would not be theologically misled, to protect their people from Oriental vices, and to fend off fears of the nearby expanding Muslim empires.[8] At the same time, reformist and revisionist thinkers reconstructed these tropes into polemical critiques of their own. In this way, exploring the reception of Muhammad since the twelfth century helps us understand modern discourses on religion.

Also writing in early modern period, Henry Stubbe, whose *Originall & Progress of Mahometanism* (1671) describes the Muslim prophet as a great reformer who fought the superstition and illegitimate power of Christian clergy and sought to return to a pure, unsullied monotheism. Stubbe's Mahomet is a religious reformer, beloved and admired ruler, and sage

legislator. Humphrey Prideaux, a fellow student with Stubbe at Oxford, in 1697 published his *The True Nature of Imposture Fully Display'd in the Life of Mahomet*, in order to show that Mahomet was an impostor and to defend Christianity. Yet increasingly, anticlerical writers such as Irish Deist John Toland portrayed Mahomet as a visionary anticlerical religious reformer, the better to smash the pretensions of the Church of England's priestly aristocracy. Some painted him as an impostor in order to associate his imposture or fanaticism with that of Christians, notably in the *Treatise of the Three Impostors* (1719) and in Voltaire's play *Le Fanatisme, ou Mahomet le Prophète* (1741). Yet others follow the lead of Stubbe and Toland to make Mahomet into a reformer who eradicates superstition and combats the power of the clergy. This is how Henri de Boulain Villiers paints the prophet in his *Vie de Mahomed* (1730), and how George Sale presents him in the "preliminary discourse" to his English translation of the Qurʾān (1734). Voltaire, thanks in part to his reading of Sale, depicts Mahomet as a reformer and great statesman in his *Essai sur les Mœurs*. Indeed, by the end of the century, writers such as English Whig Edward Gibbon see him as a "great man," charismatic leader, and legislator to the Arab nation.[9]

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in terms of the Enlightenment onslaught against religion across traditions, scholars like Kant took Protestant Christianity as already rational in order to criticize other religions. While he did not regard Judaism as "a religion at all," he viewed Islam as an antithesis of everything supposedly rational. In "An Essay on the Illness of the Head," Kant described Muhammad as a "zealot": "Zeal leads the zealot to the external, led Mahomet [sic] onto his princely throne."[10] In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the figure of Muhammad returns as a sign of unreason, nonsense and madness of imagination.[11] In contrast, in *Le Fanatism, ou Mahomet le Prophète*, Voltaire described Muhammad as an "imposter." Indeed, he turned him into an archetype of fanaticism pitted against reason. Not only Voltaire but French philosophes and encyclopaedists at large attacked Islam. To Denis Diderot, editor-in-chief of Encyclopédie, Muhammad was "the greatest enemy that human reason has ever known" and the Qurʾān an "absurd, obscure, and dishonest book."[12] Much of what is still written about him is hostile. It would have been easy for anyone to compile a chronicle of that hostility, a catalogue

of disdain, fear, and insult from the earliest Christian polemical texts against Islam to the shrill declarations of politicians like Geert Wilders, parliamentarian of the Partij voor de Vrijheid (the Dutch extreme right) who, to discredit Islam, attacks its prophet, whom he calls a terrorist, a paedophile, and a psychopath.[13] The 2005 controversy over the cartoons of Muhammad published in the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten illustrate the potentially explosive nature of Western views of the Muslim prophet, as do the killing of cartoonists of Charlie Hebdo in January 2015. Tinged by the history of European colonialism and orientalism and by terrorism that claims Islam as its justification, the controversy has provoked a flood of polemics and violence.

Against and in contrast to the polemical tradition and this reductionist portrayal of Muhammad, over the last 200 years many Christian scholars of different traditions have studied Muhammad's life and teaching and have come to have at least a partial respect for him. They have felt that they cannot put Muhammad in a totally negative category and yet equally they cannot subscribe to the Islamic account of Muhammad as the final prophet, with Jesus regarded as his forerunner. However, attitudes did begin to change. Muhammad was described not anymore as the ambitious, profligate impostor of old but as a "silent great soul," a hero who spoke "from Nature's own heart," as Thomas Carlyle called him. On the other hand, a number of European authors of the twentieth century, in the context of decolonization and increasing calls for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, argued that Christians should recognize Muhammad as a prophet. Clinton Bennett, in his book *In Search of Muhammad*, has argued that knowing the sources of Islam is insufficient for "knowing" Muhammad for Muslims. Rather, argues Bennett, we have "insider" and "outsider" perspectives.[14] To put it another way, having faith in a particular set of scriptures or documents or narratives makes all the difference in the world.

Traversing the Terrain of this Work

In this engaging and pleasantly thought out book *Muhammad Reconsidered: A Christian Perspective on Islamic Prophecy*, Moreland

intends to offer a fresh appraisal of Muhammad that considers the widest possible history of the ways in which Christians have assessed his prophethood. Moreland considers addressing the question of the prophecy of Muhammad not only a necessary 'political question' but also a 'theological question' that has not been sufficiently addressed in contemporary Catholicism. In fact, she argues, the documents from Vatican II, while offering the first boldly affirmative portrayals of Muslim belief and practice in magisterial texts ever, consciously left unresolved the question of the status of Muhammad as a prophet. This book is one step towards the direction of addressing the unresolved issues in the conciliar documents from Vatican II about the Church's stance toward Islam by applying a neglected aspect of Thomas's thought, his treatment of prophecy. She underscores and analyses what they have to say about Muslims and their place in our de facto religiously plural world. Moreland then turns to Thomas Aquinas concerning postbiblical prophecy, and endeavours to construct a Catholic theology of revelation that could embrace Muhammad as a prophet, at least in an analogical sense (here she employs Aquinas's 'third way' of understanding language, between univocity and equivocity).

In chapter 1, 'Setting the Stage' Moreland offers a background into the trajectories of debates on the role and place of religion vis-à-vis Enlightenment rationality and how societies continue to remain separated by the power construct of Christianity vs./ over Islam, West vs./ over East, and secular reason vs./over religious fanaticism. Not underestimating the urgency in the call of dialogue amid the hyperbole of Huntington's theory of the Clash of Civilizations and publication of intimidating titles like Norman Podhertz's *World War IV: The Fight against Islamofascism.* Also, recent political events (the march on Capitol Hill and rising Islamophobia) both in the U.S. and abroad (attacks like Christchurch and Paris) have shown that there is a pressing need for Christians to understand Islam in a serious theological way. The Catholic Church occupies a unique role as mediator in the complex dialogue between the world of Islam and the secular West since it shares many fundamental beliefs with both sides. Moreland is right to challenge both this construct and the larger secularization thesis that birthed it, and then

argues the converse, as it were: that encounters between communities of Muslims and non-Muslims in 'the West' are increasing rapidly, that the Catholic Church remains the (sole) Western religious institution that 'is particularly equipped to engage with Muslims in theological terms and that this will lead to salutary political consequences. While many secularists expected an inevitable decline of religious belief as Enlightenment modernity took hold around the globe, it seems that the exact opposite has occurred. As the authors of *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* wrote in 2009, "Over the past four decades, religion's influence on politics has reversed its decline and become more powerful on every continent and across every major world religion."[15] These authors argue that despite the prediction of the "secularization theory," the twenty first century can ironically be coined "God's Century." A genuine understanding of religious traditions has become a theo-political necessity in the West.

Chapter 2, 'The State of the Question', sets the stage for this inquiry through an intertextual reading of the key Vatican II documents and analytically offers a fascinating rereading of five magisterial documents of the Catholic Church: *Dei Verbum* (Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, DV), *Lumen Gentum* (Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, LG), *Nostra Aetate* (Vatican II document on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, NA), *Dialogue and Proclamation* (published 25 years after NA by the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, DP), and *Dominus Iesus* (Declaration on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2000). Important work from the past fifty years provides an understanding of the issues that gave rise to the Council, the heated debates that took place both inside and outside of the conciliar sessions, and the remaining issues that have developed in the post-conciliar period. The contested question about whether Vatican II was an "event" that ruptured the Church's ties to the past or whether it was a "renewal within tradition" has planted ideological fault lines within the theological academy.[16] Moreland argues in this chapter and recurrently throughout the book that one can interpret Vatican II with Benedict XVI's "hermeneutic of reform," whereby the

Church's new attitude toward Islam first appeared discontinuous with the past. But further probing reveals that a medieval account of prophecy—freshly understood— already contains hidden seeds of Vatican II's claims about Islam. We can say, with Benedict XVI, "It is precisely in this combination of continuity and discontinuity at different levels that the very nature of true reform consists."[17] The creative question of the prophecy of Muhammad did not emerge at the magisterial level before the opening of the Council. But a constructive answer to this question must be borne of a deep encounter with the Church's theological tradition. In this chapter Moreland take cues from a collection of essays compiled in honour of John O'Malley's *What Happened at Vatican II* (2010), in which O'Malley suggests that we are ready to move to a further stage of interpreting the Council:

> Instead of examining the documents in isolation from one another, we are now ready to examine them as interdependent and ready to see how that interdependence is essential for interpreting them correctly. We move to a consideration of each document as in some measure an expression of larger orientations and as an integral part of a cohesive corpus, which is a result in large part of the documents' intertextual character. . . . They implicitly but deliberately cross-reference and play off one another—in the vocabulary they employ, in the great themes to which they recur, in the core values they inculcate, and in certain basic issues that cut across them.[18]

Chapter 3 'Thomas Aquinas on Prophecy' chalks out Aquinas's 'taxonomy of prophecy' for where he treats revelation and explicitly writes about prophecy.[19] Both these chapters serve both a symbolic and a substantive function. Turning to a medieval figure, especially one so central to Christian thinking and practice as Thomas Aquinas, highlights the fact that the main argument is drawn from deep within the tradition of Christian theology. Moreland primarily focuses on Thomas's preliminary analysis of prophecy, first by attending to his systematic treatments of this issue in the De veritate (DVer), Summa contra gentiles (hereafter, ScG),

and Summa theologiae (hereafter, ST), and then by turning to his scriptural commentaries and systematic works that take up prophetic biblical figures (central among these are his commentaries on Isaiah, John, Hebrews, and Corinthians).[20] He does not build a theory of knowledge in these questions. Rather, he observes the varying instances of prophecy at work in Scripture and sketches a complex portrait of this phenomenon. Substantively speaking, Thomas's account of prophecy offers a surprisingly subtle understanding of this complex phenomenon, one that opens itself up organically to the animating question of this book. In the next chapter Moreland turns to particular prophetic figures from Scripture about whom Aquinas comments, in order to put his taxonomy to work. She then takes up the question of how Muhammad might figure in this taxonomy and how he might relate to this cast of characters.

In chapter 4 'Scriptural Prophets and Muhammad', Moreland turns explicitly to Thomas's scriptural commentaries and his reflection on some unlikely prophets—even some figures who reject Jesus and yet speak and act prophetically. It then turns back to the taxonomy from chapter 3 in order to draw some conclusions about these figures. Finally, it recalls our reading in chapter 2 of Vatican II documents on non-Christians generally and Muslims in particular, where Christians and Muslims share an overlapping web of beliefs, and draws some preliminary conclusions about the role of Muhammad in this taxonomy of prophecy. Together chapters 3 and 4 reveal Thomas's effort at one and the same time to be true to the varied scriptural testimonies while also weaving together a cohesive understanding of the prophetic experience. These chapters highlight contextual differences, developments in thought, and persistent themes throughout the Thomistic corpus. The textual analysis of these chapters maps out Thomas's treatment of prophecy in preparation for our test case, Muhammad. These chapters open up creative possibilities for considering prophets beyond the walls of the Church. Interpreting these ecclesial documents in light of Thomas on prophecy leads us to open up a new direction in Muslim-Christian dialogue by considering whether Muhammad, a seventh-century nomad, was a religious prophet. Karl Rahner noted that the prophetic element demanded theological reflection.[21] Most of this work on prophecy has been done in France,

Germany, and Italy, but it has received little attention in English-speaking countries.[22] In chapters 3 and 4 of this book, while not offering a comprehensive study of prophecy in the Christian tradition, She draws from the writings of Thomas, bringing to light this neglected aspect of his work. She asserts, "Thomas offers a surprisingly supple and complex account of prophecy, one that has not received sufficient attention in the scholarly Thomist literature, especially in works written in English." In addition, she draws on biblical commentaries that have been largely neglected in contemporary scholarship. In its method and approach, this book, she argues, contributes to a growing movement in Thomistic scholarship, sometimes called "biblical Thomism" or "Ressourcement Thomism."[23]

After opening up the theoretical question of Muhammad's prophecy in the first four chapters by marrying the claims made at Vatican II about Muslim belief and practice to Thomas's understanding of the role of prophecy in the church. Moreland, in Chapter 5, 'Is Muhammad a Prophet for Christians?' situates her proposal within the context of the past and ongoing conversation about this very question. The first section of the chapter takes up the work of those thinkers who have found an affirmative answer to this question: Montgomery Watt, Hans Küng, Kenneth Cragg, and David Kerr. Each of these thinkers has spent decades engaging Muslim sources and scholarship. Each of the first four thinkers offers a particular model through which to consider Muhammad's prophecy, although there are some significant areas of overlap among their proposals. Watt focuses on Muhammad's moral exemplarity as a sign of his prophetic status, Küng on his invocations against idolatry, Cragg on the praiseworthy messages of the Qur'ān, and Kerr on Muhammad's political reforms and liberating praxis. Moreland differentiates her position from these four in a brilliant and thought-provoking way: 'Muhammad as liturgical prophet'.[24] Moreland critically analyzes these theologians' approaches to this question and suggests an alternative model to these initial four. In the spirit of the medieval quaestio, the rest of the chapter addresses objections to the argument of this book that arise from two representative thinkers: Jacques Jomier, O.P., and Christian Troll, S.J., each of whom has dedicated his professional life to Christian theological work in Muslim contexts.

Both these thinkers offer objections along two main lines. The first states that a Christian assent to Muhammad as a prophet inevitably sounds to Muslim ears as if the Christian has declared submission to Islam. A belief in the prophecy of Muhammad is a belief in all that Islam teaches, including its anti-Christian elements.[25] Islam teaches that Muhammad's recitations are final and universal. A Christian could never accept that claim without ceasing to be a Christian. Particularly problematic is the fact that assenting to Muhammad's claim replaces Jesus's universality with the universality of Muhammad. Jesus becomes the forerunner, speaking to particular people at a particular time. A Muslim understanding of Muhammad, then, cannot be agreed to by Christians and cannot serve as a meeting-place for people of both faiths. So the first objector understands "prophecy" in the full Muslim sense of the word. The second line of objection argues that Muslims would and have reacted negatively to such a redefinition of prophecy, which resembles none of the thick theological claims they assume in the term "prophet." It does no good to redefine prophecy in such a way that it is unrecognizable to Muslims and then ascribe that "prophecy" to Muhammad. The second line of objection understands the term "prophet" to be emptied of its Muslim contents such that it becomes a third term that is unrecognizable to the religious other we are trying to engage. The next chapter tries to recapture the argument of this book and show how it is a fruitful alternative to the approaches of the thinkers examined in this chapter.

John Renard in his chapter 'Islam and Christian theologians' proposes an approach to this vast subject by describing the "Four M's" of Muslim-Christian theological engagement: The Apologetical Model: Defining Islam in Relation to Christianity; The Scholastic model: Come, Let Me Reason for Us; The Christian-Inclusivist Model: Can't We All Get Along? and The Dialogical Model: Inter-theology and Theological Cross-Reference.[26] David Marshall also and along the same lines argues for at least two specific and distinct contexts in which Christians can address the question of their response to Muhammad. The first is in the context of internal Christian theological discussion. In this framework, Christians ask themselves how they should interpret Muhammad within a Christian frame of reference. Where does he fit within a Christian universe of

meaning, a Christian view of God's purposes? In what sense, if any, can Christians regard him as a prophet? A feature of such internal Christian reflection is that it can allow considerable flexibility and diversity in thinking about prophecy. For Christianity, prophecy is clearly important, but it is not as important as certain other concepts, notably incarnation. It is perhaps because prophecy is not at the very centre of Christian theological thinking that such flexibility and diversity in understanding it are possible. The other context is that of Christian encounter with Muslims, whether in polemical debate or in eirenic dialogue. Christians are often asked by Muslims what they think of Muhammad and, sometimes, why they do not recognize him as a prophet, not least as Muslims recognize Jesus as a prophet. Within the wide field of Christian engagement with other faiths, there is perhaps no other figure on whom Christians are more often invited to give their opinion. In this context, Christians will (or at least should) be acutely aware of the Islamic frame of reference within which Muslims use the word "prophet." For Islam, prophecy is a more central and also a more clearly defined concept than it is for Christianity.[27]

In chapter 6 'Closing Argument' Moreland draws on the practice of analogical reasoning in the theology of religious pluralism and shows that a term in one religion—in this case "prophecy"—can have purchase in another religious tradition. Chapters 3 and 4, in fact, show that a Christian understanding of "prophecy" is already fluid, before even stretching beyond its ecclesial walls. The documents of Vatican II claim that Christians and Muslims share an overlapping web of beliefs. In other words, they use religious terms in overlapping ways. Moreland equally argues, if we turn back to Thomas, how a multi-layered understanding of Christian prophecy, such that what Muhammad heard and communicated in seventh-century Arabia in principle could fall under the term "prophecy," understood in its most expansive sense.[28] And for our conversation to develop, Moreland argues for a dire need to move from apologia to analogia. As in, how through apologia we speak words "from" or "out of" our narrative, but in analogia we are taking words "up" from our narrative and seeing how those words cohere in other religious traditions and understand the importance of a theology of religious pluralism. She

further argues how David Burrell, C.S.C., will act as a guide in this constructive proposal. Burrell embodies in practice the intellectual trajectory of his work. His first book, *Analogy and Philosophical Language* (1973), planted seeds that bore fruit years later in his ground-breaking work in comparative theology.[29] Moreland concludes the chapter by recalling that the Catholic Church already has practices of spiritual discernment that have been applied to post-canonical divine encounters. Moreland offers the unlikely category of "private revelation" here as a possible model for discerning what is true and holy in the Qur'ān. These discernment practices are offered as a possible way into a concrete examination of Muhammad's prophethood— an examination that would involve another book-length project.

(In) Conclusion

Anna Bonta Moreland's *Muhammad Reconsidered* is an excellent addition to the fields of Catholic studies in Islam, and Catholic theology of post-canonical revelation. As we are aware both Christian and Islamic traditions have long histories of explicit awareness of the challenge and delicacy of interpreting communications believed to be of divine origin, whether as products of "inspiration" or as the mediation of the very words of God. This awareness begins with the sacred texts themselves, in the ways they incorporate, or allude to, previous "books" as well as in their more explicit comments on the limits of human interpretation and the inherent differences in various types of sacred communication. It is undoubtedly a fresh appraisal of Muhammad that considers the widest possible history of the ways in which Christians have assessed his prophethood. Moreland's book is inspiring reading for anyone seeking to navigate between the Scylla of Christian exclusivism and exceptionalism and the Charybdis of onto-theological pluralism and universalism (or even religious perennialism). Communicating this idea that deep within the bosom of one tradition (Christianity) one finds a theological openness to another tradition (Islam) and this means that Christians have internal reasons from within their tradition to take seriously the revelations Muhammad received in Mecca and Medina. In fact, Christians need to

take all the resources used to interpret the Bible—historical, anthropological, philological, and theological—and apply them to a Christian reading of the Qur'ān. This work can be recognized as one of the central works—if not the central work in the modern academia to open the gates of debate and interaction to solve and untie the knots of theological puzzles between Islam and Christianity.

Mehraj Din
Research Fellow
Istanbul Zaim University
Istanbul, Türkiye

Endnotes

1   Sophia, Rose Arjana. *Muslims in the Western Imagination*, (Oxford University Press, 2015) 1.

2   Robert Cummings Neville, *Behind the Masks of God: An Essay Toward Comparative Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991) 166.

3   See Anna, Bonta Moreland, "The Qur'an and the Doctrine of Private Revelation: A Theological Proposal." *Theological Studies* 76, no. 3 (2015): 531-549.

4   Anna Bonta Moreland, *Muhammad Reconsidered: A Christian Perspective on Islamic Prophecy.* (University of Notre Dame Pess, 2020) 34

5   Moreland, *Muhammad Reconsidered,* 3

6   Sophia, *Muslims in the Western Imagination.* 8

7   Tolan (2002) gives many examples of Western Christian views of Muhammad; e.g. Peter the Venerable (xxi), Guibert de Nogent (135–147), Pope Innocent III (194).

8   Daniel, Norman. *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image.* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1960) 83.

9   Tolan, John. *Faces of Muhammad: Western Perceptions of the Prophet of Islam from the Middle Ages to Today.* (Princeton University Press, 2019) 13.

10   Irfan, Ahmad. *Religion as critique: Islamic critical thinking from Mecca to the marketplace.* (UNC Press Books, 2017)

11   Irfan, *Religion as critique*, 32

12   Irfan, *Religion as critique*, 34

13   Geert Wilders, Geert Wilders Weblog, March 30, 2011, http://www.geertwilders.nl/index.php/component/content/article/80-geertwildersnl/1741-time-to-unmask-muhammad-by-geert-wilders.

14   Clinton Bennett, *In Search of Muhammad* (London: Cassell, 1998), 205.

15   Philpott, Daniel, Monica Duffy Toft, and Tim Shah. "*God's Century: Religion and the Future of Global Politics*." (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010) 3.

16   In his 2005 Christmas address to the Roman Curia, Pope Benedict XVI called for a "hermeneutic of reform" in the interpretation of Vatican II instead of the "hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture," which risks a split between the preconciliar and the postconciliar Church. This address was reprinted as the introduction to a collection of essays meant to follow the pope's lead on this issue. See Benedict XVI, "A Proper Hermeneutic for the Second Vatican Council," ix–x.

17   Moreland, *Muhammad Reconsidered,* 32

18   James L, Heft, and John O'Malley, eds. *After Vatican II: trajectories and hermeneutics.* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), xiii.

19 I disagree with Mikka Ruokanen, who argues that "what is apparent to human reason has become an institutionalized religion in Islam" in his *The Catholic Doctrine of Non–Christian Religions according to the Second Vatican Council*, 78. Roukanen implies that *only* what is apparent to human reason emerges in Islam. In my reading of the conciliar texts, the overlapping web of beliefs about Mary, Jesus, eschatology, and so on, added to the fact that we "adore" the one God together, imply that Muslims do not come to know God just through natural reason.

20 Moreland, *Muhammad reconsidered*, 43.

21 Karl, Rahner. *Visions and prophecies.* (*Quaestiones disputatae*, 1963) 21.

22 For a recent outstanding and helpful bibliography of modern studies of "prophecy" in English, see Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy.*

23 See Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis; Scripture and Metaphysics; Christ's Fulfilment of Torah and Temple;* Dauphinais, *Aquinas the Augustinian; Mattison, Introducing Moral Theology;* Tapie, *Aquinas on Israel and the Church*; and Hütter and Levering, *Ressourcement Thomism.*

24 Moreland, *Muhammad reconsidered*, 107.

25 Christian W. Troll. *Dialogue and Difference: Clarity in Christian-Muslim relations.* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2009) 117.

26 John Renard. *Islam and Christian Theologians,* (CTSA PROCEEDINGS 48 (1993) 41-54.

27 David, Marshall. "*Muhammad in contemporary Christian theological reflection.*"(*Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 24, no. 2 (2013). 161-172.

28 Moreland, *Muhammad reconsidered*, 114.

29 David Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas.* (University of Notre Dame Pess, 1992) and *Freedom and creation in three traditions.* (Univ. Notre Dame Press, 1993).

BOOK REVIEWS

Women and Gender in the Qur'an

OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2020, 232 PAGES.

CELENE IBRAHIM

Women and Gender in the Qur'an by Celene Ibrahim focuses on women's voices, presence, and roles found within the Qur'an. Ibrahim situates her work as part of the *tafsīr* tradition by presenting herself as "*the tentative mufassira*" (8). Given that there are few known classical Islamic writings from female exegetes, it is intriguing to see a modern work from a female author claiming a place within the *tafsīr* tradition, which holds significant weight due to its role in understanding the meanings of the Qur'an. Though one may point to other authors such as amina wadud and Asma Barlas for their previous work on similar themes, it is important to note that the former two spend far more time asserting and defining their own *Weltanschauung* than engaging in close readings. To her credit, Ibrahim embodies the classical *tafsīr* ethos by centering Qur'anic language itself as the basis for her conclusions.

Ibrahim's work ties together a compelling variety of topics, from female sexuality to familial relationships, women's speech in the Qur'an, and female figures used as examples – for better or for worse – to the audience of the Qur'an. She concludes the monograph with an invitation for readers to dive deeper into Qur'anic, Hadith, and even Biblical scholarship for more answers to the many questions raised within, and

by, her own work. This book succeeds in encouraging readers from all backgrounds to adopt a gender-focused methodology in reading the Qur'an and works about the Qur'an. Ibrahim discloses her Muslim identity and assumes that her audience will also include "believing women," whom she specifically calls upon "to pursue Qur'anic scholarship so as to keep alive the heritage of our foremothers" (Preface, XIV).

Ibrahim lays the foundation for her book in "Muslima theology and feminist Quranic exegesis," which she defines in the endnotes of her introduction as "a branch of theological studies that… offers an intellectual platform to advance female-centric contemplations of piety, female-centric modes of leadership, and female-centric epistemological authority" (10). Despite this explicit assertion of genre, I would caution her readers not to expect the thoroughness or methodology of classical *tafsīr* works. For example, Ibrahim almost entirely avoids referencing *aḥadīth* to explain Qur'anic language or meaning, and similarly almost never references other existing *tafsīr* works regarding the verses that she engages. This book, therefore, is more akin to a thematic analysis of the Qur'an rather than a straightforward book of either theology or *tafsīr*. From an academic perspective, this may not be an issue; for readers coming to Ibrahim's work with a particular expectation of what a *tafsīr* book should look like, this may well be seen as a detracting factor.

Chapter 1 cuts to the chase with its title "Female Sex and Sexuality." What other authors have dedicated entire books to, Ibrahim condenses into a single chapter, signifying that women and gender in the Qur'an have much bigger scopes than sex and sexuality. She uses the chapter as a broad umbrella to cover not just the act of intercourse and its legal rulings, but to include a discussion of morality, perspectives of the female body as desired object, women as desiring *of* sexual intimacy (whether licitly or otherwise), and sex-as-reward in the Islamic Afterlife. On the purpose of sexual intercourse, for example, Ibrahim collects multiple Qur'anic verses about the creation of human beings and the biological imperative. She asserts that despite the mention of the act of procreation, there is no corresponding Qur'anic *command* of an obligation to procreate. However, one could argue against this claim by pointing to the Hadith literature, which *does* denote a strong emphasis on having

children, if not a technical obligation. This immediately brings to question the strength of Ibrahim's arguments to readers with a background in Islamic texts, as her conclusion contradicts extra-Qur'anic texts and established stances within Islamic orthodoxy.

Ibrahim then engages in the common *tafsīr* practice of reflecting upon the literary and metaphysical parallels of Qur'anic verses. She elegantly connects verses that talk about both the creation and procreation of humankind in relation to "waters" – that is, the waters of "the two seas" (25:53), and the "water" from which humans are created (i.e., "the sexual fluids of the female and the male in sexual union" (21). She relates this to an exploration of other dualities spoken of in the Qur'an, such as the heavens and the earth, and more relevantly, the "single soul" and its spouse, as described in Qur'an 7:189. Ibrahim pauses to argue for a gender-neutral translation interpretation of the term '*azwāj*', rather than "imposing an androcentric bias" (21) upon the word by understanding it as 'female spouses', and thus impacting the meanings of other Qur'anic verses such as Qur'an 30:21. Moving on from elucidating upon the metaphysical and linguistic inferences related to the concept of intercourse, Ibrahim spends some time on the topic of licit versus illicit sexual relationships, and even sexual assault and redemption in the context of sexual misconduct (specifically, the story of Prophet Yusuf and the viceroy's wife). In general, Ibrahim's approach clusters multiple tangential topics under one broad sub-heading, more or less linked together, without necessarily coming to one major conclusion. This flow of information can appear somewhat nebulous at times, but at other times brings out interesting parallels between the Qur'anic narratives she discusses.

Amidst this discussion of sexuality and sexual conduct, Ibrahim directs her readers to "contemplate the Qur'an's depiction of physical attractiveness" (39). She contends that the Qur'an presents beauty as a moral virtue rather than a pure aesthetic value – a claim that will cause a careful reader to take pause. Referencing the Qur'anic descriptions of Maryam and even the Prophet Muhammad – which utilizes the word '*ḥasana*' in relation to them – she asserts that "Such verses extend the concept of beauty beyond aesthetics to a moral plane" (39). She then

presses forward saying, "From the Qur'anic depictions of human beauty, we see that this is not primarily an aesthetic quality; rather, it relates, in a fundamental way, to virtue… The viceroy's wife and the group of women surrounding Joseph are enraptured by an angelic quality about him,… even sexual appeal… is articulated in terms of character, not aesthetic appearance" (39). Despite Ibrahim's attempt to link the "beautiful acceptance" of Maryam and the "beautiful example" of Prophet Muhammad to physical beauty, it is a tenuous linguistic connection at best. The *ḥasan* qualities ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad and to Maryam are not about physical beauty in any way. The word *ḥasan* in the contexts provided (Maryam's "*qabūl*^{in} *ḥasan*^{in}" and Prophet Muhammad's "*uswat*^{un} *ḥasana*") do not translate solely to 'beauty,' but rather to a metaphysical completion or state of perfection. Indeed, the "*qabūl*^{in} *ḥasan*^{in}" does not come from Maryam, but from God: it is God who accepts with "*qabūl*^{in} *ḥasan*^{in}" a beautiful, or perfect acceptance of her piety. The above merely underscores how unfortunately, the lack of *ḥadīth* references here undermines her argument: the *ḥadīth* of the Israa' and Mi'raaj, recorded in Sahih Muslim, wherein the Prophet Muhammad describes his ascension to the seven heavens and specifically says, "I saw Yusuf, who had been given half of beauty" (*huwa qad u'ṭiya shaṭr al-ḥusn*)[1] makes it obvious that the beauty of the Prophet Yusuf, which drove the viceroy's wife nearly mad with lust, and which distracted her peers such that they cut off their own hands at witnessing him, was indeed an explicitly physical beauty. To put it more bluntly, there is no textual indication that Prophet Yusuf's beautiful *character* aroused the viceroy's wife's interest or drove her to irrational and dramatic measures: she desired him primarily for his physical body. In this case, it is a collapse of the range of meanings of *ḥasana* that results in erroneous conflations. It is clear that the verses in the case of Maryam and the Prophet Muhammad do not relate to physical beauty, which do support her argument, but in the case of the Prophet Yusuf, it is not tenable as a generalization.

Further examples of the weakness of Ibrahim's Qur'an-only approach can be found when she broaches metaphysical topics of angels and their manifested bodies in the earthly realm and the *Ḥūr al-ʿAyn* of Paradise. With regard to angels, she says: "It is unclear if they come embodied

as fully sexed beings, or if they occasionally assume some distinctive features that signify a male identity" (40). Though her footnote does reference verses 51:26-28 and 11:70, in which the angelic messengers to the Prophet Ibrahim refuse food, she could have answered (at least part of) her own question by acknowledging the many *aḥadīth* in which angels met with the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions in the form of men, and particularly in the form of Diḥya al-Kalbī. Additionally, Maryam herself sought refuge in God when she was approached by the angel who came to her in the form of *basharan sawiyyā* (a well-proportioned man) in Qur'an 19:17-18!

The discussion on the *Ḥūr al-ʿAyn* continues in this same vein. It is true that Ibrahim is not unique in her undertaking to explain away the explicitly female, sexual nature of the *Ḥūr al-ʿAyn* (see the notorious 'white grapes' interpretation provided by Christoph Luxenberg in his *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*). However, her insistence that "no Qur'anic verses specifically address sex in paradise" and that "the beings in paradise may be aesthetically pleasing but potentially do not have teleological purpose of bringing inhabitants sexual pleasure" (45) truly strain credulity, given that even Ibrahim acknowledges that "the sensuality in the description of paradise is ostensibly intended to motivate pious action" (45). To provide sensual motivation with no follow-through, as it were, seems inconsistent with Qur'anic promises of somatic rewards. Ibrahim attempts to justify this by pointing to the lack of "need for reproduction, and hence no need for reproductive organs" (45) and deflects from deeper consideration of the sexual capabilities of *Ḥūr al-ʿAyn*. Ibrahim's avoidance of referencing classical *tafāsīr* is perhaps understandable here, given that notable *tafsīr* scholars such as Ibn ʿAbbas and Ibn Masʿud (amongst others), explicitly interpreted Qur'anic verses discussing the rewards of paradise in explicitly sexual terms, using *aḥadīth* evidence that counter her own argument. The Qur'an may not explicitly lay out details of sexual intercourse in Paradise, but there are implicit descriptions of the *Ḥūr al-ʿAyn* such that they are not meant merely for aesthetics, but for physical fulfillment. Ibrahim also takes the unusual position of positing that the *Ḥūr al-ʿAyn* and the *Qāṣirāt al-Ṭarf* are two different creations, rather than one and the same; she also tries

to make the argument that *wildān mukhalladun* includes "former human beings in a transformed state" (46), which is a proposal unique in her work. Overall, Chapter 1 of *Women and Gender in the Qur'ān* contains the weakest arguments, evidence, and conclusions of the book – ranging from far-fetched linguistic interpretations to glaring omissions in source material. This will be a disappointment to readers whose first taste of Ibrahim's Qur'anic analysis will not engender trust in future chapters, undermining the overall strength of her work.

Chapter 2, "Female Kin, Procreation, and Parenting" is a marked improvement in Ibrahim's work due to her focus on drawing out lessons of "kinship ethics" (64) from the Qur'an's verses regarding female figures, their connections to the Prophets, and their roles in these Prophets' journeys. She opens this chapter by pointing out that "For all the main figures considered "messengers" (*rusul*, singl. *rasūl*), at least one female figure is associated with that messenger (and sometimes more)" (64). She delves into the many ways that the Qur'an speaks of and honours family relationships; in particular, matriarchal figures (both Maryam, mother of Jesus, and Maryam's own mother), and sister figures (the sister of Musa, the two sisters of Midyan). Ibrahim points out that "the Qur'an never depicts theologically or ethically corrupt daughters or sisters [of Prophets], whereas it does present narratives involving corrupt sons and brothers" (85). While Ibrahim continues to avoid explicitly referencing *aḥadīth* or *tafsīr* in the main text of her work her endnotes, specifically for the story of the Prophet Ayyub, do direct readers to an academic work which *does* engage with later exegetical traditions (88). This leads readers to question this selective engagement, which is repeated with relation to Hajar, whom she does not name as a "Qur'anic matriarch" (74), but again directs readers to an academic resource (90). One wonders why she consistently avoids engaging with primary source material from the exegetical tradition, while sourcing academic literature that does engage with exegesis.

The star of *Women and Gender in the Qur'an* is Chapter 3: "Women Speakers and Interlocutors." In this chapter, Ibrahim delves into the details of women's speech in the Qur'an: "When, where, how, and to whom do women and girls speak?" (95). Masterfully, she draws parallels between

the ant and the Queen of Sheba in their interactions with the Prophet Sulayman; both are feminine voices of leaders who seek to protect their people. In the stories of Maryam and the Prophet Musa, Ibrahim notes "…the command of God is manifest through communication to, and through the actions of, a woman and a girl" (102). She highlights that God listens to women's grievances and recognizes women's piety, and that – perhaps most importantly – that God speaks directly *to* women: the first woman (known, through *aḥadīth*, as Hawwa') and the women of the Prophet Muhammad's family. Ibrahim's concluding words on the affective dimensions of female speech are particularly insightful: "…the performance of gender, through the re-enactment of Qur'anic speech, adds another interpretative layer to the ways in which gender is inscribed… The act of regularly revisiting such [Qur'anic] speech…. Bring[s] about an increase in empathy in that individual toward women…" (117). Truly, this chapter shines as a powerful starting point for believers to revisit the Qur'an's messaging and ponder its centering of female figures, especially as examples of piety for all humankind.

It is definitely worth taking the time to read through the endnotes of this chapter in particular, which yield valuable further details – often elaborating by mentioning classical *tafsīr* opinions that are not mentioned in the main text. Of course, had many of these references been mentioned in the body of the monograph, they could have strengthened Ibrahim's arguments. Their conspicuous absence leaves the Islamically-literate reader disappointed at the exclusion of such valuable texts, resigned to endnotes. It is unclear throughout what the benefit is in singling out the Qur'anic text alone, when Muslim scholarship has always included *aḥadīth* as part of the scriptural canon to help make sense of opaque language in the Qur'an itself. Indeed, this chapter felt all too brief. The stories of Maryam and the Queen of Sheba in particular are elaborated on in great detail by *tafsīr* commentaries, and one wonders what unique gems have been left out due to the author's choice of methodology. Nonetheless, Chapter 3 introduces a valuable perspective and focus on female speech in the Qur'an, in a way that connects the reader to the Qur'anic narratives of these female figures in a deeply spiritual context.

Chapter 4, "Women Exemplars for an Emerging Polity," examines how the Qur'an presents exemplary pious and sinful female personalities to "define female virtue and vice against the background of the emerging Muslim polity" (127). Ibrahim brings forth these examples in chronological order of revelation (as opposed to the order of their appearance in the Qur'an), utilizing a heuristic technique used in Qur'anic studies (127). She begins with the wife of Abu Lahab in *Sūrah al-Masad* and the reference to the sorceresses in *Sūrah al-Falaq* as illustrations of blameworthy behaviour. When discussing other women who incurred God's wrath, Ibrahim mentions verse 10 of *Sūrah Taḥrīm*, where the wives of the Prophets Nuh and Lut are singled out for condemnation, and draws a connection between these verses and the opening verses of the *sūrah*, where God rebukes two of the wives of the Prophet Muhammad for their plotting. Ibrahim concludes that "these verses... function as reminders... of the two of the Prophet Muhammad's wives whom God chides..." (p.g. 131). She does not clarify what kind of reminder this is meant to function as, whether it is meant to warn the Prophet Muhammad's wives of their possible futures should they persist in their ways, or for some other purpose that is not articulated. The implication of Ibrahim's phrasing is that it is meant to be the former. While there is some element of parallel in the beginning and ending of the *sūrah*, there is a vast difference between the two wives who are reprimanded and the two wives who were explicitly called disbelievers for betraying their husband's divine mission. It seems much more likely that including both stories in the same *sūrah* is meant to show the (d)evolution of wifely behavior rather than a bluntly explicit comparison. Shifting focus to more positive portrayals of figures such as the Queen of Sheba and Maryam, Ibrahim's work regains strength with her observations of the ways in which these two stories reflect the necessity of female figures in supporting the divine missions of their eras, with the Queen of Sheba representing the political power of women (132), and Maryam symbolizing the dialogue between Muslims, Jews, and Christians (134). This particular insight yields a starting point for future conversations on the role of Muslim women within their religious and social communities.

The second part of Chapter 4 focuses on women, law, and the polity. Ibrahim notes that "new norms serve to distinguish the developing Muslim polity by correcting or reforming a practice or social custom that was disadvantageous to women" (136). Here, she is continuing the chronological argument that she introduced at the beginning of the chapter, using a historical technique that she does not draw upon elsewhere in the book. The developing Muslim polity she is referring to is the early Muslim community of Makkah, the context in which these verses are said to have been revealed, although she also provides examples of reformation and correction that extend into the Madinan era. She demonstrates how the Qur'an does this by providing the examples of *Sūrah al-Mujādilah*, which abolished the practice of *ẓihār*; the 'test' of *Sūrah al-Mumtaḥina*, which provided an equitable solution for both fleeing believing women and their abandoned disbelieving husbands; and the establishment of punishment for those who slander chaste women, as exemplified by the story of *al-Ifk*. Here, it is worth noting that Ibrahim is forced to rely upon extra-Qur'anic literature about "the lie" in Qur'an 24:11 being specific to A'ishah and the involvement of Hamnah bint Jahsh. In the endnotes provided, Ibrahim once again does not refer to primary sources of Qur'anic exegesis or *aḥadīth*, but to the work of another academic (143). Unfortunately, Ibrahim never provides an explanation for this, demonstrating once again the difficulty (and questionable value) in discussing the Qur'an without drawing upon exegetical literature. Ibrahim ends this chapter by summarizing the chronological appearance of women in the Qur'an as a method of defining both sinful and virtuous behaviour to early Muslims, and closes by emphasizing that women's concerns played an influential role in the Qur'an's establishing of both legal rulings and Islamic ethical mores. This sudden shift to historical framing is done without clear purpose. Perhaps the majority of female figures and depictions in previous chapters had to do with historical women (Maryam, etc.) as opposed to the women around the Prophet Muhammad she addresses in this chapter. For this reason, her Qur'an-only methodology does not suffice because most of the contemporaries of the Prophet Muhammad are not addressed explicitly in the Qur'an, as the *meaning* given to these verses has always been derived from *aḥadīth*.

That said, this framing, were it to include *aḥadīth* and *tafāsīr*, would make for a compelling and robust analysis of the development of Islamic law in the new polity and as it relates to women.

The book's conclusion is succinct: the Qur'an presents female figures, female speech, values associated with sex and sexuality, and familial relationships featuring women in order to improve the spiritual and social welfare of women and society at large. Ibrahim suggests the Qur'anic method of narrative vignettes is a tool of theological education, wherein women function as both ideal figures and as warnings to believers. Poignantly, Ibrahim underscores that "If there is one common element to these disparate figures, it is that the Qur'an depicts [women] with the agency and responsibility to shape their destinies, for better or for worse" (146). She notes here, too, that amongst this rich intra-Qur'anic discourse, there is no "single archetypal female figure in the Qur'an" (146). Women are not a monolith or homogeneous, nor are women commanded to conform to one specific, restrictive model of womanhood. Here Ibrahim morphs into a scholar-activist, bringing clear, general, public relevance to her book. She reminds readers that "renewed attention to Qur'anic stories involving female figures can inform contemporary Muslim conversations" (148) on various topics that are associated with gender, such as sexual assault, domestic violence, marriage, and more. She analyzes each subject and their subcomponents through Qur'anic narratives featuring women in a way that underscores the textual and extratextual implications of each story, bringing forth conversations relatable to the average Muslim reader as well as the academic.

Finally, Ibrahim is straightforward about the limitations of her present work. She admits that she has raised questions that she could not answer and acknowledges that her book has been intentionally focused on the Qur'an alone, without engaging Hadith narratives on the topic of female figures. Ibrahim does not articulate whether she considers a Qur'an-only approach to be a weakness, nor does she make a case for *why* it is a valuable approach. She does not specifically reference her avoidance of classical exegetical literature, although one does catch glimpses of her forced reliance upon external literature to fill in the blanks, most notably when she speaks of the story of A'ishah's

slander (34). Ibrahim's final call to arms will refresh the reader, who will come away with a deep sense of appreciation for the work that she has provided, as well as the many trajectories and opportunities she has offered for deeper research and discussion.

Ibrahim's book does not end with its conclusion: one of this work's most valuable resources lie in its final pages: the appendices. While they do not add to her arguments in and of themselves, they provide a concise visual representation of her references, and serve as beneficial reference materials. Appendix A provides a detailed list of female figures in the Qur'an, referenced alphabetically by their Qur'anic names or titles. Appendix B contains female figures and families in Qur'anic narratives, categorized by the Qur'anic terms used, the translation of those terms, and the verses where they are mentioned. Appendix C provides every Qur'anic verse featuring female speech and God's messages to women. Appendix D provides a list of female figures and their families, listed by their (approximate) revelatory sequence of *sūrah*s. Appendix E is shorter, and consists of select female relatives of the Prophet Muhammad. For anyone who is invested in the subject of female figures in the Qur'an, these appendices are a wonderful asset to others undertaking research on similar themes.

Celene Ibrahim's book is an exciting addition to the fairly broad genre of "Islam and women," which tends to narrowly focus on women as sexual objects and subjects. Aside from critiques of her methodological weaknesses, Ibrahim offers a perspective that rarely makes its way into Muslim academia: that of a self-proclaimed believing Muslim woman, approaching the Qur'an on its own terms, engaging with it not just as an academic, but as someone who participates in its community and derives genuine spiritual benefit from its intellectual engagement. The strongest element of Ibrahim's work is that she painstakingly examines each and every instance in which women feature within the Qur'an. Further, as Ibrahim herself is an interlocutor with other academics who have written on the topics covered within the book, she does not lose herself in arguing against or upholding their works. She appropriately relegates these to side discussions in the endnotes, while acknowledging their contributions, even as she subtly pushes back against them as in

her consideration of the story of the Prophet Lut and his daughters (79), in opposition to Farid Essack's interpretation in "Lot and His Offer." Her work is accessible to both the casual and academic reader, which makes it even more valuable to Muslims (male or female!) who seek to explore the subject of women in the Qur'an from a holistic perspective that is neither mired in intellectual jargon, nor situated within classical Muslim literature. Despite its methodological shortcomings, specifically with regards to her avoidance of direct engagement with Hadith and *tafsīr* literature, Ibrahim's book pushes readers to consider Qur'anic narratives of women not from the perspective of comparing men and women, but from the lens of what *all* readers of the Qur'an can internalize as moral instruction. This fresh viewpoint is a much-needed addition to the current works in the field of the Qur'an and women, and leaves readers excited for Ibrahim's future writing.

Zainab bint Younus
Co-founder
MuslimMatters.org
Victoria, BC, Canada

Endnotes

1   https://sunnah.com/muslim:162a

Islam, Liberalism, and Ontology
A Critical Re-evaluation

JOSEPH J. KAMINSKI

Scholarship on Liberalism and Islam appears to be neither scarce nor soon to be. However, Joseph J. Kaminski's *Islam, Liberalism, and Ontology: A Critical Re-evaluation* diverges from this extensive literature in its substantiveness. The work attempts an ontological analysis of the issue, whereas the bulk of other work is rather "stylistic" (9), as the literature review in the Introduction puts succinctly. Kaminski undertakes this research through "a rigorous critical analysis and deep investigation of the basic categories and constructs that comprise" (3) the relevant phenomena. To this end, unlike usual discussions of the matter, he employs a comparative political theory approach, which enables him to scrutinize Islam and Liberalism as two comprehensive doctrines.

After presenting his basic concepts, such as anti-foundationalism, ontology, and discourse in the Introduction, in Chapter 2, "Setting the table: Liberalism and its enlightenment origins", he provides a history of Liberalism. One of the important points Kaminski draws attention to is the "illiberal" (26) origins of Liberalism. Through the examples of Martin Luther, Hugo Grotius, and Emmerich de Vattel, whose works inspired modern Liberalism, he shows that illiberal side. However, Enlightenment

thought evolved to become more Liberal in nature since the Eighteenth century and the Revolutions. As a result, secularism, and modern scientific thought, as opposed to religion, and discussions of universal human rights and national rights have become important foundations of Liberalism. The most significant point of the chapter concerns the place of Islam in this process. By referring to the existing broad research by Hallaq, Grosfoguel, and others, Kaminski notes that Islam has always functioned as the constitutive other of Europe.

Chapter 3, "Liberalisms", deliberates on the familial relationship between the two main categories of Liberalism: comprehensive (Enlightenment) and political liberalisms. Kaminski defines comprehensive doctrines as those that "can be essentialized as a set of commonly held beliefs that are related to a wide range of values and moral commitments—both metaphysical and religious" (52). Therefore, comprehensive Liberalism, as he exemplifies via perfectionist Liberalism, has its own universal and totalizing understanding of "the good". Considering Islam is also a comprehensive doctrine with its "radically different outlooks on what constitutes the good life" (61), Kaminski asserts that a real congruence between them is arduous. Then, he discusses political Liberalism and the argument that it is not at odds with Islam because it does not deal with the matters of metaphysics and the good life. After these explorations, the major stake of the chapter is that, despite these attempts to save political Liberalism from the comprehensive one, they cannot be fully separated. Liberalism is a conception of the good regardless of its form. Therefore, a genuine congruence between Islam and political Liberalism, which is rooted in the Enlightenment, is not plausible.

Chapter 4, "Islams", investigates the question of "what is Islam?" in a way similar to the previous chapter on Liberalism. Rather than answering the question by proposing a "conclusive discursive account" of it, Kaminski demonstrates the plausibility of a "coherent account of Islam" that makes sense to the most (75). After discussing Talal Asad's and Shahab Ahmed's readings of Islam, he introduces Wittgenstein's family resemblances as a better alternative. However, he notes that, while the entities of the family resemblances category do not share a necessary common feature, this does not apply to Islam. This is because, "there are multiple common features

connected to 'Islam' as a meta-category such as Divine Revelation, the Prophethood of Mohammed and the Qur'ān among many others" (80). Hence, he offers a "prototype theory" built on family resemblances and argues that "some elements of a category are more central than others" (82). Then, quite paradoxically, he explores the core or necessary fabric that can hold the concept of Islam together. This appears paradoxical because his reasoning for family resemblances is the elusiveness of universal agreement despite providing a coherent set of basic principles (79). Indeed, this reasoning is a compatible reading with his claim to provide an ontological analysis. More significantly, it is a profound example of an ontological analysis of Islam. Nevertheless, searching for a "core" or "necessary fabric" can result in essentializing and fixing Islam into its ontic manifestations and procedures. This quest for fixity is especially apparent in his "real question": the frontiers of the web (85). Despite his heuristic concern of "too small" or "too big", my real question regarding the book would be: why do we need to have such a fixed definition – a core – to study and understand Islam, if family resemblances or discursive tradition provide something coherent enough? The definition Kaminski attempts through five pillars and six articles aims to be a general one applicable to every context and study. Another risk of fixation considers a more theological point of view: is not the impossibility of drawing or knowing these fixed frontiers what makes us humans with limited capacities instead of omniscient God? Indeed, claiming such a "necessity fabric" – rather than more fundamental elements – permits us to unconditionally declare someone outside Islam (*takfeer*). For example, a new convert, a "non-orthodox" Muslim today, and even Muslims before the Revelation of all five pillars would be outside of Islam if we take them as "necessary" without context. This contextuality can be considered one of the reasons why Muslims always end their verdicts with "AllahuAlam" (Allah knows best) – as Kaminski does at the end of the book (192). Certainly, recognizing this contextuality and ontological nature leads Kaminski towards "discursive tradition" or "family resemblances". However, the implicit positivist urge in his quests for fixation seems to be one of the main limitations that prevents the book from fully realizing its ontological analysis despite its excellent argumentation and examples.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 compare Islam and Liberalism in terms of their approaches – to moral epistemology and human rights, to the role of religion in the public sphere, and finally to law. These chapters are critical to show the impossibility and unfeasibility of a real congruence between Islam and Liberalism as comprehensive discourses. Kaminski undertakes this compresence by resorting to the primary and canonical sources of those discourses he pointed to in the previous chapters. In that sense, with their thorough literature reviews and sagacious examinations, these three chapters serve as cogent case studies for the arguments he developed beforehand.

Building on this impossibility through domain-specific ontologies of Islam and Liberalism, Chapter 8 offers Communitarianism as an alternative to Liberalism in order to understand, conceptualize or engage with Islam. While this chapter is crucial to mapping out the current socio-political discourses in a comparative way since it provides a good description and analysis of Communitarianism, it also makes the reader question the in/adequacy and self-sufficiency of Islam as opposed to Liberalism and Communitarianism: While Kaminski regards Liberalism and Communitarianism as self-sufficient frameworks or discourses that can be understood on their own terms, why does he write as if Islam lacks this ability and needs another framework to be conceptualized or understood? He successfully exemplifies the inevitable failure of "grafting liberalism" in his Conclusion using the case of Saudi Arabia (189-190). However, we do not have any reason to think that "grafting" any discourse onto Muslims will not fail. Indeed, prophets were sent to "communities", some of which attempted to burn them alive. If we limit our focus to modern societies, as he discusses, we can still see racism – and occasionally Islamophobia – as a shared value even in some Muslim societies. Therefore, while presenting Communitarianism as opposed to Liberalism is valuable to diagnose and portray the current issues and options, offering Communitarianism "in order to conceptualize an Islamic mode of socio-political organization" (165) denies Muslims agency to dream and conceptualize such an organization via Islam and deems the Islamicate insufficient to provide the tools for this craft. However, in his conclusive remarks where he calls for toleration, he effectively demonstrates this sufficiency with his references to it.

In conclusion, despite the mentioned minor and occasional para-
doxes, Joseph J. Kaminski's *Islam, Liberalism, and Ontology: A Critical
Re-evaluation* delivers a thorough and rare analysis of Islam and
Liberalism. Its rarity mainly stems from the ontological approach he
mobilizes through comparative political theory, while the dominant lit-
erature is superficial or journalistic by comparison. This approach also
makes the book a valuable and necessary source for those interested in
Liberalism, Islam and, in general, political theory. In that sense, the par-
adoxes it poses stand as opportunities to expand further and develop the
discussion rather than difficulties or a stumbling block on the horizon,
the horizon to which *Islam, Liberalism, and Ontology* makes a significant
contribution.

Sümeyye Sakarya
Assistant Professor
Ankara University
Ankara, Türkiye

Islam and Good Governance
A Political Philosophy of Ihsan

M. A. MUQTEDAR KHAN

Muhammad Abdul Muqtedar Khan is a professor of Indian origin in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Delaware. He is known as a well-established author who has published several notable works, such as *American Muslims: Bridging Faith and Freedom* and *Islamic Democratic Discourse: Theory, Debates, and Philosophical Perspectives.* In 2019, he wrote his latest book of an inter-disciplinary nature: *Islam and Good Governance: A Political Philosophy of Ihsan*, where social sciences, humanities and theology intersect.

Political philosophy is considered one of the most important intel-lectual disciplines, since it sets the standards of judgment, defines constructive purposes for the use of public power, and constructs the frameworks to which we attach our ideas as well as the way we view the world. Hence, it is self-evident to enjoy remarkable and compelling books on governance and political philosophy from an Islamic perspective given that it is the fastest growing worldview on earth. Whereas such works are in general limited to either the moderate discourse of political Islam or the militant discourse of Jihadism as analyzed in the recently published work *Political Islam Inside-Out: Adaptation and Resistance of*

Islamist Movements and Parties in North Africa edited by Giulia Cimini and Beatriz Tomé-Alonso, this monograph by Khan is the first of its kind to pay thorough attention to the concept of *Ihsan* (beauty and goodness) in the political context. This is a dimension of political Islam which has been unintelligibly overlooked until now.

As such, the fact that Khan's *Islam and Good Governance: A Political Philosophy of Ihsan* is of groundbreaking nature is twofold: Firstly, it enriches the field of political philosophy, in particular Islamic political philosophy by introducing the concept of *Ihsan,* which is a novelty for this context. Secondly, it ventures *Ihsan* into politics! This is a major contribution to Islamic thought since *Ihsan* has been mostly understood within the scope of personal manners, interpersonal relations and worship up to the present time.

To provide context for the urgency of introducing a unique Islamic political philosophy, Khan starts in his first chapter with laying the philosophical and theological foundations for his work. His starting point is the appealing Quranic verse: '*God is with those who do beautiful deeds'* (Quran 29:69), followed by the question: Why has *Ihsan* been excluded from the political sphere until now? A legitimate question considering the amount of other Quranic verses and hadith revolving around the concept of *Ihsan.* In answering this question Khan also touches upon the fact that according to his perspective, *Ihsan* is the antithesis of identity. He explains that where identity mainly deals with external manifestations, *Ihsan* is about the internalization of excellence inspired by love for the divine.

The discipline of theology is dominant in the second chapter of the book. Khan makes clear how the development of *Shariah* and the rise of contemporary Islamic movements enhanced the loss of *Ihsan. Shariah* has in many circles and among many Islamic communities become almost equal to Islam. However, Islam is a *din*, and therefore has a much broader and wider scope than *Shariah.* Khan traces in this chapter, how over centuries *Ihsan* has been excluded as a consequence of this. This is brilliantly done by analyzing in depth two case studies: The recompense for breaking fast and blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad. By exploring these two cases it becomes clear how scholars easily tend to

approach such cases only from harsh legal principles while excluding the compassion and *Ihsan* as embodied in the lived example of the Prophet Muhammad.

In Chapter 3, the reader is introduced to how Islam was reduced over time to an identity. Several reasons can explain this phenomenon, with Islamism and Islamic modernity as the most important two. Khan analyzes how the demand for Islam as a prefix – Islamic schools, Islamic economy, etc. – has occupied the minds of many thinkers and the pens of plenty of writers. Muslim consciousness is consumed with defending Islamic identity, according to Khan. This is what Islamic revivalism has been all about for the past centuries. And if this continues, no profound transformation will happen at the level of the individual or society. However, from an Islamic perspective, and as the Quran teaches us, "It is not identity that needs to be revived, but it is the self that needs to be purified" (p. 76).

Chapter 4 touches upon the core of the book. In it the concept of *Ihsan* is explained in detail. It is interesting how this concept is approached from both a classical as well as a contemporary perspective. For the classical understanding, Khan relies on giants such as Ibn Taymiyyah and al-Ghazzali in their definition of *Ihsan*. For the contemporary understanding, Khan undertakes an intensive journey through the Middle East. He pauses in Morocco, Egypt, Iraq and other countries to engage with intellectuals, traditional scholars and academics to seek their understandings on *Ihsan*. It is noteworthy that Khan mentions that those discussions and engagement actually showed him that *Ihsan* is slowly disappearing from "the Muslim collective memory" (p. 102).

An attempt to restore this disappearance is made by Khan in the following fifth chapter. Is it possible to come up with a new vision on *Ihsan* as a first step to revive this concept in the awareness of Muslims? The word *Muhsin* is introduced: Someone who practices *Ihsan*. Also, well-deserved attention is given in this chapter to the hadith of Gabriel. In fact, this whole chapter is built upon it. What makes this hadith so important is how it "elevates *Ihsan* as the jewel in the crown" (p. 108). In addition, Khan is convinced that this hadith is the only evidence causing the orthodox concede that there is an inner spiritual world.

He goes further in this chapter by humbly suggesting that the purpose of creation according to the Quran is *Ihsan*. A vision which he bases on the second verse of surah 67 in the Quran. He ends this chapter by thoroughly discussing eight elements of *Ihsan*.

If for all these centuries, until up today, *Ihsan* was not included in the political sphere, then what was that political sphere like in Islamic history? This question is discussed and answered in depth in chapter 6 of the book. A critical genealogy of Islamic political philosophy is provided and in order to do so, this chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, Islamic theories of polity and governance are articulated starting with the work of al-Farabi, followed by the works of al-Mawardi, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Khaldun and closing with the works of Shaikh Saa'di of Shiraz. The second part discusses the theories of Islamic polity and Islamic governance, whereby responses to postcolonial realities are discussed as well as the caliphates, constitution and the quest for the Islamic State.

After a detailed explanation of the concept of *Ihsan*, and providing an in depth and critical genealogy of Islamic political philosophy, Khan now proposes his model of *Ihsan* and good governance in Chapter 7. In doing so, he provides a truly innovative model for Islamic governance where we move from structure to process and where Muslim societies become societies of *Muhsin*s. Furthermore, by applying this model citizens become a pro-active part of governing by carrying the responsibility of acting as witnesses, character builders and lawmakers.

As the journey comes to an end in the last and eighth chapter, thoughts are shared as well as reflections on the content of the book and an emphasis on the importance of it for Muslims and Muslim societies worldwide. Khan's book charters a new area in the fields of theology as well as political philosophy. Therefore, this book is not only enlightening for Muslim scholars specializing in theology and/or political philosophy, it is as much an enrichment for non-Muslim scholars by providing them a deeper understanding of what Islam has to offer when it comes to political philosophy. Nevertheless, the book also has its drawbacks. Although it provides a model for an Islamic political philosophy based on *Ihsan*, it is still a theoretical approach without any previous practical

examples supporting the practicality of the model. Also, at certain points this work of Khan reduces the flaws in Islamic political philosophy to the dominance of *Shariah* and the absence of *Ihsan* in the field of politics. This approach is too simplistic, since it disregards other major elements of governance like power struggles, inequalities and authority. In other words, it is not enough to assure good governance by weakening the role of *Shariah* and introducing *Ihsan* into the political sphere. This leaves us with the conclusion that although this book is a noteworthy contribution to political philosophy, further research needs to be performed in order to come up with applicable and effective models for good governance based on the Islamic worldview.

Samira I. Ibrahim
Research Fellow
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
Amsterdam, Netherlands

From Victims to Suspects
Muslim Women since 9/11

SHAKIRA HUSSEIN

Issues involving Muslim women are recurrent in contemporary times, given that the interest in the topic reappears when events involving Muslim populations are reported. Whether they are majority or minority populations, the conditions of Muslim women are highlighted to justify narratives about Islam and its practitioners. The present work by Shakira Hussein, *From Victims to Suspects: Muslim Women since 9/11*, offers a synthesis of recent questions about these women, covering the last years of the 1990s to the last years of the 2010s, considering events that occurred in Australia, Afghanistan, France, the United States and other locations, bringing the researcher's experience as a Muslim woman and as an academic.

Reflecting on a very important theme for Muslim and non-Muslim communities, articulating academic readings and facts disseminated in the media, as well as interviewing Muslim women in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the work clarifies that in order to understand Islam, Muslims and Islamist movements today requires a consideration of the role played by women in these arenas – or even the role assigned to them by external agents.

A book like this joins other initiatives by Muslim women writing about their life experiences, contributing to the redundancy of some information, but also offering original reflections and links between events that are often not connected. It is not a theoretical book: the author is not concerned with concepts, in deepening an epistemological or theoretical discussion about gender and Islam. However, this is not a negative point of the work: such an expedient choice makes it an accessible read that different readers, from the most versed to the less knowledgeable, will be able to enjoy.

The accessibility of the work is apparent from the beginning, in the *Prologue*, which anticipates the spirit of the book to the reader: it is a letter addressed to the author's daughter. Involved in the work of explaining what the news means to Muslim women, she ends this prologue hoping that her daughter does not need to do so much explaining as she and so many Muslim women have to nowadays. In the *Introduction*, the author raises questions that will be relevant throughout the entire work: through the perspective that the clothes a woman wears are more important than her voice and the uses of gender issues to feed the rhetoric of the Clash of Civilizations, the author outlines a scenario where Muslim women play the role of either being a fifth column against the imagined construct of Western Judeo-Christian civilization or being people at the mercy of patriarchal powers that supposedly demand interventions to free them from their tormentors

In Chapter 1, *Afghan Girls*, the author discusses how Muslim women are icons of victimization despite the existence of organizations that defy patriarchal logic, such as the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA). In this chapter, the author discusses the situation of Afghan women before and after 9/11, focusing on women in that country to highlight, for example, that Muslim women are victimized to justify imperialism. The dichotomous sympathy for Afghan women versus the fear of these Afghan women's husbands, children and brothers is highlighted by the author, indicating the ompon xenophobic component that structures the apprehension about Muslim women in general in many contexts, not only Afghan women.

In the second chapter, *Candle in the Wind*, the author begins her discussion with the figure of Malala and her struggle for the girls education being hijacked by a pro-imperialism rhetoric. Focusing on Pakistan, the author discusses Jammat-e-Islami, and in this chapter she criticizes secular feminist movements that exclude Muslim women, propagating an exclusivist Western conception of women's rights.

Chapter 3, *Shifting Perceptions*, reports changes in perceptions of Muslim women after 9/11. From the burkini issue in France, which contemplates the modesty market, with products aimed at Muslim women´s consumption, emerges the perception of branding as a form of soft-power that is favorable to Islamization. There are changes even in the public meaning of the hijab, the Islamic headscarf. Another highlight is the stereotype of the Muslim woman who in turn breaks stereotypes. Such a stereotypical woman repudiates elements of her religion and in so doing gains visibility and prominence. Thus, the hijab is seen as a sign of backward tradition, which repudiates modernity. Where there is some discussion about the place of the veil in modern societies, then a moral panic about Islamization becomes the keynote. There would thus be no options for the Muslim woman but to be placed under permanent suspicion.

In *Proxy Wars*, the fourth chapter, the author points out that Muslim women are sometimes mobilized as elements of proxy wars around different themes. Gender norms, multiculturalism, freedom of expression and feminism come to be understood as having a rhetorical element that relate to the conditions, imagined or real, of Muslim women in predominantly Muslim societies or in which Muslims are a minority. The author then argues that the Muslim issue is mobilized for issues other than those relating to Muslims or Islam. It indicates the post-Arab Spring period as a period of a sharp emergence of negative perceptions with a major emphasis on Islam as a problem. As an example of this proxy war mobilizing Muslim women, the author cites criticism of feminists for supposedly having abandoned Muslim women and, therefore, being hypocrites. On the other hand, in this chapter the author makes interesting provocations: she indicates how Muslim academics are negotiating patriarchal morality in their writings, as well as indicating that there

are conditions for the emergence of an Islam of and for women. Such a way of being Muslim emerges from these segregated spaces, beyond male surveillance, and where women develop their own reflections – which would enable or give development conditions to a possible Islamic feminism.

Chapter 5, *Invisible Menace*, focuses on the hidden threat, the stealth jihad, that Muslim women are supposed to undertake. The author returns to the economic question, this time indicating the halal industry as a way of Islamization. In addition, the fear of the Muslim woman's womb is cited, which translates into the idea of a demographic jihad, as an instrument for the de-whitening of nations. Such a perspective would lead to the idea that there is no aspect of Muslim life that cannot or should not be investigated: their particular choices, their ways of being and feeling are all suspect because they relate to Islam. The private lives of Muslim populations within a white nation are forms of silent Islamization that trigger alarms and paranoia.

The sixth chapter, *"Jihad Brides" and Chicks with Sticks*, refers to the paradox of the Islamic State (Daesh) being a patriarchal organization that still attracts women. Joining this organization would remove women from the role of victim to that of a participant in Islamization. The Muslim family itself is placed as one of the fronts on which the War on Terror should unfold, with Muslim men and women being invited to establish the role of anti-radicalization watchmen in their own homes – as if they were extensions of the power of state surveillance. The chapter closes with the author giving her account of an attempt at the co-optation of her image as an agent of influence, as someone who could influence Muslim communities in order to be more acceptable to non-Muslims.

In the *Conclusion*, the author takes up other sexual anxieties and pressing social issues, such as Muslim women's clothing as a threat to national security, the perception that Muslim women, being women, would be docile and easy to manipulate. She also discusses the impact of migration policies as new images of immigrants and refugees emerge in the public space. Significantly, Muslim women have gained greater visibility, especially after 9/11: from entertainment, to media, to politics, Muslim women have come to be seen as allies of the enemy and,

therefore, as enemies of themselves. Hence the normalization of hostility towards Muslim women on social media, which the author points out.

From the perspective of the method used by the author, it is important to emphasize that the writing involved more than one methodological step. This is because at times the text refers to the author's experience, especially in the interview with members of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan and Jamaat-e-Islami in the first two chapters. On the other hand, qualitative and observational methodologies are the focus of most of the work, composing a complex picture of the situations that Muslim women experience. Macro and micro perspectives are interrelated and the author is highly competent in demonstrating how this plethora of actions and discursivities engender demeaning representations of Muslim women. The work cites a number of other works, such as Sara Farris's *In the Name of Women′s Rights: the Rise of Femonationalism*, and refers to a range of expert authors, such as Lila Abu-Lughod, making the book an excellent starting point for thinking about gender and Islam in contemporary times.

FELIPE FREITAS DE SOUZA
PH.D STUDENT
SÃO PAULO STATE UNIVERSITY
SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL

The Shi'i Islamic Martyrdom Narratives of Imam al-Ḥusayn

MUHAMMAD-REZA FAKHR-ROHANI

The topic of the movement and martyrdom of Imam Husayn is central to the doctrine of Shi'ism. There are many works devoted to this subject, especially in the context of mourning events held annually on this occasion. Thus, an enormous amount of literature has been written on the uprising of Imam Husayn. Here, Muhammad-Reza Fakhr-Rohani has analyzed the major outlines of typical martyrdom narratives (maqtals) of Imam al-Husayn and his martyred companions.

This book was intended for both the academic reader and the reader with no background knowledge of the subject. Fakhr-Rohani begins with a summary of the basics of Shi'ism and a detailed account of the events of Ashura and the historical events that preceded it. 'Part One: Background' consists of an introduction and a chapter 'Leadership: Quranic-cum-Prophetic Perspective'. In the introduction, the author briefly describes key historical events starting from the life of the Prophet Muhammad. In his narration, he appeals mainly to Shi'i sources, which is why the predominantly Shi'i point of view is presented in the book. Thus, Fakhr-Rohani mainly refers to those events and/or personalities that are of particular importance mainly to Shi'ites. He points out that Abu Talib

was a Muslim (p. 6) when most Sunnis are of the opposite opinion; that Ali was selected by Allah as the immediate successor to the Prophet Muhammad, and his nomination was publicly announced several years later on the day of Ghadir Khumm (p. 7); during the Saqifa Abu Bakr was illegitimately elected as caliph (p. 12); Abu Bakr was wrong in denying Fatimah her share of the inheritance during the Fadak dispute (p. 12); the attack on the house of Ali and Fatima under Umar's command (p. 12), etc. If this can be seen as some kind of flaw, Fakhr-Rohani pointed out in the preface of his book that he deliberately refused to delve into some issues and disputes that are irrelevant to the subject of the book, and that the dominant point of view outlined in his book reflects that shared by 'typical' (meaning Twelver) Shi'ites (p. vii).

The chapter 'Leadership: Quranic-cum-Prophetic Perspective' presents the foundations of the Imamate based on Shi'i theology. Thus, the author mentions the story of Ibrahim, who was both a prophet and an imam (p. 31-32); the hadith of Status/hadith al-Manzilah (p. 32); and the Shi'i Islamic conception of infallibility, according to which, in addition to prophets, imams are also infallible (p. 33). According to Divine tradition, the prophets had vicegerents: Joshua (Yusha b. Nun) was the vicegerent of Moses, Jesus had twelve disciples who spread his faith among the people, and in the same way Imam Ali was the vicegerent of the Prophet Muhammad (p. 32).

Having introduced the reader to the basics of Shi'ism and the significance of Imam Husayn (as an infallible Imam, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, son of Imam Ali, and brother of Imam Hassan), the author proceeds to a detailed description of the movement of Imam Husayn, highlighting the Medina and Meccan phases, the path from Mecca to Karbala, the arrival to the place of Karbala and the events of the day of Ashura itself. When describing the latter, he also divided the martyrs into non-Hashimids, Hashimids (relatives of Imam Husayn, members of the Prophetic family), and the history of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn. Describing these events, Fakhr-Rohani often referred to the statements of Imam Husayn, collected in the book of Muhammad Sadiq Najmi *From Medina to Karbala in the words of Imam al-Husayn* (Fakhr-Rohani was the author of the English translation of this book). Also, apart from other

historical sources, Fakhr-Rohani referred to personal research interviews conducted with Shiʿi scholars in Iran and Iraq. Observations concerning little-studied events are especially valuable. For example, one of the reasons why Imam Husayn went to Kufa, which was the capital during the reign of his father Imam Ali and, accordingly, was because there should have been a large number of their followers there (the author indicated a number of other reasons as well). According to historian Dr. Sayyid Hasan Isa al-Hakim, the same reasoning applies to the case of the four special delegates and deputies of the 12th Imam al-Mahdi, located precisely in Baghdad where large populations of Shiʿites lived at that time (p. 69).

The fourth part of the book is devoted to the study of maqtals. The Arabic word ʿmaqtalʾ refers to the literary genre of lamentation. The author writes that although this genre is barely mentioned as such in several Arabic-English dictionaries, it is in fact a well-established genre (p. 128). Maqtal does not focus on all aspects of the life and times of the figure, but concentrates on writing and depicts the tragic fate of the martyr. It tries to give a vivid description of the martyrdom of a high-ranking person or group of nobles. The maqtal thus provides a kind of martyrdom-oriented (and mostly religiously charged) historiography. The literary and socio-cultural roots of the development of the maqtals can be traced back to the zeal and enthusiasm of the ancient Arabs to constantly remember their own people, who were killed in the name of, or in support of, a high goal.

In addition to maqtals, there are other similar genres such as marsiya (marthiya), ritha, nowhah, etc. (p. 182-183). These have less historical accuracy and are popular in different regions. For example, marsiyas are very popular in non-Arab Muslim, Iranian, or Indian subcontinental contexts and are the poetic counterpart of maqtal.

The maqtal is composed of several elements, namely: an eyewitness, a narrator or reporter, the victim, hence a martyr, the battlefield challenge reported, the audience, whether immediate or anticipated, and the intended effects exerted on the audience. From among the eyewitness reports, those of the Ashura survivors are of the highest reliability. Among them are the fourth Imam Zayn al-Abidin, or his son, the

fifth Imam al-Baqir. In a number of cases, the witness was also an enemy soldier or a commander who confessed to what he himself or a group of enemy soldiers had done on the battlefield against Imam Husayn (p. 142).

Maqtals usually begin with a brief account of the life and background of the martyr's personality, social status, and examples of the martyr's religious piety, followed by his/her intense struggle in the path of Allah and how he/she was martyred. The final stage of martyrdom is depicted vividly and graphically in order to evoke the emotions of the audience, notably to make them burst into tears. Often the mourner will sing a few mournful verses and the audience will repeat them as they beat their chests. Maqtals create and leave deep effects and, from this point of view, maqtals are not just historical records; they have other sublime and deeper meanings for the Shiʻites.

In this context, Fakhr-Rohani's connections with the work of non-Muslim scholars is interesting. He compared maqtals to 'Western tragedies', and unlike typical Western (and mostly Greek) tragedies, which are expected to be imitations, maqtals are mainly reports. In typical Western tragedies, the hero or protagonist is the victim of his own tragic flaw, which brings him or her to an unfavorable and notoriously fatal end. In the maqtal, on the contrary, the protagonist appears as having no flaws and consciously goes to his martyrdom (p. 142). The author also writes that maqtals can be regarded as a kind of 'literature of commitment' (a term proposed by Jean-Paul Sartre), coupled with cognizance-giving effects. Literature of commitment is meant as a type of literature in which its author is committed to revealing the truth as well as raising the audience's level of cognizance of what had taken place in the past. Maqtal writers are committed to revealing the truth about the heroism of Imam Husayn, raising the audience's awareness of what has happened in the past, and the truth about the historical movement of Imam Husayn (p. 139).

Based on the above characteristics, Fakhr-Rohani concludes that the maqtal is a genre in its own right. This is due to the fact that there are other forms or varieties of maqtals, such as oral, written, illustrated. There are also reliable, unreliable sources (p. 156-158), non-existent or lost sources – for which original versions of texts are no longer available

(p. 159). The author draws attention to these groups, describing them and giving examples. The citation of unreliable sources by Shi'i scholars allows us to see self-criticism and the critical evaluation of its own sources in Shi'i thought.

Fakhr-Rohani also introduces the reader to the term Ashuragraphy. To distinguish it from the maqtals, he points out that maqtal-writing presupposes several requirements: (a) the author's being a Muslim, whether Sunni or Shi'i; (b) the author's intention to raise a sense of feeling pity or sympathy in the audience, mainly for tackling their sentiments to make them shed tears; (c) maqtal-writing cannot temporally be restricted to the Ashura heart-rending scenes, hence a maqtal account can be developed for, hence in the case of, any non- or pre-Ashura martyr, e.g. Muslim b. Agil. Ashuragraphy, by contrast, is used for reporting and describing whatever pertains to the entire Ashura episode when the author is not a Muslim (p. 175). Fakhr-Rohani lists sources in chronological order on the events of Ashura in Arabic (starting from the first century AH), Persian, and English (from Edward Gibbon and Simon Ockley in the 18th century, but mostly after the times of British India). The author also provides a few examples of maqtals translated into English.

Given that the events of Ashura have been described in other sources, I believe that the main scientific value of the book under review is a deep analysis of maqtals as a specific literary genre. This topic is understudied and this book provides access to little-researched works, especially in Arabic and Persian. The author also appeals to other languages, indicating where one can find relevant literature (for example, on p. 185 he writes about the study of marsiya in the Balti language). He also constantly emphasizes the relevance of this topic and how maqtals and Ashura narratives were/are used in various historical contexts. For example, the technique 'goriz' is mainly used in Persian and by Iranian preachers when mourners connect a tragic scene to a tragic scene or aspect of the Battle of Karbala (p. 200). Fakhr-Rohani pointed to connections of Ashura commemorations with recent 'martyr' commemorations such as the death of Qasim Soleimani (p. 135), with the events of the Persian Constitutional Revolution (p. 172), the activities of Hezbollah (p. 175), the Iran-Iraq War and the association of Saddam Hussein with

Yazid (p. 200), the anti-religious policies of the Shah and the Islamic Revolution (pp. 172, 199). Thus, we see how commemoration narratives not only continue to exist but are also actively used for various purposes. This book will be useful for readers who are not familiar with Shi'ism to understand the events of Ashura, the significance of Imam Husayn and his martyrdom for Shi'ites, and literature related to this. In turn, academics will also find this book useful, especially in the fields of Islamic sciences, history, and linguistics, since the author has used (and respectively cited) a large amount of literature on Ashura in Arabic, Persian, and English.

AKIF TAHIIEV
RESEARCH FELLOW
MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE FOR
THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY
GÖTTINGEN, GERMANY

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All correspondence should be addressed to:
AJIS, PO Box 669, Herndon, VA 20172-0669 USA
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