DIVINE
REVELATION AND COMMUNICATION

CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM
THEOLOGICAL APPROACHES

Edited by Colin Turner

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and Communication:
Contemporary Muslim
Theological Approaches

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Divine Revelation and Communication

Contemporary Muslim Theological Approaches

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Foreword:
Editor's Introduction

It is both a pleasure and a privilege to introduce you to *Divine Revelation and Communication: Contemporary Muslim Theological Approaches*. This multi-authored, multi-disciplined volume is the first – hopefully of many – commissioned by the International Foundation for Muslim Theology (IFMT), which was founded in 2018 with the key aim of promoting 'God-talk' among Muslims, for whom the centrality of the Divine to all human affairs is all too easily overlooked and often seriously underprioritized.

We hasten to add that our original aspiration when landscaping our plans for the IFMT was, in the broadest sense, to "revive Islamic theology". Those of us responsible for the creation of the Foundation were aware that something was wrong, both in academe and at the Muslim grassroots level, when it came to talking about God. From the results of the various focus groups convened as we were laying the foundations of the IFMT, we realised that what people of all groups bemoaned was the fact that while it is relatively easy to hear and take part in discussions about God's laws and Quranic precepts, the central issue of the Creator-created relationship is conspicuous by its absence from everyday life.

It also became clear that what we really needed to do was move away from the rather grandiose and over-ambitious intention to put Islamic theology on the map. Firstly, the term 'Islamic theology' is inherently problematic, firstly because the tag 'Islamic' essentialises the theological discourse which falls under it; and secondly because there are multiple theologies, or, rather, multiple Muslim theological perspectives. The word 'theology' itself also presented difficulties, and not just because of the danger some thought it posed owing to the long association the word has had with Christianity. Furthermore, what was the kind of theology that we were trying to revivify or centre? Was it systematic or speculative, or was it sacred and confessional? Was it a mix-and-match of all of these, or was it simply a re-imagining and reworking of classical kalam for the twenty-first century?

We tried not to overthink the problematic and, relying heavily on the results of our focus group encounters, eventually came up with a wish-list that reflected what we wanted to see happen among both Muslim theologians in academe and the rest of the Muslim community, regardless of their academic, professional or cultural backgrounds, in their everyday lives. We also decided that 'Muslim theology', at least as far as the academic and outreach work of the IFMT is concerned, should focus firmly on the study of the six 'principles of faith' – belief in Divine oneness; angels; prophets; scripture; the Last Day; and Divine determining (*qadar*) – and the communication, unpacking and explication of these principles at all levels. After all, these are the basic principles that undergird one's relationship with the Creator and, indeed, with the created. They are principles which, as they are presented in the Quran in all their fullness, look to and address all of the fundamental existential questions of humankind.

It is beyond the scope of this introduction to discuss our plans to reinvigorate 'God-talk' among Muslims in general, particularly through engagement with Islamic schools, Muslim chaplaincy and other outreach activities. As far as academe is concerned, our shared experience as university students and as academics told us that if Muslim theology is discussed at all in university, be it as part of a generic Islamic Studies course or as a stand-alone module, the subject is often about the 'intellectual commodification' of what is, to those who believe it, actually a living reality rather than an academic subject covered in a review course. Islamic theology is often treated as a product or resource that can be acquired, consumed or traded for academic purposes, rather than as a source of guidance and succour for Muslims. All too often, Islamic theology is detached from its historical, cultural and spiritual context, reduced to a set of abstract concepts or theories that can be analysed or criticised without regard for their implications.

While the IFMT cannot dictate what is taught in the academy, it encourages believing Muslims who are working on theology in academic positions to teach unabashedly and unapologetically as 'insiders', while continuing to adhere to the academic conventions of openness and critical thinking that are the root components of their craft. Obviously, conditions and contexts differ, and if one is teaching a review course to a class composed largely of non-Muslims, the duty to act as a theologue whose primary function it is to communicate, unpack and explain the truths of the six 'principles of belief' may not be appropriate in such a setting. Nevertheless, when it comes to research projects and publications, we believe that committed academic theologues should focus on some aspect of the 'six principles' rather than busying themselves with issues in classical kalam, for example, which may have little or no bearing on the existential needs and anxieties of contemporary Muslims. It matters little that they are academics

writing for academic audiences, for other Muslim academics may be as much in need of theological guidance and 'shepherding' as any Muslim lay audience.

The current volume is one of our first admittedly 'baby steps' taken to reinvigorating Muslim theology as we have redefined it by allowing Muslim theologues to engage with 'God-talk' as insiders. The first of the 'six principles' is the affirmation of the oneness of God, or *tawḥīd*, and we thought it fitting that the first book in what will hopefully be a series should focus mainly on the reality of Divine communication and revelation. Thanks to the generous funding from the John Templeton Foundation which financed the project of which this volume is but one of the fruits, we were able to bring together a number of Muslim academics working in different but complementary disciplines and give them the space and opportunity to write about aspects of Divine discourse – how God talks about Himself and to us and the rest of creation, and how we talk both to and about Him – which interested and engaged them. The contents page of the volume will immediately give you an idea of the scope of issues and ideas broached and unpacked here, while the thumbnail bibliographies at the end of the book show how diverse the backgrounds and sub-disciplines are from which our authors hail.

Now that our first big project is over, we at the IFMT feel that our most important task is to contribute with our work to the strengthening of the belief and God-awareness of Muslims by turning imitative or unquestioned faith into verified faith. In a world in which secularity has become the default setting, and where secular education systems perpetuate the banishment of God to the sidelines of human concern, we believe that it is an absolute necessity to be preoccupied first and foremost with the fundamentals of faith.

In line with this, we have attempted to redefine theology in a way which militates against conflation either with speculative theology or the highly specialised – and scope-limited – discipline of kalam. Our aim is, through our education workshops and publications, to facilitate the return of God – and God-talk – to the very centre of human affairs, concerns and discourse, with the undergirding aim being a mirroring of the Quranic verse which talks about believers "commemorating God whether they are standing, sitting or lying down". In other words, our work is to reinvigorate the practice of God-talk among Muslim academics and educators in general, and, downstream, among all Muslims in general, in a way that helps and encourages them to re-sacralise their everyday lives – lives which, like our lands and communities, have been colonised by alien currents and secularised to the extent of pushing God and any kind of God-talk out to the periphery. Theology, then, as reimagined by the IFMT, is in its new, sacralised form, better understood as 'God-talk'. As a consequence of this, we see the theologue – the God-talker – as any committed

Muslim believer, academic or otherwise, as an inheritor of the prophetic mission of shepherding, bringing to bear the tenets enshrined in sura *al-ʿAṣr*, namely the 'counselling of truth' (*tawāṣaw bi'l-ḥaqq*) and the encouragement of forbearance and spiritual fortitude (*tawāṣaw bi'l-ṣabr*). No longer should theology be seen as some sterile, ultimately insignificant and inutile dialogue between spiritually disinterested parties, discussing issues which have little or no bearing on the Muslim believer's everyday reality.

We understand that this Introduction says more about the IFMT and its vision than about the volume itself. However, the writers and their chapters will speak for themselves, and it would be reductive to condense these excellent essays into just a few words. The academic world is as important to us as a target as is the Islamic school, the chaplain's office or the individual Muslim's home and life situation, and we hope that this book will be the first in many that give Muslim academics the space to do their own 'God-talking' in their own way.

The IFMT Editorial Board
February 2025

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Quranic Framework for *waḥy* as Revelation: Four Levels of God's Communication with His Creation

Mehmet Ozalp[1]

Revelation, *waḥy*, is the only access humans have to the unseen transcendent creator. In Islamic scholarship, *waḥy* is nominally understood and discussed as God's guidance to humanity through revelation in compiled scriptural texts through the agency of an appointed messenger of God. Often, *waḥy* is understood to be synonymous with the Quranic revelation. This nominal understanding of revelation is discussed in books on the Quran and taught in mosques, Islamic schools and traditional madrasas. Limited understanding of *waḥy* in this sense leads to the restraining of God's communication with his creation. Yet, the Quran informs its readers that there are no limits to the words of God. "If all the trees of the earth were pens and the whole sea (were ink), with seven more seas added thereto, the words of God would not be exhausted in writing."[2] The unlimited words of God should not be just understood as a conditional possibility but as actuality. A more open and rigorous reading of the Quran could enable the development of a comprehensive Quranic framework for *waḥy*, confirming classical understanding and interpretation, and at the same time opening new grounds to expand our understanding of the Quran and one of its central themes, *waḥy*.

This chapter provides the outcome of this rigorous reading to argue that *waḥy* is God speaking and communicating to and through the entire creation.

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1   Mehmet Ozalp is one of the most prominent Muslim community leaders and theologians in Australia. He is an Associate Professor of Islamic studies and the Director of the Centre for Islamic Studies and Civilisation at Charles Sturt University. He is also the founder and Executive Director of Islamic Sciences and Research Academy (ISRA).

2   Quran, 31:27.

God communicates in two distinct modes. He communicates through the universe as the 'book of creation' and communicates to the universe – including prophets, humans, animals and inanimate objects – as a reflection of God's mercy (*raḥma*) and lordship (*rubūbiyya*) that guides the entire creation. In God's revealing through the creation mode, the creation itself is designed in a way that allows it to communicate sublime and supernal truths about its Creator. The main recipient of this mode of revelation is humankind. From the perspective of God communicating to the creation, there are four types of *waḥy* encompassing the mode of revelation and communication from the Creator to the creation – (1) communication of guidance and knowledge through appointed messengers of God; (2) inspiration (*ilhām*) to humans through their creational disposition (*fiṭra*); (3) the bestowal of instincts on animals; and (4) the placing of 'natural laws' operating in the universe.

The chapter combines the methods of Islamic theology and exegesis to produce a holistic framework of understanding *waḥy* in Islam. The chapter substantiates this broader framework of *waḥy* by first outlining the conceptual and logical backbone of its argument. It proceeds to summarise the definition of *waḥy* in classic and modern Islamic scholarship. It continues and lays a theological framework for revelation before progressing to apply the framework on the Quran and tafsir works to show that the Quran includes two modes of revelation in general and four specific types of *waḥy* in relation to God communicating with His creation.

Methodology

The central aim of this chapter is to deduce a Quranic framework for understanding divine communication through a critical analysis and theological interpretation of verses pertaining to it. The critical reasoning of the chapter is logically constructed as follows:

1. God communicates through his creation
2. If God communicates to humans, animals and inanimate objects then God communicates to the entire creation
3. God communicates to humans, animals and inanimate objects
4. God communicates to the entire creation (From 2 and 3)
5. God communicates to and through His creation (From 1 and 4)
6. *Waḥy* is God communicating
7. *Waḥy* is God communicating to and through His creation (From 5 and 6)

The soundness of this reasoning relies on the truth of premises 1 and 3. The substantiation of these premises are demonstrated within the Quranic text and its interpretation. Such textual justification makes the overall conclusion – *waḥy* is God speaking *to* and *through* his creation – the Quranic definition for divine communication.

Three specific methods are utilised to support premises 1 and 3. Firstly, I build on Said Nursi's[3] and other Muslims scholars' contention that the universe is a book of revelation where God discloses Himself, His oneness and existence. The creation, on all levels, is a means through which God communicates Himself to humankind.

Secondly, I establish the theological foundations that God reveals (*waḥy*) Himself in and through the creation in different ways and at different levels, over and above speaking to humanity through prophets and revealed texts. The setting of this theological foundation relies on Nursi's theological exegesis[4] of a number of Quranic verses. Although Nursi does not build a framework for *waḥy*, he provides a sufficient starting point to think about *waḥy* as encompassing God's communication to the entire creation.

Thirdly, once the working framework for God's communication to and through creation is established, this framework is tested to see if it holds with the verses of the Quran and in the works of other prominent exegetes. If we can identify different types of revelation in the Quran other than the sacred books revealed to messengers of God, it would provide evidence for the proposition 3 (God speaks to humans, animals and inanimate objects). I have used six tafsir sources for this part: (1) Muḥammad ibn Jarīr ibn Yazīd al-Ṭabarī's (839-923) famous *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*. This work is used as it is one of the earliest complete tafsirs; (2) Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī's (1074-1143) *al-Kashshaf*, famous for its linguistic analysis; (3) Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (1150-1209) *Tafsīr al-kabīr*, recognised as one of the most comprehensive Quranic exegetical works covering all fields, particularly philosophical theology; (4) Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Qurṭubī's (1214-1273) *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām* for its balance in bringing

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3   Said Nursi (1876-1960) is a prominent, late Ottoman Muslim scholar and author of a vast number of works. He lived through a tumultuous period witnessing the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the emergence of secular nation states, two world wars, and the challenges imposed by European modernity on traditional Muslim societies and Islam. Residing in Turkey, Nursi, unlike other revivalist leaders, produced a theological exegesis of the Quran in his magnum opus *Risale-i Nur* written in classic Ottoman Turkish. For Nursi's biography see S. Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, New York, State University of New York, 2005.

4   For a treatment of Nursi's writings as Quranic exegesis see Çoruh, H. *Modern Interpretation of the Qurʾān: The Contribution of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*. Switzerland, Palgrave, 2019.

together narration-based and interpretive-based exegetical methods, together with legal deductions; (5) Ismail Haqqi Būrsawī's (1652-1724) *Rūḥ al-bayān*, a comprehensive exegetical work rich in mystical and theological interpretations; and (6) Muhammed Hamdi Yazir's (1878-1942) *Hak Dili Kuran Dili*, the first full Quranic commentary work in Turkish prepared diligently combining previous authoritative exegetical views with modern considerations. These tafsir works cover a thousand years of tafsir tradition and development, allowing us to see if there has been any change in the views of tafsir scholars regarding *waḥy*.

This methodology and treatment strongly supports the overall conclusion that the Quranic notion of *waḥy* is God speaking *to* and *through* his entire creation. Furthermore, this mode of *waḥy* becomes a way of divine disclosure to conscious beings, chiefly to the human audience. Human beings remain at the centre of the revelatory aim in the universe, yet revelation is not limited to the human beings.

Understanding of *waḥy* in Muslim Scholarship

Waḥy and its various derivatives are mentioned 78 times in the Quran: 'six times as the verbal noun *waḥy* and 72 times as the form IV verb *awḥā*.'[5] Classic *ulūm al-Qur'an* works tend to confine *waḥy* strictly to the revelation of the Quran.[6]

In pre-Islamic Arabian poetry, the word *waḥy* referred to a writing by some unknown person on rocks. ʿAbīd b. ʿAbd al-ʿUzzā, for instance, describes the passage of time and the inhabitants of a land disappearing as being 'like the writing (*al-waḥy*) written by a slave on stone'.[7] Such writings were not always understood. Pre-Islamic poetry also used the verb form *awḥā* to refer to unintelligible communication, such as the communication between animals. The poet ʿAlqama al-Faḥl, describing the communication between two ostriches, writes, 'He communicated (*yūḥī*) to her, with clacking sounds like the incomprehensible talking of the Byzantines (al-Rūm) in their castles'.[8] Thus, *waḥy* had connotations of written and verbal communication in pre-Islamic Arabic.

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5   S. P. Loynes, *Revelation in the Qur'an: From Divine Sending down (tanzīl) to Divine Communication (waḥy),* Ph. D., Edinburg, The University of Edinburg, 2019, p. 63.

6   A. Afsaruddin, 'The Vocabulary of Revelation: Divine Intent and Self-Disclosure in the Qur'an', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2020 p. 195.

7   Loynes, *Revelation in the Qur'an*, p. 57.

8   Loynes, *Revelation in the Qur'an*, p. 61.

Linguistically, *waḥy* means 'to inspire or to communicate in a manner that is not obvious or apparent to anybody else in a swift manner'.[9] Speed of communication is often emphasised. *Waḥy* does not necessarily 'refer to the revelation itself as a proper noun' but to the divine process of communication.[10] *Waḥy* as a process of communication is supported by the Quran in verse 20:114, where the Prophet Muhammad is exhorted not to hasten in committing the passages of Quran to memory until the process of communication is complete,[11] 'Exalted is God, the True King! Do not rush with the Quran before its communication (*waḥyuhu*) is completed to you.' The message encapsulated within the communication is obviously the intent. Writing words on a rock and paper or expressing them as spoken language are ways in which the message is conveyed in a symbolised form for the recipient to understand. *Waḥy,* then, is God's process of communication with His creation.

Islamic theological literature discussed *waḥy* to some extent. After discussing the necessarily-existent God and the divine attributes, *kalām* specialists generally transition to the necessity of God sending messengers and providing revelation through *waḥy*. There is not much discussion in the classical *kalām* theological literature on the nature and definition of *waḥy*. The main discussion centres around the Quran as God's speech and the theological polemics against the Mu`tazilite contention regarding the createdness of the Quran. Their arguments continue to postulate the Quran as the uncreated speech of God with the primary aim of preserving and affirming God's eternal attribute of speech.[12]

One relevant discussion point concerns the debate between Ash'ari and Maturidi theologians on the attribute of *takwīn* (creating; bringing into being). Ash'ari theologians do not accept *takwīn* as a separate attribute, focusing instead on explaining God's creation in real time through the command '*kun*' (be!) and through the divine attributes of will, knowledge and power.[13] In effect this explanation renders the entire created realm a reflection of God's speech. This would mean that God has always been speaking. Ash'ari scholars, however, do not form a link between the creative speech of God and *waḥy*.

Traditionally, *waḥy* was discussed as part of the *'ulūm al-Qur'an* (sciences of the Quran) literature. These works mainly deal with the 'occasions of revelation',

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9   A. A. Y. Qadhi, *An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an,* Birmingham, Al-Hidaya Publishing, 1999, p. 62.

10 Loynes, *Revelation in the Qur'an*, p. 70.

11 Loynes, *Revelation in the Qur'an*, p. 131.

12 For detailed treatment of this debate see H. A. Wolfson, The Philosophy of the Kalam, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1976, p. 235-262.

13 A. Ibn Yusuf, *Imam Abu Hanifa's al-Fiqh al-Akbar Explained*, Santa Barbara, White Thread Press, 2007, p. 126.

the history of the Quranic text, and methods that can be utalised to understand and interpret the Quran. Not all have a discussion on *waḥy* and its nature.[14] The few that does tend to define *waḥy* as revelation of God to a chosen messenger in the form of scriptural texts. They also mention that God spoke to Moses directly, while with other prophets He spoke through the archangel Jibril. God has also spoken with the mother of Moses, with angels and even with Iblis.[15] Their analyses tend not to go any further than this.

Contemporary *'ulūm al-Qur'an* works recognise that *waḥy* is not limited to the Quran and God's revelation to prophets. *Waḥy* is God's communication to prophets of God and additionally includes inspiration to humans (28:7) as in the case of the mother of Moses receiving inspiration or, in some cases, non-human creation being inspired, as in the case of the bee (16:68).[16] Abdullah Saeed recognises several forms of *waḥy* as inspiration to inanimate objects, animals, to human beings and angels.[17] Abu Ammar Yasir Qadhi briefly categorises types of *waḥy* to also include, in addition to revelation to prophets, *ilhām* as 'human intuition and emotion', and as animal instincts, with the example of the bee guided by revelation (16:68-69). He also includes the laws of nature, citing the example of 41:12, in which it is said that God 'inspired in each heaven its affairs'.[18] Qadhi does not go in detail and is content to provide a simple list. Identifying animal instincts and laws of nature as forms of revelation is an important contemporary interpretation that this chapter will explore.

Thus, the classical and contemporary *'ulūm al-Qur'an* literature define revelation generally as Divine communication. Classical sources do not go into detailed categorisation. Some of the contemporary works do provide lists of categories of *waḥy*, such as the one by Qadhi which includes natural laws and animal instincts as *waḥy*. There is no overall framework of what these mean within the general theological structure of Islam.

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14   See for instance J. al-Suyūṭī, *The Perfect Guide to the Sciences of the Qur'an,* Reading, Garnet Publishing, 2011.

15   A. Saeed. 'Rethinking Revelation as a Precondition for Reinterpreting the Qur'an: A Qur'anic Perspective.' *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* Vol. 1, No. 1, 1999, p. 98.

16   A. V. Denffer, *Ulum al Qur'an: An Introduction to Sciences of the Qur'an,* Leicestershire, Islamic Foundation, 2011, p. 21-23.

17   A. Saeed, "Revelation", in O. Leaman, *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia*, Abington, Taylor and Francis Group, 2006, p. 541.

18   Qadhi, *Sciences of the Qur'an,* p. 62-63.

Theological Foundations of God Speaking 'to' and 'through' the Entire Creation

The main idea that there exists a Quranic theoretical framework for *waḥy* comes from the theological and exegetical approach found in Said Nursi's *magnum opus*, the *Risale-i Nur*. Nursi does spell out the framework as such, but he does provide the key theological underpinnings to suggest that such a framework is possible.

What is common in these theological underpinnings is that Nursi takes his readers beyond thinking that the only revelation God provides are the sacred texts vouchsafed to His prophets. Confining revelation only to that which is given to prophets is rather a narrow understanding of *waḥy*. Not only does it limit God's communication to a finite number of chosen prophets in time, but it also detaches Divine communication from the rest of the universe and the human condition, creating a dualistic approach to the universe, knowledge and life. This is a major problem for the modern era. I will discuss five key theological notions Nursi expounds in his works which have a bearing on this.

The first is the way Nursi explains *ilhām*, namely by drawing a distinction between divine inspiration received by a Prophet and divine inspiration received by ordinary believers.[19] He gives the analogy of a king having two types of communication. To meet the personal needs of one of his subjects, the king would use the telephone to converse with him. He would call his subject directly and deal with the issue in a personal manner. No one else needs to be involved in this communication. If the king wishes to speak to all of his subjects, he would appoint a special envoy to represent him as the monarch of the realm. He would hand his envoy a special decree that would then be broadcast to the entire nation. In this analogy, the special envoy represents a prophet of God. The individual subject represents ordinary believers.[20] Nursi's conclusion is that there are two types of revelation: formal revelation, given to prophets of God in the form of revealed texts; and informal revelation, imparted to the human heart in order to meet a specific need of an individual believer. The analogy is deployed to show the dramatic difference between the two.

For our purpose, however, this treatment has the important outcome that God communicates not just with prophets but also with ordinary believers at an appropriate level. Nursi affirms God reveals Himself constantly and consistently *to* humankind, thus opening up the definitional scope of the word *waḥy* to include ordinary human beings, who are, in a sense, also recipients of Divine revelation. While other scholars prefer to describe this level of divine communication as *ilhām*

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19   Nursi, *Words,* p. 445.

20   S. Nursi, *Mektūbat (Letters)*, Istanbul, Söz Basım Yayın, 2003, pp. 634-635.

to distinguish it from the *waḥy* vouchsafed to prophets, this designation places *ilhām* outside the ambit of *waḥy*. Nursi on the other hand classifies both forms of communication as *waḥy* (or God's communication with humans) but differentiates between the two in terms of their directness and impact. Instances of *waḥy* to prophets are objective and are given for the needs of all humans, while *waḥy* given to ordinary believers concerns them only and should not be generalised. Although Nursi does not extend this interpretation any further, there is nothing to stop us from extending this notion to include the rest of the creation, provided we bear in mind that the mode of God's communication differs according to context; that it is appropriate to God's purpose; and that it meets certain needs of the creation at levels which befit their situation and circumstances.

The extension of God's communication to encompass the entire created realm is made possible in Nursi's second key theological underpinning. He makes the point that God has two revealed books: the Quran as the book of revelation and universe as the book of creation.[21] It follows that just as the Quran is a source of God's guidance in the form of *sharia al-Qur'aniyya*, the book of creation has what is called the *sharia al-takwīniyya* (laws of creation). Both the Quran and the universe have to be studied with equal alacrity and religious devotion.[22] Just as Muslims try to follow the laws of the Quran to be pious believers, they should follow the laws of creation with God-awareness and enthusiasm in order to achieve success in this world and the next. The inextricable link between the Quran and the universe – and especially the association of the laws of nature with the laws of the Quran – [23] carries the implication that the laws of nature are a form of revelation and a mode of Divine communication with the universe.

The inclusion of the laws of nature within God's revelation is also supported by the third idea that Nursi expounds, namely that God's speech (*kalām*) is limitless, just as his knowledge (*'ilm*) and power (*qudra*) are limitless.[24] In this respect, Nursi focuses on the verse, 'If all the trees of the earth were pens and the whole sea (were ink), with seven more seas added thereto, the words of God (*kalimāt Allah*) would not be exhausted in writing. Surely, God is All-Glorious, the All-Wise.'[25] This verse is usually understood as applying to revealed texts

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21 Nursi, *Words,* pp. 193-194.

22 Nursi, *Words,* pp. 193-194. See also S. Nursi, *Şuālar (Rays)*. Istanbul, Söz Basım Yayın, 2004, pp. 32-34 and pp. 178-79.

23 This is not suggesting that they are identical, rather, it recognises laws of nature to have divine source. This frees Muslims from having a dualistic worldview.

24 S. Nursi. *Lemālar (Flashes)*, Istanbul, Söz Basım Yayın, 2003, pp. 428-430.

25 Quran, 31:27; also 18:109

– if God wanted, He could reveal unlimited pages of the Quran for example.[26] Nursi, however, interprets this verse differently, affirming that God has always been speaking through the creation, and that if this speech were to be written on paper it would literally take oceans of ink and innumerable pens to write down the amount of God's speech since the beginning of creation.[27] If God has spoken in this way in the past, He is speaking the same in real time. Once again, this extraordinary interpretation of the verse opens up the possibility that God's speaking – and therefore the revelation of His words – is directed at the entire creation, including humans, animals, plants and inanimate objects.

The fourth key theological underpinning Nursi explains is in relation to the role of the archangel Jibril (Gabriel), who is involved in delivering God's revelation to the prophets of God. Nursi generalises the responsibility of Jibril, describing him as having the overarching role of communicating and demonstrating the relations of divine lordliness (*munasibāt-i rabbāniyya*) to humans.[28] He adds that the four archangels represent the four fundamental acts of God's *rubūbiyya* (lordliness): revelation; life-giving; life-taking; and the provision of sustenance. These four functions are related to all animate beings and not just humans.[29] Consequently, Jibril would be involved with revelation and inspiration to the entirety of living beings. His role of delivering God's revelation to Prophets would be just one of his roles – albeit a special role – rather than being his only role. The implication for our purpose of these interpretations is that God's communication is more general than just the revelation of sacred books and scripture. Divine communication encompasses humans and all living beings.[30]

The fifth key theological underpinning in Nursi's interpretation concerns the *kitāb-i kāʾināt* (the book of the universe) metaphor, in which both the visible universe and the 'realm of the unseen' (*ʿālam al-ghayb*) are posited as a vast book, made up of limitless Divine words.[31] This means that, for Nursi, God is not only revealing Himself to the creation but also through each and every created being,

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26   I will deal with various exegetes' interpretations of this verse in the next section.

27   Nursi. *Flashes,* pp. 428-430.

28   Nursi, *Rays*, p. 345.

29   Nursi, Rays, p. 345.

30   If God communicates to the entire creation, His communication includes the angels. The Quran, for example, affirms this in 8:12, 'when your Lord revealed to the angels, I am with you. So, make the believers stand firm...' The focus of this chapter is revelation concerning the Quran, humans and the witnessed creation of the natural world and cosmos. The aim is to develop a broad Islamic framework for *waḥy* that incorporates all three.

31   C. Turner, 'Creation as Text: The Graphological Trope in Said Nursi's Risāle-i Nūr', *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3, 2019, p. 94.

each of which is a word of God. God's special communication is through the revealed text of the Quran, but His general communication is to and through the entire creation. This important notion is discussed in detail in the next section.

God Speaking 'through' the Creation

The Quran often insists that its readers contemplate on the verses or signs (*āyāt*) in the natural world and urges them to reflect using their critical reasoning.[32] The fact that the same word – *ayāt* – is used to refer to both the revealed 'verses' of the Quran and the 'signs' – or, more correctly, the verses – revealed in the natural world, is sufficient grounds for us to posit the natural world and the universe as a place in which God reveals similar meanings to those revealed in the Quran. In other words, God communicates through the creation as well as communicating through the Quran.

The Quran does this for an important reason. Just as modern Muslims are confronted by people who question the authority of the revelation, the Prophet Muhammad faced a similar audience in his time. Unbelievers in his time did not readily accept him as a messenger of God or the Quran as an authoritative source from the divine. The only objective source of knowledge accessible to both believers and disbelievers was the universe itself: the cosmos was the one thing they had in common as a place where the propositions of faith encapsulated within the revelation of the Quran might be tested. While they appealed to the cosmos in a rudimentary way, modern believers and disbelievers could do so in far more detailed way through the discoveries of science. There is even a greater need to understand God's revelation in the universe for contemporary humanity. If faith propositions revealed through the *waḥy* that comprises the Quran are testable by examining the natural world and the cosmos, then it becomes doubly clear that mode of *waḥy* is also revealed through the universe.

The notion of God revealing Himself through creation is not new. Apart from the well-known mystical interpretations of divine self-disclosurein the universe represented by thinkers such as Ibn 'Arabī,[33] many classical Muslim

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32 See for example, Quran 3:190-191. 'Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the day and night there are signs (*ayāt*) for people of reason. They are those who remember God while standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth and pray, "Our Lord! You have not created all of this without purpose. Glory be to You! Protect us from the torment of the Fire".'

33 For a thorough coverage and analysis of Ibn Arabi on this topic see C. W. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-'Arabī's Cosmology*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1998.

scholars saw this notion as one of the main features of the Quran. Al-Ghazālī summed up these views and affirmed the role of the universe as a source of *waḥy*. He depicted the universe as *al-kitāb al-manshūr* (the outspread book), as a theological and physical mirror to the Quran, which is *al-kitāb al-mastūr* (the written book).[34] Such views influenced scholars after al-Ghazālī. Even Ibn Taymiyya, staunchly critical of mystical interpretations, held similar views. Ibn Taymiyya posited the signs revealed by God in the universe as a Quranic and prophetic natural theology – a means of not only discovering God's existence but also of attaining knowledge of God and 'His essential nature as the One Being upon whom all else depends'.[35] Nevertheless, the notion of God revealing Himself through the creation remained primarily within the mystical field and did not make its way to mainstream Islamic theology until the contemporary era, when knowledge of the universe greatly increased through science.

Said Nursi, here, forms an important bridge between the classical and contemporary Islamic understanding on the matter. Nursi developed a sophisticated theology on the cosmos as a revealed source of God-knowledge and as the way that God speaks to and through the creation. He does this by first including the cosmos within the Islamic epistemological framework, considering it as a primary source:

> There are three great and universal describers which make known to us our Lord. First is the Book of the Universe ... Second is the Seal of the Prophets, upon whom be peace and blessings, the supreme sign of the Book of the Universe. Third is the Great Noble Qur'an.[36]

The cosmos, Nursi avers, should be read and studied like a grand book,[37] for just as the Quran is a commentator on the 'verses of creation' (*āyāt al-takwīniyya*) embedded in the universe,[38] the universe is an exegete of the 'verses of revelation' (*āyāt al-Qur'āniyya*) encapsulated in the Quran.[39] That this is one of the most distinctive features of Nursi's theology can be understood from his assertion

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34   T. Ramadan, *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 88.

35   J. Turner, 'Ibn Taymiyya on Theistic Signs and Knowledge of God', *Religious Studies*, Vol. 58, No. 3, p. 585.

36   Nursi, *Words*, p. 319.

37   Nursi, *Words*, p. 224.

38   Nursi, *Words*, p. 490.

39   Nursi, *Words*, p. 319.

that, 'every creative act of God is an act of revelation, and that the created realm as a whole is from all aspects revelatory in nature.'[40]

Nursi goes further than any other theologian by in locking together the Quran and the universe in an innate mutual relationship:

> Just as the attribute of Speech (*kalām*) makes the Most-Sacred-Divine-Essence (*dhāt al-aqdas*) known through revelation and inspiration, so too the attribute of Power (*qudra*) makes the Most Sacred Divine Essence known through masterly works – each of which act as an embodied word – describing and ascribing a Powerful-Possessor-of-Glory (*qadīr dhu'l-jalāl*) by presenting the entire cosmos as a materialised form of the Qur'an.[41]

Seeing the 'entire cosmos as a materialised form of the Quran' has important consequences. Firstly, there is an 'intertextuality of the Quran' with the universe as a book, given that they reveal the same truths 'doubling as verses which are there in order to be read, interpreted, internalised and acted upon... with the Quran posited as the verbal summation of the writings which are found on the pages of the book of creation'.[42] Secondly, it posits the universe as a source of knowledge for propositions of belief, which, in turn, provides an empirical foundation for those beliefs. Especially given that philosophical developments since the European Enlightenment and scientific discoveries about the natural world and the universe have challenged the truth claims of all religions,[43] such an empirical foundation becomes a necessity if religion (and Islam) is to have any relevance in the modern world. Furthermore, science offers a detailed and thorough knowledge of the world and cosmos, and this knowledge is increasing exponentially. Instead of setting up science as an adversary of God and religion, incorporating its content as an epistemological source in support of belief in God may not end the conflict between science and religion but at least it it gives hope that they will one day be allies.

A corollary of this approach is that knowledge of the physical world through science may be taken to a level where science becomes the mouthpiece of divine revelation, that is God reveals things about Himself through the universe as He make Himself known through the Quran. Citing the verse 17:44, '...and there is not a thing but extols His glory and praise...' and contending that many window-like facets open to God through everything, Nursi remarks:

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40 C. Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed: A Critical Analysis of Said Nursi's Epistles of Light*, Berlin, Gerlach Press, 2013, p. 191.

41 Nursi, *Rays,* p. 200.

42 Turner, 'Creation as Text', p. 100.

43 W. M. Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, Edinburg, Edinburg University Press, 1985, p. 158.

> The essence of the creation and the reality of the universe is founded upon the Divine Names. The reality of everything depends upon one or many names. Even the qualities and art displayed over the creation rely upon a divine name. In fact, the true science of philosophy is based on the name *ḥakīm* (All-Wise); true science of medicine depends on the name *shāfi* (Healer), and the science of geometry relies on the name *muqaddir* (Determiner), and so on. Just as each branch of science is based on a divine name and eventually ends in a divine name, the realities of all scientific disciplines, human perfections and all levels of human virtues are also founded on the divine names... In fact, manifestations and the impresses of as many as twenty divine names may be plainly observed on a single living creature.[44]

Crucially, materialistic philosophy – a source of unbelief for Nursi – also uses empirical data from the natural world and the universe to support its claims for truth. Atheist philosophers and scientists argue the complete opposite claims to theologians but a similar claim for certainty.[45] How is this possible and who is right?

For Nursi, the answer lies in the inherently deceptive nature of human perception. Deceptiveness of perspective is not exactly same as al-Ghazālī's deceptiveness of sensory perception; rather, it is deception effectuated through two differing perspectives in interpreting empirical data obtained from the natural world. Nursi calls these two perspectives *ma'nā al-ism* (self-referentiality) and *ma'nā al-ḥarf* (Other-indicativeness).[46] He makes this distinction when he explains the difference between how the Quran and positivistic scientific philosophy talk about the natural world and the universe:

> The Wise Qur'an is the most elevated commentator and the most eloquent translator of the Grand Qur'an (book) of the universe. It is the *furqān*[47] that instructs humanity ... in the verses of creation inscribed by the pen of power on the pages of the universe and the tablets of time. It looks at creatures – each acting like a meaningful letter – from the perspective of

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44   Nursi, *Words*, p. 853.

45   The Quran seems to recognise that people can arrive at opposing conclusions using the same body of evidence from the natural world. See for examples 2:26; 10:101.

46   Nursi, *Words*, p. 193.

47   *Furqān* is a title of the Quran meaning the 'criterion'. This attribute is given to the Quran in the verse 2:185 as it claims to set the criterion of what is right and what is wrong, especially in terms of the theological disputes previous generations fell into.

ma'nā al-ḥarf[48] (meaning indicative of the letter). That is, it looks at them in the name of their Artistic Maker (*Sānī*). It says, 'how marvellously they have been made; how beautifully they point to the beauty of their Artistic Maker (*Sānī*)', and through this, it exposes the true beauty of the universe. Whereas, the philosophy, called natural philosophy or science … instead of looking at the epistles in the grand book of creation from the perspective of *ma'nā al-ḥarf*, that is in the name of God, it looks at the creation through the lens of *ma'nā al-ism* (self-referentiality), that is in the name of creation itself. Instead of saying, 'how beautifully they have been made,' it says 'how beautiful they are.'[49]

In a letter, Nursi further clarifies the difference between these two perspectives to one of his confused students.[50] He gives the analogy of an image in a mirror and the difference in what is seen depending on whether one is focusing on the mirror or the image in the mirror. If one's attention is focused on the mirror, all one sees is the glass. The image in the mirror blurs and remains in the background as fuzzy detail. In this perspective, the mirror acts in the role of *ma'nā al-ism* and has as much value as the material worth of the glass. Conversely, if one focuses attention on the reflected image in the mirror, one will see the image clearly and the glass becomes secondary. In this perspective, the mirror acts in the role of *ma'nā al-ḥarf*. The physical significance of the glass remains in the background and the mirror gains greater value and significance.[51] Since the true function of a mirror is to reflect images, *ma'nā al-ḥarf* is the right perspective to have when the universe is viewed as a mirror to see images of meanings conveyed through constituting parts.

For Nursi, the *ma'nā al-ism* perspective stops at the physicality of things and renders the entire universe meaningless, which invariably leads to disbelief and rejection of God.[52] The *ma'nā al-ism* perspective would be akin to looking at the Statue of Liberty[53] without considering its artist, historical context and priceless symbolic value for the American people. Consequently, the worth and significance of the statue would reduce to its material properties and value. Conversely, in the

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48 In the Turkish original, the phrase is written in Ottoman style, *mana-yı harf*. I have used the Arabic equivalent to make it more understandable to scholars and readers not familiar with Ottoman Turkish.

49 Nursi, *Words*, pp. 193-194.

50 Nursi, *Words*, p. 1126.

51 Nursi, *Words*, pp. 789-790.

52 Nursi, *Words*, pp. 417-418.

53 Example is mine.

ma'nā al-ḥarf perspective, every entity is perceived as part of a greater meaning, in the same way that a letter has no independent meaning, but, as part of a word, points to a greater meaning. The letter 'r,' for example,[54] has no meaning by itself. When used to construct meaningful words, however, 'r' gains meaning, and hence value, beyond itself. In the *ma'nā al-ḥarf* perspective, creation is viewed as part of a greater meaning where every entity is arranged like letters in a word to convey meaning over and above themselves. If viewed this way, creation will evidently be seen as the purposeful work of God pointing to God's existence, unity and divine attributes and hence gain profound meaning and value.

Nursi contends that, when viewed through the lens of positivistic philosophy (through *ma'nā al-ism*), science simply describes the sun in and of itself.[55] Although the scientific perspective gives knowledge about the sun's physical properties, it gives no meaningful spiritual knowledge and wisdom. The Quran, on the other hand, looks at the sun as being indicative of a greater meaning (*ma'nā al-ḥarf*). It focuses on the sun's role in the cosmic order when it says, "the sun revolves"[56] and brings to mind the orderly behaviour of the solar system resulting in the night-day and summer-winter cycles that are indicative of God's cosmic order, for it is beyond the capacity of the sun to create this system. The Quran also says, "He has set up the sun as a lamp,"[57] highlighting one of the key purposes of the sun – to illuminate the earth and make it hospitable for life. It is clearly beyond the sun to think compassionately about creatures and assist in their survival.[58] Hence, Nursi argues the fact that God reveals Himself through the creation.

How can one be so sure that the revealed meaning Nursi insistently suggests is really there; could it be that Nursi is forcing meaning on the universe that simply does not exist? Nursi does not pose such a question, but he provides an answer.[59] If someone says they cannot decipher any meaning conveyed through the universe, it does not mean that the meaning is not there. But if multiple people can decipher the same meaning from the same set of empirical data, the meaning must be there. If a beautifully written Quranic text is shown to a person who cannot read or understand Arabic, the text will be appear intelligible and meaningless. The best they can do is describe the properties of the book and explain how beautifully it is put together. But if

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54 Example is mine.

55 Nursi, *Words*, p. 331.

56 Quran 36:38.

57 Quran 71:16.

58 Nursi, *Words*, p. 331.

59 Nursi, *Words*, p. 191.

the same Quranic text is shown to Arabic speaking Quran experts, they will immediately recognise it as the Quran and be able to read the text and explain its meanings in more or less the same manner. This demonstrates the fact that the text conveys a meaning beyond its mere letters. Similarly, since people with discerning eyes and reflecting minds can translate more or less the same meaning conveyed through the book of the universe, the meaning must be there in reality.[60]

Thus, as a creation of God, the book of the universe becomes a mode of revelation complementary to the Quran as a book of revelation. Just as the Quran is a source of knowledge about God and matters of belief, the knowledge obtained from the universe through *ma'nā al-ḥarf* can also be a source of knowledge about God and matters of belief. This theological interpretation supported by numerous verses from the Quran demonstrates that God speaks through the creation as an act of self-disclosure, complementing the Quran and allowing humans to better understand God and the Quranic revelation.

God Communicating 'to' Creation through Four Types of *waḥy*

God communicating to and through his creation has opened a theological window to revaluate Islamic understanding of *waḥy*. Communicating *to* and *through* the creation are two main modes of God's self-revelation. In the mode of communicating *to* the creation, there are four *types*, covering prophets, humans, living beings and non-living entities – basically the entire cosmos. In this section, the four levels are explained by examining four sets of relevant verses in the Quran to see how prominent Muslim exegetes have interpreted these verses and to test whether the argument of this chapter holds within the Quranic exegetical framework.

The four sets of verses are listed below. They will be fully quoted in respective sections to follow:

1. *Waḥy* as scriptural revelation to prophets – 2:2, 4:163, 16:102 and 42:51
2. *Waḥy* as inspiration (*ilhām*) to human conscience – 28:7. 42:51 and 91:8
3. *Waḥy* as animal instincts – 16:68-69
4. *Waḥy* as natural laws inspiring inanimate objects – 41:11-12 and 99:4-5

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60   Nursi, *Words*, pp. 192-193.

God's Communication with Messengers of God and Revealed Texts

Waḥy to appointed prophets of God is the most well-known type of revelation and the most often mentioned and clearly described in the Quran. Such revelation came at pivotal moments in history but were perpetuated through holy scriptures, system of faith traditions and large numbers of followers.

The Quran often makes the point that Prophet Muhammad was receiving revelation directly from God similar to the previous messengers: 'Verily, we have revealed (*awḥaynā*) to you as we have revealed to Noah and the Prophets after Him...'[61] Revelation is God's direct communication to a nation or the entire humanity, its purpose being to guide human beings in righteousness: 'This is the Book! There is no doubt about it – a guide for those righteous.'[62]

Revelation can come through different ways, i.e. directly or through an angel:

> It is not for any mortal that God should speak to him unless it be by revelation (*waḥy*) or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger (angel) to reveal, by His leave, whatever He wills (to reveal). Surely, He is All- Exalted, All-Wise.[63]

> Say, the holy spirit has brought it (the Quran) down from your Lord with the truth to reassure the believers, and as a guide and good news for those who submit to God.[64]

In addition to revelation in the form of direct words of God, prophets have received revelation in the form of wisdom: 'This is part of the wisdom which your Lord has revealed to you.'[65]

Waḥy sent to the masses through a prophet has an official tone with important consequences for this world and salvation in the afterlife, which is why it is generally accepted as the highest type of revelation. Since such revelation only happened formally at rare occasions, this kind of revelation is also the rarest form of God's communication with his creation. I will not analyse this first type of *waḥy* any further as revelation to prophets is universally accepted in Islamic scholarship and by Muslims.[66]

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61 Quran, 4:163.

62 Quran, 2:2.

63 Quran, 42:51.

64 Quran, 16:102.

65 Quran, 17:39.

66 For a detailed treatment of Quran as revelation see Afsaruddin, A. 'The Vocabulary of Revelation: Divine Intent and Self-Disclosure in the Qur'an', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, Vol.

Inspiration (ilhām) as God's Communication with Humans

The second type of *waḥy* to creation is the inspiration to each human being through their conscience and *fiṭra* (created human disposition). God's specific communication to humans leads to new knowledge, discernment of right and wrong and the fostering of 'inner peace'[67]. The key verses are 42:51 and 7:172-174. This type of revelation is general in the way human being functions but also specific to the circumstances of each person as they go through life.

The second type of *waḥy* is inspiration cast into the hearts of human beings as a means of specific guidance. This form of revelation is important as it is open to all human beings and at all times. In contrast to formal and binding revelation received by prophets, inspiration would be considered subjective and not legally or Islamically binding and applicable to all human beings. To distinguish between the two, Muslim scholars used the term *ilhām* (inspiration) to refer to *waḥy* cast in human hearts. The term *ilhām* appears in verb form in the verse, " And inspired it [with discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness." (Quran, 91:8).

There are two verses that are analysed to explore the relationship and distinction of *waḥy* to prophets and ordinary humans:

> It is not for any mortal that God should speak to him unless it be by revelation (*waḥy*) or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger (angel) to reveal, by His leave, whatever He wills (to reveal). Surely, He is All-Exalted, All-Wise.[68]

> We inspired (*awḥaynā*) the mother of Moses: "Nurse him, but when you fear for him, put him then into the river, and do not fear or grieve. We will certainly return him to you and make him one of the messengers.[69]

With respect to verse 42:51, al-Ṭabarī does not mentions anything specific to *ilhām*. Al-Zamakhsharī notes that God speaks to humans through *waḥy* as in revelation to prophets or through *ilhām* as inspiration 'cast in the human heart' (*qadhf al-qalb*). Interestingly, he mentions the view of famous early exegete Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d. 722) that the *Zabūr* (Psalms) was cast directly into the

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67   Z. Keskin, 'Inner Peace in Islam', *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 23.

68   Quran, 42:51.

69   Quran, 28:7.

heart of Prophet David.[70] Al-Qurṭubī discusses different ways in which *waḥy* was revealed to prophets. He attributes a view to Mujāhid that as well as prophets, the verse 42:51 also applies to some ordinary humans, as they can receive inspiration (*ilhām*) cast in their heart directly or delivered through an angel or in a dream.[71] For al-Rāzī, *waḥy* has particular meaning depending on its type and who is the receiver. It is usually used specifically for prophets and saints. For other humans, *waḥy* can only be *ilhām*.[72] Al-Rāzī also stresses that the best meaning of *waḥy* is the inspiration (*ilhām*) cast in the heart or a meaning conveyed in a dream. The mother of Moses and prophet Abraham received such *waḥy* as inspiration cast in the heart and through a dream respectively.[73] It is interesting that al-Rāzī includes saints and non-prophets among those who receive *waḥy* without classifying it as *ilhām.*

Būrsawī makes a general contention that God communicates with humans by casting revelation in their hearts. He makes the distinction that, 'waḥy and *ilhām* are the same in reality' but *waḥy* is the revelation used to describe what prophets receive and *ilhām* for the saints.[74] The nature of revelation is the same, but the roles of prophets and saints and the implications of the revelation and inspiration are different. This is much like how the prophets and saints may preach the same teachings but in different roles, and how the reception of this preaching by other people may have different salvific consequences.[75]

Yazir echoes similar views to Bursawi but notes that other than prophets, saints and all humans could receive *ilhām* as a form of revelation with the key difference that saints and humans do not experience the involvement of any angels. Although some saints may realise they are receiving *ilhām,* most do not realise it other than a sudden appearance of a new knowledge in their consciousness and understanding.[76] Yazir adds, 'God Almighty's communication with creatures continues forever' meaning God is always in a state of communication with His creation in different modes and types.[77]

The case of *waḥy* delivered to the mother of Moses in 28:7 is clearer with respect to a non-prophet receiving divine communication. Al-Ṭabarī quotes the view

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70   A. al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshaf*, Riyad, Maktaba al-Abikan, 1997, Vol. 5, p. 420.

71   A. A. Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jami' lil- aḥkām al-Qur'an*, Beirut, Al-Rasalah Publishers, 1995, Vol. 18, p. 507.

72   F. al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr aw mafātīḥ al ghayb*, Ankara, Huzur Yayinevi, 1992, Vol. 14, p. 275.

73   Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, Vol. 19, p. 481.

74   I. H. Būrsawī, *Rūḥ al-bayān*, Istanbul, Matba al-Uthmaniyya, 1912, Vol. 8, p. 347.

75   Būrsawī, *Rūḥ al-bayān*, Vol. 8, p. 348.

76   M. H. Yazir, *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili*, Istanbul, Zehraveyn, 1998, Vol. 7, pp. 35-36.

77   Yazir, *Hak Dini*, Vol. 7, p. 38.

of Qatāda ibn Diʿāma (d. 735) that *waḥy* received by the mother of Moses was cast in to her heart and the type of *waḥy* was unlike the one received by the prophets.[78] Al-Zamakhsharī, does not make any significant explanation on this verse.

Al-Qurṭubī mentions scholars debated the nature of revelation received by the mother of Moses resulting in different views. One view is attributed to Qatāda that she has received *ilhām* cast in her heart. Another view is that the inspiration came to her as some words as mentioned in the verse in her dream. A third view is attributed to Muqātil that Jibril appeared to her and delivered the command to leave him in the river even though she was not appointed as a prophet. Al-Qurṭubī contends that there are numerous narrations where angels come to speak to or give some sort of news to humans even though they are not prophets.[79] Būrsawī provides similar views to al-Qurṭubī and adds that Maryam, mother of Jesus, has also received *waḥy* delivered by an angel as a specific piece of news, but unlike the general revelation given to prophets of God.[80] These views definitely do not exclude angelic involvement in the case of *waḥy* to non-prophets although these would be exceptionally rare. After all, mothers of Jesus and Moses were mothers of prophets.

Al-Rāzī's view is that the *waḥy* received by the mother of Moses is of the *ilhām* kind.[81] Yazir says that *waḥy* in 28:7 is understood as *ilhām* or a dream, different to the revelation received by the prophets. Since in this case, Moses's mother acted on this inspiration, *ilhām* can be a strong indication specifically for the receiver to act but not a source of knowledge for others.[82]

In sum, although the verse 42:51 is usually understood to cover different ways *waḥy* is revealed to prophets of God, the fact that revelation to messengers (*rusul*) of God is mentioned separately to other forms of revelation prompted Muslim exegetes to apply the verse to humans other than prophets. Quranic exegetes unanimously accept that *waḥy* is received by humans other than the prophets, citing the mother of Moses receiving revelation as evidence. Although as Būrsawī contends, *waḥy* received by prophets and other humans are of a similar nature, scholars felt the need to distinguish between the two by calling *waḥy* given to humans as *ilhām* – inspiration cast in the hearts – for two reasons. Firstly, *waḥy* to the prophets concerns and binds not just prophets but also their followers, whereas *waḥy* to other humans binds only the recipient. Secondly, scholars may have felt

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78   Muḥammad Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Al-Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, Cairo, Markaz al-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt al-ʿArabiyya wa-l-Islāmiyya, 2001, Vol. 18, p. 157.

79   Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jami'*, Vol. 16, p. 232.

80   Būrsawī, *Rūḥ al-bayān*, Vol. 6, p. 372.

81   Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, Vol. 14, p. 273.

82   Yazir, *Hak Dini*, Vol. 6, p. 175.

that without this distinction, ordinary Muslims would be confused, or, worse still, people might claim to be receiving prophet-like revelation, leading to possibly to claims of [false] prophethood in extreme cases. Ordinary believers could at best say they are receiving *ilhām* and protect their faith.

Animal Instincts as God's Communication with Living Beings

The third type of *waḥy* as God's communication with His creation is the animal instincts as extraordinary behaviours. All such animal instincts would be God's revelation to guide animals in the survival of the species and to fulfil purposes greater than what animals can conceive, plan and implement for themselves. The most well-known Quranic evidence of this type of *waḥy* is the inspiration given to bees:

> And your Lord inspired (*awḥā*) the bee, saying: 'take your habitations in the mountains and in the trees and in what they erect. Then eat of all fruits and follow the ways of your Lord made easy (for you).' There comes forth from their bellies, a drink of varying colour wherein is healing for men. Verily in this is indeed a sign for people who think.[83]

Al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī and al-Qurṭubī all agree that *waḥy* in 16-68 refers to a form of inspiration (*ilhām*) cast into the heart of bees. They proceed to explain how bees live in their natural habitat producing the extraordinarily nutritious substance of honey.[84] Būrsawī accepts *waḥy* to bees as God's revelation and importantly generalises this as a form of inspiration delivered to all animals.[85]

Al-Rāzī gives a detailed account of how extraordinary the hexagonal shape of the beehives are in the way they are perfectly symmetrical, made without any tools, and with the knowledge that the hexagonal shape does not produce any waste of space. He concludes that these are beyond the ability of the honeybee and requires inspiration. In this respect, *waḥy* to the bee means to impart to the bee such extraordinary inner drive and skills (instincts) that they are beyond even a human intellect to work out.[86]

Yazir makes a distinction that *waḥy* in 16:68 is clearly not the form of revelation given to prophets. It is *ilhām* as a meaning cast in the hearts of the

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83   Quran, 16:68-69.

84   Al-Ṭabarī, *Al-Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 16, p. 287. Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 3, pp. 450–451. Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmiʿ* Vol. 14, p.287.

85   Būrsawī, *Rūḥ al-bayān*, Vol. 5, pp. 9-10.

86   Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, Vol. 14, p. 275.

bees. In humans, *ilhām* does not necessarily lead to certain knowledge and obligation. In the honeybee, however, the inspiration leads to a necessary action in the Divinely-created disposition (*fiṭra*) of the bee. Interestingly for Yazir, in the necessary obligation aspect, bee's actions and what it produces is similar to the obligatory action generated by the *waḥy* to a prophet. So, *waḥy* to the bee is the divine education and guiding of the bee embedded in its nature expressed within the instincts of the bee.[87] This is a very sophisticated interpretation and, although Yazir does not generalise, supports the view that all such animal instincts can be classified as *waḥy*.

Waḥy to bees is a single example. Quran could very well have included others. What is distinctive about the bees is the extraordinary behaviours they display to find food sources, make honey and build and maintain the hives. In doing so, they perpetuate their species and fulfil important duties of cross pollination of plants, serving a purpose unaware themselves. As Būrsawī recognises all such animal behaviour and instincts would equally be *waḥy* as God's communication with all animals. Hence, God communicates with all animals through their instincts as part of His creation.

Natural Laws as God's Communication with Inanimate Things

The fourth type of *waḥy* is God's communication with inanimate objects on earth and the universe. There are grounds to generalise the type of revelation mentioned in verses 41:11-12 and 96:4-5 to God's interaction with all matter and things in the universe. In this respect, the reality of what it termed as natural laws in science would be *waḥy* – God's revelation to non-living objects and entities.

The relevant verses in this respect are:

> And He directed (His design) to the heaven when it was as a cloud (of gases), and ordered it and the earth, "Come both of you, willingly or unwillingly!" They said, "We have come in willing obedience." So, He fashioned the seven heavens in two days and inspired (*awḥā*) in every cosmic heaven its affair...[88]

> On that Day the earth will recount everything, that your Lord has revealed (*awḥā*) to it (the earth).[89]

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87   Yazir, *Hak Dini*, Vol. 4, p. 236.

88   Quran, 41:11-12.

89   Quran, 99:4-5.

With respect to verses 41:11-12, al-Ṭabarī interprets *waḥy* as God's command delivered to the cosmic objects and that they followed the command, basically paraphrasing the verse without explanation and further analysis.[90] Al-Zamakhsharī does not comment on this verse. Al-Qurṭubī mentions two interpretations. The first is that the *waḥy* in these verses were through divine speech, possibly following on the dialogue nature of communication in 41:11. The stronger view is that these are commands of God related to His creation and activity in the universe expressed in dialogue form.[91] Al-Qurṭubī does not use the notion of laws of nature, as such a concept did not exist for Muslim exegetes in the thirteenth century. His description of *waḥy* as God's commands, however, is no different to saying God creates and governs the affairs of the universe through what we call the laws of nature.

Al-Rāzī mentions that the expression 'willingly or unwillingly' indicates compulsion and necessity. The key part of the verse 41:12 'inspired in every cosmic heaven its affair' means that God has assigned all parts of the cosmos its tasks and affairs meaning how they will function from the moment they are created to their eventual destruction.[92] This interpretation is important in that it covers all laws that are involved in the operation of the universe.

Būrsawī explains *waḥy* in these verses as the commands of a superior conveyed to the inferior where the inferior has no option but to obey. Similarly, cosmic objects necessarily follow the creative commands of God.[93] In today's scientific terminology, this necessity is described as the laws of nature. Yazir says the expression 'we come in willing obedience' is not a conscious dialogue response, rather, it is a necessary response embedded in the nature of things,[94] pointing to the laws of nature.

With respect to the verse 99:5, al-Ṭabarī interprets *waḥy* as God's command rather than revelation. He recognises that there is a view that *awḥa* in the verse means God's inspiration to the earth, but he sees this as a weak interpretation.[95] Al-Zamahksharī understands '*awḥa*' in the verse as God 'letting the earth know', differentiating it from the command interpretation. He takes it also to mean that God commanded through speaking. He also recognises that the *waḥy* meaning could be taken literally but notes that this interpretation is inappropriate as inanimate objects could not comprehend what is spoken and

90 Al-Ṭabarī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 2001, Vol. 20, pp. 392-394.

91 Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, Vol. 18, pp. 397-398.

92 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, Vol. 19, p. 361

93 Būrsawī, *Rūh al-bayān*, Vol. 7, p. 125.

94 Yazir, *Hak Dini*, Vol. 6, p. 549.

95 Al-Tabarī, *al-Jamiʿ al-bayān*, Vol. 24, p. 559.

consciously carry out the command.[96] This difficulty is, however, eliminated if we were to understand '*awḥa*' as revelation, but the type pertaining to laws of nature.

Al-Qurṭubī narrates the views of Mujāhid, who accepted the view that God's communication in this verse is *waḥy*. Another interpretation is God 'took the earth under his command'.[97] Al-Rāzī makes a short remark to say that the command reflecting divine will has reached the earth and the earth has received it.[98] Būrsawī understood it as meaning informing and commanding. He reports that the majority of exegetes understood it *waḥy* here as God communicating his command through speech.[99] Yazir, remarks that the *waḥy* in the verse refers to the earthquake as an effect the divine command *kun fa yakūn* (be and it is!) enforced, in that it is a creative command that has effect in the natural world.[100]

The nature of communication with inanimate objects is not to enter into a dialogue or for them to respond in a conscious way, as would be the case with human beings. So, commanding inanimate objects and things to take part in the creative work of God is a form of *waḥy* as God's communication to creation. Particularly, verses 41:11-12 discuss the creation of stars and planets from gaseous nebulae. The Quranic description of God's interaction with the earth and gaseous nebula represented in the form of human dialogue and referring to it as *waḥy* is very strong evidence that *waḥy* includes God's communication with inanimate objects and that this communication is played out on the creation through natural laws. This view is supported, as mentioned earlier, by Qadhi who includes natural laws as a type of revelation. Asma Afsuruddin also recognises natural laws as God's revelation in reference to 41:12, saying 'This may be regarded as a reference to the natural laws which govern the orbits of the planets, the rotation of the earth, and so forth.'[101] So, *waḥy* is God's communication to His creation and this communication includes inanimate objects. God communicates with inanimate objects through natural laws. Put differently, natural laws are God's specific communication (*waḥy*) with His creation.

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96   Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, Vol. 6, p. 413.

97   Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, Vol. 22, p.481.

98   Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, Vol. 23, p. 334.

99   Būrsawī, *Rūh al-bayān*, Vol. 10, p. 492.

100 Yazir, *Hak Dini*, Vol. 9, 373

101 Afsaruddin, 'The Vocabulary of Revelation', p. 198.

Conclusion

This chapter combined the methods of Islamic theology and exegesis to produce a holistic framework for understanding and establishing *waḥy* in Islam. The argument of the chapter builds on the previous scholarship while proposing a more comprehensive framework for *waḥy*. The chapter substantiated this broader framework of *waḥy* by first outlining the conceptual and logical backbone of its argument. It proceeded to summarise the definition of *waḥy* in classical and modern Islamic scholarship. It continued to lay the ground of the theological framework for revelation before progressing to apply the framework on the Quran and tafsir works.

The outcome of this rigorous reading and analysis is that *waḥy* as represented by the Quran should be understood more generally than it has been so far: *waḥy* is God speaking and communication *to* and *through* the entire creation in two distinct modes. God communicates *through* the creation as the book of creation and communicates *to* the creation prophets, humans, animals and inanimate objects as a reflection of His mercy (*raḥma*) and lordship (*rubūbiyya*) of guiding the entire creation.

In God revealing *through* the creation mode, the creation itself is designed in a way that allows it to communicate sublime and supernal truths about its Creator. The main recipient of this mode of revelation is the humankind. In this respect, the book of the universe becomes a mode of revelation complementary to the Quran as a book of revelation. Just as the Quran is a source of knowledge about God and matters of belief, the knowledge obtained from the universe can also be a source to of knowledge about God and matters of belief. This theological interpretation supported by numerous verses from the Quran demonstrate that God speaks through the creation as a self-disclosure complementing the Quran and allowing humans to better understand God and the Quranic revelation.

In God communicating *to* the creation mode, there are four specific types of *waḥy* encompassing ways of revelation *from* the Creator *to* the creation – (1) communication of guidance and knowledge through appointed prophets of God; (2) inspiration (*ilhām*) and creational disposition (*fiṭra*) to humans, (3) the bestowal of instincts to animals and (4) natural laws operating in the universe. This means that God is involved with the creation not only to make things exist but to be in constant communication with all levels of creation through some form of communication as encapsulated in the Islamic concept of *waḥy* and revelation.

Ultimately, God's attribute of speech (*kalām*) is not limited to a certain time and place. God speaks at all times as he is in constant act of creation.

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2

A Religiously Interesting Natural Theology

Jamie Turner

> Not everywhere in Nature, but at special points, well-known and numerous
> enough, the awareness of God seems, as it were, to have broken through, or to
> have supervened upon our ordinary physical experience of those subjects.[1]

Introduction

Natural theology, which we might provisionally define as an enquiry into the
existence and nature of God without drawing on special revelation,[2] has often
articulated itself through a series of abstract arguments.[3] Those arguments such
as the ontological, cosmological and teleological arguments have been principally
placed to establish the existence of God. One of the concerns with this traditional
approach to natural theology is its inability to properly map onto the kind of
religious belief of ordinary believers, one which relates us to God not merely in
cognitive terms, but also in *affective* terms. In other words, a belief in the God
that combines propositional assent with spiritual praxis, servitude, devotion and
desire. Typically, believers do relate to God in emotive and even existential ways.
As Clifford Williams points out, belief in God is characteristically bound up to
noncognitive or affective aspects of believing because it routinely arises due to

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1   W.E. Hocking, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, New Haven, Yale University Press,
     1912, p. 230.

2   By special revelation we mean a form of divine disclosure in terms of revealed or inspired
     speech (i.e., scripture) or other more specific modes revealed to human beings which go
     beyond our ability to discern via our natural cognitive faculties.

3   Cf., W. Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland, *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, Oxford,
     John Wiley & Sons, 2012.

a satisfaction of our deepest desires, yearnings and existential needs.[4] Williams rightly points out that believing in a personal God will typically involve both cognitive and affective elements: 'It contains the belief that such a God exists and that this God has certain qualities, along with feelings and desires, and includes an attraction to the qualities and a feeling of gladness because God satisfies certain needs'.[5]

One way to construe this concern with traditional approaches to natural theology is to say that the traditional approach focuses on merely the "thin outer layers", as opposed to the "thick inner layers" of religious belief. In other words, the religious belief which traditional approaches to natural theology seek to achieve is one that concerns not the centre of religious belief, but merely the periphery. In this vein, Mark Wynn is probably correct in saying that 'knowledge of God, in the theologically or religiously interesting sense, involves a commitment of the person in their affective-practical-cognitive integrity'.[6] So, if natural theology is concerned merely with a kind of religious belief or knowledge that is religiously uninteresting and minimal, might it not be worthwhile to attempt to develop an approach to natural theology which *is* religiously interesting? Such an approach will be one which aims to encapsulate not merely the thin outer layers but also the thick inner layers of religious belief, by concerning itself with both the cognitive and the affective aspects of religious belief. In tipping the hat to Wynn, then, let us call an approach to natural theology which has as its target religious belief which is of the theologically and religiously interesting kind, '*a religiously interesting natural theology*'.

A religiously interesting natural theology, then, is concerned with a religiously significant, rich, or simply interesting form of religious belief. As such, attaining that sort of religious belief through natural theology is one of its principal targets. However, it is proper to think that it should also seek to secure another target, one that is present in more traditional approaches to natural theology: a religious belief that is positively epistemically appraised (i.e., rational, justified, warranted). The arguments of natural theology have often been drawn upon by believers to either demonstrate how their religious belief is congruent with reason or simply because such arguments are deemed necessary for one to be epistemically rational in holding to beliefs such as that there exists a God belief. If a religiously interesting natural theology is merely one which induces religious belief for a person on merely practical or pragmatic grounds

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4   Cf., C. Williams, *Existential Reasons for Belief in God*, Eugene, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011.

5   Ibid. 73.

6   M. Wynn, *Faith and Place: An Essay of Embodied Religious Epistemology*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 9.

(i.e., because that is satisfies certain existential needs, say), irrespective of good epistemic grounds, then I think it would be seriously lacking in some sense. Therefore, we might think of the target of this approach to natural theology more properly as: religiously interesting, positively epistemically appraised religious belief. It is just this kind of approach to natural theology, then, that this chapter seeks to develop a version of.

Natural Theology and Theistic Evidence

To properly articulate the approach that we seek to develop, we ought to begin by saying something more definite about the nature of natural theology itself. Typically, natural theology has been contrasted with revealed theology, where the latter refers to a theology rooted in special revelation. In an epistemic sense, this form of theology works in a sort of top-down way, where scripture, say, which has the presumption of God's existence intrinsically interwoven into it, gives us a knowledge of the divine based on a more direct medium of communication with His creatures. On the other hand, natural theology is supposed to pick out a form theology which works from the bottom-up, where knowledge of God is reached through and from the natural world, without presupposing the truth of the contents of any given special revelation.

In contemporary philosophy, as alluded to above, natural theology has most often been concerned with w the 'classical arguments for theism'. As such, the 'natural' element to natural theology has often been synonymous with natural reason, where, for instance, one reasons to the existence of God from the contingency or orderliness of the universe. However, I think that we can construe the 'natural' element in broader terms. We may simply think of it as referring to our 'natural cognitive faculties'.[7] It seems reasonable to think that *if* God does exist, then He may make knowledge of Himself available to us via means beyond mere reason or philosophical argument. As such, we might think that natural theology should be able to draw on other resources accessible to us. Perhaps there is a quasi-perceptual *sensus divinitatis* like faculty which allows us to apprehend God in some immediate way.[8] It may be that our emotions could be a source of divine recognition, or it might be through our faculty of intuition. It may even be through art, poetry, and literature; or if not by means

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7   Amber Leigh Griffioen (2017) puts forward a plausible case for regarding natural theology in as a discipline that draws on all our natural cognitive resources beyond merely reason.

8   Cf., A. Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2000.

of narrative.[9] It is then this broader conception of natural theology that we'll be working with in this essay.

Given that natural theology concerns itself with forming beliefs about God, most often a belief in His existence, perhaps a reasonable starting point for any natural theological pursuit is to ask the following question: what sort of evidence would we expect to find of God if He were to exist? The philosopher C. Stephen Evans provides us with a helpful way of answering this question. According to Evans, *if* the God of the monotheistic traditions were to exist, then He would make evidence of His existence both 'widely available' but also in some sense 'easily resistible'.[10] Evans's basic thought behind these two evidential constraints is the idea that plausibly if God did create us, particularly because of His omnibenevolent nature, He did so principally for us to know Him and develop an interpersonal relationship with Him.[11] In such a case, then, God would surely want to make knowledge of His existence accessible to everyone, not merely to intellectual elites. So, evidence of God would be widely available to human beings. At the same time, He would probably make such evidence accessible only insofar as those who *desire* God will find Him. For in this case, the relationship sought and developed will be a rich and meaningful one. It will be one that is free, joyful and loving. We may also think that love by its very essence desires that the one loving responds freely. Hence, God out of His perfect love, desires that the creatures whom He loves respond to Him not by compulsion, but by free loving desire. But if the evidence for God was overwhelming, not only would everyone be compelled to acknowledge God, but they might also conclude it foolish not to serve God on pragmatic grounds, even if they do not desire or love

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9   Cf., K.J. Clark, 'Narrative and Natural Theology', in C.P. Ruloff (ed.), *Christian Philosophy of Religion: Essays in Honor of Stephen Davis*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2014, pp. 249-257; A. McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, Grand Rapids, Baker Publishing Group, 2019.

10 C.S. Evans, *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God: A New Look at Theistic Arguments*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 14-17.

11 In the Islamic tradition, for example, God states in the Qur'ān (51:56) that, 'I did not create jinn and humans except to worship me'. Yet, Ibn Taymiyya (1995, 10: 203-204) explains that 'the term worship ('*ibāda*) comprises love (*mahabba*) and humility (*dhull*)', and states that, 'Friendship (*khulla*) is the perfection of the love that entails necessarily, on the part of the servant, perfection of [his] servanthood vis-à-vis God and, on the part of God, Glorified is He, perfection of [His] lordship vis-à-vis His servants, whom He loves and who love Him. The term servanthood ('*ubūdiyya*) comprises perfection of humility and perfection of love' (ibid.). Hence, it is possible to conceive of God's purpose for creating human beings as for them to develop an interpersonal relationship or rather friendship (*khulla*) with God, from the standpoint of Islamic theism. I think the same can be said of Christian and Jewish brands of theism too.

this relationship with Him.[12] As such, it would preclude the possibility of this deeper, more meaningful relationship with God which includes the *desire* for awareness of Him.

Another way to think about Evans's idea is the following rather succinct and elegant simile offered by John Cottingham. He writes that,

> [An] apt simile for how awareness of God comes about might be the fleeting appearance of morning dew – certainly not something that needs complicated techniques to experience, but something that requires you to be interested enough to get up early in the morning and go out in the fields.[13]

The idea here is that an awareness of God would be of an egalitarian kind. God would make an awareness of Himself widely available to all of us, to put it in Evans's terms. Significantly, though, that awareness of God will require a kind of desire, interest, perhaps even a yearning or searching. This is noteworthy because as we have suggested in the above section, an awareness or knowledge of God in the religiously interesting sense includes affections (such as desire, love or gratitude). Therefore, we might think that prior affective states are required to properly access the evidence of God, which in turn allows for the development of an interesting and richer form of religious belief.

Finally, one might also construe the expected evidence for God, *if* He exists, along slightly different lines. Consider the following remarks by the French mathematician and theologian Blaise Pascal (d. 1662 CE),

> It is right that so pure a God discloses himself only to those whose hearts are purified.[14]

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12 Michael J. Murray (1993, 34) also argues that God would create a form of 'epistemic distance' between Himself and His creatures. Specifically, he argues that 'the hiddenness of God is required in order for free beings to be able to exercise their freedom in a morally significant manner given the strength of the threat implied by knowledge of the threat implicit in the traditional Christian story [i.e., immanence of punishment]'. One can offer the same argument with the Jewish or Muslim concept of God in mind. Paul Moser also argues that God, given His morally perfect nature as a being worthy of worship, would provide awareness of Himself only to those ready to accept His revelation in all humility and live a life of love (*agapē*), cf., Moser (2012). Also cf., Gensler (2023, 60-61) on the issue of expected evidence of God conditional on His existence.

13 J. Cottingham, *Philosophy of Religion: Towards a More Humane Approach*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 58.

14 B. Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 142.

> ... And you will give him further thanks that he has not revealed himself
> to wise people full of pride, unworthy of knowing so holy a God.[15]

Pascal seems to be saying that because of God's perfect, pure and holy nature, a reception of His being into the 'hearts' of human beings is only proper when infused into hearts sufficiently purified or poised to be worthy of that infusion. One might surmise that a heart purified is one that possesses both certain affections and a certain moral disposition i.e., to desire do the good; to serve God. In this case, then, evidence for God is widely available in the sense that it is open to all human beings irrespective of intellectual or philosophical acumen but is accessible only to those whose hearts are properly situated for its reception. The emphasis here is not on God's desire to make available to humans the great good of a free and joyous relationship with Him but rather that, given His pure and perfect nature, hearts impurified are unable and in some moral sense even unworthy to receive an awareness of a Being as pure as He.

Intimations of the Transcendent

In the preceding sections, we have attempted to outline, first, the central concern of this chapter: to develop a religiously interesting natural theology – one that seeks to secure religiously interesting, positively epistemically appraised religious belief. Second, we have suggested that we are working with a conception of natural theology which construes the resources available to the natural theologian in terms broader than in more traditional approaches. And third, we have said that the sort of evidence of God that might be accessible, *if* He exists, will probably be widely available and yet resistible in some sense. This latter idea also suggests that we may require a certain affective and even moral disposition to access that evidence. Given this backdrop, I think we ought to proceed by considering the sorts of spaces or occasions in which evidence for God, with the aforementioned evidential constraints in mind, might be made accessible to us using our natural cognitive faculties in all their muster.

It seems to me that there emerge certain moments in the course of our lives which temporarily interrupt the regular pattern of our ordinary routines, and although they need not be of the miraculous, they speak to us of the 'beyondness' of things. In sudden and perhaps even fleeting moments, a kind of intimation of some marked or grand significance that otherwise might have gone amiss, presents itself to us. We encounter these impressions with a certain sense of the

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15   Ibid. 7.

extraordinary. Perhaps it is in recognition of the sheer splendour of the natural world at large, or through perceiving the elegant beauty of a modest flower. It might be in an abrupt awakening to the radical contingency of all things or simply oneself, which has one peering into the purity of existence, leaving one overwhelmed by a momentary grasp upon the momentousness of simply *being*. It may even be by a kind of precipitate realisation of the moral fabric of the universe. In any one of these rich and unique experiences, one senses portions of reality – even if for only a brief moment – as transfigured in such a way that what is beheld appears to be of great value, meaning, and perhaps even *cosmic* significance. At the very least, these experiences are of the sort that give us a heightened sense that there is something beyond mere materiality.

John Cottingham refers to these sorts of experiences as 'intimations of the transcendent' i.e., indications of or pointers to a transcendent reality (i.e., God).[16] Cottingham points out that the suggestion of there being something of a deeper or profound nature beyond the material fabric of our world is in some sense a natural and ordinary form of experience. That is to say, our awareness of the beauty in nature, our experience of love in interpersonal relationships, our wonder at the starry heavens above, our awe at the sheer existence of things, our reverence before the moral law or conscience within us, our sense of the sublime experienced through forms of poetry, art or music, are all experiences which to borrow Cottingham's phrase, are 'part of our ordinary birthright'.[17] These experiences which intimate to us something of the transcendent do not require of us that we become well trained mystics or ascetics or theologians. For despite in one sense their rarity, they are in another sense ordinary and natural, part of a genuine human experience of the world. They are experiences which all of us might rightly think that we have on some occasion had. As such, we might more truly think of them as 'natural intimations of the transcendent'.[18]

Yet, these experiences are perhaps not mundane or somewhat rare for a reason. Although they do not require of us that we become theologians, they do perhaps require of us at least something: *that we participate in them*. Clearly, one does not as such need a great deal of participation to detect the beauty of a flower; one need only be presented with one to hand. But one does require a certain participation to detect the sense of an intimation existing behind the beauty of the flower. The sense of the extraordinary or transcendent within that beauty does not present itself to us in quite the same way as does the apparent

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16 J. Cottingham, *Philosophy of Religion: Towards a More Humane Approach*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 60.

17 Ibid. 63.

18 Ibid. 63.

beauty itself. Consider that it is not proper to approach these aspects of the world in a detached, cold and objective way, if they are really going to function in the fullest sense, in intimating to us a sense of the transcendent. Recognising the transcendence to which the beauty points will not likely be grasped by a sort of standoffish, coolheaded and dispassionate scrutiny. Rather, such awareness becomes more possible through being passionately engaged with the object of one's attention. Part of doing that, though, will probably mean that we must draw on our affections, because it is just such senses of awe, wonder, love, desire and so forth, that engage us and pull us in to the relevant object and enable it to permeate through us.

Significantly, this is in a sense illustrative of the sort of evidence of God (the ultimate Transcendent One), that we might expect *if* He were to exist. This is because being able to grasp an intimation of the transcendent, or more specifically of the divine in the natural world, is something that is widely available to us, but which also requires having a certain sort of affective posturing or stance. Relevant here is the notion of 'transformative religious experience'.[19] Certain experiences of a religious kind (i.e., experiences which may ground religious belief broadly understood), can be thought of as prompting a sort of transformation of character or disposition which might be necessary for us to recognise how God's existence can make sense of our experiences of the world, or that His existence is at least conceivable, given our experiences. Recognising intimations of the transcendent might be a fitting kind of transformative experience in this sense because such experiences typically evoke responses such as awe, wonder or gratitude, and give us a sense that there is something meaningful, loving and genuinely valuable at the heart of or, at least part, of reality itself. This in turn creates a kind of affective shift in our character or disposition. Thus, given that God by His nature is supposed to ground reality in such a way that He imbibes it with value and meaning, responding to aspects of the world by acknowledging an inherent value and meaning through a profound sense of the extraordinary might transform us, or at least open us up, in such a way that the idea of their being something which ultimately grounds this value inherent in things is considered a genuine possibility. Therefore, we might think that 'intimations of the transcendent' are a good starting point for our natural theological pursuit because they fit well within our conception of expected theistic evidence, make possible a certain prerequisite transformation of character needed to properly appreciate that evidence, and evoke the sort of affective responses required for interesting religious belief. So, the question that remains with us then is: how

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19   Cf., C.S. Evans, 'The Epistemological Significance of Transformative Religious Experience: A Kierkegaardian Exploration', *Faith and Philosophy*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1991, pp. 180-192.

exactly should one approach intimations of the transcendent as a potential means to discover God's reality?

It seems to me that any approach taken toward aspects of the world which speak to us of the transcendent and which are being sought for the goal of seeking God, requires a form of contemplation which involves the whole dimension of a person – contemplation wherein one approaches these features of reality by bringing with them both reason and the heart.[20] Consider the following point made by Mark Wynn: 'before our reason is deployed, we need to decide what to think about; and the emotions have a role in this regard, by picking out matters which are *worthy of attention*'.[21] In other words, we cannot approach the relevant aspects of the world hoping to find a sort of transcendent significance to them without a passionate engagement that draws on our affections or emotions. This is because failing to do so will make us miss the relevant or salient features worthy of our attention i.e., those aspects of the world which inspire within us awe, wonder, sublimity, gratitude, and so forth. So, we require our emotions to pursue our enquiry here because our emotions guide us in our pursuit by orienting our gaze to what is necessary to give our attention to: those features of the world which inspire within us awe, wonder and gratitude, (i.e., intimations of the transcendent).

Perhaps we might also think that if Pascal is right in his famous dictum that 'the heart has its reasons which reason itself does not know',[22] then would we not be acting unreasonably in depriving our contemplative skills of those 'reasons of the heart' if we adopted a detached, cold and objective posture? For we have already considered that, given God's existence, He will probably make evidence of Himself available to all human beings, and as such probably enable us to know something of Him through our cognitive faculties unrestricted to reason, so perhaps then the heart is relevant to divine enquiries. Therefore, it seems right to me to think that the sort of contemplation required amidst a seeking of God through intimations of the transcendent is one that involves the whole person, in terms of both their rational and their affective natures; it requires reason and the heart. But what *exactly* does it mean to suggest that 'the heart has its reasons' and that the affections or an affective posturing more generally might be a helpful *epistemic* tool in an enquiry like this

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20   By the 'heart', I simply mean the locus of our affections or emotions (i.e., the cognitive source of our affective and emotional states of mind, responses, etc).

21   M. Wynn, 'The Relationship of Religion and Ethics: A Comparison of Newman and Contemporary Philosophy of Religion', *Heythrop Journal*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2005, p. 439.

22   B. Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 158.

An Epistemology of the Heart

A traditional view of the affections or emotions is that they are rationally inhibiting,[23] or 'non-reasoning movements; unthinking energies that simply push the person around'.[24] However, in contemporary philosophy, increasingly emotions are being understood to hold propositional content and act as a sort of way of *seeing*.[25] On this view, unlike our sense perceptions, which deliver the 'descriptive' and 'physical' aspects of the world to us, emotions enable us to *perceive* 'evaluative' and 'non-physical' value-laden features of reality. For instance, in the emotion of gratitude one *perceives* that what another did is worthy of thanks. In compassion, one *perceives* another as being worthy of help or support. In fear, one *perceives* there to be an object of threat. In each of these cases the emotions in question do appear to possess propositional content, such as, 'that x object of fear *seems* dangerous', or 'that y object of gratitude *seems* worthy of thanks', and so forth.[26]

In being an *evaluative* kind of seeing, emotions are often related to forms of moral perception. For instance, the torture of innocents; the wickedness of the Holocaust; that children are precious; that compassion is virtuous – all of these are moral beliefs that are typically connected to and evoked by some visceral emotion.[27] For instance, through one's emotion of disgust one *sees* the severity of the wickedness involved in the Holocaust. Through one's emotion of compassion one *sees* the preciousness of children, construing them as objects worthy of loving care. Emotions often elicit evaluative perception in non-moral cases though as well. The emotion of wonder, for instance, is a response to something one deems to be magnificent, yet perhaps also in some sense incomprehensible or ineffable.

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23   I use emotions and affections interchangeably, but it is sometimes thought that the former refers to feelings which are more sudden, superficial, fleeting, whereas the latter are longer-lasting, deeper, and even rational. See G.R. McDermott, *Seeing God: Johnathan Edwards and Spiritual Discernment*, Vancouver, Regent College Publishing, 1995. In drawing on these two terms, I am using it closer to the notion of affection than emotion, although, as suggested, they are here and elsewhere deployed synonymously.

24   M. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 310.

25   Cf., A. Pelser, 'Emotion, Evaluative Perception, and Epistemic Justification', in S. Roeser, and C. Todd (eds.), *Emotion and Value*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 106-122; R. Roberts, *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003; L. Zagzebski, 'Emotion and Moral Judgement', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 66, pp. 104-124; M. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001; R. de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion*, Cambridge/MA, MIT Press, 1987.

26   A. Pelser, 'Emotion, Evaluative Perception, and Epistemic Justification', in S. Roeser, and C. Todd (eds.), *Emotion and Value*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 110.

27   Ibid. 111-112.

Through the emotion of wonder, one construes the object of one's wonderment as exhibiting value-laden qualities, and thus it acts as a means of *perceiving* the grandeur and magnificence of the object in question.[28]

Significantly, emotions thus construed may be a source of *epistemic justification*. This can be argued from the fact that we typically hold certain beliefs based on emotions which we are plausibly epistemically justified in upholding.[29] For example, beliefs like 'the sunset is beautiful', 'rape is abominable', 'integrity is admirable', 'the Holocaust was pure evil', and so forth. In all such cases, these evaluative beliefs are paradigmatic instances of beliefs formed by emotions and are also all plausibly epistemically justified for us. I take it that S has epistemic justification for p just in case S's belief that p is based on some grounds that S has for p.[30] Grounds may be propositional i.e., arguments, or nonpropositional i.e., experiences; seemings.[31] With this in view, then, it seems reasonable to think that emotions themselves can be epistemic 'grounds' which confer *prima facie* epistemic justification upon us, at least with respect to the evaluative beliefs (i.e., moral, and aesthetic beliefs) that we form.[32] Let us attempt to connect, then, what we have just noted concerning the epistemology of emotions with our initial question of their epistemic role in aiding one's pursuit of the divine.

We have already seen how the 'heart' might be required in that our emotions play a role in orienting our gaze to relevant and salient features of the world which speak of the transcendent. Such features, we noted, seem plausibly to be the sort of evidence we might expect of the divine, particularly with the formation of an interesting religious belief in mind. Yet there is another perhaps more fundamental sense in which the heart is necessary here. Consider that when one recognises or acknowledges an intimation of the transcendent, one is construing the world in value-laden terms: one perceives the world to be possessed with a kind of value which transcends the 'bruteness' of mere materiality. This is because such intimations (seemingly) reveal to us an aspect of reality imbued with value i.e., the moral fabric of the universe, the beauty of the nature, love

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28 A. Pelser, 'Reasons of the Heart: Emotions in Apologetics', *Christian Research Journal*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2015, 36.

29 A. Pelser, 'Emotion, Evaluative Perception, and Epistemic Justification', in S. Roeser, and C. Todd (eds.), *Emotion and Value*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 111-112.

30 Cf., W. Alston, 'Epistemic Desiderata', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 53, no. 3, 1993, p. 527.

31 On the epistemic concept of 'seemings', cf., M. Huemer, 'Compassionate phenomenal conservatism', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 74, no. 1, 2007, pp. 30-55.

32 One might argue that emotions are source of epistemic justification for certain theoretical non-evaluative beliefs as well, cf., L. Silva, 'Epistemic Emotions Justified', *philosophies*, vol. 7, no. 5, 2022, p. 104.

present in an interpersonal relationship, an inherent *telos* to the cosmos, or more generally that there is a real significance to life. Therefore, when the natural world opens up to us in the form of such intimations, our 'heart' just will be that source of 'perception' which construes the world as having these forms of value. For as we have seen, it is through our emotions that we perceive value in the world, as evinced from the moral and aesthetic cases noted above. So, we might surmise that these intimations are perceived through our emotion of wonder or awe or reverence, for instance, and evaluated as valuable in some sense i.e., beautiful, worthy of reverence, and so forth. Therefore, without a kind of *emotive* element present in our contemplation of the natural world, one will likely lack the prerequisite posturing needed to *perceive* intimations of the transcendent in the first place.[33]

We have seen, then, that the sort of contemplation required to recognise or perceive the divine through intimations of the transcendent is of the sort that requires the whole person, including both reason and the heart. It requires both rational reflection and the guidance of our affections. However, this is not sufficient for fully-fledged natural theological knowledge. For although our emotions might be a source of epistemic justification for believing in a transcendent reality witnessed through its intimations, that is not equivalent to believing in God.[34] Furthermore, believing in God because of such experiences grounded in emotions alone might provide one with some *prima facie* epistemic justification, but not a great deal of such positive epistemic status. As such, what might well be required here, beyond these mere experiences, is the kind of framework which allows us to *see* God through these intimations. So, we might think that what is needed is some very broad or loose form of inference to God from these experiences. This, however, presents us with a fresh challenge in developing our natural theological approach. Recall that part of the aim of this approach is to avoid the pitfall of a traditional philosophical and strictly inferential form of natural theology. That pitfall was the problem of its lacking the religiously interesting edge in contrast to one which has a theologically interesting and more typical religious belief as its target. If our approach to natural theology merely seeks to abstract our experiences of intimations of the transcendent to some inference with the conclusion that God exists, then it

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33   We might also add that given the expected evidence of God *if* He exists, it requires that one adopts a certain affective posture vis-à-vis God, by valuing God as a good and desiring Him. In the absence of such a posture, grounded in a desire for God, one might fail to perceive intimations of Him.

34   If our emotions are sufficient grounds for *prima facie* justification for beliefs about matters in moral and aesthetic domains, the same would seem to apply for intimations of the transcendent (God) as well.

will fall into that pitfall and concern itself with merely the cognitive aspect of religious belief, as opposed to both cognitive and affective aspects. We need, then, a way to make sense of this and avoid such a pitfall.

Narrative and Natural Theology

The challenge at hand, then, is to develop a way of moving from perceptions of intimations of the transcendent, which, as we have spelled out, entails a form of contemplation involving both reason and the heart, to more specific beliefs about God. One way to think about this is to conceive of perceptions of intimations of the transcendent as grounds or triggers for beliefs about God. Perhaps they work to trigger within us an immediate sense that God exists.[35] However, this perhaps requires a prior theistic frame of reference i.e., being embedded within a particular religious tradition, which supplies the conceptual script to make sense of the relevant experience.[36] As such, conceiving of the role of relevant intimations this way, although it may be sufficient for a believer to acquire an epistemically justified belief in God of a religiously interesting kind, will not likely be sufficient by itself for the nonbeliever who may be seeking to find through these intimations a divine reality behind them. Nor will it necessarily be helpful to simply supply them with a religious scripture which they do not yet in anyway uphold as being true or even reliable. In this case, then, we need an additional component of our natural theological quest which supplies a framework through which the divine may be perceived.

As suggested above, such a framework might be something like an inference from perceptions of intimations of the transcendent to God. However, it will not be of great use for a religiously interesting natural theology if that merely implies that we take these experiences and abstract them as data that stand in for premises from which we argue to the conclusion that God exists, as pointed out above. Instead, we need a way of blending the broadly 'experiential' aspect of our seeking the divine through intimations of the transcendent and a loosely 'inferential' element which provides a framework for perceiving God through such intimations. In other words, we need to 'transcend the futile

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35   Cf., A. Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2000; C. Williams, *Existential Reasons for Belief in God*, Eugene, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011, pp. 68-70.

36   Cf., J. Greco, 'The Possibility of Spiritual Perception: Objections and Replies', in F.D. Aquino, and P.L. Gavrilyuk (eds.), *Perceiving Things Divine: Towards a Constructive Account of Spiritual Perception*, Oxford, Oxford University, 2022, pp. 3-19.

dyad' between experience and argument.[37] According to David A. Pailin, one way of construing natural theology in general is to think of it as 'a search for a comprehensive *story* of the ultimate character of reality that fits and makes sense of our experience and understanding of it'.[38] It seems to me that the notion of a 'story' or 'narrative' concerning the 'ultimate character of reality' is a helpful one for our purposes here.

Roughly, narrative refers to a 'form of communication that arranges human actions and events into organized wholes in a way that bestows meaning on the actions and events by specifying their interactive or cause-and-effect relations to the whole'.[39] Narratives take different forms and can range from novels, memoirs and epics, to essays or historical accounts. Narratives can also be woven together and interrelated in some way or participate in some grander 'meta' narrative with draws together the more 'local' narratives and bestows additional or perhaps *ultimate* meaning upon such local narratives. Religious traditions such as Islam and even theism itself, provide a kind of 'grand narrative' which offers a 'story of everything' and makes intelligible individual stories and our localised human experiences of the world. These 'grand narratives' act as a lynchpin which holds the meaning of everything together in place; a kind of central point which weaves, webs and connects the multiplicity of existents, experiences and narratives together.[40]

Significantly, narratives can also be a form of argumentation in the sense that they are attempts to provide reason or offer an account or explanation of something whilst adopting a 'narrative structure', as opposed to 'argumentative prose' or 'clear-cut inferential' reasoning.[41] These sorts of narratives are what one might call 'narrative arguments'.[42] For example, one could be thinking here of a narrative explanation of a crime and its culprit, where an attempt is made to offer a persuasive account of events by pointing out certain salient features which fit well with our background knowledge. It could instead involve a parable which brings you toward a conclusion less explicitly, for instance, such as Leo

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37 Cf., J.E. Smith, 'The Tension Between Direct Experience and Argument in Religion', *Religious Studies*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1981, pp. 487-497.

38 D.A. Pailin, 'Natural Theology', in P. Byrne, and L. Houlden (eds.), *Companion Encyclopedia of Theology*, New York, Routledge, 1995, p. 407.

39 C. Smith, *Moral, Believing Animal: Human Personhood and Culture*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, 65.

40 Ibid. 69.

41 T.A. Hollihan and K.T. Baaske, *Arguments and Arguing: The Products and Processes of Human Decision Making*, Illinois, Waveland Press Inc., 2015, p. 27.

42 Ibid. 27-28.

Tolstoy's *Three Questions*, which through recounting fictional events gently pushes us toward a conclusion about how to live. It is nevertheless a form of argument because its conclusion is based on reasons which resonate with aspects of real human experience. Perhaps a narrative recounts the lives of individuals who have suffered negatively due to certain government policies concerning the state welfare system. Those sorts of narratives may also be argumentative in that they seek to persuade us why this policy is wrong, for instance.

The narratives we have considered thus far when thinking about the notion of narrative arguments are all forms of 'local' narratives which are situated within the context of a small range of phenomena and concerns. However, 'grand' or 'meta' narratives may also be employed in argumentative form also. Particularly relevant to our concerns here is the extent to which theism may be deployed as a kind of grand narrative from an argumentative perspective. As noted above, grand narratives supply a kind of 'story of everything' and make intelligible individual stories and our localised human experiences of the world. In other words, they 'weave together all the other individual stories we tell'.[43] Theism is the view that there exists at least one God, who, in the traditional sense, is a personal, omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent being.[44] To put it in Anselm's famous words: a being than which nothing greater can be thought.[45] Theism also takes this being to be the ground of all other finite beings which exist beside it: the ultimate reality on which all things depend for their existence. This view also implies that God is the source of our future and destiny, as well as our origins, and acts to influence the affairs of our world. As such, we might think of theism as a sort of grand narrative that tells a 'story about the origin and purpose of the cosmos, about the nature and destiny of humanity, [and] about fundamental order'.[46]

What then might be the relevant sort of criteria one could draw on in evaluating the grand narrative of theism? First, I suppose that the criteria of *coherence* and *correspondence* will be important. That is, that the narrative be internally consistent and correspond well with basic facts known to us by our experience. Second, it might also be relevant to consider whether there is a kind of *resonance* between one's own experiences and the extent to which it fits neatly

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43   A. McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, Grand Rapids, Baker Publishing Group, 2019, p. 9.

44   I use personal here in a very broad sense: that this being possesses person-like qualities i.e., knowledge, love, consciousness, etc.

45   Cf., Anselm, *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 87.

46   C. Smith, *Moral, Believing Animal: Human Personhood and Culture*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, 69.

into the narrative of theism.[47] Third, the extent to which the narrative of theism makes one's experiences *intelligible* may also be of importance to consider. In other words, that the narrative provides a degree of sense to the experiences one has undergone, e.g., that the story makes sense of why one experiences love. This may also include that it renders intelligible one's own personal narrative such that we can see ourselves as participants in this narrative of the world; being part of the cast of the story. Fourth, it might also be evaluated in terms of its *explanatory scope* and *explanatory power*, with respect to one's experiences and observation. This could include its capacity to offer a realistic account of one's personal existence and existence as a whole, or the binding of the various 'clues' and features of the world into one neat holistic story and picture. Fifth, one may also consider the extent to which this grand story tells a more *fitting* story about the world than its rivals.

If these are the sorts of relevant criteria for evaluating the extent to which the grand narrative of theism is true, how exactly does one go about drawing on these criteria to assess it? It seems to me that what is required is that one 'step' or 'enter' into the story and see from within the way in which it narrates the world to us. It requires that we 'dwell' within it to properly appreciate how well it knits things together. It requires us to *imagine*, *feel* and *see* how things are from its own perspective in assessing the epistemic quality of the narrative. In doing so, this then enables us to properly ask questions such as, 'Does this story seem to ring true to life and experience? Does it weave things together in a more coherent and satisfying way?'.[48] One might also be better positioned to question or consider the extent to which one belongs to the cast of this narrative. Do I seem to be part of a grander plan? Do I seem to experience my life as purposeful or connected to some other higher form of reality? To be in the right epistemic position to pose these questions or to properly deploy the relevant criteria more generally requires a form of stepping and dwelling into the story. Consider that part of the grand narrative of theism is the idea that the whole of reality is dependent on a personal being, not a mere abstract entity or theoretical principle – a being possessed by such qualities as love and compassion. Therefore, appreciating the grand narrative of theism epistemically might be more akin to appreciating certain implications drawn out in the life of a person rather than a scientific theory. As such, we

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47 I take it that there is a subtle difference between 'correspondence' and 'resonance' here. By the latter, I simply mean corresponds to evident facts in the world i.e., that according to mainstream science the universe had a beginning. By the former, I mean apparent feelings or experiences i.e., an experience of beauty, orderliness in nature, love, etc.

48 A. McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, Grand Rapids, Baker Publishing Group, 2019., p. 55.

need to situate ourselves and *dwell* in the story and assess it by wearing the lenses it provides us and seeing things through its perspective.

Notice, however, that arriving at the realisation that the story of theism makes sense of one's experiences through the means of dwelling in the story and drawing on relevant criteria of assessment, is to arrive at a conclusion of inference, at least broadly conceived.[49] The story of theism itself provides a kind of framework from which one is able to situate oneself within in considering one's experience of intimations of the transcendent. It provides a basis from which one can perceive or infer from such experiences the existence of God. However, it need not do so by treating those experiences as mere data abstracted into an inference to the best explanation. Rather, in considering one's experiences and the viability of theism through the medium of narrative, one can dwell both within the story and one's own experiences. This allows one to permeate such experiences with reflection and to see how things might look from the perspective of the theistic story. One does not step back from one's experiences to inference; one steps into them and any 'inference' to theism works in a more organic fashion than through methodical abstract argument.

Intimations of the Transcendent and the Theistic Story

It is at this point, then, that we can now begin to draw a thread toward our concern regarding the role of experience and inference in developing a religiously interesting natural theology. Given what we have suggested concerning the notion of intimations of the transcendent, the need for the deployment of the heart, the necessity of a certain framework, and the need to square the dichotomy between experience and inference, we can now say the following. The combined notions of a grand narrative of theism and that of 'dwelling' within a story provide us with the sort of broadly inferential framework required to make sense of one's intimations of the transcendent in theistic terms and confer it with positive epistemic appraisal, whilst maintaining an affective element required for the development of religious belief in the interesting sense. To see how this works more clearly, consider a short story of our own:

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49 In certain instances, it may in fact be more proper to conceive of it in terms of a 'conclusion of reflection', cf., R. Audi, *The Good in the Right: A Theory of Intuition and Intrinsic Value*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004, pp. 45-48. However, I shall not entertain such scenarios in this chapter.

Story of a Seeker

Suppose that a seeker on the quest of the divine forms a belief that there exists a transcendent reality of which certain aspects of the world and features of her experience intimate. She forms this belief based on contemplating those relevant aspects and features by allowing her affections to orient her toward what speaks to her of beauty and sublimity, and thus forms her belief in a transcendent reality based on her emotion of wonder. Her responses to witnessing apparent intimations of the transcendent are also affective, responding with a sense of awe and gratitude. Suppose now that she is prompted in some sense, perhaps by a religious friend or simply by her own reflections, to consider the extent to which her experiences might fit well into the grand story of theism. For her to properly consider this, she recognises that it requires her to 'dwell' within the story. Let us imagine that she does do this. She begins to see how the story of theism narrates one that views the world as charged with God's grandeur and life as imbued with meaning. She sees how this resonates with her own experience of life, which appears to her not as a meaningless series of random events, but as being suffused with meaning, value and purpose. She reflects on the aspect of the story which narrates of God's goodness and love being the source of all value, then she begins to recognise how it might be that the universe appears to her to have a moral fabric interwoven within it. The more our seeker reflects, at least for the most part, the greater resonance she begins to see between her experiences of transcendent intimations and the grand story of theism. Her reflection is heightened by her dwelling in the story. She begins to wonder whether she might be a member of the cast in this grand story itself. She ponders her sense of purpose, moral duty, conscious experience, and her desire for inner peace. Through her dwelling in the narrative, she comes to recognise that her own casting resonates with what the story of theism narrates about the casting of human beings in general. She responds with an overwhelming sense of gratitude the more that she realises that this story of which God is supposed to be author and continues to author, values her, and makes possible her inner fulfilment. Our seeker slowly but surely turns to God in prayer, petitioning Him for His guidance. Our seeker thus comes to believe.

This short narrative is an attempt to explore the possibility of how someone might approach the divine through one's experience of intimations of the transcendent. It begins with the thought that in order to grasp something of those intimations, it

requires one to be porous and allow the heart to aid our reason in this discovery. As such, our seeker approaches those experiences in this way and forms the belief that there exists a transcendent reality which is in some sense grounded in the 'reasons of the heart'. Her experiences can be construed as forms of 'transformative religious experiences': experiences which create a shift in affective character or disposition, gently opening one toward the possibility of God's existence. For through a recognition of value, this helps to open one up the possibility that there is a transcendent source of value i.e., God. Thereafter, our seeker is then prompted to consider how her experience of intimations of the transcendent may fit into the story of theism. This means, first, that she dwells within her experience while seeking to 'understand that experience and permeate it with reflection'.[50] In other words, considering whether the story of theism resonates with her experience of intimations requires her to fully appreciate that experience itself. It means that she dwells within and ponder over it to understand the momentousness of the experience. Then, second, it also means that she must dwell within the story of theism itself and attempt to see things from within the perspective of that narrative.[51]

To assess the extent to which her experience resonates with that story, she must properly see things from the perspective of the story. Here then we can a see a reciprocal relationship between dwelling within one's experience and dwelling within a narrative. As a result, our seeker can remain within her experience and maintain a kind of affective posture in her assessment of the potential congruence between her experience and the story of theism. Our seeker is also able to draw on the sort of criteria that we suggested might be relevant in assessing that congruence, even if she does not do so in an explicit or conscious way, she is *tacitly* checking for the resonance, correspondence, explanatory power and scope. In this sense, although her initial approach towards the divine and her sense of the beyondness of things is experiential, her apparent realisation of the truth of the theistic story is also broadly inferential. For in the end, she comes to broadly infer from experiences, through her consideration of the story of theism, the truth of the theistic story. Yet, this inference is not made in the abstract and is perhaps better thought of as a form of *tacit perceiving* of the connection between her experiences and the truth of the story of theism. Consequently, her belief in God will not be of a merely cognitive dimension. Rather, because

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50   J.E. Smith, *Experience and God*, New York, Fordham University Press, 1995, p. 152.

51   Kelly James Clark (2014) also rightly suggests that narrative itself a powerful (if not the most powerful) way to reorient our passions or affections such that we may be in a better position to grasp some relevant evidence. He also points out that stories 'might open our passions and sentiments towards the divine'. However, I am suggesting in addition that conceiving of theism as a story itself by situating or dwelling within the story of theism or the theistic picture of reality might reorient our passions in the right sort of way.

the approach she has taken in seeking the divine has been inextricably linked to her affections and emotions (as well as reason), her witnessing intimations of the transcendent and subsequent dwelling in those experiences whilst 'stepping' into the story of theism has enabled her to form a religious belief that evokes affective responses such as gratitude, wonder, inner-peace, and a sense of value or meaning. As such, her religious or theistic belief is more likely to be one that instils a desire for commitment or 'living it out' and so is interesting in the theological or religious sense. If all of this follows, then, we have seen how the combination of intimations of the transcendent and the narrative of theism allows us to reconcile experience and inference without precluding the formation of a religiously interesting belief. At this point, then, one might wonder how exactly this reflection can culminate in an *epistemically justified* belief in God, as opposed to a purely pragmatic sort of belief. For part of the target of our natural theological approach also included 'positive epistemic appraisal'.

Consider, first, that our seeker forms a *prima facie* epistemically justified belief in the existence of a transcendent reality (broadly construed), based on 'reasons of the heart'. She has emotion-based epistemic grounds for holding that there exists beauty, value, meaning and purpose to the cosmos in that there exists something that grounds these forms of value beyond mere materiality. In other words, our seeker S has epistemic justification for holding that p i.e., that a transcendent reality exists, and that S's belief that p is based on an emotion-based epistemic ground S has for p (e.g., S's belief that p is grounded in their emotion of 'wonder', say, which construes a relevant object X as valuable, in the real ontological sense, beyond its mere material composition). This sort of epistemic justification is what one might term 'immediate justification' in that S is justified in believing that p because that belief is based on a certain experience E where E is thought to be a ground for p because E directly or immediately supports the belief that p.[52] Consider, second, that our seeker has also come to recognise the story of theism as in some sense supplying the best account of the profound experiences she has. Broadly construed, we might think that in holding that the story of theism best accounts for such experiences, she has now acquired a form of 'mediate justification' as well. For one to possess that form of justification is for one's justification to be grounded in other things that one knows or believes. In this context, we might say that S's experience of the transcendent E is an epistemic ground that justifies S's believing that p where S's belief that p in some sense best explains E.[53] So, for instance, our

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52   W. Alston, 'The Place of Experience in the Grounds of Religious Belief', in K.J. Clark (ed.), *Our Knowledge of God: Essays on Natural and Philosophical Theology*, Dordrecht, Springer, 1992, p. 88-89.

53   Ibid. 88-89.

seeker seems to hold that the truth of the theistic story best explains the sorts of experiences of intimations of the transcendent she has. So, in this case, those experiences provide her with mediate justification given her belief in the truth of theism providing the best explanation of them.

Significantly, what now becomes crucial here is that in coming to hold that E is best explained by p, our seeker's experience E of intimations of the transcendent becomes a fully-fledged form of religious experience itself, lending immediate justification for S's believing in theism. This means that at the epistemic level, there occurs a kind of fusion between the immediate and mediate forms of justification that our seeker receives. This occurs in two ways. First, the initial immediate form of epistemic justification our seeker receives takes on a new life when she comes to consider that the story of theism best explains her experiences. For in this case, her experiences of transcendent intimations are no longer of mere indications that there exists a transcendent reality in the broad sense, but rather they become recognised as experiences of God. As such, her initial perception of intimations of the transcendent become transfigured into more explicit 'religious experiences'. Our seeker no longer merely recognises intimation of the beyond which those portions of reality indicate but now sees them as genuine divine disclosures and intimations of the Transcendent One. Second, at the same time, as Alston rightly notes, 'grounds are not confined to what the belief is based on at its initial acquisition; if one acquires additional reasons for a belief at a later stage of its possession, they too can count as grounds from that later stage on'.[54] As such, she can be thought to simultaneously possess mediate justification and immediate justification for theism, i.e., she does not lose her mediate justification, it remains and is combined.

Consequently, in light of her experiences of intimations of the transcendent and situating herself within the story or grand narrative of theism, not only is our seeker able to form a religious belief of the interesting kind – given that it involves both significant cognitive and affective aspects – but plausibly her belief also receives a significant degree of *prima facie* positive epistemic appraisal in terms of her being epistemically justified in believing that theism is true.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to develop what it coined a *religious interesting natural theology*. Unlike in traditional approaches to natural theology, the target of this approach is a theologically interesting form of the religious, which involves both

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54   Ibid. 96.

cognitive and affective aspects. Like traditional approaches, it also seeks to attain positive epistemic appraisal for the conclusions of one's natural theology. In developing this approach, the chapter considered the importance of the affections and 'reasons of the heart' besides reason, in accessing relevant evidence for God's existence. It argued that evidence for God may be best construed in terms of intimations of the transcendent, which requires both reason and the heart for awareness of. In seeking to maintain both the congruence between experience and inference in light of attaining both a religiously interesting and positively epistemically appraised religious belief, it sought to introduce the concept of narrative and specifically the narrative of theism. It considered how conceiving of theism in terms of narrative is a suitable framework to situate one's experience of intimations of the transcendent within, whilst assessing the viability of theism in a way to maintain both experience and inference. The chapter concluded by suggesting that through a combination of intimations of the transcendent and drawing on the story of theism, a theologically interesting, positively epistemically appraised religious belief can be formed. As such, this chapter has suggested a new and perhaps even successful way of doing natural theology, which may lead to a more religiously interesting form of belief, without losing sight of the importance of acquiring positive epistemic status.

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3

Reclaiming Space for God-talk:
Theories of *ijtihād* and Intra-Muslim Differences in Matters of Fundamental Theological Belief

Ali-Reza Bhojani[1]

It is towards reclaiming established spaces for differences in Muslim theological beliefs that this chapter is focused. A substantive and dynamic God-talk demands such a space, for if there is no space for difference, there is little space to talk productively. When God-talk commences with the presumption that different opinions are flatly incorrect it often descends into dogmatic polemics, with each side aimed simply at demonstrating the other is wrong. The risks, both spiritual and social, of such ostensive God-talk are compounded when one considers that even the slightest error in belief is deemed tantamount to disbelief. It is such dogmatism, something that continues to plague Muslim theological discourse,[2] that led Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 1111) to pen his important *al-Fayṣal al-tafriqa*. Aptly described by Sherman Jackson as motivated by a need to temper the

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2   For exploration of the compounding of such dogmatism in contemporary Muslim thought, where the epistemic aspirations of pre-modern *kalām* (i.e. definitive, unequivocal, truth) have come to characterise the approach to questions well beyond its pre-modern remit in a 'The Theologization of Islam', see Thomas Bauer *A Culture of Ambiguity: An Alternative History of Islam*. Translated by Hinrich Biesterfelft and Tricia Tunstall (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021) pp. 85-93.

theological intolerance and indifference which were afflicting the scholarly circles of his day, the work emphasises the role of figurative interpretation (*taw'īl*) in accounting for difference of opinion.[3] For al-Ghazzālī, disbelief reduces ultimately to denial that Muhammad is a prophet, together with the concomitant belief that he is a liar (*takdhīb al-risāla*). Those who misunderstand, or misinterpret, his teachings may well be incorrect, but they fall beyond the scope of Islam only if their beliefs are deemed tantamount to considering the Prophet false. The hermeneutical theory explicated in *al-Fayṣal* afforded much space for tolerance of theological diversity, and its influence cannot be understated.[4] However al-Ghazzālī did maintain that fundamental errors in matters of belief, while not amounting necessarily to unbelief, are in fact sinful and thus accountable before God.[5] As he puts it, 'sin and error are concomitant (*al-ithm wa al-khaṭ' mutalāzimān)'*. When it comes to the core subject matter of God-talk, namely the theological matters that al-Ghazzālī considers definitive (*qaṭ'ī*) and purely rational, 'the truth can be only one, and whosoever is wrong about the truth is a sinner'[6]. He continues:

> Included in these issues is: the origination of the world; establishing the originator – glorified be He – and His necessary, possible and impossible attributes; the sending of prophets – the blessings of God be upon them – their verification through miracles; the beatific vision; the createdness of actions; the volition of created beings and everything in which there is 'talk' amongst the Mu'tazila, the *Khawārij*, the *Rāfiḍā* and the innovators.[7]

Such a presumption impacts the dynamics of God-talk. Instead of difference being valued, allowing scope for the deepening of understanding through conversation across difference, difference of opinion in theological matters remains stigmatised as subject to nothing less than the potential of divine sanction.

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3   For an extensive introduction, discussion and full translation of the *Fayṣal,* see Sherman Jackson, *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). An earlier translation appears in Richard Joseph McCarthy, *Freedom and Fulfillment: An annotated translation of Al-Ghazzālī's al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl and other relevant works of al-Ghazālī* (Louisville: Twayne Publishers, 1980), pp. 125-150.

4   See for example Mullā Ḥadī Sabzawarī's (d. 1873) discussions of unbelief and *ta'wīl,* the core elements of which directly follow al-Ghazzālī's theory in *al-Fayṣal; Sharḥ al-Asmā'* (Beirut: *Mu'assasa al-Balāgh*, 2006/1367) pp. 243-250.

5   Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, *al-Mustaṣfā min 'ilm al-uṣūl* (Medina: Al-Jāmi'a al-Islāmiyya, N.D.) vol. 4, p. 30.

6   *al-Mustaṣfā,* vol. 4, p. 30.

7   *al-Mustaṣfā ,*vol. 4, p. 30-31.

Difference and diversity are an oft-mentioned theme in the Quran. Various facets of the fact of human difference and diversity are portrayed in the Quran as being from God, and indeed a means *to* God. 30:22 describes 'the differences in your tongues and your colours' as being from 'amongst His signs'. 49:13 states 'Surely We have created you of male and female and placed you as tribes and communities so that you may know (each other) through each other (*li-t'ārafū*)'⁸. In 5:48, God describes Himself as the source of differences even in religious tradition and practice, 'for each amongst you, we have made a path and a way...', before reminding all that ultimately our return is to Him, '... To God, is your return, all of you.' Such verses offer much scriptural scope for the grounding of theologies of diversity and difference. Yet none of these verses, explicitly at least, tackles arguably the most sensitive form of difference for Muslim theologians, namely intra-Muslim differences on matters of fundamental theological belief.

This chapter focuses its attention on the resources found in this regard within the extensive and detailed theorisation of the phenomenon of *ijtihād*, the scholarly effort to understand sources that are not immediately or explicitly clear. Granted, the theory of *ijtihād* is a subject treated typically within the discipline of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and thus concerned ostensibly with theorising the need for scholarly effort and the accommodation of difference, regarding understandings of sharia practice. The classical debate however did not limit itself to the realm of practice and typically entertained the possibility and implications of a need for *ijtihād* in matters of theological belief. The comments of al-Ghazzālī cited earlier were made in this very context. For him, the aforementioned theological issues are established through definitive evidence and are thus not the subject matter of *ijtihād*. In this chapter we will examine ideas regarding *ijtihād* in matters of theological belief set forth by Ibn Taymiyya, the widely invoked Sunni reformer from the fourteenth century, and al-Mīrzā al-Qummī, an important nineteenth century Twelver Shīʿī Uṣūlī reviver. In different times and in different contexts, and coming from distinct theological traditions, these two thinkers argued for theories of *ijtihād* in matters of fundamental belief that can allow for an embrace of theological difference. Neither theory is indifferent to truth nor intolerant to error. These theories afford the possibility of theological discourse that encourages a pursuit of truth, with humility, through an engagement with difference – whether that difference be about revelation – the general subject matter of this volume – or other, wider issues within the scope of Muslim God-talk, past or present.

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8   I return to my rendering of *li-t'ārafū* as 'so that you may know through each other', which is in contrast to more typical translations, in my concluding comments.

Theorising Differences of *ijtihād*

Accepting a need for *ijtihād* (understood here broadly and simply as the exertion of intellectual effort) in any matter suggests that there will be diversity of opinion on that matter. After all, the need for intellectual or scholarly effort only really arises when an issue is not absolutely clear. The practice of *ijtihād* is first and foremost associated with the exercise of scholarly effort by a *faqīh* to infer (or justify) from the sources of the sharia, rulings which regulate human actions. Unsurprisingly then, how to account for the diversity that emerges from the presumption of a need for *ijtihād* in matters of sharia practice, or the *furūʿ al-fiqh,* became a classical discussion within works of *uṣūl al-fiqh.*

The theories that emerged are typically seen as falling into one of two positions. They were either *taṣwīb* theories (sometimes referred to as theories of inerrancy) or they were *takhṭi'a* theories (sometimes referred to as theories of fallibility). A *taṣwīb* theorist may hold that all suitably determined opinion is accurate, at least in the absence of explicit texts related to the matter in question. Thus, every practitioner of *ijtihād* is inerrant or correct (*kullu mujtahid muṣīb*). The *takhṭi'a* theorist emphasizes that only a single position in any given circumstance, namely the object of search in the *ijtihād*, is correct (*al-muṣīb wāḥid*). Although emphasising the fallibility of the *mujtahid*'s understanding, the proponents of *takhṭi'a* acknowledge that false or incorrect understandings may still be authoritative and excused, if, and when, they are deemed procedurally sound. It is not our concern here to further tease out the subtle differences, or implications, of the variety of positions which emerged amongst these two groups of theories in their attempts to accommodate, and limit, legitimate diversity within matters of sharia practice.[9] What is of interest here is how these theories may relate more directly to the realm of God-talk, theology and belief more generally – a question that scholars of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, widely considered a narrowly legal discourse, rarely failed to consider.

When it came to matters of belief, the realm of *uṣūl al-dīn* and particularly the related but broader category of rational fundamental doctrines (*ʿaqliyyāt),* scholars of *uṣūl al-fiqh* usually agreed that the correct position can be only one

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9   On inerrancy and fallibility generally see; Aron Zysow, *The Economy of Certainty: An Introduction to the Typology of Islamic Legal Theory* (Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2013), Chapter 5: *Ijtihād*, pp. 259-278; Mohamed Ahmed Abdelrahman Eissa, *The Jurist and the Theologian: Speculative Theology in Shāfiʿī Legal Theory* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2017) pp. 239-314, and in the context of modern Shīʿī thought Seyyed Mostafa Mohaghegh Damad, "The Reception of Factuality (*taṣwīb*) Theories of Ijtihād in Modern Uṣulī Shīʿī Thought" in Bhojani, Alireza et al, eds. *Visions of Sharīʿa: Contemporary Discussions in Shīʿī Legal Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp.10-25.

(*al-muṣīb fil-ʿaqliyyāt waḥīd*). For example, either the world is originated or it is not, and either God's speech is an attribute of his essence or it is not. Accordingly, and in contrast to the 'substantive pluralisms of Islam's socio-legal dispensations', Tim Winter states that 'in its central doctrines Muslim theology was certainly not pluralistic in intention, since an elementary law of non-contradiction applies to metaphysical truth-claims'.[10] The perceived implications of errors in such 'central doctrines' were not trivial. Incorrect beliefs in matters of fundamental doctrine could be a sin, worthy of divine punishment, and a cause of unbelief (*kufr*) – with all the potential worldly and otherworldly implications of such status at stake.[11] Focusing on the consequences of such a framework for salvation, Mohammad Fadel describes this soteriological intolerance to diversity of belief as stemming from a shared epistemic framework prevalent across medieval *kalām* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*.[12] Just how widespread this framework actually was, or indeed if and how the implications were actually held up by scholars and the societies in which they lived, are important questions. Here, however, the aim is to show that this was not the only position entertained. In fact, what Fadel describes as the prevalent intolerance to diversity in belief was expounded typically in response to the markedly inclusive, even pluralistic, and well-known views associated with ʿUbayd bin al-Ḥasan al-ʿAnbarī (d. 168/784-5) and Abū ʿUthmān ʿUmrū bin Baḥr al-Jaḥiz (d. 255/869).

The ideas associated with al-ʿAnbarī and al-Jaḥiz suggest that every mujtahid was indeed correct even in matters of belief, at least in the sense that their errors were not sinful and that God would hold them to account only in accordance with their own understanding. Notwithstanding the typical rejection of such views[13], we see Ibn Taymiyya and al-Mīrzā al-Qummī reviving these ideas in subtly distinct ways. Both argue for a theory of *ijtihād* that endorses singular truth in matters of fundamental theological belief, whilst acknowledging the possibility of sincere and excusable errors of understanding. Such theories open up a space for God-talk, not only despite difference, but maybe even through it.

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10   Tim Winter, "In Search of a Contemporary Sharīʿa Discourse of Pluralism" in Jocelyn Cesari, ed. *EuARE Lectures 2: Annual Conference 2019* (Bologna: Fondazione per le scienze religiose Giovanni XXIII, 2020) pp.102-103.

11   See Fadel, Mohammad, "'No Salvation Outside Islam', Modernists, Democratic Politics, and Islamic Theological Exclusivism" in Khalil, Mohammad Hassan, ed. *Between Heaven and Hell: Islam, Salvation, And The Fate Of Others* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) pp. 35-61.

12   Ibid.

13   The rejection of even the milder interpretation of al-ʿAnbarī and al-Jaḥiz on this point was considered so broad that Fakhr al-Rāzī (d. 1209) could claim 'that all scholars (*sāʾir al-ʿulamāʾ*) have been agreed upon the invalidity of this view'. Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad bin Ḥasan al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣūl fī ʿilm al-uṣūl* (Beirut: Muʾassasa al-Risāla, 1992) vol. 6 p. 29.

Ibn Taymiyya on *takhṭi'a* and *taṣwīb*

The ideas of Ibn Taymiyya, 'one of the most controversial figures of medieval Islam', continue to be 'both influential and fiercely contested'.[14] Recourse to his authority is used widely by advocates of violent jihad and Muslim modernists alike. '[B]lamed for introducing excessive intolerance and theological error', he is also a hate figure for many others, be they Sunnī, Shī'ī or non-Muslim.[15] The divisiveness of his ideas and legacy is down not only to his prolific and wide ranging polemics, targeted as they are at aspects of Sufi thought and practice, Ash'arī Sunnī and Twelver Shī'ī theology, Aristotelian logic and *falsafa* (philosophy) more widely; it may also stem from the 'quality' of his writings, described by Vasalou as presenting 'the gravest challenge' to ascertaining his views on any given subject.[16] His writing style, both in the short *fatāwā* and in his longer works, was often multi-layered, addressing numerous issues within a persistent critique of others. His ideas naturally changed over time, and thus apparent inconsistency might be read more charitably as understandable evolution or as the giving of responses in accordance with specific circumstances. Sometimes, inconsistencies appearing within his ideas may well arise out of the aforementioned polemical intent that runs throughout his work, for he was a pragmatic utilitarian through and through.[17] At other times, inconsistencies may appear for no other reason than the impoverished understanding of his reader. Here is not the place to enter into debate about how, or indeed if, a coherent and cohesive reading might best be mined or constructed out of his oeuvre. Accordingly my recourse to his ideas on *ijtihād* in matters of belief does not aim to contribute to debates that seek either to moderate his perceived extremism or to endorse it. My aim is simply to demonstrate that even in the work of such a divisive figure there are resources for theorising a space for difference and diversity in theological beliefs. It is for experts in his wider thought to judge how important the thesis entailed therein is for him, and whether greater attention to this thesis can help us better understand his wider ideas and legacy.

In the thirteenth chapter of his *Minhāj al-sunna al-nabawiyya*, Ibn Taymiyya undertakes a broad discussion and critique of views regarding the inerrancy and fallibility of the mujtahid. The context of this discussion, and of the book generally,

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14   Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya* (London: Oneworld, 2019) p. 1.

15   Ibid.

16   Sophia Vasalou, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theological Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 16.

17   On Ibn Taymiyya's utilitarianism see "Foundations of Ibn Taymiyya's Religious Utilitarianism" in Peter Adamson (ed.) *Philosophy and Jurisprudence in the Islamic World* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), pp. 145–168.

is a response to the views of al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī's (d. 1325) *Minhāj al-karāma fī maʿrifat al-imāma*.[18] The particular point Ibn Taymiyya seeks to respond to in this chapter is the claim of al-Ḥillī that criticism (*maṭāʿin*) of the companions of the Prophet has been widely recorded and reported amongst the majority of Muslims (i.e. the Ahl al-Sunna), to the extent that one can even find whole treatises written about these defects[19]. Al-Ḥillī adds that such works included no mention of even a single thing that might belittle the family of the Prophet – a line of argument presumably seeking to support the Twelver Shīʿī reliance on the family of the Prophet as the authoritative channel of Prophetic teachings.[20]

Ibn Taymiyya's response involves dividing the criticism reported about the companions into two categories: the truthful and the false. Such reported criticism is, in his view, most often a lie. The false criticism may be something entirely fabricated, or an adulterated version of something which would otherwise be beyond blame and criticism.[21] As for the cases where the criticism reported regarding the companions is true, he notes:

> [I]n most of these issues, they [the companions] have excuses which remove the issues from being sins, and make them instances of *ijtihād*, in which if the *mujtahid* is correct he receives two rewards and if he is incorrect he receives one. That which is ordinarily correctly reported from the rightly guided Caliphs is of this category. As for that which is considered from amongst these [truthful] things and is actually a sin, these do not diminish that which is known of their virtues, their precedence, and that they are from amongst the people of paradise – because the punishment for that which is actually a sin may be lifted in the next world through many means.[22]

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18   On the *Minhāj al-Sunna* see Roy Vilozny, "Some Remarks on Ibn Taymiyya's Acquaintance with Imāmī Shīʿism in light of his *Minhāj al-sunna al-nabawiyya*" *Der Islam* 97, no. 2 (2020): 456–475 and Tariq al-Jamil, "Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī: Shiʿi Polemics and the struggles for Religious Authority in Medieval Islam in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, eds. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 229-246.

19   The cited example is a work referred to as *Fī Mathālib al-Ṣaḥāba* of al-Kalbī; al-Ḥasan bin Yūsuf Ibn Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, *Minhāj al-karāma fī mʿarifat al-Imāma* (Qum: Muʾassasa Tāsūʿā, 2000), pp. 98-99. Ibn Taymiyya dismisses this quite simply by noting that Hishām b. Muḥammad b. al-Sāʾib al-Kalbī (d. 819 or 821) is well known as a liar, Aḥmad bin ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya fī Naqḍ al-Shīʿa al-Qadariyya* (N.P: N.P, 1986), vol. 5, p. 81.

20   *Minhāj al-karāma,* p. 98; *Minhāj al-Sunna,* vol. 5, p. 81.

21   *Minhāj al-Sunna* Vol. 5, p. 81.

22   *Minhāj al-Sunna,* vol. 5, pp. 82-83.

After briefly mentioning some of these multiple avenues to God's forgiveness, he moves to an extensive discussion of different views on fallibility and inerrancy. Within the next forty pages of the forty-five page section of the published text, he aims to set out what he calls a 'general principle' in this regard, not only for his Shīʿī interlocutor, but for the 'entirety of the Muslim community'.[23] In fact what follows seems to be a treatment of fallibility and inerrancy theories in the context of intra-Sunni debates; not once is there a direct engagement with specifically Shīʿī views on the matter.

For Ibn Taymiyya, the fundamental questions giving rise to the different theories of *ijtihād* are two. The first of these asks 'whether or not it is possible for every person to come to know, through his intellectual effort (*ijtihād*), the truth in every matter'.[24] The second follows from a negative response to the first. If it is not possible that everyone can know the truth in every issue through their best efforts, are they deserving of punishment for adhering to a view which they believe to be correct when their *ijtihād* fails to reach the truth as it actually is? Ibn Taymiyya details two broad groups of responses to these questions, 'the root of the matter (*aṣl al-masʾala*)',[25]ultimately advocating a third position. The first range of positions, which he associates with the *Qadariyya*, holds that everyone who seeks justifications is capable of understanding the truth in every matter. Accordingly, those who fail to comprehend the truth are subject to divine punishment. Sin and punishment are a necessary concomitant of error. The second, which he associates with the 'determinist *Jahmiyya*', is based on the principle that humans have no capability (*qudra*) or capacity of their own; divine punishment is simply in accordance with the pure unadulterated will of God. Accordingly, proponents of this view hold that 'He punishes even one who has not performed the slightest of sin, whilst conferring blessings on one who has disbelieved and openly sinned'.[26] For Ibn Taymiyya these two broad positions are not simply strawmen from early Muslim theological history, with both tendencies being endorsed by 'many later scholars'.[27]

In his critique of these two groups of theories he surveys a range of opinions. In doing so he expands on various theological, epistemic and jurisprudential debates that arise in the process of explaining and challenging both the views of others and his objections to them. He describes the position that he advocates

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23   *Minhāj al-Sunna,* vol. 5, p. 83.

24   *Minhāj al-Sunna,* vol. 5, p. 84.

25   *Minhāj al-Sunna,* vol. 5, p. 83.

26   *Minhāj al-Sunna,* vol. 5, p. 95.

27   *Minhāj al-Sunna,* vol. 5, pp. 95-96.

himself as 'bringing together that which is correct in both the other views'[28], with his own thinking woven throughout the accounts and analysis. This is typical of his style, and amongst the challenges posed by the 'quality' of his writing mentioned earlier. Although 'to decisively tell apart what is in his own voice and what is in others'[29] is difficult, there are clear building blocks to his own position developed throughout his account and criticism of others.

Amongst these building blocks is his interpretation, and rehabilitation, of the much maligned view attributed to al-ʿAnbarī regarding *taṣwīb* in matters of fundamental theological doctrine. For Ibn Taymiyya, the meaning of that which is reported from al-ʿAnbarī is that 'the mistaken from amongst the mujtahids of this community are not deemed sinful, be it in fundamental beliefs (*uṣūl*) or in praxis (*furūʿ)'.[30] He recognises that the majority of *kalām* specialists, be they Ashʿarī or Muʿtazilī, rejected this position. For these theologians, at least in the realm of theoretical issues (*masāʾil al-ʿilmiyya*), there is definitive evidence through which the truth may be known with regard to every issue. Any errors on the part of one who tries to discover this truth demonstrate that sufficient effort has not been exhausted, and thus they are sinful in their errors.[31] In the case of practical issues (*masāʾil al-ʿamaliyya*) Ibn Taymiyya notes a wider range of opinion. He records the view of Muʿtazilī scholars Abū Hudhayl, al-Jubbāʾī senior, and his son, as well as the most famous of the Ashʿarī views held by the likes of al-Bāqilānī, al-Ghazālī and Abu Bakr b. ʿArabī as distinguishing between those issues for which the evidence is definitive (*qaṭʿī*) and those issues for which it is not.[32] Where the evidence is definitive, error and sin are concomitant. However, in cases where the evidence is not definitive then 'Allah does not have with regards to it a hidden ruling, the ruling of Allah upon every mujtahid is that which their *ijtihād* takes them to'.[33] This inerrancy of the mujtahid, which accommodates a diversity of 'correct' opinion, is restricted to matters of practice. Theology, or dogma, is definitive. Difference of opinion in theology cannot be excused.

Ibn Taymiyya, however, is clearly not happy with the widespread dismissal of al-ʿAnbarī's inclusivity – an inclusivity that stretches across both the domains of theological dogma and the regulation of practical actions. Seeking authority from beyond 'the people of *kalām* and personal opinion', Ibn Taymiyya begins his rehabilitation of al-ʿAnbarī's theological *taṣwīb* thus:

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28 *Minhāj al-Sunna,* vol. 5, p. 98.

29 Vasalou, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theological Ethics*, p, 16.

30 *Minhāj al-Sunna,* vol. 5, p. 87.

31 *Minhāj al-Sunna,* vol. 5, p. 87.

32 *Minhāj al-Sunna,* vol. 5, p. 85.

33 *Minhāj al-Sunna,* vol. 5, p. 85.

> As for other than these [people of *kalām* and personal opinion] they say:
> This opinion is the opinion of the pious forerunners (*ṣalaf*) and leaders of
> juristic opinion (*a'imma al-fatwā*), like Abū Ḥanīfa, al-Shāfi'ī, al-Thawrī,
> Dāwūd bin 'Ali and others. They did not deem sinful a mistaken *mujtahid*,
> not in issues of fundamental doctrine, nor in issues of practice...They say:
> this is the opinion known of the companions, of the succeeding generation
> that followed them with goodness, and of the leaders of the religion: They
> did not consider unbeliever, nor miscreant, nor sinful any single mistaken
> *mujtahid*, be it in issues of practice or issues of knowledge'.[34]

For the proponents of this view, and for Ibn Taymiyya himself, to distinguish
between the realms of *uṣūl* and *furū'* with regard to the theory of *ijtihād* is deeply
problematic.[35] It is described as 'an innovated distinction within Islam, having
no basis in the Quran, Sunna or *ijmā'*'.[36] Furthermore, the distinction is 'not
upheld by any of the pious forerunners or imams, and is rationally invalid'.[37]
The rational problem lies in the failure of the proponents of the distinction to
properly identify that which distinguishes the two categories. Accordingly, Ibn
Taymiyya offers a detailed review of a number of ways the distinction between
uṣūl and *furū'* is envisaged, problematizing each in turn.[38] Again, the criticisms
Ibn Taymiyya cites here build towards setting the grounds for his own position
on fallibility and inerrancy in *ijtihād*. Insightful as these polemics are, closer
examination of the arguments is not necessary for our purposes here; instead we
turn to the other premises that he sets out more directly for his own position:
premises which again stem from his criticism of others.

For Ibn Taymiyya, beyond adopting the problematic distinction between
uṣūl and *furū'*, both groups of positions on fallibility and inerrancy also presume
flawed notions of what constitutes oppression. He cites the *Qadariyya* position as
holding that 'oppression, when considered with regard to God, is that which we

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34 *Minhāj al-Sunna,* vol. 5, p. 87.

35 Within the passages analysed here, Ibn Taymiyya cites third party criticism of the views of
the majority of the 'people of *kalām* and personal opinion'. For a more direct statement of his
rejection of the distinction between *uṣūl* and *furū'* see *Majmū' fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad
bin Taymiyya* (Riyad: Maṭābi' al-Riyāḍ, 1962), vol. 19, pp. 207-212. On his inclusion of both
the realms of 'belief and action' under the single rubric of 'law' also see Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya,*
pp. 56-57.

36 *Minhāj al-Sunna,* vol. 5, p. 88.

37 *Minhāj al-Sunna,* vol. 5, p. 88.

38 *Minhāj al-Sunna,* vol. 5, pp. 88-95.

know from the oppression of people, some against others'.[39] Although somewhat obliquely stated, and consistent with his typically polemical intent, he refers here to the justice-orientated rationalist meta-ethics of the *'Adliyya* (literally, 'people of justice'; a term used self-referentially by Mu'tazilī and Shī'ī theologians).[40] Restating slightly, he positions the *Qadariyya* as thinking of oppression with regard to God in the same sense as they think of oppression when considering human actions, 'such that if it is said He creates the actions of His people, and He is the one who intends everything that occurs – yet it be held that He punishes the sinful – this is oppression, analogous to our oppression'[41]. This depiction is problematic, particularly if he still intends here the Mu'tazila and the Shī'a who emphasize the attribution of human acts to humans; the creation of actions is not directly attributed to God.[42] Ibn Taymiyya's main point here, however, is to highlight the application of human conceptions of morality to God, something which he strongly rejects.[43] Otherwise his own ethical theory, although more consequentialist than deontological, seems to resonate more strongly with the *'Adliyya* position than the contrary view ascribed to the *Jahmiyya*.[44]

The position of the *Jahmiyya* is described as holding that 'Oppression, with regard to God, is that whose existence is impossible. As for everything whose existence is possible, then that is not oppression'.[45] On this basis, oppression arises either when one subject to authority contravenes a command, or when one uses the property of another without their permission. Humans can be described as oppressive because they contravene the commands of God and because they use the property of others without permission. God, however, is not subject to command nor is there any proprietor beyond him; 'He only employs that which is within His own dominion, and thus everything that is possible is not oppression'.[46] For Ibn Taymiyya, it is this premise of the *Jahmiyya*, 'and those who agree with them from amongst the Ash'arī's, and those who agree with them from the followers of the four jurists, and the Sufis as well as others', that

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39   *Minhāj al-Sunna,* vol. 5 p. 96.

40   On al-Ḥillī's formulation of a rationalist *'Adliyya* meta-ethics, and its wider elaboration in Twelver Shī'ī, thought see Ali-Reza Bhojani, *Moral Rationalism and Sharī'a: Independent Rationality in Modern Shī'ī uṣūl al-fiqh* (Oxon: Routledge, 2015) pp. 52-79.

41   *Minhāj al-Sunna,* vol. 5 p. 96.

42   See al-'Allāma al-Ḥasan bin Yūsuf al-Ḥillī, *Kashf al-murād fī sharḥ tajrīd al-ittiqād* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-'alā lil-maṭbū'āt, n.d.) -pp. 285-286.

43   See Hoover, Ibn Taymiyya, pp. 126-126.

44   See Vasalou, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theological Ethics.*

45   *Minhāj al-Sunna,* vol. 5, p. 96.

46   *Minhāj al-Sunna, vol. 5,* p. 97.

makes them endorse the possibility that God may punish someone unable to understand the truth despite their best efforts.[47]

For Ibn Taymiyya, the sound response to the fundamental question at play giving rise to the fallibility and inerrancy theories is that 'not everyone that strives and seeks evidence is capable of understanding the truth, and punishment is not due to anyone except he who leaves that which is commanded or performs that which is prohibited'.[48] It is only the emphasis on right action contained in the later part of this statement, consistent with his wider framework[49], that marks a formal distinction from his portrayal of al-'Anbarī. Furthermore, it is clear in what follows that Ibn Taymiyya ultimately defends a position that might be restated as 'punishment is not due to anyone except he who leaves that which *their ijtihād understood* to be commanded, or performs that which *their ijtihād understood* to be prohibited'. Ibn Taymiyya goes on to focus his attention on the key issues that underpin this formulation. With his polemic now largely focused on the 'determinist *Jahmiyya*', he argues that punishment is not arbitrary and that oppression is not simply that which is impossible. He affirms a substantive vision of God's morality. Of course, this vision is grounded in scriptural reasons rather than the non-scriptural *'Adliyya* approach of the likes of al-Ḥillī. Accordingly, he cites, and offers interpretations of, an array of textual evidence.[50] His reading of the Quranic verses cited sets out a substantive vision of the oppression negated from a God who holds humans to account solely on the basis of their own actions and in accordance with their deserts. Furthermore – and bear in mind Ibn Taymiya's rejection of a distinction between theology and practice – he emphasizes that God does not oblige beyond one's capacity (7:42, 2:233, 65:7), that humans are commanded to be wary of God to the extent they are able (64:16), and that the believers call out to Him stating "*Our Lord, do not hold us to account if we forget, or if we err. Our Lord, and lay not upon us a burden like that which you laid down upon those before us. Our Lord, and burden us not with that which we have no ability to bear*" (2:287).

Summarizing his exegesis of these verses, he states the following:

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47   *Minhāj al-Sunna, vol. 5,* p. 97.

48   *Minhāj al-Sunna, vol. 5,* p. 98.

49   Capturing Ibn Taymiyya's 'ethical turn' neatly, Hoover describes him as even 'locating the principle meaning' of the fundamental Muslim confession – that there is no God but God – firmly 'in the realm of human action'. *Ibn Taymiyya*, p. 42-43.

50   Including Quran 17:15, 67:8-9, 38:85, 6:130-1, 28:59, 11:117, 20:112, 2:286, 6:114, 50:28-29, 11:100-101, 43:74-76.

These texts indicate that He does not give responsibility to anyone where he be incapable of it – contrary to the view of the determinist *Jahmiyya*. And they indicate that He does not hold to account the one who is mistaken, nor the one who is forgetful – contrary to the view of the *Qadariyya* and the *Mu'tazila*.[51]

For Ibn Taymiyya then, the *mujtahid* is one who:

[I]s obedient to God, and deserving of reward, if he is wary of God to the extent that he is capable. He will not be punished in the least, contrary to the [view of the] determinist *Jahmiyya*. He is correct (*muṣīb*) in the sense that he is obedient to Allah, although he sometimes knows the truth as it actually is and sometimes he does not, in contrast with the [view of the] *Qadariyya* and the Mu'tazila when they say 'whosoever exhausts their effort knows the truth', for this is invalid... rather whosoever exhausts their effort is deserving of reward.[52]

For Ibn Taymiyya it is clear that this principle is relevant to *ijtihād* in a broad sense, that is an effort to understand the truth either of theological belief or of the regulations of practical action. Importantly, he also maintains explicitly that it applies to anyone holding a view resulting from an evidence-based scholarly effort, be they 'an imam, a judge (*ḥākim*), a scholar (*ʿālim*), a theologian-thinker (*nāẓir*), a debater (*munāẓir*), a *mufti* or other than these'.[53]

Al-Mīrzā Al-Qummī on *takhṭiʾa* and *taṣwīb*

Al-Mīrzā al-Qummī was a first generation student of the famed Twelver Shīʿī Uṣūlī reviver al-Waḥīd al-Bihbahānī (d.1205/1791). Uṣūlīs, spearheaded by al-Bihbahānī and his students, have continued to dominate Twelver Shīʿī scholarship since the eclipsing of the contrasting Akhbārī trend.[54] Amongst the hallmarks of Uṣūlī thought is an emphasis on the necessity of ijtihād by expert scholars (*mujtahids*) in matters of sharia practice, or *furūʿ al-fiqh*. Within Uṣūlī discourse,

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51 *Minhāj al-Sunna, vol. 5,* p. 111.

52 *Minhāj al-Sunna, vol. 5,* p. 111.

53 *Minhāj al-Sunna, vol. 5,* p. 111.

54 On the Akhabri-Uṣūlī dispute see; Andrew Newman, "The nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī dispute in late Ṣafawid Iran. Part 1: ʿAbdullāh al-Samāhijī's 'Munyat al-Mumārisīn'", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 55*(1) (1992), pp.22-51.

the corollary of a need for experts to authoritatively understand matters of sharia practice is the rational duty of non-experts to perform *taqlīd*, that is to follow or rely upon the views of a suitably qualified *mujtahid* (or *marjʿa*, i.e. authoritative source of sharia reference). With the Uṣūlī revival, arguably the discipline of uṣūl al-fiqh has become the key forum for Shīʿī scholarship. Al-Qummī's influence on modern Uṣūlī thought is significant, with his works on *uṣūl al-fiqh* being studied as core texts in the training of mujtahids until relatively recently.[55] Despite modern Uṣūlī scholarship treating the question of fallibility and inerrancy 'as a resolved issue, rather than an open debate',[56] al-Qummī dedicates much space to its discussion.[57] Mohagegh Damad has provided a preliminary account of al-Qummī's ideas, positioned as an example of the influence of inerrancy (or what he terms 'factuality') theories in modern Shīʿī thought. Therein he describes al-Qummī's position as holding 'important implications for contemporary debates on religious plurality'. [58] Amongst these implications is the relevance of his theory of *ijtihād* to the accommodation of intra-Muslim differences in theological understanding.

In his *uṣūl al-fiqh* text, *al-Qawānīn al-muḥkama fī al-uṣūl,* al-Qummī addresses the issue of fallibility and inerrancy in a dedicated section which begins, 'Scholars have disagreed over whether every *mujtahid* is correct or not'.[59] Within the section, just as Ibn Taymiyya rehabilitates the inclusivity of al-ʿAnbarī, al-Qummī seeks to rehabilitate the view of al-Jāhiz. This treatment is prefaced by an even more extensive discussion of the controversies regarding *taqlīd* in matters of *uṣul al-dīn*.[60] It is here that al-Qummī engages most directly with the questions which Ibn Taymiyya sets out as 'the root of the issue', setting the ground for his views on fallibility and inerrancy in matters of theological belief. al-Qummī does adopt and employ a distinction between matters of *uṣūl al-dīn*

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55 On epistemic aspects of al-Qummī's jurisprudential theory see Bhojani, *Moral Rationalism and Sharia*, pp. 150-156.

56 Mohaghegh Damad, "The Reception of Factuality (*taṣwīb*) Theories of Ijtihād in Modern Uṣulī Shīʿī Thought", p. 11.

57 Abū al-Qāsim al-Mīrzā al-Qummī, *al-Qawānīn al-Muḥkama fī al-uṣūl* (Qum: Dār al-Iḥyāʾ, 2008), vol. 3/4 pp. 448-454; The section concerned with inerrancy and fallibility in matters of theological belief has been translated, with some brief introductory comments, in Ali-Reza Bhojani "Is every mujtahid correct or not ?' and the implications of holding incorrect theological beliefs for ones fate in the hereafter, from Qawānīn al-uṣūl of Mīrzā al-Qummī (d. 12311816/)' in Omar Anchassi and Rob Gleave (eds.), *Islamic Law in Context: A Primary Source Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

58 Mohaghegh Damad, "The Reception of Factuality (*taṣwīb*) Theories of Ijtihād in Modern Uṣulī Shīʿī Thought", p. 10.

59 *al-Qawānīn,* vol. 3/4, pp. 448-460.

60 *al-Qawānīn,* vol 3/4, pp. 351-447.

and matters of *furūʿ al-dīn*. Yet when it comes to the fundamental questions regarding the theory of *ijtihād*, the distinction is not decisive.

> Just as two followers on different opinions are both rewarded in matters of practice, neither being held accountable for differing with the actual state [of the ruling] – akin to two differing mujtahids in these matters – it is the same in matters of belief for two differing mujtahids who have both fulfilled their duty to investigate.[61]

For al-Qummī, the foundations of his position are firmly epistemic. His view brings together the *ʿAdliyya* justice-orientated rational meta-ethics of Shīʿī theology, and an embrace of a religious ambiguity typical of his jurisprudential hermeneutics. Although based on different foundations to Ibn Taymiyya, he too rejects what Fadel describes as the basis for the dominant intolerance to theological diversity in Muslim thought. Al-Qummī accepts that the correct position in matters of theological dogma is always a singular one (*al-muṣīb waḥīd*). However the subscriber to incorrect beliefs is considered sinful, subject to punishment and possibly treated as an unbeliever in the hereafter, *only if* their incorrect position is the result of obstinacy before disclosed truth and/or the product of wilful negligence.

For al-Qummī, like Ibn Taymiyya, holding that God may punish incorrect beliefs that result despite ones best efforts would be to ascribe oppression to God. In line with his *ʿAdliyya* position, the scriptural references cited by Ibn Taymiyya would, however, be read as instructive (*irshādī*) towards a rational negation of this possibility. Humans are capable of basic moral judgements regarding the praiseworthiness and blameworthiness of actions. Oppression is self-evidently blameworthy, arising out of need and ignorance, and thus must be negated of God.

An *ʿAdliyya* meta-ethics is of course not determinative of al-Qummī's view. As seen in Ibn Taymiyya's accounts, it can be employed within an argument holding that error is necessarily concomitant with sin, such that every mistaken scholarly opinion in matters of belief is accountable before God. Indeed, it seems that this was a view held by at least some of al-Qummī's generation of Usūlī scholars, and al-Qummī does not ignore it. According to this view, holding that the correct position is always singular in matters of fundamentals means that, 'it is necessary that God has designated evidence for this [truth]. For otherwise it would imply oppression, futility and vanity [on the part of God], and thus whoever does not reach [that one truth] must be culpably negligent'.[62] For

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61   *al-Qawānīn,* vol 3/4, pp. 35. 3

62   *al-Qawānīn,* vol 3/4, p. 353. For a formulation of this argument by a contemporary to Mirza al-Qummī, and another important first generation student of al-Bihbahānī, see Muḥammad

al-Qummī, this argument is only sound 'if it is established that the obligation is to correctly reach the truth and reality as it actually is'.[63] On his reading, however, that which is accepted is only the duty 'to correctly reach the truth in accordance to one's own investigations, with no wilful negligence (*taqṣīr*) or minimalism (*tafrīṭ*)'[64]. One's responsibility then is personal, even subjective. It is to submit to the truth as it is disclosed to the one who seeks it. Responsibility varies in accordance with understanding and the evidence for fundamental doctrines is, for al-Qummī, not absolutely definitive.

In his engagement with the above argument, al-Qummī employs an important distinction regarding fundamental doctrinal beliefs: he distinguishes between the principle of a doctrine and its details (*aṣl al-uṣūl wa tafāṣīluhā*).

> Yes, if someone were to distinguish and argue this with regards to, for example, the existence of the creator in general, or argue this with regards to His unity, or argue this with regards to the principle of Prophethood, or argue this with regards to the principle of return, then it would not be implausible. Because it is apparent that the evidence for these mentioned things are amongst those capable of being claimed to necessitate correctly reaching the truth as it actually is. As for examples such as His – exalted be He – immateriality; the identity of His attributes; the origination of the world; the negation of cosmological intellects; the modality of the Return, and other than these, then no![65]

When it comes to the details of fundamental doctrines, points of vigorous debates and deep diversity even amongst expert theologians and philosophers, the claim that the evidence for these issues are universally definitive is, for al-Qummī, most unreasonable (*fī ghāyat al-buʿad*).[66] The evidence for these details does not yield certainty to every responsible person, in every time and in every place.

Ḥusayn al-Isfahānī, *al-Fuṣūl al-gharawiyya fī al-uṣūl al-fiqhiyya* (Qum: Dār iḥyāʾ al-ʿulūm al-Islāmiyya, 1983), vol. 1, p. 406.

63   *al-Qawānīn,* vol 3/4 p. 353 also see p. 449.

64   *al-Qawānīn,* vol 3/4 p. 353. In the context of his discussion of the claimed consensus amongst Muslims that there is a duty to attain certain knowledge (*ʿilm*) in matters of fundamentals, al-Qummī elaborates on this position; 'We negate the establishment of a responsibility to attain certain knowledge absolutely, in all states, and in that which would necessity difficulty and hardship. For the most that is established from the indication of the evidence is that it is [a duty] in those matters where certain knowledge is possible and only if it does not necessitate difficulty and hardship' p. 383.

65   *al-Qawānīn,* vol 3/4 p. 354, also see p. 451.

66   *al-Qawānīn,* vol 3/4 p. 451

Sincere, best effort errors – arising out of attempts to understand the details of these principle doctrines – are thus likely. He acknowledges that the details of fundamental doctrines may be known definitively *if* established explicitly by God or His Prophet, but this evidence is useful only after having first affirmed God and His prophets.[67] After one's acceptance of Islam and the Prophet of Islam there is still ambiguity, even in the widely invoked category of religious teachings referred to as 'essentials' (*al-ḍarūrriyyāt*). Essentials – such as, for example, the fact that there a duty in Islam to perform the canonical prayer (*ṣalāt*) – are those teachings which have been established definitively, and denial of which is considered tantamount to denial of the truth of the Prophet himself, thus constituting unbelief. Yet al-Qummī points out that difference of opinion concerning the identity of these essentials, their extent, their number and their modality.[68] In fact, the tone of his comments suggests that he is not entirely convinced that the evidence even for the principle of the fundamental theological doctrines is universally definitive. As cited above, he states that the claim that they are is not implausible (*laysa ba'īd*), albeit without affirming that he accepts this to be the case.

His embrace of ambiguity in the evidence for fundamental doctrines, together with his *'Adliyya* commitments demanding that God does not punish beyond capacity, open up his theory of *ijtihād* to relevance beyond difference and diversity within Islam, implying that sincerely mistaken non-Muslims may also be excused their errors in belief. This implication, which is also seen as a problematic consequence of the view attributed to al-Jaḥīz, is one which al-Qummī explicitly maintains. al-Qummī engages with a number of typical objections to the idea that even non-Muslims whose incorrect fundamental beliefs are the result of sincere error may be excused and actually rewarded in the hereafter.[69] These objections include the claim that there is a consensus that a *kāfir* (pl. *kuffār)* is among those who are destined for the fire, for s/he differs with Muslims on the fundamentals of belief and is known to be accountable for his or her errors in the hereafter. In response, al-Qummi uses two key arguments. Firstly, he argues that such a consensus can apply only to those who are wilfully negligent (*al-muqaṣṣirīn*) in their pursuit of true belief, since to punish someone whose errors occurred despite their best efforts (*al-qāṣir*) would be an instance of oppression, and thus not ascribable to a just God.[70] Secondly, he argues that the apparent meaning of the Quranic verses and hadith

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67   *al-Qawānīn,* vol 3/4 p. 354.

68   *al-Qawānīn,* vol 3/4 p. 356.

69   *al-Qawānīn,* vol 3/4 pp. 449-454.

70   *al-Qawānīn,* vol 3/4 p. 452.

reports indicating that the *kuffār* are destined to be punished should be read in accordance with the most immediate occurring sense (*al-mutabādir*) of the term *kāfir*. For al-Qummī, the immediate and most obvious sense of the term, when used in the context of those who will receive otherworldly punishment, is the obstinate (*al-muʿānidīn*) and wilfully negligent (*al-muqaṣṣirīn*). The term does not immediately refer to just anyone who has not accepted Islam.[71] He supports this position by citing a report from the first Shīʿī Imam and fourth Caliph, ʿAli b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) describing a Friday sermon in which he stated; "O God! Punish the *kafara* of the People of the Book, those who place obstacles upon your path, obstinately deny (*yajhaduna)* your signs, and belie your messengers".[72] This position, however, does not impact the treatment of non-Muslims in this world. In al-Qummī's view, to affirm that the sharia rules regarding the *kāfir* are applicable to everyone who fails to accept Islam, whether out of obstinacy or sincere error, does not imply oppression on the part of God.[73] Not everyone who does not accept Islam should be treated in this world as a *kāfir*, with all the legal implications that follow. Yet in the hereafter, it is only the *kāfir* – in the sense of one who obstinately rejects Islam, or who is wilfully negligent in the pursuit of truth – that will be destined for divine punishment.

For al-Mīrza al-Qummī, then, accountability in the hereafter, be it in matters of belief or in matters of practice, is proportionate to sincerely acquired knowledge and capacity. The scope for diversity of understanding arises not only out of the nature of religious evidence, but also as a result of the nature of the responsible agents themselves. The latter, for al-Qummī, is undisputable: 'intellects differ in their levels of understanding and vary in their appreciation of evidence, in a manner that cannot be denied. Whosoever denies this is simply stubborn, their reason having left them'.[74] The proof or argument (*ḥujja*), which God holds people accountable against is not any designated evidence itself. Rather, the proof or argument which God holds people accountable to 'is one's mind, thinking, and deliberation, [employed] with sincerity and fairness,

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71   *al-Qawānīn,* vol 3/4, p. 452

72   Muḥammad bin ʿAlī bin al-Ḥusayn b. Bābawayh al-Qummī, *Man lā yaḥḍurhu al-faqīh* (Beirut: *Dār al-tʿāruf lil maṭbūʿāt*, 1994) vol. 1 pp. 337.

73   Surpassing this limit, others have more recently argued that the category of *kāfir* is categorically more particular than the category of non-Muslim. Accordingly, to treat the sincere non-Muslim in accordance with the rules pertain to the *kāfir* is oppression, even in this world. See Yūsuf al-Sāniʿī, *Muqāribāt fī al-tajdīd al-fiqhī*. Translated by Ḥaydar Ḥubuallah (Beirut: Muʾassasa al-Intishār al-ʿArabī, 2010), pp. 202-207.

74   *al-Qawānīn,* vol 3/4, p. 355.

and without obstinacy, to the extent of one's ability, capacity and potential'.[75] Although the correct opinion in matters of fundamental doctrines is single, it is not straightforward to assume that differences of opinion arise out of wilful negligence. Rather, differences of opinion may well arise out of sincere error, and error in fundamental theological belief is neither constitutive of unbelief necessarily, nor deserving of punishment in the world to come.[76]

Conclusion

Muslim God-talk, be it concerned with questions of revelation and prophecy, or with wider fundamental issues of theological belief, has typically been divisive. Indeed, there is much that sets apart Ibn Taymiyya and al-Mīrzā al-Qummī. Amongst their many differences, beyond their distinct times and circumstances, is the fact that they both adopt very different theological methods, defending different visions of fundamental theological doctrines. Yet both maintain theories of *ijtihād* in matters of theology that may allow for an embrace of differences, where difference can become a productive opportunity for a God-talk that is dynamic rather than dogmatic. Neither Ibn Taymiyya nor al-Mīrzā al-Qummī was indifferent to truth. When it comes to matters of fundamental theological beliefs, both assume that there, in reality, a singular truth. It is clear from their writings that they both vigorously argued for the positions they believed to be correct. Yet neither defended theories of *ijtihād* with regard to matters of beliefs that were intolerant to theological error. Both allow for the assumption that our errors, or limits, in theological understanding may well be the sincere results of one's best efforts.

    This chapter began with mention of al-Ghazzālī's emphasis in *al-Fayṣal* that theological error does not necessitate unbelief. This is an idea that remains as important today as it was in al-Ghazzālī's day, with sectarianism and *takfīr* too often features of both scholarly and public Muslim theological rhetoric. Al-Ghazzali's position, however, maintains that errors in fundamental theological beliefs are sinful. Such a position, despite its utility for curbing illegitimate *takfīr*, is limited in what it offers for an ethics of God-talk across difference. Why seek to speak about, deliberate upon, and discuss different ideas about God and His

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75   *al-Qawānīn,* vol 3/4, p. 355. For discussion of the moral qualifications of *takhliyya wa inṣā*f, translated here as 'sincerity and fairness' see Devin J. Stewart, "Strategies of Sanctifying *Ijtihād* in Later Twelver Shīʿī Legal Theory" in Wahid M. Amin and Muhammad R. Tajiri (eds.) *Ijtihād and Taqlīd: Past, Present and Future* (Birmingham: AMI Press, 2019), pp. 39-49.

76   *al-Qawānīn,* vol 3/4, p. 454.

relationship to creation when we run the risk of falling into sin, and when we assume that others are unjustified and accountable for their errors? Ibn Taymiyya's and al-Mīrza al-Qummī's theories of ijtihad in fundamental theological beliefs, however, go beyond simply uncoupling theological error from unbelief. Their theories, which also reject any assumption that error in fundamental theological matters is necessary sinful, are able to ground an ethics of theological engagement across difference. Although truth is only one, every scholarly effort is fallible and thus accountable before God, with its reward and punishment being accord with our own limited capacity and understanding. This offers a platform for an ethics of God-talk that encourages one to continually seek truth, with humility in the pursuit of understanding, not in spite of differences of theological opinion, but possible even because of them. Such an ethics of God-talk resonates with the Quranic theology of difference alluded to at the commencement of this chapter. Revisiting the oft-cited verse 49:13, we see that the Quran states 'Surely We have created you of male and female and placed you as tribes and communities...' for a declared purpose. This purpose, it seems, may not be simply '...to recognise each other' – the purpose of difference and diversity may also be to learn, or to know, *through* each other (*li-t'ārafū*).

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Frontier Theology, God and a Glut-Theoretic Account of the Problem of Foreknowledge in Islamic Theology

Safaruk Zaman Chowdhury

Theological Frontiering

Islam, like all religious worldviews, has a central doctrine about what is Transcendent, Ultimate, Absolute and Real, i.e. what is *divine*. It also has a doctrine about everything else other than the divine, namely what is immanent, immediate, relative and transitory, i.e. what is *creation*. According to Islamic theological anthropology, humanity is God's exceptional category of creation endowed with a profound nature that reflects properties of its Creator. 'Intelligence', 'will' and 'speech' – essential divine qualities – are also to a highly finite degree, humanity's qualities. *Intelligence* allows humans to understand, grasp, learn and render intelligible the reality around them to access truth; the *will* allows them to choose, desire, seek out and be otherwise in order to be morally significant and *speech* enables them to capture, articulate, communicate and express their experiences through a construction and use of language.[1] Yet, how humanity conceives of and understands its relationship and interaction with the divine when there is an ontological chasm or divide between them has been (and continues to be) a perennially perplexing phenomenon. On the Islamic view, humanity's inability, failure and limitations in accurately talking about the divine is not due to any fallen state affecting their noetic capacities; the limitations rather are more to do with their very finite and creaturely nature: *finitum non capax infiniti*. This is one of the reasons why humanity requires revelation (*waḥy*): a communication of a comprehensive message from the divine

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1   Seyyed H. Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (London: Aquarian, 1994), pp. 15-40.

to His creation, mediated via Prophets and Messengers.[2] However, even after revelation, with divinely informed content, humanity's conceptual engagement with its ultimate Source reveals differing attitudes or approaches. In the Islamic tradition, in addition to the well-known development of a formal, discursive and rational discourse about God and divinity – the *consistentising* enterprise of the systematic *kalām* theologian (and indeed the philosopher)[3] – there is arguably a deep and rich discourse rooted in an identifiably non-discursive approach, one through which God and related phenomena about God are expressed in more experientially direct terms that can include spiritual perception, non-inferential modes of knowing and employment of a language of paradox and inconsistency. This has been broadly identified with a type of *apophatic* (negative) method of theology in contrast to a *kataphatic* (positive) method of theology, evident in other religious traditions like Christianity.[4] I take this apophatic impulse as an entry point for exploring non-consistentising theorisations about God within Islamic theology. Such theorisations will not always concede to pressures of logical consistency or systematic explication. It entertains the possibility of opposing claims (whether given in the Quran or Hadith, personal experience and reflection) to coexist in evident tension because at bottom, descriptive representations of reality itself (or parcels of it) may be unavoidably inconsistent.[5] There are at least five kinds of non-consistentising postures that could be applied to Islamic theological claims and I will briefly describe each for basic orientation:[6]

1. **Antinomy**: this is when correct propositions, sound reasoning or logically valid rules are used that lead to an impossible conclusion or a contradiction.

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2   "Revelation and Inspiration", *EQ*, vol. 4, pp. 437-448 (Daniel Madigan).

3   For more on what I mean by consistentisation and non-consistentisation, see the second section below.

4   For which see Aydogan Kars, *Unsaying God: Negative Theology in Medieval Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

5   Zach Weber, *Paradoxes and Inconsistent Mathematics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 3-27; although cf. fn. 2, p. x.

6   I am aware of the numerous ways each of these terms have been defined and used in the religious and philosophical literature and how they are even taken to be synonymous. For example, in some works, there is no essential difference between mystery, paradox and antinomy. Other works equate ineffability with mystery and yet in others contradiction and paradox are taken to mean the same. I take each term to have an identifiable degree of difference but cannot lay out an analysis due to space. For some helpful remarks on the differences in the Christian usage, see R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1986), pp. 43-47 and idem, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defence of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositionalism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: The Zondervan Cooperation, 1984), pp. 77-80.

More specifically, it is when we have a pair of logically sound arguments that lead us to opposite conclusions and these opposition conclusions mutually exclude each other.[7]

2. **Contradiction**: this is the notion that any account of God (His nature, attributes or actions) must concede to it being *actually* contradictory, meaning the affirmation and negation of some claim is equally applicable to God. Thus, inconsistency, gluts (contradictions) would be a metaphysical feature of reality and divinity.[8]

3. **Ineffability**: this is the idea that God is not only in simple terms entirely unknowable and inexpressible but *essentially* resistant to conceptual grasp and any form of linguistic articulation. God is beyond any and all human categories.[9]

4. **Mystery**: another complex term referring to a form of epistemic submission where realities and claims about God are true but they are perplexingly beyond any epistemic agent to fully comprehend let alone explain with language or logic. Here, there may be a possible resolution at some later time or dimension but not in the present as it confronts an agent who defers it to a truth beyond the ken of anyone to explain.[10]

5. **Paradox**: this denotes some phenomenon about God or theology that is an *apparent* contradiction. This means that to some reasoner, theorist or observer, something *appears* to be or entails a contradiction even though in

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7   Chris Dolan, *Paradox and the School Leader: The Struggle for the Soul of the Principal in Neoliberal Times* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2020), pp. 21-23.

8   Newton C. A. da Costa and Jean-Yves Beziau, "Is God Paraconsistent?" in Ricardo Sousa, Silvestre, Benedikt Paul Göcke, Jean-Yvez Béziau and Purushottama Bilimoria, eds. *Beyond Faith and Rationality: Essays on Logic, Religion and Philosophy* (Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2020), pp. 321-333.

9   André Kukla, *Ineffability and Philosophy* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 1-51; Guy Bennett-Hunter, *Ineffability and Religious Experience* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 7-22; Silvia Jonas, *Ineffability and its Metaphysics: The Unspeakable in Art, Religion and Philosophy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 10-22 and Timothy Knepper, "Ineffability in Comparative Philosophical Perspectives" in *Ineffability: An Exercise in Comparative Philosophy of Religion*, Timothy D. Knepper and Leah E. Kalmanson, eds. (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2017), pp. 257-287. I discuss ineffability in the context of a critique to my proposals in the fifth section ("Implications of a Glut-Theoretic Theology") of this chapter.

10   See Dale Tuggy, "Paradox in Christian Theology: An Analysis of its Presence, Character and Epistemic Status", *Faith and Philosophy* 26/1 (2009), pp. 104-108 and idem, "On Positive Mysterianism", International Journal of Philosophy of Religion 69/3 (2011), pp. 205-226.

reality it may not be one. In principle, it may be resolvable. Thus, there is an epistemological feature to a paradox and not necessarily an ontological one.[11] Adopting these five broadly non-consistentising postures would be to take current Sunnī theological discourse into *frontier* theology, by which I mean to the borderline of the traditional paradigm and discursive method of theology conceived in the *kalām* approach and traditionalist or *atharī* approach. Both these approaches sought a systematic explication of the foundational articles of the Islamic creed in order to demonstrate its underlying coherence based on a set of presuppositions, principles and interpretive community of authoritative figures that guide the configuration of that systematic explication. Traversing beyond the boundaries of that consistentising Sunnī discourse would mean to leave what is contiguous and stable and cross into something more diffuse, fuzzy and unknown. Although frontier theology may be seen as perilously hovering at the 'Sunnimost' edge, it could also be seen as a point of contact, a permeable and porous 'border' between two different discourses such that contact of one with the other may lead to a rich reciprocal exchange. Frontiering in this context no doubt can be conceptualised in other ways; my aim here is not typology. Rather, my aim is to delineate how a very limited exploration of a contradictory theology (CT) or glut-theoretic theology (GTT) – number two on the above list of non-consistentising postures – may look when its boundary intersects with the boundary of traditional Sunnī theology when a controversial theological case-study is examined.

The Consistentisation Project of Traditional Kalām Theology

In one of her many penetrative essays on the problem of evil, Marilyn Adams suggests a way for Christian philosophers to tackle the perceived incompatibility between God's omni-attributes and the reality of evil and that is either to accept the incompatibility *atheologically* ("as a proof for the non-existence of God") or to approach the problem *aporetically* ("as generating a puzzle and posing the constructive challenge of finding a solution that displays their compatibility").[12] She explains:

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11 See James Anderson, *Paradox in Christian Theology: An Analysis of its Presence, Character and Epistemic Status* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007); Joel Arnold, *Theological Antinomy: A Biblical Theology of Paradox* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2020) and Dolan, *Paradox and the School Leader*, pp. 13-37.

12 Marilyn Adams, "Problems of Evil: More Advice to Christian Philosophers," *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988), p. 121.

> When, in the history of philosophy, a number of prima facie plausible premises seem to generate a problematic conclusion, the resultant argument can be said to formulate a problem, which can be dealt with in various ways. One can simply accept the argument as sound and its surprising conclusion as true. Alternatively, one may remain confident that the conclusion is false but see the argument as creating a difficulty for anyone who rejects it: that of explaining how the prima facie plausible premises are not all so acceptable, the inferences not so evident, as they seem. To respond the latter way is to take the argument aporetically, as generating a puzzle.[13]

The aim behind Adams favouring an aporetic approach to this problem is ultimately for "understanding consistency" and "to appreciate the internal coherence of the Christian position" so that a sceptic might "withdraw his charge of irrationality".[14] Like in Christianity, this drive for consistency and coherence was an identifiable approach to the Muslim rational-based theology of "kalām" that characterised much of the way theology was undertaken and practiced within the Muslim world beginning from the 3rd century AH / 9th century CE.[15] No system of theology on this *kalām* approach would accept a contradiction let alone accept it as a solution for any theological problem or philosophical puzzle. This is because the Aristotelian and stoic logic that was subsequently adopted as orthodox logic into Islamic theology and philosophy – critically mediated by Arab philosophers such as Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d.339/950) and Ibn Sīnā (d.428/1037) among others – rules it out.[16] Hellenic and medieval logic was a two-valued or bivalent logic, there are only two truth values to any proposition: true (**t**) and false (**f**). There was no possible case in which this logic would allow for accepting a proposition being both true and false -$(p \bullet \sim p)$ – known as "glutty" propositions – and neither true nor false ($p \lor \sim p$) – called "gappy" propositions. Accepting the

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13   Adams, "Problems of Evil, p. 122.

14   Adams, "Problems of Evil, pp. 136, 137.

15   For a survey of the key discussions and debates in *kalām*, refer to the introduction by Mustafa Shah in *Islamic Theological Discourses and the Legacy of Kalam. Gestation, Movements and Controversies* (Berlin and London: Gerlach Press, 2019).

16   For overviews of both these systems of logic, see Adriane Rini, "Aristotle's Logic", pp. 29-50 and Katerina Ierodiakonou, "Stoic Logic", pp. 51-70 both in eds. Alex Malpass and Marianna Marfori, *The History of Philosophical and Formal Logic: From Aristotle to Tarski* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017). For a basic overview of logic in medieval Islamic thought, refer to Musa Akrami, "Logic in Islam and Islamic Logic" in *Beyond Faith and Rationality*, pp. 277-300.

former would be to deny the Law of Non-contradiction (LNC)[17] and accepting the latter would be to contravene the Law of Excluded Middle (LEM), that taken together with the Law of Identity (LI) ($p = p$), constitute the foundational *laws of thought*.[18] Current suggestions in the history of Arabic logic are that "under the influence of Avicenna, Aristotelianism became the dominant view in the Islamicate world and little by little the views which accepted truth value gaps or gluts disappeared from the philosophical scene".[19] Under his intellectual direction, Islamic theology and Peripatetic philosophy fused together and "post-Avicennian *kalām* emerged as a truly Islamic philosophy, a synthesis of Avicenna's metaphysics and Muslim doctrine".[20] One consequence of this fusion was "the authority of the principle of bivalence among the Islamic theologians (*mutakallimūn*)."[21] Essentially, Ibn Sīnā argued that it is not possible to accept both the affirmation and negation of a proposition (a contradiction) as well as the denial of the affirmation and negation of a proposition (bivalence); hence he held LNC and LEM as bound inextricably together. For him, denial of LNC entailed *trivialism* (everything is true), which is absurd.[22] The entailment that everything follows from accepting a single contradiction is known as "explosion": $p, \neg p \vdash q$ which reads: for any statements p and q, if p and its negation are both true, then it logically follows that q. In other words, from a contradiction, *anything* follows. Thus, with Ibn Sīnā, a logical theory must be a conjunction of both *consistency* and *coherence*. A logical theory is consistent if and only if no single proposition of the form $p, \neg p$ is derivable from it. *Coherence* means *non-triviality*. A *trivial* or *absurd* theory as already mentioned is one in which absolutely every proposition holds. For Ibn Sīnā, it is not possible to have coherence without consistency. Contradiction on his system is equated with absurdity.

For the *kalām* theologians, their model of God was constructed out of a quest for consistency with the assumption of this Avicennian theory of logic.

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17   On Aristotle's defence of LNC in book Γ of the *Metaphysics* and whether his arguments are dialectically robust, see Graham Priest, *Doubt Truth to be a Liar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 7-42.

18   On an outline of these fundamental laws, see Satya S. Sethy, *Introduction to Logic and Logical Discourse* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021), pp. 61-68.

19   Behnam Zolghadr, "Avicenna on the Law of Non-Contradiction", *History and Philosophy of Logic* 40/2 (2019), p. 105. For possible examples of glutty and gappy admission in Islamic theology, refer to Kars, *Unsaying God*, pp. 23-72.

20   Robert Wisnovsky, "Avicenna and the Avicennian Tradition", in eds. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor, *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 92.

21   Zolghadr, "Avicenna on the Law of Non-Contradiction", p. 92.

22   Zolghadr, "Avicenna on the Law of Non-Contradiction", pp. 105-115.

Neither God nor anything attributable to God's actions could be "paraconsistent" (admitting logical inconsistency) on pain of entailing absurdities in the theology. Logic for them *carves reality at the joints*, where joint carving means capturing the real or objective structure of reality. God for example, can neither *be* anything inconsistent nor *do* anything inconsistent – His constraints are *logical*. Hence, when the Ẓāhirī polymath Ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba (d.456/1064) suggested that God logically could, if He willed it, take an offspring based on a reading of Q. 39:4, it was met with utter derision and incredulity and the view labelled heretical.[23] Ibn Ḥazm argued for *logical voluntarism*, the view that the entire logical economy is not independent of God's power. If God wished, He could even uncreate the laws logic, although it is His wisdom that may withhold Him from doing that in the actual world. In the Islamic tradition, Ibn Ḥazm stands alone in holding such a view. Dropping consistency therefore was not an option entertained by the theologians. In the fourth section ("Divine Attributes and a Glut-Theoretic Account"), we will see through exploring a well-known theological problem how attempting to be consistent in the face of the problem may not be so theoretically virtuous; rather embracing inconsistency or a contradiction as an exception may have more desirable theological merit.

Glut-Theoretic (Contradictory) Theology

In the beginning of the chapter, I briefly introduced contradiction as one of the five non-consistentising postures for understanding God and possible theological doctrines. For the purposes of this chapter, I will use the phrase *glut-theoretic theology* (GTT). In the following section, I shall explain a little further what I mean by it. Other similar and overlapping terms that are used to refer to this kind of God-talk phenomenon include: (i) *dialetheic theism*, which is the view that a 'dialetheia' (a true contradiction) is possibly applicable to the conception of a single absolutely metaphysically ultimate being, (ii) *paraconsistent theology* where God-talk is upheld as meaningful and coherent even without logical consistency and (iii) *contradictory theology*, which is the affirmation of a logical contradiction to God. The last phrase has been brought to the fore by the explosive book of Jc Beall in analytic Christology titled *The Contradictory Christ* and I will refer to it

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23   Safaruk Chowdhury, "There was God and No Thing was with Him: Abstract Objects and Some Muslim Philosophical Views" (paper presented at the annual Helsinki Analytic Theology Conference, 2019, February 21-22, Helsinki, Finland), pp. 13-18. On logical voluntarism, see James C. McGlothlin, *The Logiphro Dilemma: An Examination of the Relationship Between Logic and God* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017), ch. 3.

below. Although all these phrases are broadly interchangeable, I will retain GTT throughout the remainder of the essay unless I specify an alternative use and the reason for doing so.

Logic, 'FDE' and GTT

In order for GTT to be possible, it would require a system of consequence relations (or for short *logic*) that tolerates contradictions. This is because accepting a genuine contradiction in the case of God or claims about God and related phenomena is to make one's theology *contradictory-admitting* or glutty. To understand this, it will require briefly outlining what logic is and what its role and reach is.[24] Logic studies specific relations of *meaningful sentences* of a given *language*, i.e. what sentences can follow other sentences. This is known as *consequence*. In order to know what consequence relation holds in a language, *models* of that language are constructed. A logical model is a structure or representation of a language (using sets, relations, functions) or how fragments of that language behave in terms what logically follows from what. The behaviour that is represented by the logical model considers which arguments in the language are in fact logically valid. A language is said to have a *syntax* (the grammatical components or 'ingredients' of sentences) and a *semantics* (the meaning of sentences). A *logical language*, one that represents the consequence relations between sentences of a given language, also has a syntax and a semantics. The syntax includes (a) logical vocabulary like connectives "and" ("•"), "or" ("∨"), "not" ("~") and the defined connectives "if . . . then" ("⊃") and "if and only if" ("≡"), (b) singular terms and (c) sentences (with or without connectives). The semantics is under what given *cases* or *possibility* a particular sentence is assigned the value of **true** or its negation **false**. If the consequence relations in a given language are free from any counterexamples, then we have *validity*. Different theories of logic give different accounts of the logical behaviour of the connectives in a given language. The 'orthodox' logic in Anglo-American philosophy until the middle of the 20th century was classical logic (CL). The dominant logical model within the Islamic intellectual tradition has been that of Hellenic logic (Aristotelian and Stoic) and their major Arab mediators. Although both systems of logic are in many respects worlds apart, each upholds a two-valued or bivalent logic where the only logical space of possibilities are true and false. The exclusion of any contradiction in Hellenic logic from the space of logical possibility shaped medieval *kalām*

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24 On what follows in this section, I rely on Beall, *The Contradictory Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 13-35.

theology, that remains the case until the present. In contemporary philosophy of religion, the same exclusion of contradiction in classical logic underpins much of theological analysis.

Beall in his account of contradictory theology upholds the true system of logic as being a sub-classical four-valued one called First-Degree Entailment (FDE). It has the widest space of logical possibility: **true** (t), **false** (f), **neither** (n) and **both** (b). It is the value of neither (gappy) and both (glutty) as logical possibilities that is a striking feature of the logic. This means that if FDE logic is applied to constructing an account of theology (a theory about God), there would be nothing *logically* to rule out simultaneously affirming something and its negation or denying something and its negation. It affords the widest space of possibilities, some favourable when constructing true claims about complex and rare phenomena like theological ones. Hence, if there is a reason to, meaning, if a theology specifically motivates a reason to accept a glut (or gap), then according to FDE, it would not *a priori* be ruled out because there is no restriction to just true or false. Although space will not permit me to present the technical aspects of the system, I will assume it as the logical system for the GTT.

Motivations for adopting sub-classical systems like FDE is that they allow for reasoning with inconsistent premises while still reaching sensible conclusions and avoiding the Avicennian worry of trivialism as outlined above. On logics that allow for accepting contradictions without entailing arbitrary absurdities, the insistence is that all contradictions are false although at least one might be true due to an exception. It also means that the best and truest descriptions of the world include inconsistency and so a logic is required to reflect that. Examples such as the Liar Paradox and the Sorites Paradox are flagged up as typical cases that are troublesome for a CL system.[25] Of relevance to this chapter, the key point is that if a logical system does rule out a possible contradiction, then there would be no logical objection in embracing it. The question then arises is whether there is anything in the target theology that warrants embracing a contradiction as an exception.

Divine Attributes and a Glut-Theoretic Account

In the previous section, I laid out some of the basic theoretical details of a GTT. In this section, I will examine an application of GTT to a core controversy related to a divine attribute discussed extensively by *kalām* theologians – the

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25   See Safaruk Chowdhury, "God, Gluts and Gaps: Examining an Islamic Traditionalist Case for a Contradictory Theology", *History and Philosophy of Logic* 42/1 (2021), pp. 17–43.

problem of God's knowledge (*'ilm*) of future actions – in order to spell out how that application would look. I will begin with setting out different types of inconsistencies that divine attributes can generate, after which I examine three theological responses proposed to address the problem of God's foreknowledge from within the theological tradition and follow this by presenting a glut-theoretic solution. I will conclude the section with some brief remarks about the virtues of this glut-theoretic (contradictory) approach.

Divine Knowledge

In a recent article, drawing on the works of logician and Christian philosopher Jc Beall,[26] Chowdhury tentatively introduced GTT (he used the label 'contradictory theology') as a framework for Islamic theological speculation on the divine attribute of speech (*kalām*).[27] The complexities and operations of this glut-theoretic approach using the sub-classical logic FDE to divine speech can arguably extend to divine knowledge. Whether or not that is a fruitful extension within the Islamic theological context will be the exploration of this essay. One helpful way to frame this extension would be to use a typology of inconsistencies expounded by Yujin Nagasawa in his book *Maximal God*. Here, Nagasawa outlines three broad types of arguments that attempt to problematise the concept of an omni-God – a being that possesses a triad of "great-making properties":[28] *Omnipotence* (being absolutely powerful), *omniscience* (having complete knowledge) and *omnibenevolence* (being wholly good):[29]

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26 See Jc Beall, *The Contradictory Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

27 Chowdhury, "God, Gluts and Gaps", pp. 17-43.

28 Peter Williams describes a great-making property as:
   any objective property which a) *is intrinsically good to have* ('which endows its bearer with some measure of value, or greatness, or metaphysical stature, regardless of external circumstances') *and* b) *has a logical maximum*. For example, *size* isn't a great-making property. A whale isn't more valuable than me just because it's bigger than me; and however large a something you imagine, it's always logically possible to imagine a larger one. Even the universe is expanding, and there is no *logical* limit to how big it can get! On the other hand, *power* is a great-making property, one that has a logical maximum in the quality of being omnipotent. Knowledge is a great-making property, one that has a logical maximum in omniscience. And the goodness of *being* (which is a pre-condition of every other good) is a great-making property that has a logical maximum in necessary being.
   A Faithful Guide to Philosophy: A Christian introduction to the Love of Wisdom (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018), p. 162.

29 Nagasawa, *Maximal God: A New Defence of Perfect Being Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 82-87.

1. Type A: arguments that purport to show the internal incoherence of God's individual properties: where one attribute is shown to be incoherent, often via constructions of paradoxes, e.g., 'the paradox of the stone' to problematise omnipotence.[30]
2. Type B: arguments that purport to show the mutual inconsistency between God's properties: where two or more attributes are shown to be inconsistent with each other.
3. Type C: arguments that purport to show the mutual inconsistency between the set of God's properties and a certain fact about the actual world (where one or more attributes are inconsistent with realities of the world like evil and suffering).[31]

Of the three types given above, applicable to our investigation would be Nagasawa's Type C inconsistency argument. Thus, in the present case-study, I will explore how one of God's omni-attributes, here omniscience, and more specifically His *foreknowledge*, is inconsistent with some fact of the world (human free acts).[32] To state the target problem clearly, we have two contradictory propositions, both upheld in Islamic theology:

God is omniscient (includes foreknowledge) (O)
Human beings have the ability to choose otherwise (A)

Propositions O and A are not *explicitly* contradictory, so we will have to see the kind of arguments that demonstrates them to be so (see the details below in 4.2.1 and thereafter). In other words, what makes it the case that we cannot have both O and A, i.e. $\sim\diamond(O \cdot A)$. I will argue that there should be no need to seek a balancing act from either above (God's eye perspective) or from below

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30 For sub-classical solutions to paradoxes in this category, see Jc Beall and A.J. Cotnoir, "God of the Gaps: A Neglected Reply to God's Stone Problem", *Analysis* 77 (2017), pp. 681-689 and A.J. Cotnoir, "Theism and Dialetheism", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 96/3 (2018), pp. 592-609.

31 Nagasawa, *Maximal God*, pp. 85-87.

32 Zach Weber has forcefully highlighted the serious limitations in employing contradictory solutions to type C arguments, see "Atheism and Dialetheism; or, 'Why I Am Not a (Paraconsistent) Christian'", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 97/2 (2019), pp. 401-407. Finally, Michael De Vito has made a preliminary but beneficial intervention in this very dilemma of divine foreknowledge and free will within the context of general theism, where he expounds on a contradictory or glutty solution to the dilemma. The philosophical insights from his discussions will be helpful for the aims of this section. See "Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom: Exploring a Glut-Theoretic Account", *Religions* 12/9 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12090770>

(creaturely perspective) in order to avoid the contradiction. Rather, the posture should be to embrace it as permitted by the logic. This will then be followed by explaining the alternative glut-theoretic solution to the problem. Before all that, let me define 'omniscience' as it occurs in *O* and 'freedom' used in *A*. Firstly, we are assuming our conception of an omni-God. Secondly, we will take a 'thick' or 'robust' conception of divine knowledge and give it a definition that will suit our purposes:

> (Omniscience): For any person *S*, *S* is necessarily omniscient =$_{df}$ if for every proposition *p*, necessarily *S* knows that *p* is true (or that *p* is false).

Thirdly, this standard account of omniscience entails that if there are any true propositions expressed in whichever way, God knows them. This thick or robust omniscience consists of at least three connected features:

- it is *penetrative* (where the reach of knowledge is detailed and deep),
- it is *exhaustive* (where the knowledge is fully encompassing and comprehensive),
- it is *limitless* (where the knowledge has no bounds in its scope).

It is not necessary for the purposes of the argument to explicate the exact modality of each of these three aspects of omniscience or for example the conditions God's epistemic states (if indeed He has any) must satisfy for something to count as knowledge. The argument does not necessarily hinge on such metaphysical details. Regarding the meaning of human freedom in A, we could propose a definition as follows:

> (Freedom): an agent *a* is free =$_{df}$ if *a* could have willed some act ψ or performed ψ at time *t* but did not.

This definition has two parts: the first is that a person is free as long as she *willed* or *desired* to do something. You can only want what you want and to realise your want is *sufficient* for you to be free.[33] The second part is that a person is free as long as she generally *could have done* otherwise even though she *did*

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33   On this meaning of the will as a sufficient condition of free will and not the capacity to perform acts (which comes from God's endowment), see Saʿīd Fūdah, *al-Sharḥ al-Kabīr ʿalā ʾl-ʿAqīda al-Ṭaḥāwiyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Dhakhāʾin, 2014), pp. 1208-1213.

not, i.e. she must have the capacity to do otherwise than she does.[34] This is known as the *principle of alternative possibility* (PAP).[35] Here I am omitting two things: (a) the entire discussion on the controversy over the ontology of acts extensively discussed in the *kalām* manuals, namely whether or not God creates human acts and the state of the world leading up to the moment in which the acts are executed and (b) avoiding the contemporary discussion of free will and moral responsibility because both will present us with the impossible task of disentangling the different assumptions, conceptions and arguments. The aim here is only to minimally establish an account of omniscience and creaturely freedom sufficient for a contradiction to be generated.

Theological Fatalism

Arguments about fatalism from antiquity and the issues generated by them became the predecessor sources for the subsequent discussions among Christian theologians from the third century CE right the way through the medieval period that interacted with at least six centuries of philosophical reflection within the Islamic tradition. Adams explains the idea of 'fatalism' inherited from antiquity familiar to the medievals in the following way:

> Briefly, fatalism is the view that whatever happens must happen of necessity and whatever does not happen of necessity does not happen at all. According to the fatalist, it is never both possible that something will happen and possible that it will not happen. That is, the fatalist denies that any events, actions, or states of affairs are contingent. It is generally taken to be an obvious consequence of fatalism that nothing a man does is ever really up to him. What he has done he had to do; and what he will do he must do.[36]

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34 For a technical discussion on whether human beings have the capacity to do moral contraries (*al-istiṭāʿa jāʾiza ʿalā al-ḍiddayn*), see Abū 'l-Muʿīn al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat al-Adilla fī Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2020), pp. 375-382. Cf. Sherman Jackson, *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 108-109.

35 On this principle, refer to David Robb, "Moral Responsibility and the Principle of Alternative Possibilities", <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/alternative-possibilities/>.

36 See *William Ockham: Predestination, God's Foreknowledge and Future Contingents*, trans. by Marilyn M. Adams and Norman Kretzmann (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1983), p. 3.

The detailed logic behind this fatalism[37] – originating from Aristotle's discussion of it in his famous sea-battle paradox[38] – will not be fully rehearsed here as space will not permit me but it was natural for theologians to see how this metaphysical type of fatalism telescopes to the theological domain where the problem becomes what is known as *theological fatalism*.[39] In a nutshell, theological fatalism is the view that:

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37 Some of the logical details underpinning contemporary analysis of the problem include: (a) *the law of bivalence*: which states that propositions can only have one of two truth values T or F, $\forall p \ (Tp \lor Fp)$, but never neither (gap-free) nor both (glut-free). (b) *accidental necessity*: which is the idea that if you decide to do something from a number of options, then once you do make your choice and act, there is no turning back and that event becomes fixed and unchangeable. (c) *transfer of necessity*: the idea behind this principle is that if we have a case of accidental necessity, then that necessity transfers across entailment. To put it roughly, if p is accidentally necessary and p implies q, then q will also be accidentally necessary, $p \bullet (p \supset q) \supset q$. (d) *Truth-maker theory*: truth-makers are generally defined as entities (abstract or concrete) that exist (in the world or beyond), which make propositions true: $\forall p \ Tp \supset \exists y$ such that y is a truth-maker for p. We can make y a placeholder for candidate truth-makers like states of affairs, tropes, facts, entailment, natures, essences, etc. We can say that a proposition p is true because it states how things really are in the world. Conversely, we can say that a proposition p is true because there is something (like a fact) in virtue of which p is true. As an example, if we take facts to be a candidate *truth-maker*, then the proposition that 'snow is white' would be true because it is a fact that snow is white, i.e., the world is such that snow is white and it is this reality that makes p true. See Ciro De Florio and Aldo Frigerio, *Divine Omniscience and Human Free Will: A Logical and Metaphysical Analysis* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 1-26.

38 Where Aristotle presents the famous sea battle that purports to demonstrate that if something will not be the case, then it is not possible for it to be the case. If this is so, then our power of free will to determine the course of the future is entirely undermined. This is fatalism and fatalism negates free will. See his *De Interpretatione* (19ᵃ30-4): Λέγω δὲ οἷον ἀνάγκη μὲν ἔσεσθαι ναυμαχίαν αὔριον ἢ μὴ ἔσεσθαι,οὐ μέντοι γενέσθαι αὔριον ναυμαχίαν ἀναγκαῖον οὐδὲ μὴ γενέσθαι· γενέσθαι μέντοι ἢ μὴ γενέσθαι ἀναγκαῖον. ὥστε,ἐπεὶ ὁμοίως οἱ λόγοι ἀληθεῖς ὥσπερ τὰ πράγματα, δῆλον ὅτι ὅσα οὕτως ἔχει ὥστε ὁπότερ' ἔτυχε καὶ τὰ ἐναντία ἐνδέχεσθαι,ἀνάγκη ὁμοίως ἔχειν καὶ τὴν ἀντίφασιν. *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Richard McKeon (Modern Library Edition, 2001). On Aristotle's account of the paradox and his solution for it, see William L. Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), pp. 1-59. The discussion of future contingents within the Islamic philosophical tradition revolved primarily around this passage of the *De Interpretatione*. For key secondary literature on how some Muslim philosophers treated future contingents in light of the sea battle paradox, see the references cited in Safaruk Chowdhury, "Examining Two Accounts of Divine Omniscience from al-Ashʿarī's *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*" (unpublished manuscript, 2017), fn. 9.

39 Also referred to as the *problem of foreknowledge*, *theological determinism* or *divine determinism*. On this problem, refer to William Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom: The Coherence of Theism: Omniscience* (Leiden: E. J. Brill. 1991), pp. 162-236 and Peter Furlong,

God is omniscient, and so knows everything there is to know, including facts about the future. God is also infallible, and so cannot be mistaken in what He knows. This means that God has always known how everyone will decide and act at any future time. But if God has always known just how each person will decide in the future, then those future decisions appear to be necessary or fixed in some way. And if those decisions are necessary or fixed, then they are not free, because someone makes a free decision only if she is able to decide otherwise.[40]

God's foreknowledge precludes any robust sense of creaturely free will. What God knows must necessarily be and hence whatever anyone does will not affect that knowledge. At core then is the following tension: if God knows beforehand every action we do or will do in the future like pray, fast or pay *zakāt* throughout our lives, then how much of what we do is genuinely up to us? Conversely, if what we do is genuinely up to us, then to what extent is God in control?

Theological Fatalism and the Islamic Context

The orientalist historian Franz Rosenthal aptly summarises the problem of theological fatalism in the Islamic context:

> On the human level, the understanding of the concept of God's knowledge was pivotal for deciding whether there could be some degree of freedom for human action or whether rigid predestination had to prevail. If God were to know what human beings were going to do, they could not be held responsible for their actions. If God's knowledge was true omniscience, that is, the knowledge of everything particular and universal; if it was eternal and immutable, man's fate was of necessity determined in all its details. God's knowledge meant more for the problem of human freedom than God's power or God's will. His power and His will could, in theory, be so construed as to leave some choice for human beings. But God's knowledge had to know, if there was a choice, what the outcome was to

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The Challenges of Divine Determinism: A Philosophical Analysis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 14-33.

40 Leigh C. Vicens and Simon Kittle, *God and Human Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 3-4.

be, or it was imperfect knowledge, unworthy of God. Thus, there could be no real choice whatever, if God was truly omniscient.[41]

The doctrine of free will and God's foreknowledge that gave rise to Muslim determinist, libertarian and compatibilist positions have been studied extensively and it is not my purpose to survey it here.[42] Readers of Islamic intellectual history will know that Muslim theological groups from the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries had divergent theological presuppositions and ideas that had implications on the theological doctrines of omniscience, foreknowledge, omnipotence, omnibenevolence, time and conceptions of freedom – difficulties that remained intractable throughout the successive centuries. The intractable nature of the issue persisted because the differing theological groups were attempting to consistentise God's omniscience (as well as His omnipotence and omnibenevolence) with human freedom; that is, they were avoiding contradictions. The major emerging views included a hard determinism, a restrictive libertarianism and a moderate compatibilism. I will mention an example from each view merely to illustrate how the quest for consistency by these theologians meant resorting to a balancing act from either above (God's eye perspective) or below (creaturely perspective) that leaves the two theological axioms *O* and *A* unsatisfactorily resolved.

Hard Determinism

Beginning with hard determinism, the well-known proponents of this view are labelled in the heresiographical works as the 'Jabriyya'.[43] Their balancing act from above entailed eschewing any notion of genuine human freedom in order to safeguard divine power and knowledge. The Andalusian scholar with multi-specialisation Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (d.621/1273) gives a brief typology of the Jabriyya in his commentary of the Qur'ān on 3:103:

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41   Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*: *The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), p. 124.

42   For a list of references on general studies about early Islamic controversies over free will, see Chowdhury, "Examining Two Accounts of Divine Omniscience", fn. 4.

43   Literally translated as the 'compulsionists'. On them, see James Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology*: *A Study of the Interpretation of Theological Ideas in Two Religions*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: James Clark & Co., Ltd, 1967), vol. 2, pp. 161-168; "Djabariyya", *EI²*, vol. 2, p. 365 (William M. Watt); "Ḳadariyya," in *EI²*, vol. 4, pp. 368-372 (Josef Van Ess) and "al-Ḳaḍā' wa-l-Ḳadar", *EI²*, vol. 4, pp. 365-367 (Louis Gardet).

The Jabriyya divide into twelve sects that include: the *al-muḍtarriyya* (compulsionists) who say: 'human beings do not really act themselves; rather, God does them all.' The *al-afʿāliyya* (actionists) who say: 'we do perform acts but have no actual capacity (*istiṭāʿa*) of our own to do them; we are like beasts led on a rope.' The *al-mafrūghiyya* (creationists) who say: 'everything has already been created, and nothing is created now.' Among them are the followers of al-Najjār (*al-najjāriyya*) who say: 'God punishes people for His own acts, not theirs.' The *al-mannāniyya* (libertines) say: 'follow whatever comes to your heart, and do what you deem is good.' The *al-kasbiyya* (non-acquisitionists) say: 'a human being earns neither reward nor punishment.' The *al-sābiqiyya* (fatalists) say: 'whoever wishes to act, let him act and whoever wishes not to act, let him not act; the felicitous one is not harmed by his sins, and the wretched one is not helped by his piety.' The *al-ḥubbiyya* (mystics of love)[44] say: 'whoever drinks the cup of God's love is no longer obliged to worship with his limbs.' The *al-khawfiyya* (non-fearful) say: 'whoever loves God no longer fears Him, as the lover does not fear his beloved.' The *al-fikriyya* (contemplatives) say: 'whoever increases in knowledge is exempted from worshipping in proportion to it.' The *al-khashshabiyya* (rebels)[45] say: 'The world belongs equally to all human beings. There is no precedence among them in their father Adam's inheritance.' The Manniyya say: 'acts proceed from us and we have the capacity to perform them'.[46]

We can formulate the hard determinism strain of the Jabriyya in the following argument, which we will call JA:

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44 A heretical mystical group who espoused that loving God entailed absolution from any religious acts of worship, see Wilfred Madelung and Paul Walker, *An Ismaili Heresiography: The "bāb al-shayṭān" from Abū Tammām's Kitāb al-Shajara* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 66-68.

45 See Madelung and Walker, *An Ismaili Heresiography*, p. 91.

46 The last two are contrary to the previous ten. See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jamiʿ li-Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, ed. by ʿAbd Allāh al-Turkī (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 2006), vol. 5, pp. 249-250:

ثم أنقسمت الجَبْرية اثنتي عشرة فرقة: فمنهم المضطرية قالوا: لا فعل للآدميّ، بل الله يفعل الكل. والأفعالية قالوا: لنا أفعال ولكن لا أستطاعة لنا فيها، وإنما نحن كالبهائم نقاد بالحبل. والمفروغية قالوا: كل الأشياء قد خُلقت، والآن لا يُخلق شيء. والنجارية زعمت أن الله تعالى يعذّب والمنّانيّة قالوا: عليك بما يخطر بقلبك، فافعل ما توّمت منه الخير. والكسبية قالوا: لا يكتسب العبد ثواباً ولا على فعلهم عقاباً. والسّابقية قالوا: من شاء فليعمل ومن شاء (ف) لا يعمل، فإن السعيد لا تضرّ ذنوبه والشّقي لا ينفعه برّه. والحبّية قالوا: من شرب كأس محبة الله تعالى سقطت عنه عبادة الأركان. والخوفية قالوا: من أحبّ الله تعالى لم يسعه أن يخافه؛ لأن الحبيب لا يخاف حبيبه. والفكرية قالوا: والمنية قالوا الدنيا بين العباد سواء، لا تفاضل بينهم فيما وزنّهم أبوهم آدم؛ : قالوا من أزداد علماً أسقط عنه بقدر ذلك من العبادة؛ والخشبية

: منا الفعل ولنا الاستطاعة

Abbreviations:

Θ   =   God is omniscient (includes omnipotence and omnibenevolence)

C   =   actions are caused or originated (i.e. direct causal agency)

P   =   predestination (all things known and willed by God brought about by His power)

PAP   =   principle of alternative possibility

R   =   morally responsible for some action

F   =   free performance of an action

JA:

1. If God is omniscient, then predestination is true.
2. If predestination is true, then humans cannot act otherwise.
3. If humans cannot act otherwise, then they do not freely perform actions.
4. Therefore, if God is omniscient, then humans do not freely perform actions. [From: 1, 2, 3].
5. Actions are freely performed if and only if the action is caused.
6. Therefore, if God is omniscient, then no action is freely performed [from 4, 5].

Symbolised:

1. $\Theta \supset P$
2. $P \supset {\sim}PAP$
3. ${\sim}PAP \supset {\sim}F$
4. $\therefore \Theta \supset {\sim}F$
5. $F \equiv C$
6. $\therefore \Theta \supset {\sim}F$

JA states that there cannot be genuine human free will so long as God has His omni-attributes because God's knowledge entails the impossibility of creatures doing otherwise than what He knows, and this precludes PAP. Therefore, because restricting omniscience (or any divine attribute) is effectively heresy, the only option is to abandon genuine free will. Thus, JA is a balancing act from above (i.e., the God's perspective). In order to uphold omnipotence and omniscience, genuine and meaningful human freedom is denied.

Libertarian Views

Now for the example of the libertarian view. In his heresiographical work
Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn, Abū ʾl-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d.333/945) mentions a number
of views held by early *mutakallimūn* about God's knowledge of events and human
actions and their relation with time. Two of those views, which I shall call the
Libertarian Arguments (LA) are the following:

> Those who believed that God does not know something unless it exists,
> differed among each other giving rise to fifteen views. The Sakkākiyya[47]
> argued that God is essentially knowing (*bi-nafsihi*) and the attribute of
> knowing is an attribute of his Essence but He cannot be predicated of that
> attribute until something actually exists. If it does, then He is predicated as
> knowing otherwise He is not because the thing has not yet existed and it is
> not correct to claim knowledge of something that is not yet existent [...] a
> group of the anthropomorphists (*ahl al-tashbīh*)[48] claimed that God knows
> everything before it occurs except human actions, which He only knows at

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47   The Sakkākiyya are those who adhere to the doctrines of Abad Allāh al-Sakkāk al-Luwatī from
     Sakan and as a group are considered one of the six sub-divisions of the Ibāḍiyya movement
     in Tunisia who reached there as merchants during the 2nd/8th Hijrī and 3rd/9th centuries CE.
     al-Sakkāk was a skilled goldsmith and was extremely conversant with books of which he had
     a huge collection. He amassed a considerable following due to his erudite talents and sharp
     reasoning. He fiercely opposed the Ibāḍiyya – and orthodox positions – in many theological
     and juridical issues and was met with harsh opposition such that his followers upon death
     would be tied to horses and dragged along the ground to be finally tossed mercilessly into pits
     – without a funeral prayer or burial. Some of their opponents from the authorities considered
     them to be polytheists whereas others considered them hypocrites. Some of the recorded
     doctrines attributed to the Sakkākiyya include: (i) their rejection of the Prophetic *sunna*, (ii)
     their rejection of consensus (*ijmāʿ*), (iii) their rejection of analogy (*qiyās*), (iv) their belief that
     the call to the Prayer (*adhān*) and the congregational prayer were invented acts of worship
     (they would bray like donkeys upon hearing the call to prayer) and (v) the Qurʾān alone was
     the medium through which to understand Islamic teachings. See al-Darjīnī, *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt
     al-Mashāʾikh bi-l-Maghrib*, 2 vols. ed. by Ibrahim Tallay (Constantine: Maṭbaʿat al-Baḥth,
     1974), vol. 1, pp. 118-119 and S. A. Ṭāʿima, *al-Ibāḍiyya ʿAqīdatan wa Madhhaban* (Beirut:
     Dār al-Jīl, 1985), pp. 65 and 275.

48   أهل التشبيه is omitted in other MSS editions of the *Maqālāt*. Rosenthal conjectures that it may
     be referring to the Jahmiyya. See *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 125. One of the views attributed
     to Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d.128/746) as mentioned by al-Ashʿarī is very similar to the ones quoted:
     وألزمه وحكي عن الجهم خلاف هذا وأنه كان لا يقول أن الله يعلم الأشياء قبل أن تكون لأنها قبل أن تكون ليست بأشياء فتعلم أو تجهل
     مخالفوه أن لله — سبحانه — علماً محدثاً
     Something contrary was related regarding Jahm which is that he would not say that God
     knows things before they exist because before anything is, it is not something that can be

the time of its occurrence. This is because were He to know the one who obeys from the one who disobeys, it would deny the sinner and the sin.[49]

Before explaining the argument, Rosenthal's comment is worth reproducing:

> Muslim theologians of the eighth and ninth centuries were fully aware of the relationship between knowledge and power and will as well as of the necessity of somehow restricting God's knowledge in order to assure at least a modicum of human self-determination. Yet, the contention that God does not know what is not, and that He does not know what is before it is, had to give way to the determinist point of view that He knows what is not, and that He knows what is before it is. The radical attempt ascribed to the *ahl al-tashbīh* [possibly meaning the Jahmiya?] to make room in God's all-encompassing foreknowledge for human freedom of action by making an exception for human actions "which He knows only at the stage of their coming-into-being, because if He knew who would be obedient to God and who would be disobedient and a sinner, He would intervene between sinner and sin," seems to have found as little of an echo as the more modest formula in favor of a conditional knowledge in God cited above.[50]

The second LA argument (LA2) is a specific case of the first argument mentioned by al-Ashʿarī, that of the Sakkākiyya (LA1), so it would be helpful to briefly say something about it. LA1 states that if the future is indeterminate then it cannot follow that they are foreknown by God because God cannot know something

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known or not known. His opponents necessitated him to hold that God has knowledge that is temporally originated.

See al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa-'Khtilāf al-Muṣallīn*, ed. by Muḥyī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo: al-Maktbat al-ʿAṣriyya, 1991), vol. 1, p. 293. The reference may also be to the Shabībiyya who held an identical view to the Sakkākiyya. See al-Khushaysh's account of them in al-Malaṭī's *Tanbīh*, pp. 126-135 cited in William M. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1998), p. 94 and cf. p. 97 and n. 60-61 as well as Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 661.

49 al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn* (ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd edn), vol. 1, pp. 291-292 = Helmut Ritter's edition (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1980), pp. 219 and 221:

أن الله عالم في نفسه وأن العلم له بالعلم من السكاكية وافترق الذين قالوا أن الله لا يعلم الشيء حتى يكون على خمس عشرة مقالة: فقالت صفات ذاته غير أنه لا يوصف بأنه عالم حتى يكون الشيء فإذا كان قبل عالم به وما لم يكن الشيء لم يوصف عالم به لأن الشيء ليس وقالت طائفة من أهل التشبيه أن الله يعلم ما يكون قبل أن يكون إلا أعمال العباد فإنه لا يعلمها إلا في حال...وليس يصح العلم بما ليس كونها لأنه لو علم من يعصي ممن يطيع حال بين العاصي وبين المعصية.

50 Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 125.

that is not yet existent. If God cannot know something that is not yet existent, then this goes someway in avoiding a hard determinism.[51] Such implications no doubt would mean seriously adjusting the traditional understanding of an exhaustive divine omniscience to an omniscience restricted in scope, where the future remains epistemically 'open' to God. LA2 on the other hand upholds that although God foreknows all things, human actions are the exception. The motivation is clearly human freedom: God foreknowing an action before it occurs in time entails precluding human freedom and moral responsibility because it would no longer be meaningful to describe something as a 'sin' and its agent as a 'sinner'.[52] Moreover, on this view, a person by definition is not free if she is compelled to do something. If God is predicated with 'knowing' some act φ before it is performed, it would be incorrect until φ occurs. Hence, God would be predicated as knower of creaturely free acts in a *posterior* and not *prior* sense. In this way, on LA2, divine foreknowledge does not determine, like a direct cause, human acts because there is nothing that is yet known in order to determine it. By removing a cause (divine knowledge), any subsequent effect (human action) is also removed. This manoeuvre is argued to salvage some degree of creaturely freedom but at the expense of exhaustive foreknowledge. Thus, LA1 is a balancing act from below (i.e., the creaturely perspective). In order to uphold human freedom, the scope of omniscience is restricted.

A Compatibilist View

On to our third and final example, which is the compatibilist view. Here I briefly mention what is referred to as 'the acquisition doctrine' (*kasb*), developed by al-Ashʿarī from antecedent proto-*kasb* theories in the third/ninth century that were later finessed by its proponents and subsequently became the mainstream

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51 On this view, a non-existent object (*maʿdūm*) cannot be known because of at least three main reasons: (i) they are not causally efficacious, i.e., they cannot interact with anything and thus are epistemically inaccessible, (ii) they are not realities for truths about them to correspond, meaning there is nothing to be known and (iii) non-existence to existence would entail a change in the knower, i.e. in this instance an increase in God's knowledge making Him mutable. Wolfson on this remarked:

Knowledge of non-existent things ... was objectionable to the medievals on two main grounds. First, it was not true knowledge, if by truth is meant correspondence of the idea in the mind to an object outside the mind. Second, in the event the non-existent object became existent, it would imply a change of the knower.

The Philosophy of Spinoza, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1934), p. 27.

52 al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, vol. 1, p. 292 (ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd edn) and p. 221 (Ritter's edition).

Sunnī position on free will and human actions.[53] Linguistically, the word means 'earning', 'acquiring' and 'doing'. As technically explained by its proponents, *kasb* refers to a person's acquisition of an act that is created *ex-nihilo* in time by God in response to a movement of the will to act by that person.[54] In order to elaborate this terse phraseology, I am going to set it out in a sequence of statements regarding what can be called a minimalist account of *kasb* agreed by all its proponents. Nuances can be gained from consulting the references cited in the footnote. Let 'φ' be the act of raising the arm at some point in time.

- Person S desires to φ.
- S's desire is an act of her volition (will) to exercise some choice.
- God is timelessly Creator of all things in space-time, including φ.
- S as a created being therefore lacks any intrinsic power to φ. God acknowledging S's *desire* to φ creates in S the required *power* to φ by connecting that created power to the created act φ.
- When S does any act through the created power God has given her and through Him connecting a power to act, S is said to have *appropriated* or *acquired* the power to act and the act itself, but not to have *created* either one. In this way, S is still someone who does φ although through acquiring the power to do it by God.

The power generated or created in human beings by God is the means by which they are allowed to become the agents of the actions they desire to do, meaning the proximate cause of it. This mode of agency is in effect acquisition of something God creates. In other words, human beings are the acquirers (*muktasib*) of the acts that God creates for them through a power created for them (*bi-quwwa muḥdatha*) based on their willing to do that act. In effect, human beings are the temporal conduits of God's creative efficacy. God then, in a manner of stating it, sets everything up for S (act, power, and their connection) so that she can finally execute through her actions what S had originally willed to do: raise her arm. The relation of S's will in resolute fashion to perform an action is what grounds her moral responsibility and not the commission of the act itself. Thus, for a

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53 On specifically the doctrine of *kasb*, refer to Michael Schwarz, "'Acquisition' (*kasb*) in early Kalām", in *Islamic Philosophy and The Classical Tradition*, ed. Samuel M. Stern, Albert Hourani and Vivian Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 335-387; J. Meric Pessagno, "Irāda, Ikhtiyār, Qudra, Kasb: the View of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104 (1984), pp. 177-191 and Benyamin Abrahamov, "A Re-Examination of Al-Ashʿarī's Theory of Kasb According to Kitāb al-Lumaʿ", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 2 (1989), pp. 210-221.

54 See Fūdah, *al-Sharḥ al-Kabīr*, pp. 1195-1213.

person to possess choice, all that is required is her *act of will* to do something. There is no requirement for her to *create her action or even to perform it* because someone else could do it on her behalf or assist her in it. If she was *made to do something against her will, then it would be accurate to say she was forced or compelled to do it.*

The doctrine of *kasb*, an attempt it seems at a balance from both above and below, actually turns into a balance from above as it arguably collapses into the determinist view. This is because it upholds a number of determinist theses, one being, relevant for our present purposes, God's predestination of all things via His foreknowledge. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d.606/1209) mentions this thesis in his monumental commentary of the Qur'ān called *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* under Q 13:42:

> 'He knows what every soul does': He intends by that all creaturely actions are in God's knowledge (Most Exalted is He). Whatever is contrary to His knowledge is impossible for it to occur. If this is the case then everything that God knows will occur, will necessarily occur and everything that God knows will not occur, will necessarily not occur. If this is the case, then there is no real power for any creature to either do or refrain from an action. All of it then was from God.[55]

In another place, he emphasises the point as follows:

> Fourthly: when [God] (Most Exalted is He) determined something based on His wisdom and knows it will occur, then if that thing does not occur, it will entail making that very determination false and [His] knowledge ignorance and this is impossible.[56]

If human beings have the actual ability to do otherwise, i.e., if they exercise genuine free choice as agents who are the exclusive sources of their own actions, then this would entail making false God's foreknowledge. There are other theses that proponents of *kasb* also uphold that entail determinism but undoubtedly a rejection of libertarian free will is one of them. Hence, at strains to avoid inconsistency, the determinist, libertarian and compatibilist views all seek to

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55 See al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿat al-Bahiyya al-Miṣriyya, 1934), vol. 19, p. 168:

الوقوع، وإذا كان كذلك فكل ما علم الله وقوعه فهو واجب الوقوع، يريد أن أكساب العباد بأسرها معلومة لله تعالى، وخلاف المعلوم ممتنع الوقوع، وإذا كان كذلك فلا قدرة للعبد على الفعل والترك، فكان الكل من الله تعالى وكل ما علم الله عدمه كان ممتنع

56 al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, vol. 26, p. 171:

أنه تعالى لما اقتضت حكمته شيئا، وعلم وقوعه، فلو لم يقع ذلك الشيء لزم انقلاب ذلك الحكم كذبا وانقلاب ذلك العلم جهلا وهو محال

balance either from above or below and in so doing, cannot take propositions *O* and *A* as a conjunction. Let us now turn to the glutty account to see whether or not there is good reason to adopt it as a solution to theological fatalism.

The Glutty Account

In order to better see the proposed glut-theoretic account, we can set out the basic argument for theological fatalism with both our axioms *A* and *O* showing how the argument is logically valid on a FDE contradiction-tolerating logic.

Abbreviations:

A	=	Human beings have the ability to choose otherwise (i.e., they are free)
F	=	God has foreknowledge
O	=	God is omniscient
PAP	=	principle of alternative possibility
R	=	morally responsible for some action
F	=	free performance of an action

The Argument:

If God is omniscient, then He has foreknowledge
God is omniscient.
Therefore, God has foreknowledge [From 1, 2 Modus Ponens].
If human beings are free then God does not have foreknowledge.
Human beings are free (to choose otherwise).
Therefore, God does not have foreknowledge [From 4, 5 Modus Ponens].
Therefore, God both has and does not have foreknowledge.

Symbolically:

1. $O \supset F$
2. O
3. $\therefore F$
4. $A \supset {\sim}F$
5. A
6. $\therefore {\sim}F$
7. $\therefore F \bullet {\sim}F$

A core motivation for adopting a glutty (contradictory) approach is that the consistentising approaches of the Muslim determinists, libertarians and compatibilists result in giving up either one of the two axioms e.g., premises 3 or 5 (or other versions of them), or highly modifying them; both of which are a theological undesirability. This means rejecting outright 7 because logic on a consistentising view will not allow it to be ruled in. On the glutty view, however, the problem of theological fatalism is not a genuine problem – God's knowledge would be truly and fully glutty, i.e., its description would be given with nothing less than a contradiction. The inverse would also hold, namely the human ability to choose otherwise would be truly and fully glutty ($A \bullet \mathord{\sim} A$), i.e., its description would be given with nothing less than a contradiction. The dilemma then is generated not from God's foreknowledge and neither is it generated from human freedom; rather the dilemma arises "when the two are together – when they are entangled". This "glutty entanglement is a feature of any world within which both realities obtain".[57] Moreover, neither of the axioms are abandoned nor are they modified or 'thinned' to give a less than robust sense of each. Finally, neither axiom is false: God really and truly foreknows, and humans really and truly choose freely. What the theological fatalism dilemma brings to light is that both axioms A and O in conjunction are a contradiction. Both phenomena in their robust sense are achieved only via a genuine contradiction, a contradiction that can be accommodated within a logical system that affords a wider space of possibilities.[58]

The merits of such an account are many but mentioning two will suffice. The first merit is its *simplicity* and the second is its *resilience*.[59] Its simplicity lies in the fact that there is no need for ad hoc modifications to any aspect of the axiom like the meaning of terms, their scope or applications. Each axiom is accepted as the axiom is in its full expression and meaning. Its resilience, as it were, is because it is 'revenge' free, meaning it can accommodate any modified version of theological fatalism arguments that bounce back as a fresh dilemma or problem because the basis for which the dilemma or problem arises is diffused from the outset in that a contradiction is tolerated right from the bat.

Implications of a Glut-Theoretic Theology

In this fifth and final section, I examine some criticisms and wider-reaching implications on Islamic theology in adopting GTT with some general responses.

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57   De Vito, "Divine Foreknowledge", p. 5.

58   De Vito, "Divine Foreknowledge", pp. 5-6.

59   From De Vito, "Divine Foreknowledge", p. 6.

Such an adoption would take us into the frontier theology that I mentioned in the first section above.

Criticisms of Glut Theoretic Theology

In a recent published paper,[60] Abbas Ahsan has laid out a thorough critique of an Islamic contradictory theology (ICT) that merits serious consideration. Before examining some of his criticisms, a few brief points are necessary. The first point is that the details of Ahsan's criticisms need to be taken in light of a flurry of other papers he has written and not just from his most recent one attacking the viability of ICT. This will allow us to see a cumulative case that he puts forward. The second point is that the criticisms I present here are selective due to space constraints and so I do not consider the full ambit of his various arguments. The third point, related to the second, is that I have had to omit a lot of the technical discussions Ahsan gives and instead merely outline the primarily conceptual underpinning of his criticisms and hence urge readers to consult his various papers directly for those details.[61] Finally, a point on abbreviations. In this section, I will use ICT instead of GTT that I have been using throughout. This is because firstly both are generally synonymous and secondly ICT is used by Ahsan, which will make it easier for referencing purposes.

The Ineffable and Unknowable God

Ahsan's central argument against ICT is succinctly summarised in the following words:

> The under-lying mechanics of 'Contradictory Christology' cannot be extended and applied to a given Islamic theological contradiction. Thus, establishing that there can be no such thing as an Islamic contradictory theology.[62]

Unpacking the statement, Ahsan insists that the FDE sub-classical system of logic (or, as we shall see, *any* system of logic) outlined above in the second section and then utilised for our target theological contradictions discussed in

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60 Abbas Ahsan "Islamic Contradictory Theology . . . Is There Any Such Thing?", *Logica Universalis* 15 (2021), pp. 291-329.

61 For list of his works, see Abbas Ahsan, "Islamic Mystical Dialetheism: Resolving the Paradox of God's Unknowability and Ineffability", *Philosophia* (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11406-021-00452-1>, fn. 4.

62 Ahsan, "Islamic Contradictory Theology", fn. 7.

the third and fourth section is wholly inadequate in addressing contradictions (as he defines it) within Islamic theology. In order to present his argument in a structured way, I will divide this section into two parts: part one will be what I call his *general* ineffability argument and part two will be his *specific* ineffability argument. Once the general argument is understood, the latter specific argument is simply an instance of the former. Beginning with Ahsan's general ineffability argument then, its core components as I understand it, are the following two propositions:

a.   God is beyond the laws of logic.
b.   God is beyond any and all philosophical theories of truth.

We can take both propositions and construct his general ineffability argument formally as follows:

1.   If God is beyond the laws of logic and all philosophical theories of truth, then God is absolutely ineffable.
2.   God is beyond the laws of logic and all philosophical theories of truth.
3.   Therefore, God is absolutely ineffable.
4.   Therefore, God is a paradox (= a contradiction).

Abbreviations:

L   =   God is beyond the laws of logic
T   =   God is beyond all philosophical theories of truth
E   =   God is absolutely ineffable
P   =   God is a paradox

Symbolically:

1. $(L \bullet T) \supset E$
2. $L \bullet T$
3. $\therefore E$
4. $\therefore P$

Let me now explain the premises of the argument. Premises 1 and 2: It is important to mention first Ahsan's "radical notion of an Islamic God,"[63] because

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63   Ahsan, "Islamic Contradictory Theology", §7.

it is the plank on which his objections against ICT ultimately rest. This notion of God, basing it not on the Quran or Ḥadith but on remarks found in the works of Islamic thinkers like the philosopher Yaqūb b. Isḥāq al-Kindī (d.256/870), Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d.505/1111), the Sūfī metaphysician Ibn ʿArabī (d.637/1240) and others, is that God is both utterly unknowable and utterly ineffable.[64] Ahsan believes this is the true and proper conception of God in the Islamic tradition and the uncompromising axiom of that theology rendering it the true theology. His explanation is worth quoting in full:

> I shall assert that God transcends all human conceptions of time, space, categories, and our cognitive and linguistic capacities. God is therefore believed to be absolutely transcendent. As a result of such absolute transcendence, I shall infer that in the Islamic tradition, God is absolutely ineffable. The absolute ineffability that I have in mind is a radical type which eludes all thought and articulation of God. In this sense God would be incomprehensible and inexpressible. Let us term these as conceptual and semantic ineffability sequentially. By conceptual ineffability I mean logically inconceivable and by semantic ineffability I mean linguistically inexpressible. Combining these two types of ineffability would qualify it with an absoluteness that allows us to distinguish it from weaker forms of ineffability. Weaker forms in ineffability are types that would be inclined to making some form of concession. This would include granting an ability to either conceive or express a notion of God or both in order to avoid the paradoxical scenario it gives rise to.[65]

He understands God's utter transcendence (*tanzīh*) – we will write that with 'T' – as entailing absolute *ineffability* (let us label that as 'E') and total *unknowability* (labelled as 'U'). Thus: $T \vdash (E \cdot U)$. The conjunction of ineffability and unknowability, Ahsan argues, generates a paradox or a contradiction (I will retain his use of the Greek metalinguistic variable *b* to represent a contradiction), where $(E \cdot U) \vdash \beta$.[66] However, Ahsan argues that this contradiction generated by the conjunction of ineffability and unknowability is a *metaphysical* contradiction

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64   Ahsan, "Islamic Contradictory Theology", §3.1; idem, "The Paradox of an Absolute Ineffable God", *Philotheos* 19/2 (2019), pp. 245-246; idem, "The Logical Inconsistency in Making Sense of an Ineffable God of Islam", *Philotheos* 20 (2020), pp. 68-74 and idem, "Islamic Mystical Dialetheism", §2.2.

65   Ahsan, "The Paradox of an Absolute Ineffable God", p. 246.

66   He uses the word 'paradox' and 'mystery' as a synonym for a contradiction, see "The Paradox of an Absolute Ineffable God", p. 247 and idem, "Islamic Mystical Dialetheism", §2.2.

and not a *logical* contradiction (even though the system of classical logic was used to explicate it) because both classical logic and inconsistent or contradiction tolerating systems of logic (namely, sub-classical systems like strong Kleene, Logic of Paradox, FDE, etc) cannot properly account for it.[67] This is for two reasons: (i) the laws of logic define or impose the parameters of what is metaphysically possible, i.e. they etch the boundaries of what is real and not real and (ii) all such logical systems presuppose philosophically conventional theories of truth and these theories of truth (however divergent) further rely on truth to be something meaningful and declarative.[68] By taking truth as meaningful and declarative, we also impose both metaphysical and semantic constraints on our logical target (namely God). If we have such metaphysical and semantic constraints then this limits our capture about God and therefore undermines His utter transcendence, which is the fundamental axiom of what he believes is the true Islamic theology. On this, Ahsan comments:

> If the contradiction that β entails is tolerated by way of truth-valuations that are either substantive or insubstantive, it would impose a metaphysical and semantic constraint, respectively, on how we understand (or make sense of) β. The metaphysical and semantic constraints would thus confine our understanding of β to certain conceptual parameters and the scope in which these operate. Irrespective of the specific truth-theory that is adopted, it would infer that β is meaningful and declarative. To qualify for being meaningful and declarative would thus come at the cost of divesting God of His absolute transcendence. Paradoxically then, the very grounds upon which the Islamic contradictory theologian believes β, namely God's absolute transcendence, is compromised.[69]

When Ahsan insists that God is ineffable and unknowable (i.e., His being contradictory), it means God fully escapes all logical possibilities represented by the widest space that logic can admit. That includes four-valued logical systems like FDE that allow for the values true, false, neither (gappy) and both (glutty). It also includes any modal categories (necessity and possibility) applied to God because these categories also come with cognitive and semantic constraints, parameters and frames of reference, which would limit what we can say about God and therefore compromise His transcendence – again the very reality

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67   See his discussion in Ahsan, "Islamic Mystical Dialetheism", §§3.1-3.6.

68   Abbas Ahsan, "Beyond the Categories of Truth", *Axiomathes* (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10516-021-09581-4>

69   Ahsan, "Islamic Contradictory Theology", §4.1.

constituting the *raison d'être* for accepting God being a contradiction (ineffable) in the first place. Logic and language then cannot be our tools to help tolerate that contradiction. Another way he explains this is that the paradigm approach that employs logic and language as its guiding and defining method is analytic philosophy (and its intellectual cousin analytic theology) and due to this it cannot be employed for undertaking the task of dealing with ineffability.[70] What then is the way out of ineffability's contradictory 'grip'? Ahsan suggests that the correct solution for or mode of engaging with (accepting?) the contradiction is to leave behind the hyper-rationality of analytic philosophy and uphold a "mystical sense" of truth under what he has called "mystical dialetheism".[71] Ahsan argues that mystical truth "is a type that lies beyond all formal categories of truth", one that "does not consider truth to be meaningful and declarative" in the way western philosophical theories have explicated them "that impose metaphysical and semantic constraints."[72] Another way he characterises this is through using the term *mystery*, where God is "intelligible" but "undecipherable", "absolutely inaccessible" and "inconceivable". God must be kept free from "the contamination of reason" and must not be "philosophised under the conceptual parameters of human apprehension" as it is tantamount to a "form of idolatry" that "denigrates God's holiness".[73] Therefore, disengaging rational speculation from God is what

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70   Ahsan, "The Paradox of an Absolute Ineffable God", pp. 256-257. In two separate articles, Ahsan also argues that the approach of analytic theology fails to deal with ineffability because of its commitment to what he calls *metaphysical theological realism* and *epistemic theological realism*. See his "A Realist Approach in Analytic Theology and the Islamic Tradition", *Philosophy & Theology* 29/1 (2017), pp. 101-132, idem, "Analytic Theology and its Method", *Philotheos* 20/2 (2020), pp. 173-211 and idem, "Islamic Mystical Dialetheism", §4. In short, God-talk fails on a realist account because God is not a mind-independent reality like other objects that is accessible and human language cannot capture truths about God. To get a better appreciation of the sources and precedence of Ahsan's anti-realism objections, refer to the detailed discussion by Eberhard Herrmann in *Religion, Reality and a Good Life: A Philosophical Approach to Religion* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), pp. 41-181. For a brief overview of theological realism in the analytic tradition, see Peter Byrne's *God and Realism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 1-20.

71   See his "Islamic Mystical Dialetheism".

72   Ahsan, "Islamic Contradictory Theology", §4.2.

73   Ahsan, "Analytic Theology and its Method", pp. 202-208 and idem, "Islamic Mystical Dialetheism", §2.2. Ahsan's hard scepticism and strong pessimism echoes that that of Benedikt Göcke who provocatively claims that the majority of analytic philosophers of religion implicitly turn God into a finite entity despite their affirmation that He is infinite because they analyse Him with and subject His nature to the Law of Non-Contradiction, "The Paraconsistent God" in *Rethinking the Concept of a Personal God*, Thomas Shärtle, Christian Tapp and Veronika Wegener, eds. (Münster: Aschendorff, 2016), p. 189.

ultimately preserves God's transcendence and exaltedness, makes Him the proper object worthy of religious worship and is in fact what constitutes true faith of the Abrahamic variety. Conclusion: God is an ultra-reality, above rationality, supra-logical and beyond truth. With this general ineffability argument now outlined, we can move to Ahsan's specific ineffability argument – one that directly targets the impossibility of ICT. I will first present a formal version of Ahsan's argument, which I will call the Radical Ineffability Argument (RIA), and then briefly explain it:

RIA:

1. Necessarily, if God is transcendent, then He is utterly ineffable and utterly unknowable [theological axiom].[74]
2. Whatever is utterly ineffable and utterly unknowable is a contradiction [Definition].
3. If God is utterly ineffable and utterly unknowable, then it is impossible for God to be captured by any conceptual and linguistic categories [entailment of the axiom].[75]
4. Whatever is impossible to capture by any conceptual and linguistic category is a contradiction [Definition].
5. Therefore, God is a contradiction [From 2, 4].
6. All systems of logic function under conceptual and linguistic categories.
7. If all systems of logic function under conceptual and linguistic categories, then it is impossible for God to be captured by any system of logic.
8. Therefore, it is impossible for God to be captured by any system of logic [From 6, 7 Modus Ponens].
9. FDE is a system of logic.
10. Therefore, it is impossible for God as a contradiction to be captured by FDE [From 5, 6, 7, 8].

Premises 1-8 of RIA contain two mini but connected arguments and are just extended versions of his generic argument for ineffability. Premise 9 is the key premise. Ahsan goes to great lengths to explain how the sub-classical system of FDE, required to ground an ICT, contains all the God-constraining elements already highlighted regarding all other systems of logic, namely: FDE contains logical laws and FDE presupposes some philosophical theory of truth. Both of

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74   See Ahsan, "Islamic Contradictory Theology", §3

75   See Ahsan, "The Logical Inconsistency", p. 73; idem "The Paradox of an Absolute Ineffable God", p. 228 and idem "Beyond the Categories of Truth".

these facts about it impose cognitive and semantic constraints on what can be said about God; but God is considered to be beyond any conceptual and semantic constraints. More to the point, we cannot even claim that God is a being regarding whom some logical contradiction applies, i.e., it is true to say of God (whether His essence, attributes or actions) that f • -f. Why? Because the logical possibilities of true, false, neither and both on FDE do not exhaust the full range of possibilities when talking about God. In fact, on a radical ineffability doctrine we cannot say *anything* about God let alone that He is a logical contradiction since to do so would be to enclose Him in finite creaturely categories. Therefore, if a sub-classical logical system like FDE fails to capture God as a contradiction (transcendent, ineffable, unknowable) entailed by the true Islamic theology, then by extension, any theology like an Islamic contradictory theology that assumes or adopts FDE, will ipso facto fail as a system to capture the contradiction. As already mentioned, logic and language cannot be the horizon in which to tolerate the contradiction of God's ineffability – that, Ahsan tells us, we will have to capture with an altogether different paradigm.

Replies to the Objections

There are a few objections that I think problematises Ahsan's account as it stands. I will focus my objections on the very plank of his argument, which is his idea of God's absolute ineffability. His issue with FDE is derivative of and built around the ineffability idea. Whether FDE as system of logic can capture or describe what is possible about God (namely a contradiction) is secondary to whether God is describable with logical categories and concepts in the first place. My first objection then is regarding the concept of ineffability itself. Ahsan's claim that God is utterly ineffable and unknowable is never fully spelled out. For example, how it is derived from the sources of the theology (like the Quran and Hadith) as an axiom of that theology is not explained. He notes that readers must "acknowledge that there *exists* a notion of an unknowable and ineffable God within Islamic theology. Irrespective of how implausible it may seem"[76] and he acknowledges that he is not offering a "normative account" of any theological model of God but a stipulated one.[77] However, there are some points on this I would like to make. Firstly, it is indeed correct that his proposed notion of an ineffable God has some precedence in Islamic theological thinking, but it is arguable whether the Muslim figures he cites held to a totalising sense of

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76 Ahsan, "Islamic Contradictory Theology", §3 (author's emphasis).

77 Ahsan, "Islamic Contradictory Theology", §7.

ineffability that he upholds.[78] Secondly, even if they did, the point is how did ineffability become an axiom of the theology. Citing intellectuals that adhered to a version of the view cannot automatically make it an axiom. It has to at least be derived from the revelatory sources of the theology or entailment relations from the truths found in the revelatory sources. Otherwise, anything can be admitted into the theology. Theology is a theory about God so when we begin to construct or delineate the theology, we begin adding truths about what God is and is not from the revelatory sources. These truths entail other truths, i.e., certain claims follow from other claims. Governing the relation between one claim in the theology following from or being a consequence of another one in order to deem it an axiom will help us make the theology adequate to capture our target phenomenon (in this case God). Logic is a unique framework by which to govern the consequence relations between truths or claims in a theology. If consequence (closure) relations are not governed in any way, then we could not deny that from the truth that God exists and is the sole Creator of everything other than Himself that there is another co-Creator or that God caused Himself. Thus, we would fail to even uphold God's transcendence. Thirdly, claiming a view is not Islamically normative but at the same time arguing that any other conceptualisation of God is flawed, contrary to, incompatible with and compromises the real nature of God just *is* to assert a normative claim. One is in effect saying this is the true conception of God in Islam to the exclusion of all others. Fourthly, Ahsan's anti-realism (metaphysical and epistemic)[79] effectively leads to a denial of at least three things: (i) denial of God having an objective existence beyond humans as cognising agents, (ii) denial of any capacity of these agents to properly know or make true claims about God and (iii) denial of any means or ways for linking God as an objectively existing reality to a subjectively cognising agent. In sum, the entire enterprise of theology collapses because all three of these things are necessary for it. This would further mean the impossibility of characterising God as ineffable because that would be to make him an object of a subjective cognising agent. Ahsan's own endeavour, therefore, would be unable to take off. Lastly, it seems to me that Ahsan may be collapsing terms like ineffability, paradox, mystery and contradiction in an undifferentiated way (see my outlines of each in the first section). There are clear differences between each term, and some may carry unwanted implications for Ahsan's view where others may not. The nebulous way in which he uses these terms and manoeuvres them into his various arguments across his papers would be better served if they were clarified in a more precise way.

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78 Ahsan too acknowledges this.

79 Ahsan, "Beyond the Categories of Truth" and idem, "A Realist Approach", pp. 111-120.

My second objection, following on from and related to the first, is that the revelatory sources of Islam do uphold proper claims about God. There can be an informed and deep knowability. How we know that this is the case is derived from what God has informed about Himself in the Quran and what the Prophet Muḥammad has described via revelation. God does not seem to have revealed any doctrine about radical ineffability of the kind Ahsan suggests. Rather, the Qur'ān indicates that there are truths about divinity that can be grasped by the creatures He has created and other truths that follow as consequence. I will mention three examples which I think will suffice for making the point. Take for example Q 47:19 that contains the command by God to "know that there is no deity except Allah," where commentators explain that the knowledge must be 'firm', i.e., established and proven. The command to 'know' assumes there can be a proper object of knowledge, which in this case can be read as propositional knowledge that God alone is worthy of total worship, obedience, submission and love and not an internal witnessing.[80] Another example is Q 7:31 where it warns against "saying things about God of which you have no knowledge." Seriously misspeaking and misinforming about God implies there must be correct knowledge and information with which God is spoken about.[81] Finally, the Quran is replete with God's beautiful names (*asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*), which are pointers to God's character and how He engages with His creation. These names therefore reveal something about God's reality sufficient for us to make accurate knowledge claims about it.[82] None of this presupposes that in order to know anything about God, creatures have to directly "tap into" and somehow possess "epistemic admittance into apprehending God in all His divine glory."[83]

My third objection is that the very categories employed by for example al-Ghazālī (Ahsan cites him most often and takes him as his exemplar)[84] to establish God's absolute ineffability are themselves conceptual and linguistic categories. Terms like 'substance', 'body', 'substrate', 'genus', 'species' and 'differentia' etc., are philosophical and logical categories adopted by medieval Muslim thinkers from their Hellenic predecessors. According to Ahsan, these categories cannot capture anything about God (in fact they will limit Him); but they were nevertheless

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80   al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunna* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2005), vol. 9, p. 274.

81   al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunna*, vol. 4, p.411.

82   On an explication of these names, refer to al-Ghazālī's *al-Maqṣad al-Asnā fī Sharḥ Asmā' Allah al-Ḥusnā*, tr. by David Burrell and Nazih Daher as *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1992).

83   Ahsan, "A Realist Approach", p. 119.

84   See Ahsan, "The Paradox of an Absolute Ineffable God", p. 245 and idem, "Islamic Mystical Dialetheism", §2.2.

used to establish the claim that God is ineffable. Extending this point, even Ahsan demonstrating that God is a contradiction (transcendent, a paradox, mystery, ineffable, unknowable) required him to do so by using the law of non-contradiction and indeed human categories and expressions. It seems odd how inadequate conceptual and linguistic categories – creaturely constructs no doubt – are used to justify a doctrine that requires or entails their very repudiation. The circularity warrants clarification.

My final objection is whether God freed from any rational speculation is even Abrahamic as Ahsan suggests. It does not seem so (at least according to the Quran). Muslim exegetes of the Quran have extensively commented on Q 6:74-83, which recounts how Prophet Abraham arrived at the conclusion that there was only one single and unique Lord "Who originated the heavens and the earth" [85] from observing the finite nature of celestial and astral objects like the stars, the moon and the sun.[86] He was thus held to be reasoning from perceptible data to the conclusion that the object worthy of total worship could not be like any finite entity. A conclusion he reached not through a retreat into sheer mystery but reflection and observation, and this inference by Abraham was acknowledged by God without censure.[87] Therefore, it seems that what is closer to the Abrahamic way is indeed an intellectual contemplation where realities and truths are arrived at through some process of reasoning and not an antagonism towards its use. Thus, although this short section has not presented the contours of Ahsan's sceptical arguments in its full richness and depth, it has highlighted how the tension of God-talk endures within Islamic theological discourse even today and how questions still remain about how optimistic we can really be in reason's ability to capture truths about God as the supreme reality.

Implications on Islamic Theology

The implications of a GTT on Islamic theology are arguably far-reaching. Chowdhury has highlighted some of the new territory of complications arising from adopting it. I will not rehearse them here due to reasons of space.[88] In addition to those complications highlighted by Chowdhury, I will add two further worries. The first is the danger of the *relativisation* of theological claims. If we take logic as *normative*, meaning a standard or binding criterion for how

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85   Q 6:79.

86   Q 6:76-78.

87   See al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunna*, vol. 4, pp. 135-144 and al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, vol. 13, pp. 26-65 for an extensive discussion

88   I defer the reader to Chowdhury, "God, Gluts and Gaps", pp. 37-40.

we *ought to reason*, then an obvious problem arises. For example, if person S_1 conceives of what is ruled in or out within a model of her theology based on one theory of validity or consequence (i.e., her logical system), call that L_1, then S_1 would be bound by the normativity of L_1, because it is a system of logic. If another person S_2 conceives of what is ruled in or out within the same model of theology but based on another differing theory of validity or consequence (i.e., a different logical system), call that L_2, then person S_2 would be bound by the normativity of L_2, because it too is a system of logic. If L_1 and L_2 are both normative, then both their entailments are normative. This would further imply admitting as valid any theological belief based on any system of logic. In short, we would have to accept *logical pluralism*, the position that there are in fact any number of equally meritorious and virtuous but distinct logical systems according to which different arguments come out valid and invalid. No one system, on logical pluralism, is any more correct (truer) than any other.[89] If there is no one true logic – the view known as *logical monism* – then choosing one logical system over another would be primarily an arbitrary matter, thereby lending itself to a relativistic conception of theology.

The second worry is related to what I am describing as the *normativity of an exemplary community*. The Prophet Muḥammad stated that his community of Companions and the successive two generations (from 632 CE to the close of the ninth century CE)[90] that comprise the 'righteous predecessors' (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*, or 'Salaf' for short), are the exemplary generations and fall under the Prophet's praise of their excellence and virtue. The *Salaf* are thus considered by the Muslim community as the ideal embodiment of the teachings and exemplary practitioners of the correct theology. This grants them a theologically (scripturally) endowed normative status.[91] Given this, it may be argued that the *Salaf* appear to assume or are working with a narrow space of possibilities, whereby contradictions constitute a reason for or a basis on which to exclude or reject any doctrine that asserts a contradiction or entails one. In other words, although their view of what counts as an instance of logical consequence is not privileged (the *Salaf* generally avoided logic and rational theology anyway), they do nevertheless have privileged knowledge about religious matters (due to their proximity to the Prophet, more authentic understanding and overall general pietistic outlook)

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89   See Jc Beall and Greg Restall, *Logical Pluralism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

90   There are of course differences on the exact closing generational demarcation for who is included under the category 'salaf' that results in various dates ranging from 800-900 CE. For an overview on the linguistic and technical definition *al-salaf*, refer to Saʿd al-ʿAjmī, *Ḥujjiyyat Fahm al-Salaf: al-Naẓariyya wa-l-Taṭbīq* (Beirut: Dār Madārik li-l-Nashr, 2018), pp. 47-56

91   See "Al-Salaf wa-l-Khalaf", *EI²*, vol. 8, pp. 900a-b (Éric Chaumont).

and so are in a position to identify what the scope of the theology-specific consequence relations are in the target theology and this carries a normativity. If it is the case that a theory-specific consequence relation may rule out gluts, then perhaps there is a theology-specific consequence relation that is non-glutty as identified by or suggested by the *Salaf*. What this would further imply is that the *Salaf* upheld a consistency-driven theology and not an inconsistent one. This objection no doubt is a matter that needs further investigation and analysis and one that cannot possibly be evaluated here. The objection was mentioned merely to raise an additional point of consideration for a paraconsistent (glut-tolerant) Muslim who advocates a GTT. There is then, much left to investigate and work out when we allow revelation to uphold glutty (and perhaps gappy) possibilities. Such an investigation will inevitably take us further into the space of frontier Islamic theological thinking.

Logical Abbreviations

Symbol	Meaning
x, y, z	objects
p	a proposition
□	the necessity operator
◇	the possibility operator
≡	logical equivalence (if and only if)
⊃	lhe conditional (if-then)
~	negation (not)
∨	disjunction (either or)
•	conjunction (and)
∃	existential quantifier (some)
∀	universal Quantifier (all)
∴	therefore

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Supplication as Divine Communication in the Quran

Seyfeddin Kara

Introduction

The Arabic word *du'ā* means supplication or invocation, which refers to the act of petitioning God for help or requests.[1] The Quran, Hadith and Muslim supplication manuals include various supplications that establish direct communication with God. According to Muslim theology, God's formal communication with his creatures occurs through his appointed prophets, who, having received Divine revelation through the mediumship of angels, then convey it to the people of their communities. The holy scripture thus revealed provides people with an explanation of the purpose of creation; contains moral and ethical wisdom derived from the stories of previous nations and prophets; and warns them about the imminent coming of the Day of Judgement as well as promoting the idea of eternal life in the next phase of humankind's journey towards God. However, it leaves it to the people themselves, in the end, to decide on their attitude towards this message.

According to Islamic teachings, aside from this formal method of divine communication, every creature has an informal form of free and open access to God without the medium of prophets. This secondary form of divine communication is *du'ā* or supplication. According to Muslim theology, supplications are a free form of connection to God. Supplication is fundamentally different from other Islamic rituals and acts of worship, which are in general strictly regulated, commanded

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1   Hamid Algar translates a technical definition of supplication as "seeking the occurrence or non-occurrence of a thing with a wording that combines the praise and exaltation of God with the confession of one's own weakness and helplessness" (M. ʿAlī Tahānawī, *Kaššāf eṣṭelāḥāt al-fonūn* Istanbul, 1984. cited in H. Algar, 'Doʿā', *Encyclopedia Iranica*, VII:452–56, 1995.

and conditioned. There may, however be certain pre-settings for a successful supplication, such as a sincere and humble heart, a state of being in absolute dependence on God, which could enhance the effect of supplication.[2] Furthermore, it is believed that supplication is a universal phenomenon. So long as individuals believe in a creator, there is no requirement of being a Muslim to make a petition to God as He issues open invitations to everyone: "Invoke me, and I will respond to you"[3] or "What would my Lord care for you if not for your supplication?"[4] "Is He [not best] who responds to the desperate one when he calls upon Him and removes evil…"[5] A more striking example of this effect is "And when they board a ship, they supplicate God, sincere to Him in religion. But when He delivers them to the land, they associate others with Him at once."[6] The verse implies that while the supplications of faint-hearted believers are most certainly acceptable to God, even the sincere supplication of polytheists may be accepted.

Since it is a simple and intimate communication process between the Creator and created, without any formalities, this communication can be established in any language and location.[7] In this vein, Constance Padwick, based on the most comprehensive study of Muslim scriptures, captures the intimate essence of divine communication performed in Muslim supplication, saying, "When a man is at his prayer-rite he is in intimate converse with (*yunājī*) his Lord."[8]

Moreover, the Quranic verses indicate that God takes this intimate connection seriously and promises to respond to legitimate supplications within the boundaries of divine wisdom. The boundaries seem to have been established in the following verse:

> And remember that Abraham was tried by his Lord with specific commands, which he fulfilled: He said: 'I will make thee an Imam to the Nations.' He pleaded: 'And also (imams) from my offspring!' He answered: 'But My Promise is not within reach of evil-doers'.[9]

2　　Algar, 'Doʿā', op.cit.

3　　Q 40:60.

4　　Q 25:77.

5　　Q 27:62.

6　　Q 29:65.

7　　Hamid Algar notes that "In principle the petitioner may formulate his own *doʿā*, in any language of his choosing, but prayers in Arabic and hallowed by tradition are generally preferred as a matter of practice." See: Algar, 'Doʿā', p. 452.

8　　Constance E Padwick, *Muslim Devotions: A Study Of Prayer-Manuals In Common Use*, London, Archegos, 1969, p. 11.

9　　Q 2:124.

The verse is one of the most striking examples in Muslims scripture of the power and efficacy of intimate communication that believers can have with God. Yet it also shows the limits of supplication by giving an example of when or how a supplication may be declined, even if it comes from one of His most trusted agents. God may grant spiritual and material qualities to individuals for their achievement or simply because of their willingness to Him, thus acknowledging His power, generosity and the feebleness of human existence. Yet, God does not upset the delicate balance built upon the preservation of human free will. So long as individuals make a conscious decision to follow the path of ungodliness, it is contrary to God's wisdom to turn their hearts to faith, let alone make them leaders or role models to preserve it. Therefore, while God elevates the status of Abraham to the highest level of human existence, He in His wisdom declines the request to extend his position of leadership to his offspring, or at least not to all of them.In this vein, this verse establishes boundaries of the influence of supplication over the material and spiritual realms of human existence. As I will note below, the Quran portrays God as extremely generous in granting supplicants' petitions that may easily change the course of causally mediated events, conditions and boundaries that dominate human life in this world. Despite its informal nature, reading through Muslim scripture, one quickly notices that God provides templates for successful supplications in His formal communication – namely, Divine revelation – owing to its great power over all physical and spiritual realms. The relevant verses of the Quran demonstrate God's eagerness to teach people how to present reasonable requests, whether they pertain to this corporeal realm or to the spiritual, immaterial realms beyond our immediate perception. This is most often done by quoting the prophets' supplications in the Quran. These supplications are mentioned in the Quran to teach people what and how to ask from their Creator. Most significantly, but less often, God engages directly in the process of supplication and teaches his creatures how and what to ask from Him directly.

This chapter will analyse divine communication in Muslim scriptures, most specifically the Quran, within the framework of supplications, and will explore the guidance of God for successful supplication. It will also argue that supplication as a component of Creator-creature communication is related essentially to the spiritual realm but may also be used to petition God for the material needs one has and the felicity one aspires to in this corporeal realm. It will survey some of the most relevant Quranic verses in which supplications are mentioned, both in the form of supplications offered by prophets and other pious individuals, and God's suggestions for the best forms of petitioning. Before examining the relevant verses of the Quran, I will discuss briefly a number of previous studies on supplication in the Muslim tradition.

Study of Attitudes towards Muslim Supplication

Constance E Padwick's *Muslim Devotions: A Study Of Prayer-Manuals In Common Use* is still the most important study of supplication in the field of Muslim liturgy.[10] It studies, along with selective verses of the Quran and examples from the hadith, manuals and collections of supplications from a range of Sunni, Shi'ite and Sufi sources, focusing on some of the critical concepts related to supplications such as prostration, worship and remembrance. This pioneering anthropological and textual study was instrumental in introducing the vast living culture of supplication in the Muslim world, but unfortunately no substantial research has followed it. Therefore, the study of Muslim supplication in Muslim scripture and culture remains almost completely unexplored. However, some brief studies of Muslim supplication culture and short research articles followed in Padwick's footsteps, and I will briefly mention them below.

Hamid Algar's brief encyclopaedia entry on supplication provides an important reference on supplication in Sunni, Shi'ite and Sufi traditions.[11] He briefly elaborates on the supplication practice in Muslim culture, focusing on the Sufi and Shi'ite practices as evidenced in modern Iran. Colin Turner's research on the Twelver Shi'ite supplication manuals was perhaps the only work dedicated explicitly to studying supplication in Muslim culture after a few decades of Padwick's work. Turner, building upon Padwick's study, focuses mainly on two monumental Shi'ite supplication collections: the *Ṣaḥīfa Sajjādiyya*, ascribed to the fourth Shi'ite Imam Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (d. 95/714) and the *Mafātīḥ al-jinān*, authored by ʿAbbās b. Muḥammad Riḍā Qummī (d. 1940), which contains over 600 supplications.

In her crucial work *Prayer in Islamic Thought and Practice*, Marion Holmes Katz allocates a short yet insightful section to Muslim supplication practice, especially in terms of providing attitudes of Muslim legal scholars to supplication.[12] Sayeh Meisami's outstanding study of "Mulla Sadra on the Efficacy of Prayer (Duʿā)"[13] documents an analysis of the esoteric interpretation of the supplication among Muslim mystics and philosophers with a focus on Mulla Sadra. Finally, Karim Samji's important recent work *The Quran: A Form-Critical History* studies

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10   Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*. (cited in full on p. 3).

11   Algar, 'Doʿā', pp. 452-456.

12   M. H. Katz, *Prayer in Islamic Thought and Practice*, Themes in Islamic History, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139034333>.

13   S. Meisami, 'Mullā Ṣadrā on the Efficacy of Prayer (Duʿā)', *Journal of Sufi Studies* 4, no. 1–2, 2015. 59–83, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22105956-12341276>.

some of the supplication verses of the Quran comparatively with narratives in the Gospels on supplication according to the form-critical method.[14]

One gathers from the studies mentioned above that there are significantly different approaches to supplication in Muslim traditions. For example, both Padwick and Turner emphasise the significance of supplication in the everyday life of Muslim communities: supplication is considered a way of connecting with the Creator and manifesting one's religious identity and convictions. Padwick focuses on the importance of supplication for seeking forgiveness and refuge, blessing and self-purification. In addition to highlighting the spiritual significance of supplication in Shi'ite supplication manuals for spiritual purification, Turner also focus on intention (*niya*) included in some supplications which render them channels of petition for the bestowal of material attainments.

For example, Turner's study of Shi'ite supplication manuals notes that common believers have recourse to supplicatory prayer not only for spiritual advancement but also as a means of attaining worldly needs. For instance, the exhortation to "Free me from need, expand Your provision towards me"[15] demonstrates explicitly that the faithful do not harbour spiritual aspirations alone, but that they also petition the Creator for the material means they believe will give them a happy and stable life. However, the faithful are always advised to exercise caution with regard to the temptations of material wealth, which may give them a false sense of pride and ungratefulness. This is shown in the phrase "and do not tempt me with ingratitude! Exalt me, but do not afflict me with pride!", [16] which appears directly after the utterance of need for material bestowals. There seems to be two reasons why strive to attain a happy and comfortable life: first, so that they are better able to praise God for the provisions that He may bestow on them and thus inculcate in them the feeling that they are not needy of anyone else but God; and second, so that they may share their material happiness with their loved ones and others in society in order to alleviate suffering or increase happiness. This is exemplified in the entreaty, "Let good flow out from my hands to the people, but do not let it become corrupted by my making them feel obliged!"[17]

This notion of gaining material wealth through supplication in order to be able to share that wealth aligns with the feeling of social solidarity and respect for the rights of one's fellow man that is central to Islam. Islam is not an individualistic belief system: it is a social religion, and the religious scriptures

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14   K. Samji, *The Qur'ān: A Form-Critical History*, Boston, De Gruyter, 2018.

15   C. Turner, 'Aspects of Devotional Life in Twelver Shi'ism', p. 391.

16   Ibid.

17   Ibid.

teach that God is pleased with the collective happiness of his creation in this world and afterlife. The Quran constantly emphasises the need for individuals to attend to the needs of the family, of relatives and society in general, and to strive for collective happiness in both realms – the here-and-now and the hereafter – while avoiding pitfalls such as pride, ungratefulness and a false sense of power. Another important Shi'ite supplication text, the 'Supplication of Abū Ḥamza al-Thumālī' (d. 150/767), which is included in the *Mafātīḥ al-jinān* and was attributed to the fourth Shi'ite Imam Zayn al-ʿĀbīdīn (d. 95/713), makes the theme of worldly happiness explicit in the Supplication of Sustenance:

> "... O Lord, grant me from Your vast provision and the abundance of Your favours, wealth that will suffice me and support me in my time of need. Remove from me the misfortunes that befall me and repel from me the afflictions that trouble me. Let me not be afflicted with the loss of wealth or the distress of poverty. Enrich me from Your bounty and make me among those who enjoy Your abundant favours and Your infinite grace..."[18]

However, Meisami draws attention to a form of an elitist or esoteric form of understanding of religion represented by philosophers and some mystics who contend that only perfect souls can connect with God through supplication. It would appear that despite the simple and intimate nature of supplication as understood from Muslim scriptures, some very prominent Sufis and philosophers seem to have complexified it by making something of an exclusivist practice. Some of them have claimed that only the perfected beings such as prophets, Imams and other such holy persons can utilise such powerful tools effectively. One of the greatest Shi'ite mystic philosophers, Mulla Sadra (d. 1635/40), who was influenced by the great Sunni mystic philosopher Ibn Arabi (d. **638**/1240) and by Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), is arguably one of the foremost examples of this kind of elitist understanding. Mulla Sadra's philosophical doctrine of substantial motion (*al-ḥarakat al-jawhariyya*) contends that the whole world moves towards perfection and the human soul is an evolving entity that is capable of crossing over from the physical realm to higher spiritual realms in this world as a result of this essential and continuous motion. When a human soul ascends to the station of what Ibn Arabi calls the 'perfect man' (*al-insān al-kāmil*), the possessor of that soul is said to be able to have influence over the physical realm. And the primary tool of the perfected soul for making changes to the physical world is invocation or communication with God. Mulla Sadra argues that the perfect human is able

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18 Abū Ḥamza al-Thumālī, *Mafātīḥ al-jinān,* Online Copy: <http://www.duas.org/downloads/mafatih_al_jinan.pdf>, p. 1020.

to "cross over all times and spaces and can bring physical objects under control in the same way that the souls control bodies."[19] This is the domain where supplication is used as a link between the human and the divine in order to bring about certain effects in the world:

> And this is possible since it has been proved in theology that the matter submits to the souls and is influenced by them, and that the natural forms (al-ṣuwar al-kawniyya) succeed one another in the matter under the influence of the heavenly souls. And the human souls are of the same substance as the heavenly souls, strongly resembling them, because their relation to them is like that of children to their parents. Thus, the human soul affects matter in this world, although it is often through the effusion of its effect over a certain domain, that is, her body... And at times the soul may reach such a degree of sagacity and purification from bodily concerns and sensual pleasures that there shall be bestowed on her from the Supreme Origin (al-mabdả al-a'lā) such a power and dignity by which the soul becomes influential on the world of natural elements (al-'ālam al-'anāṣir). As a result, the soul would heal the sick, sicken the evil, transform one element into another, and move those objects that she is not typically capable of moving like in unhinging the...."[20]

Mulla Sadra, like Ibn Arabi, believes that only perfect beings such as prophets, Imams and other such pious and perfected persons can make changes in the physical realm through the use of invocations or supplications. The imperfect beings or common people may not be able to take advantage of the power of invocation.[21] However, it must be noted that it seems Mulla Sadra is referring mainly to the power of the soul, which may have no direct or exclusive bearing on the power of invocation as such. What Mulla Sadra seems to argue is that once souls reach a very high status, they are able to influence the material world in various ways and by various means, with supplication being one of them. It is difficult to assume that Mulla Sadra questioned the efficacy of the common people's use of invocation and the possibility of God's response to these supplications, despite their lower spiritual status.

Furthermore, Mulla Sadra believes that invocation is not merely a simple act of making requests from God, but rather something which is in itself a form of worship that connects God and His creatures. Invocation enables petitioners

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19   Meisami, 'Mulla Sadra on the Efficacy of Prayer (Du'ā)', p. 70.

20   Ibid.

21   ibid., pp. 63–68.

to acknowledge their weakness and dependency on God, which thus leads to a higher level of spiritual awareness and purification:

> And from the benefits of prayer are the proclamation of humbleness (dhill) and brokenness (inkisār), confession to weakness and poverty, the correction of our relation of servanthood ('ubūdiyya) and our immersion in the excess of contingent deficiency (nuqṣān al-imkānī) and the fall from the zenith of highness and sufficiency to the bottom of degradation and needfullness and poverty and fearfulness.[22]

It may be possible that the apparently elitist position of Ibn Arabi[23] and Mulla Sadra regarding the need to become a perfect being before one can establishing true communication with God may have been influenced by earlier mystics such as ʿAbdullāh b. Mubārak (d. 797), who went so far as to claim that "it is about fifty years that I have not prayed nor wished that anyone should pray for me."[24] However, there are also reasons to doubt the influence of ʿAbdullāh b. Mubārak on our two mystic philosophers and their later approach to supplication and/ or invocation. In this regard, Hamid Algar draws attention to the problematic aspect of supplication for Sufi asceticism and the practice of self-denial in general:

> Despite all the foregoing, do'ā appeared problematic to many Sufis because of its connotations of concern for the self and the tension or even contradiction that they perceived between it and the virtues of reżā (satisfaction with divine decree), taslīm (surrender), and tafwīż (assignation of one's affairs to God).[25]

The often fatalistic interpretation of the faith by some Sufi adepts led to supplication being seen as a subtle form of protest against the divine will, thus rendering it difficult to come to terms with. Therefore, it is possible that Sufi masters who lived before Ibn Arabi had a different reason for their cautious approach to supplication. Nevertheless, between the two wide spectrums of views on supplication, the mainstream Sunni position is one which acknowledges that

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22 Ibid., pp. 74–75.

23 See, H. Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi*, trans. R. Manheim, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1969, p. 248.

24 A. Schimmel, 'Some Aspects of Mystical Prayer in Islam', *Die Welt Des Islams* 2, no. 2, 1952, p. 112. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1569044>.

25 Algar, 'Do'ā', p. 454.

supplication is accessible to everyone, and that one may use it to petition God for both spiritual and material needs, so long as they are licit:

> In another early report, in contrast, Ibn Ḥanbal is said to have declared, "There is no harm in a man's supplicating (*an yad'uwa*) for all of his needs relating to this world and the next." The great Ḥanbalī scholar Ibn Qudāma endorsed the latter view but cautioned that "it is not permissible for him to make a prayer in his ṣalāt by which he aims at the indulgences and pleasures of this world, and that resembles the speech and wishes of human beings, such as 'O God, give me a pretty slave girl, a spacious house, good food, and a pretty garden.'" In contrast, al-Shāfiʿī is supposed to have emphasised that one could pray however, and for whatever, one liked.[26]

Supplication and/or Invocation in the Quran

In addition to the verses mentioned above, there are other Quranic verses that encourage people to invoke God for their needs:

> "And when My servants ask you, [O Muhammad], about Me – indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me."[27]

> "Invoke your Lord humbly and in private..."[28]

> "Invoke Him in fear and hope..."[29]

These are examples of verses addressed to believers in which God asks them to invoke Him when they, or indeed others, are in need; He then reassures people that He is near and will respond to the invocations, especially those which come from humble, fearful, distressed and hopeful hearts. Moreover, supplications that are made in private seem to be more effective as they are likely to be more intimate and sincere. It appears that the recipe for successful supplication is simple: first, faith in an all-powerful God is a precondition, as those invoking Him should trust wholeheartedly that there is an omnipotent and omniscient Creator Who listens to His creatures and is able to bestow favour and bounties

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26   Katz, *Prayer in Islamic Thought and Practice*, p. 34.

27   Q 2:186.

28   Q 7:55.

29   Q 7:56.

on them when they call on Him. In other words, the main ingredient needed to connect with God is a humble, fearful, desperate and hopeful heart; without this, it is questionable whether one would be able to expect to receive His individual mercy and blessing.

The emphasis of Q 2:186 on the proximity of God is noteworthy. Muslim exegetes of the Quran considered attaining a state of nearness (*qurba*) to God vital in a successful supplication. In his interpretation of the above verse, Zamakhsharī focuses on the proximity of God to His creatures, which enables Him to respond to invocation speedily.[30] Rāzī makes considerable effort to prove that this proximity is clearly spiritual-immaterial rather than physical. He further connects the verse to the previous verse pertaining to people who fast in Ramadan and glorify God,[31] which qualifies believers to be "near" to God.[32] Hence, for Rāzī, acceptance of the supplication is conditional on fulfilling the condition of remembering and obeying God, which gives the impression that Rāzī believes being a Muslim is also a condition for invocations to be accepted.

However, it appears that for the Shi'ite scholar 'Allāma Muhammad Ṭabāṭabā'ī, accepting one of the monotheistic faiths is the only requirement; in other words, petitioning God and God alone is the sole condition for the acceptance of invocations.[33] The word "distressed", mentioned in Q 27:62, is believed by Muslim exegetes in general to refer to a state of being needy in the face of worldly calamities such as illness and poverty. In this state of distress, if one invokes God, He then responds to the invoker's call. Again, there is no precondition of being a perfect human in this verse for supplications to be accepted. But it appears that in Muslim theology, strong and focused human emotions are extremely important if one is to connect with God. Emotions seem to act almost like radio frequencies that tune with the right channels to convey the individual petitions uttered by the human tongue to God. In this sense, the role of human emotions in religious devotion from Islamic perspective may require further studies.

Perhaps one of the most compelling pieces of evidence for the connection of strong human emotions with the success of invocation appears in sura *'Ankabūt*:

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30 al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl wa 'uyūn*, vol. 1, Beirut, Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1987, p. 228–29.

31 Q 2:185.

32 al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr Al-Kabīr*, vol. 5, Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1981, p. 108–12.

33 M. Tabatabai, *Al-Mizān Fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 2, Qom: Ismā'īlīyān, 1985, p. 31–41.

And when they board a ship, they supplicate Allah, sincere to Him in religion. But when He delivers them to the land, at once they associate others with Him.[34]

Aside from providing a compelling example of human ungratefulness towards divine blessings, what makes this verse more remarkable is that it explicitly refers to polytheists, who, in moments of distress, turn to God alone (*mukhliṣīna lahū al-dīn*) and invoke Him for their safety. But when God then responds to their invocation – see Q 27:62 – by delivering them to land safely, they go back to their state of polytheism. In such situations, an all-knowing God is without doubt aware of their transient embracing of the faith and yet He does not rebuff their request. According to the verse, a moment of sharply focused emotion – the emotion of desperation – overcomes the unbelief which veils the soul, and this sincerity of heart immediately triggers God's response to their invocation. It is almost a mechanical process that seems to be operating in the spiritual realm. In this sense, God, in accepting supplications, does not discriminate based on religious conviction or the level of faith accumulated in the heart. His main criterion is the sincerity of the heart, whether it is transient or long-lasting, once this condition is fulfilled, God seems to respond to supplications habitually.

The Quran also encourages people to supplicate through its mentioning the invocations of previous prophets who needed support, protection, reassurance and victory in their struggle against their enemies. The outcome of these supplications is also mentioned in the Quran in order to increase the believer's conviction that his or her supplications will be answered. For example, when Adam acknowledges his error in a sincere and remorseful supplication,[35] God responds to him positively and forgives both him and his wife.[36]

When, frustrated, Noah invokes God for help against the elites of his community who were sworn enemies to his mission to reform the societal corruption, he says: "My Lord, support me because they have denied me'".[37] God answers Noah's call with the news that he and his followers will be delivered to safety, but that his enemies will perish with the deluge.[38] The Quran also mentions Abraham's invocation to God to sanctify Mecca, to grant provisions to its residents and to guide him and his offspring:

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34 Q 29:65.

35 Q 7:23.

36 Q 2:37.

37 Q 23:26.

38 Q 23:27.

> And [mention, O Muḥammad], when Abraham said, 'My Lord, make this city [Makka] secure and keep me and my sons away from worshipping idols. My Lord, indeed they have led astray many among the people. So whoever follows me – then he is of me; and whoever disobeys me – indeed, You are [yet] Forgiving and Merciful. Our Lord, I have settled some of my descendants in an uncultivated valley near Your sacred House, our Lord, that they may establish prayer. So make hearts among the people incline toward them and provide for them from the fruits that they might be grateful. Our Lord, indeed You know what we conceal and what we declare, and nothing is hidden from Allah on the earth or in heaven. Praise to Allah, who has granted to me in old age Ishmael and Isaac. Indeed, my Lord is the Hearer of supplication. My Lord, make me an establisher of prayer, and [many] from my descendants. Our Lord, and accept my supplication.[39]

The Quran confirms that God responded to his supplications by sanctifying the entire city of Mecca, including its plants and animals.[40] According to the Quran, based on this supplication, God even today draws people to this sacred place thousands of years after Abraham died, indicating God's response to Abraham's supplication is still in effect. In Islamic theology, this is arguably an example of the immortality of the human soul in terms of affecting the affairs of the physical world. A sincere soul who can focus his or her emotions on a legitimate cause may leave an immortal legacy that is more powerful than anything else. Finally, the verse also mentions Abraham's firm conviction and hope that God will respond to his supplications.

That the Quran inspires believers to invoke God is also emphasised in the accepted invocations of the other prophets mentioned in its verses. Examples include the answered prayers of Lot (Q 29:31), Joseph (Q 12:101), Moses (Q 10:88), Solomon (Q 27:19), Zachariah (Q 3:38) and Jesus (Q 5:114). However, one of the most striking invocations mentioned in the Quran comes not from a prophet but from the mother of Mary, Jesus's mother, who implores God for her daughter's protection:

> [Mention, O Muḥammad], when the wife of ʿImrān said, 'My Lord, indeed I have pledged to You what is in my womb, consecrated [for Your service], so accept this from me. Indeed, You are the Hearing, the Knowing.' But when she delivered her, she said, 'My Lord, I have delivered a female.' And

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39   Q 14:35-40.

40   Q 22:26.

> Allah was most knowing of what she delivered, and the male is not like the female. 'And I have named her Mary, and I seek refuge for her in You and [for] her descendants from Satan, the expelled [from the mercy of Allah].' So her Lord accepted her with good acceptance and caused her to grow in a good manner and put her in the care of Zachariah. Every time Zachariah entered upon her in the prayer chamber, he found with her provision. He said, 'O Mary, from where is this [coming] to you?' She said, 'It is from Allah. Indeed, Allah provides for whom He wills without account'.[41]

One of the strongest human emotions is the love of a mother for her child, exemplified her by Mary's mother, who utilises this powerful emotion for a righteous cause. What makes these verses noteworthy is that God responds to the wife of Joachim's ('Imrān) supplication and accepts young Mary as a gift of her mother's dedication to God. He then protects her from the internal and external influences of Satan and makes her raise the baby in the best manner, under the supervision of prophet Zachariah. According to the verses, it seems that the supplication made by Mary's mother did not only help Mary to be raised in the best manner, away from the many dangers of life, but also provided her with material sustenance on a daily basis, for we read that "every time Zachariah entered upon her in the prayer chamber, he found with her provision."[42] The verses are not explicit if the provisions appeared as a result of her mother's supplication or the supplications of Mary herself, but it is clear that the daily provision was a result of supplication.

Despite their highly elevated status, neither Mary nor her mother were prophets. Yet, they could communicate with God through invocation, and God listened and responded to their invocations. The Quran also includes God's response to the invocations of other significant figures, such as the Magicians of the Pharoah and the Seven Sleepers.[43] In so doing, it provides the believers with the wisdom of a great many benefits of sincere and hopeful supplications.

Quranic Templates for Supplication: Seeking Happiness in Both Realms

The impression that one may receive upon reading Islamic writings in general is that humankind cannot be happy in any lasting and meaningful sense in this worldly life and that permanent and genuine happiness is to be found only in

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41   Q. 3:36-37.

42   Q. 3:37.

43   See Q 20:73 and Q 18:10.

the afterlife.[44] The negative outlook on this world in terms of its ephemerality and the impossibility of attaining wholesome happiness has led some to think that Islam is a religion of perseverance and grief. So long as believers remain in this world, they are entrapped in the state of numerous and relentless calamities, hardships, illness, pain and death. The only way to attain true happiness, it would appear, is to move to the next phase of the human journey towards God, which is to be unfolded in the afterlife. Although people are frightened of death and moving to an unknown world, it is at least a comforting idea to know that so long as they believe in God and obey His commands, they will attain eternal happiness in the afterlife.

After all, within the widely accepted Islamic context, Adam – and by extension and association every human soul – gave in to the deception of Satan and was consequently expelled from the blissful and comfortable life in the special 'garden' from where human life originated:

> So We said, 'O Adam, indeed this is an enemy to you and to your wife.
> Then let him not remove you from the Garden so you would suffer.
> Indeed, it is [promised] for you not to be hungry therein or be unclothed.
> And indeed, you will not be thirsty therein or be hot from the sun'.[45]

Their only way to return to the state of happiness that they had enjoyed was to be cast down to earth and then work assiduously to attain the final heaven known as paradise. However, the exile to earth, like any eviction from one's comfort zone and place of safety, left humankind with many existential problems and practical difficulties, such as the unexpected exposure to worldly worries of livelihood, hunger, thirst and the general vicissitudes of earthly life, as alluded to in the verses.

Happiness in this world is not gained solely through attaining materialistic or worldly objectives, but it may be achieved by working for the betterment and flourishing of society and by striving to attain proximity to God. Returning

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44   Seyyed Hossein Nasr's article is a good example of such interpretation of happiness in Islam. On his interpretation of Mulla Ṣadra's position he notes: "Mullā Ṣadra follows in this matter the teachings of al-Fārābī, Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyā' al-Rāzī, Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazzālī, and many others in identifying happiness with knowledge of the immutable intelligible world and detachment from the entanglements of material existence, but he does so in the context of his metaphysics based on the unity, gradation, and principality of *wujūd,* on trans-substantial motion and on the ultimate union of knowledge consciousness with the object of knowledge, being."
He, however, does not deny the possibility of happiness in this world but relates it to Hereafter. (S.H Nasr, 'Happiness and the Attainment of Happiness: An Islamic Perspective', *Journal of Law and Religion* vol. 29, no. 1, 2014, p. 89 and 79.)

45   Q 20:117-119.

to the story of Adam and Eve, when Adam and Eve were placed in the Edenic garden, where they received everything they needed, they were deceived by Satan, who is the sworn enemy of humankind, on account of his jealousy towards Adam and his open rebellion to God:

> We said, 'O Adam, dwell with your mate in paradise, and eat thereof freely whencesoever you wish; but do not approach this tree, lest you should be among the wrongdoers (ẓālimīn).'[46]

According to the verses, Adam and Eve's lapse in approaching the tree of immortality happened because they were duped by Satan's insinuations. Satan thus caused them to slip and stumble from their state of blissful innocence, whereupon God said, "Get down, being enemies of one another! On the earth shall be your abode and sustenance for a time."[47] However, when Adam and Eve acknowledged their error and realised that they were victims of a scheme hatched by their sworn enemy, God taught them how to supplicate so that they might return one day to the initial state of purity and happiness they had once enjoyed in the Edenic garden: "Then Adam received from his Lord certain words, and He accepted his repentance. Indeed, it is He who is the Accepting of repentance, the Merciful".[48]

These "certain words" denote perhaps God's inspiration to Adam to repent, together with His acceptance of the supplication of repentance made by Adam and his wife. The fundamental section of this supplication is mentioned elsewhere in the Quran: "They said, 'Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers'".[49] This is the supplication that God taught Adam so that he and his wife come out of their state of sinfulness and return to Him. These words uttered by Adam came from a softened and sincere heart and thus had the desired effect. Once these conditions – the correct way of asking, plus the possession of a softened and sincere heart – are fulfilled, God certainly grants the supplication of the beseecher: "We said, 'Get down from it, all together! Yet, should any guidance come to you from Me, those who follow My guidance shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve'".[50] There are several other examples in the Quran which makes it apparent that God teaches his creation how to supplicate in the best possible manner.

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46   Q. 2:35.

47   Q 2:35-36.

48   Q 2:37.

49   Q 7:23.

50   Q 2: 38.

Some Muslim schools of thought have gone so far as to consider the happiness and pleasures of this world as seriously dysfunctional to the attainment of spiritual proximity to God. Some Sufi schools in particular went so far as to promote harsh asceticism and self-inflicted pain in order move away from the pleasures and happiness of this world and thus attain a greater spiritual status. The overemphasis on the event of Karbala in Twelver Shi'ite communities may also be considered an example of this negative outlook. Constant remembrance of the massacre of the grandson of the Prophet and his family and sympathising with their suffering have been considered the correct path for achieving a higher spiritual station, with existing in a state of constant sadness being epitomised as the very perfection of faith.

However, a careful reading of Muslim scriptures suggests otherwise: the Islamic way of life is aimed at ensuring maximal human well-being, which means that this earthly realm can be utilised as a place where content and wholesome human souls can be cultivated in readiness for the attainment of eternal bliss and happiness. God's dialogues with Abraham provide a very important insight into this: "My Lord! Grant me a righteous [child]!"[51] Among all other things, Abraham chooses to ask God for a child. According to the Quran, God tasked Abraham with the very difficult responsibility of being a role model for humanity, and he had endured enormous calamities in the process. He also accumulated great wisdom and knowledge, and it is very probable that he wanted a child who would be able to inherit this knowledge and wisdom. But there might have also been ordinary human reasons for Abraham's supplication, which can be seen as the entreaty of a father who is longing for a child so that he may enjoy the bliss of parenthood in this world. And God granted Abraham this legitimate request: "So We gave him tidings of a gentle son".[52] A more detailed version of the supplication is mentioned elsewhere in the Quran:

> And when Abraham said: My Lord! Make safe this place, and preserve me and my sons from worshipping idols...Our Lord, I have settled some of my descendants in an uncultivated valley near Your sacred House, our Lord, that they may establish prayer. So, make hearts among the people incline toward them and provide for them from the fruits that they might be grateful... Praise to God, who has granted to me in old age Ishmael and Isaac. Indeed, my Lord is the Hearer of supplication.[53]

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51   Q 37:100.

52   Q 37:101.

53   Q 14:37.

It is worth noting that another supplication of Abraham is quoted in the same manner elsewhere: "Our Lord, and make us Muslims [in submission] to You and from our descendants, a Muslim nation [in submission] to You..."[54] Abraham's strong longing for a child has left his emotional mark in the Quran.

Moses, while seeking forgiveness for himself and his brother Aaron,[55] made a supplication similar to that of Abraham's, seeking goodness in this world and in the hereafter: "Grant us in this world which is good and [also] in the Hereafter"[56] One of the common themes of the prophets is their desire for successors to continue their line. Abraham made this abundantly clear, as we have already seen. Moses, however, does not request a child successor but asks God to appoint his brother Aaron as his deputy: "Appoint a deputy for me from my family".[57] According to the Quranic narrative, Moses must have had children at this point of his life and it is very likely that Aaron, who was blessed with great spiritual and physical qualities, was the most suitable person to aid Moses in his struggle against the Pharaoh and his attempt to liberate the Children of Israel.

At first glance, Moses' supplication seems to support the puritanical view of Abraham's plea for a child, as both Aaron and Moses appear focused on having supporters and successors for their missions. However, it is not unreasonable to think that Abraham desired both a child and a successor. His subsequent trial involving his son Ismael suggests that Abraham longed for a child to whom he was deeply attached, and he also wanted a successor to pass on his knowledge and wisdom to future generations. Conversely, Moses fulfilled his wish to share his important mission and its spiritual rewards with his brother, with whom he had a strong familial bond.

The prophet Zachariah also asked for good and righteous offspring: "Zachariah invoked his Lord, saying, 'My Lord, grant me from Yourself a good offspring. You are the hearer of supplication'".[58] His supplication was accepted, and he and his wife were blessed with Yaḥyā (John the Baptist) in their old age. The consistent pattern of prophets asking God to grant them good offspring or supporters from their own blood is noticeable in the Quran. Prophets realise the greatness of what they have attained, and long to share it with their closest ones to make it a long-lasting legacy.

This is a basic human tendency, but it is often focused on material gains rather than spiritual attainments and divine knowledge. The very notion of

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54 Q 2:128.

55 Q 7:151; 28:16.

56 Q 7: 156.

57 Q 20:29.

58 Q 3:38.

monarchy or the continuity of worldly power within one family, which has caused some of the worst catastrophes and bloodsheds in human history, is a result of this human tendency. But the requests of the prophets in their supplications have no such malicious objective, largely because, according to the Quranic narrative, the vast majority of them never acquired significant material wealth and power. What is more remarkable is that, according to the Muslim faith, God quotes these requests and includes them in the Quran as examples of best practice when it comes to supplication. That these supplications embody the ideal combination of enjoying legitimate worldly happiness of family and wishing for the continuity of spiritual perfection is mentioned elsewhere: "And those who say, 'Our Lord, grant us from among our wives and offspring comfort to our eyes and make us an example for the righteous'".[59]

Overall, in the Quranic supplications of the prophets, there is the persistent notion of the sacred nature of bloodline in the monotheistic religions, and this can be seen clearly in Muslimscripture. What makes this connection sacred is a mystery, as individuals have no choice over their blood relations. But it may be the simple request of virtuous souls to acknowledge the favour of their parents over them which seems to be associated with God's generous bestowals, and their wish that the goodness they are favoured with – namely the bounty of faith – should also benefit their progeny.

> And We have enjoined upon man, to his parents, good treatment. His mother carried him with hardship and gave birth to him with hardship, and his gestation and weaning [period] are thirty months. [He grows] until, when he reaches maturity and reaches [the age of] forty years, he says, 'My Lord, enable me to be grateful for Your favour which You have bestowed upon me and upon my parents and to work the righteousness of which You will approve and make righteous for me my offspring. Indeed, I have repented to You, and indeed, I am of the Muslims'.[60]

However, the prophet Solomon's supplication for an unprecedented kingdom to rule over this world is markedly different from the supplication of other prophets: "He said, 'My Lord, forgive me and grant me a kingdom such as will not belong to anyone after me. Indeed, You are the Bestower'".[61] But, in the context of the Quran, Solomon's supplication is not a selfish request to dominate the world with his God-given special powers; he asks for domination

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59   Q 25:74.

60   Q 46:15.

61   Q 38:35.

for the express purpose of establishing and preserving divine knowledge. It does however appear to be a much more ambitious supplication than those made by the other prophets in that it seems to be focused more on worldly success.

Nevertheless, God grants Solomon's request, and interestingly, his supplication is quoted and preserved in the Quran. This may be in order to allow believers to compare and contrast it with the requests of other prophets, such as Abraham, to gain more wisdom. It may also indicate that if the offspring does not possess the standard qualities of spirituality, the prophets would not desire the position of successorship for them based solely on bloodline.

Although the Quran mentions the supplication of a number of prophets, thus disclosing their intimate communication with God to humanity, it makes no mention of the Prophet Muhammed's intimate supplications to God. Did he follow his great many prophetic ancestors in asking for successor who would convey God-knowledge and wisdom to later generations? Did he invoke God for various kinds of earthly attainments? The Quran is silent on this, no doubt because of the intimate nature of supplication where the Prophet Muhammad is concerned. It only mentions God instructing the Prophet to make supplications.[62] Disclosing the intimate communications of the prophets who lived thousands of years ago is different from disclosing Prophet Muhammad's supplications to the very community in which he lived and preached. Therefore, it is understandable that the Quran does not include the intimate supplications of the Prophet.

The Quran informs us that some of the best supplications are taught by God to people so that the faithful can ask from their Creator in the best possible manner. Limited human nature is unable to grasp the treasures and blessings of the Creator, and God is acutely aware of this human deficiency. Therefore, one of the oft-repeated supplication verses of the Quran, recited daily by the faithful, provides an excellent example of how God teaches people to pray correctly: "And among them, there are those who say, 'Our Lord, give us good in this world and good in the Hereafter, and save us from the punishment of the Fire'".[63]

Having criticised the worldly or materialistic expectations of people from God during the ritual of the Hajj, God instructs the faithful how to ask for the reward of performing the pilgrimage. The verse teaches the faithful to ask for goodness or happiness both in this world and afterlife. The concept underpinning the verse is most intriguing; believers perform the pilgrimage for the sake of God, and then they want to ask for their reward from God. Perhaps some ask for petty gains whereas others ask only for otherworldly blessings. But God halts people to teach them how to ask for goodness or happiness from God and what

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62   See Q 17:80; 20:114; 23:93-94, 97-98 and 117.

63   Q 2:201.

they should ask for. This is because people are not fully aware of the bounties of God, and as a merciful God, He wants to bestow people with His blessings both in this world and the afterlife. To do so, He teaches people not just about the moral and ethical codes but also the right formula and mindset with which to ask from God.[64] In addition, the verse also makes an important assertion: according to the Quran, happiness is not confined only to the afterlife; God expects believers to seek happiness in this world too. Of course, real happiness – perfect bliss – is something that can obtain only in the Hereafter, but that does not mean that Islam is a fatalistic faith that constantly encourages its followers to seek and relish state of agony and sorrow in this world. So long as believers remain within the boundaries of the faith, they are encouraged to seek happiness and prosperity in the here-and-now and not just in the Hereafter.

Another verse teaches believers to remember God before starting any new endeavour, supplicating to Him with a formula that helps them pursue the right conduct in their affairs:

> Say, [O Muhammad]... And never say of anything, 'Indeed, I will do that tomorrow,' Except [when adding], 'If God wills.' And remember your Lord when you forget [it] and say, 'Perhaps my Lord will guide me to what is nearer than this to right conduct'.[65]

The phrase "If God wills" (*inshallah*) included in this formula of supplication has become deeply ingrained the Muslim culture to indicate that one's wish is of course dependent on whether God will confer reality on that wish and bring it into effect. It can also be seen as a way of invoking God to bless the actions of believers. Here are some of the selected supplications mentioned in the Quran which have been framed as templates to seek help against the temptations of Satan and the evils of both the *jinn* and other human beings. There are also invocations for guidance, for protection and forgiveness, for success and a blessed life, and for help in not straying from the path.

> It is You we worship and You we ask for help. Guide us to the straight path – The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favour, not of those who have evoked [Your] anger or of those who are astray.[66]

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64   M.S Bahmanpour and S. Kara, *Understanding Surah Al Baqarah: A Modern Interpretation of the Quran in the Light of the Quran*, UK, Sun Behind the Cloud, 2022.

65   Q 18:24.

66   Q 1:4-7.

Our Lord, do not impose blame upon us if we have forgotten or erred. Our Lord, and lay not upon us a burden like that which You laid upon those before us. Our Lord, and burden us not with that which we have no ability to bear. And pardon us; and forgive us; and have mercy upon us. You are our protector, so give us victory over the disbelieving people.[67]

And say, 'My Lord, I seek refuge in You from the incitements of the devils, And I seek refuge in You, my Lord, lest they be present with me'.[68]

Say, 'I seek refuge in the Lord of daybreak from the evil of that which He created and from the evil of darkness when it settles and from the evil of the blowers in knots, And from the evil of an envier when he envies'.[69]

Say, 'I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind, The Sovereign of mankind, The God of mankind, against the evil of the retreating whisperer -Who whispers [evil] into the hearts of mankind – From among the jinn and mankind'.[70]

Conclusion

The study of supplications provides an excellent opportunity to understand a very intimate version of divine communication, which is a component of God-talk in general. The Quran is, of course, the most important source to understand the nature and limits of this communication in Muslim theology. The study of the Quran thus shows, despite the unwitting effort of certain Muslim groups to make it complicated, that the practice of supplication is strongly encouraged in Muslim scripture and well-integrated into Muslim culture. The Quran describes God as eager to respond to supplications that come from sincere hearts. It is a sort of bonus granted for the worldly and spiritual needs of people who are willing to connect to God. Of course, there are limits to this spiritual mechanism; it does not work to negate people's free will and force their hearts to the faith. With that caveat in mind, it is fair to say that supplications and/or invocations are described as very potent solutions for many different difficulties emerging from the natural consequences of human life. In this light, God does not only

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67 Q 2:286.

68 Q 23:97-98.

69 Q 113:1-5.

70 Q 114:1-6.

urge people to supplicate, but He also provides templates and examples to show believers how to seek happiness and prosperity in both realms.

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6

Divine Metaphysics in Mullā Ṣadrā:
God and His Speech

Farhan A. Zaidi

Introduction

To engage in any form of God-talk entails a certain worldview made up of metaphysical, epistemological and ethical tenets – whether explicitly acknowledged or otherwise. These tenets not only determine the propositional knowledge of our underlying beliefs but also imply our method of arriving at them. We may assert that God is One, God has attributes, God speaks; but what do these propositions actually entail in reality, or rather, what do *we mean* by them? More fundamentally, what does it mean to simply say that 'God *is*'?

It may be rare for us to consciously acknowledge and evaluate the philosophical presuppositions that we subsume into our latent understanding of reality and by which we make sense of everything around us (or at least, try to make sense of everything). Perhaps the defining hallmark of seminal figures in the history of human thought and ideas is their engagement with this very process of appraising primordial assumptions and formulating a novel worldview that is effectively articulated. The person with whom we are concerned in this chapter, Ṣadr ad-Dīn Muḥammad Shīrāzī, commonly known as Mulla Ṣadrā (ca. 1571 – 1636), is most certainly one such seminal figure. During the Safavid period, Ṣadrā ushered in a new paradigm within the intellectual history of Islamic thought wherein the fundamental nature of *existence* took the prominent role in a dynamic manner, and became the means to address contentious philosophical and theological issues that had beset Muslim thinkers. Ṣadrā represents a significant maturity of centuries of metaphysical discourse as he reshaped elements from

notable predecessors[1] and formulated an innovative system that presented God-talk in a new light.

In two parts, this chapter will undertake the formidable task of probing the propositions mentioned at the beginning of this introduction in view of Ṣadrā's philosophy. To say God is One delves into an area that has recently garnered renewed attention in contemporary Western philosophical theology: divine simplicity.[2] Ṣadrā grounds his discussion on the fundamental and univocal nature of existence or being (*wujūd*). This provides the essential basis for understanding the nature of divine attributes, concerning both their interrelationship and their relation to the divine essence. We then see how God's attributes relate to contingent beings, which brings us to part two: divine speech. We observe how this attribute becomes the vehicle to articulate the creative act of God as well as His communication through modalities of existence. Importantly, we see how Ṣadrā interweaves his metaphysical insights with the scriptural sources of Islam – something more pronounced in his oeuvre than many modern studies would lead one to appreciate. It reveals a philosophy that becomes a hermeneutics of the Qur'ān and traditions, and highlights the dynamic connectivity between metaphysics, spiritual unveiling and exegesis.[3] Ṣadrā's philosophy of being provides a stimulating impetus for God-talk and a unique perspective on what it means to believe 'God is.'

God's Simplicity and Attributes

Divine Simplicity

When probing the nature of God, divine simplicity is posited against any form of intrinsic multiplicity. To assert God is simple means to deny any composition or parts in the reality of His Being. Thus, divine simplicity is affirmation of God's

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1   As will becomes clear in this chapter, some of these predecessors include Ibn Sīnā (ca. 970 – 1037), Suhrawardī (ca. 1154 – 1191), Ibn ʿArabī (ca. 1165 – 1240), the dialectic theologians of the Islamic tradition, elements of Neoplatonism (particularly the Plotonian treatise and so-called 'Theology of Aristotle'), and not least the traditional scriptural sources of Islam in the Quran and traditional narrations.

2   See for example, Dolezal, J. *God without parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness*. Eugene, Oregon, Pickwick Publications, 2011.; Duby, Steven J. *Divine Simplicity: a Dogmatic Account*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016. For counter arguments, see Misiewicz, Rory, Divine simplicity: some recent defenses and the prevailing challenge of analogical language. *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 82 (1), 2021: pp. 51-63.

3   For a useful insight on this dimension of Ṣadrā's methodology, see Jambet, C. *The Act of Being: The Philosophy of Revelation in Mullā Sadrā*. Mit Press, 2006: pp. 45-51.

absolute transcendence from all kinds of distinctions and constituents that we may ordinarily apply to other categories of things, be they physical or metaphysical.[4] For example, adherents of divine simplicity affirm God's immaterial nature in rejecting any corporeal or quantitative categories, just as they also navigate the more nuanced issue of how His numerously conceived divine attributes relate to His Essence.[5] As a doctrine it received significant attention from Jewish, Christian and Muslim thinkers throughout the so-called medieval period – incorporating the Islamic 'Golden Age'[6] – and this trend continued into the 16th/17th centuries of the Safavid period, which is where we find our philosopher, Mulla Ṣadrā.

The fundamental premise which dictates Ṣadrā's understanding of divine simplicity is his perspective on the distinction between quiddity (*what* a thing is) and existence (that a thing *is*). This distinction is normally distilled for contingent or created beings so that, to use a common example, man has both quiddity in being a rational animal, and existence by the instantiation of his concrete reality.[7] Ibn Sīnā was the first to probe the quiddity-existence dichotomy in metaphysics – though not enough to satisfy Ṣadrā. The Peripatetic thinker never plainly delved into which of these two metaphysical constructs actually had primacy (*aṣālah*) in reality, since he was more concerned with the ontological demarcation and categories of necessary (God), possible (creation), and impossible existence. While this latter division had a lasting impact on philosophical theology after Ibn Sīnā's referring to God as the "Necessarily Existent" (*wājib al-wujūd*) became standard among the later intellectual milieu, the perceived lack of clarification in the existence-quiddity dynamic meant that his various assertions on the subject gave rise to a plethora of interpretations. In the case of God, Ibn Sīnā would sometimes say His quiddity was the same as His necessary existence, and other times assert He has no quiddity at all. But His simplicity and singularity is maintained in contrast to contingents, which are of composite nature.[8]

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4   Vallicella, W. F. "Divine Simplicity: A New Defense," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers:* Vol. 9 (4), Article 6, 1992: pp. 508-525.

5   Gale, R. *On the Nature and Existence of God* (Cambridge Philosophy Classics), Cambridge University Press, 1991: p. 23

6   Wolterstorff, N. Divine Simplicity. *Philosophical Perspectives,* vol. 5, 1991: 531–552.

7   Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (henceforth, Ṣadrā), *al-Hikma al-mutaʿāliyya fī 'l-Asfār al-ʿaqliyya al-arbaʿa*, 9 vols., eds. R. Lutfī, I. Amīnī, and F. Ummīd, 3rd edition, Beirūt: Dār ihyā al-turāth al-ʿarabī, 1981: I, p. 96. (Henceforth, *Asfār*)

8   Avicenna. *The Metaphysics of the Healing*. Brigham Young University, 2005: 38. Perhaps the best overview on this issue is Bertolacci, A.,The distinction of essence and existence in Avicenna's metaphysics: The text and its context, *Islamic philosophy, science, culture, and religion,* 2012: 257-288; Cf. McGinnis, Jon. *Avicenna*. Oxford University Press, 2010: pp. 168-169.

In Ṣadrā, a true appreciation of divine simplicity rests on an understanding of the reality of existence in relation to both the Necessary Being and contingent beings. Here, we come to the fundamental principles of his metaphysics: the primacy of existence (*aṣāla al-wujūd*) and the gradation of existence (*tashkīk al-wujūd*). The former asserts that, contrary to being, a mental construct which is posited by the subjective mind towards external entities (a metaphysical position not uncommon among Ṣadrā's contemporaries), existence is real, rather, it is the *only* reality. But if nothing is real except existence, how are multiplicity, differentiation and individual identities explained in relation to contingents? Here we arrive at the second principle and perhaps the hallmark of Ṣadrā's entire philosophy. Gradation of being refers to the various degrees of intensity or debilitation by which existence is individuated and given a mentally constructed identity, thereby precipitating contingencies. A thing's quiddity (*what* it is) is simply its particular degree or delimitation of existence along the singular modulated continuum of being.[9] This way of distinguishing between existence and quiddity divests a 'pure being' from any form of composition, since all such complexities arise solely from quiddity, that is, some form of existential delimitation. Since God is pure existence, "He has no quiddity, and whatever has no quiddity has no parts; be they mental or external parts."[10] Ṣadrā is thus able to denude the Necessary Being of all compositions that arise from modulated existence, be they among conceptual, external, or quantitative constituents: conceptual categories incorporate genus and differentia which facilitate logical definitions (such as "man is a rational animal"), yet such analysis cannot be applied to simple, pure existence since it has no common genus or particularised difference. This then extends to external categories such as matter and form, which are instantiations of genus and differentia;[11] in turn, the negation of these latter classifications means no quantitative characteristics are possible since they are the properties of bodies.[12] Composition in all its various categories can apply only to contingent existents. God, however, has no such distinction since His quiddity *is* nothing but His very existence – as we see in Ibn Sīnā – and this equates to no quiddity, and no possibility for conceptual analysis of His reality.[13]

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9   *Asfār*, IX, pp. 185-186.

10   *Asfār,* VI, p. 103.

11   Ṣadrā distinguishes between 'form and matter' both externally and mentally. See Ibid, 100. See also Saeedimehr, M., Divine Simplicity, *Topoi*, 26(2), 2007: p. 196.

12   *Asfār,*VI, 100-106. Particularly 103 lines 9-12; 106 lines 1-2. See also, Ṣadrā, *Metaphysical Penetrations*. Brigham Young University. Nasr, S.H. (eds.), 2014: pp. 6-8. (Henceforth *Mashāʿir*)

13   *Asfār,* I, 96. Of course, by negating conceptual analysis of God's *nature* is meant the impossibility of conceptualising the reality of His existence. This is separate to positing a conceptual proof

Ṣadrā then arrives at his famous dictum on simplicity which he finds latent in the Neoplatonic tradition – especially in the so-called *Theology of Aristotle* (*Uthūlūjiyā*) – but without the explicit apparatus of his own ontological principles. He quotes a passage from this Plotinian treatise that describes the 'Pure One' as the cause of all things yet not of those things; since it is pure, one and simple, it has none of those things *in* it while all things flow *from* it.[14] Our philosopher, however, arrives at his own principle through the modality of being:

> Every existent (*mawjūd*) in which one denies a certain form of existence ('amr wujūdī*) is not a simple reality. Rather, its essence (*dhāt*) is composed of two aspects: the aspect by which it is such-and-such, and the aspect by which it is not such-and-such. Reversing the opposite, [we come to the principle]: <u>that which is a simply reality is all things</u>. Safeguard this [principle] if you are of its people.[15]

Since all contingent beings are by definition delimited modes of existence which we mentally constructed as having 'quiddities,' they essentially amount to being compounded with privation or 'non-existence.' Aside from the pure absolute existence of God, we can say that conceptually speaking all other beings 'partake' in both a degree of existence *and* non-existence since the latter is associated with quiddity.[16] Ṣadrā identifies this difference in theological terms with the famous Qur'ānic epithet for God, '*al-Ṣamad*' which traditionally signifies the One upon Whom all depend for their existence and needs, without His having any dependence or need at all.[17]

This principle which Ṣadrā has espoused in numerous forms throughout his oeuvre is at risk of being interpreted as existential monism or pantheism. This reading is perhaps even more susceptible in a version where the philosopher states "The Simple Essence (*al-dhāt*) is all existents (*al-mawjūdāt*)."[18] However, ontological simplicity in Ṣadrā means a non-composite being necessarily possesses all existential perfections and cannot entail any form of multiplicity or distinctions. Such multiplicity is only possible in the form of imperfections and limitations

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for the Necessary Being which Ṣadrā himself would famously put forward.

14 *Asfār,* VII, pp. 272-273.

15 *Mashā'ir*, p. 55. On occasion Ṣadrā has mentioned it more tersely, "The Simple is every thing" (*al-basīt kull al-ashyā'*), *Asfār,* V, p. 112.

16 *Asfār,* VI, p. 357, lines 6-7: "every contingent being is composed of quiddity and existence, and quiddity is like non-existence..."

17 Ibid.

18 *Asfār,* VI, p. 122.

which are nothing more than the gradational occurrences of privation through existential delimitation. God in His absolute simplicity cannot be compared to, nor attributed with, anything composite or conditioned, meaning *nothing can be predicated of Him*. It is affirmation of God's transcendence. Conversely, He is the very source of all existence and degrees of perfection identified in contingent things at all lower gradational planes of being. This is the essence of Ṣadrā's dictum on simplicity and the idea of diversity-in-unity.[19]

A further upshot is how it transforms our understanding of associating characteristics or qualities to God. Since divine simplicity puts Him beyond even the composition of 'existence and non-existence,' He must necessarily incorporate all possible existential perfections to the absolute degree while only 'non-existence' is denied of Him. Here begin the seeds of what can be both affirmed and negated of pure existence which takes on a more theological hue in the form of divine attributes. It has now been established that for Ṣadrā, existence equates to perfection while non-existence equates to imperfection. An example of such perfection is God's knowledge, which came to be a thorny issue among the intellectual milieu of the Muslim world since the time of Ibn Sīnā.[20] That Ṣadrā believed the solution to this problem was based on his doctrine of divine simplicity is clear by the mere fact that he would often follow his discussions on the latter immediately and in conjunction with a discussion on divine knowledge.[21] The general nature of all such perfections or divine attributes – which itself became another contentious issue among Muslim theologians – can only truly be apprehended when directly correlated to the discussion of God's simplicity. In his work, *'Arshiyya*, Ṣadrā touches on these affirming and negating dimensions (existence and non-existence) when he repeats his dictum that a simple reality is all things by virtue of its unity (*waḥdah*), and qualifies it by adding, "It is deprived of none of those things [perfections], except for what is on the order of imperfections, privations, and contingencies."[22] It is on this basis that Ṣadrā establishes his understanding of the numerous 'positive' and 'negative' attributes of God.

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19 Saeedimehr is correct to point out that any potential charge of pantheism is the reason why this dictum is sometimes qualified as follows, "that which is a simple reality is all things, *but not any of them*." See Saeedimehr, 197. Although this addition is apparently not Ṣadrā's own wording, it can be understood as meaning a simple reality is all things in terms of existential quality, but not any of them in terms of their privation or quiddity.

20 See Marmura, M. E. Some Aspects of Avicenna's Theory of God's Knowledge of Particulars. *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 82(3), 1962, pp. 299–312. Cf. Adamson, P. On Knowledge of Particulars. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol. 105, 2005, pp. 257–278.

21 *Mashā'ir* 54-55. Ṣadrā, *The Wisdom of the Throne*. Princeton University Press. Morris J. W. (tr.), 1981: 99. (Henceforth *'Arshiyya*)

22 *'Arshiyya*, p. 98.

Divine Attributes

Ṣadrā usually situates his discussions concerning both divine attributes in general, and divine speech in particular, within the broader historical controversy that embroiled theologians for centuries.[23] Taking the two major theological schools as representing the polarised ends of the debate, he describes how the Ash'arites affirmed the reality of the numerous attributes *in actuality*, or existentially, making them objectively real and external to the Divine Essence. This separation between God and His attributes risked compromising the most fundamental tenet of Islam: divine oneness (*tawḥīd*), by making something separate but comparable to God in terms of His pre/post-eternity. Ṣadrā thus designates this view as anthropomorphic (*tashbīh*). By contrast, the Mu'tazilites, who championed themselves as true defenders of God's oneness, negated the notions of attributes altogether while still affirming their effects, thus replacing the cause of these effects from being God's attributes to directly being His transcendent Essence, raising further issues in relation to causality and oneness. Ṣadrā terms this as 'negation' (*ta'ṭīl*), in that it denies something which must clearly be affirmed for God.[24]

Since our philosopher equated the understanding of God's nature with the understanding of existence and its reality, his deliberations had a clear starting point. Ṣadrā's perspective on divine simplicity coupled with his theory of gradation allows his philosophical insights to endorse the terminology of the rational-mystics (primarily Ibn ʿArabī and his commentators) to express the various planes of existence. These include, at their apex, the plane of singularity (*martaba al-aḥadiyya*) and the plane of divinity or oneness (*martabah al-ilāhiyya / wāḥidiyya*).[25] The former represents the utmost simplicity of being in that God is absolute existence without any distinction or differentiation so that all multiplicity including the names, the named, the attributes, and the attributed (or possessor of attributes) are effaced. The second plane of *al-ilāhiyya* allows all these categories to be conceived, and in doing so, permits distinctions to be conceptualised in relation to the numerous attributes, both between themselves and from God's Essence. It is here that we enter discussions on the nature of divine attributes and what their multiplicity on this plane actually entails.

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23   *Asfār,* VI, pp. 123, 309, 144; Ibid., VII, p. 12; Ṣadrā, *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya*. Mashad. Āshtiyānī J. (eds.), 1981 (Henceforth *Shawāhid*): pp. 38, 57; *ʿArshiyya*, pp. 104, 109; *Mashāʿir*, pp. 59, 61.

24   *Asfār*, VI, p. 145; *Shawāhid* p. 38; *Mashāʿir* p. 59; *ʿArshiyya* p. 104.

25   *Asfār*, VI, p. 145. Ibid., II, pp. 309-311. The subsection that begins on page 310 is taken almost verbatim from a classical text of mysticism, Qaysarī's famous introduction to Ibn ʿArabī's Fusūs al-Hikam. See Ali, M.H., *Foundations of Islamic Mysticism: Qaysarī's Introduction to Ibn ʿArabī's Fusūs al-Hikam*. Spiritual Alchemy Press, 2012: p. 44.

It would be useful here to recount Ṣadrā's lucid demarcation of the divine attributes into certain categories from his *magnum opus*, the *Asfār*. In volume six of the modern edition which deals with theological issues, he devotes a subchapter on their basic divisions which tends to follow the broad classifications of the celebrated Shīʿī theologian, ʿAllāmah Hillī, and his teacher, the renowned commentator and apologist of Ibn Sīnā, Naṣīr al-dīn Tūsī.[26] The primary division is the bifurcation between positive (*thubūtī*) and negative (*salbī*) attributes. This is related back to a Qurʾānic verse: "Blessed is the Name of your Lord, the Majestic (*al-jalāl*) and the Honour (*al-ikrām*)" (Q 55:78), where the attribute *al-jalāl* signifies negation in as much as His Essence completely transcends any similarity to all things; and *al-ikrām* signifies the noble descriptions with which we identify and recognise the divine Essence to be adorned with. These positive attributes further branch into what are considered real (*ḥaqīqiyya*) attributes which are identified with the Essence itself in being intrinsic to it, and relational (*iḍāfiyya*) attributes which are subsequent to the Essence and are relations between God and other than God.[27] Ṣadrā expands extensively on each of these categories according to the principles of his ontology.

The negative attributes are the negation of "imperfections and nonexistences" that we already saw as a qualification for a simple reality.[28] This reaffirms postulations regarding the existence of God having no limitation since He is The First (*al-Awwal*), while everything other than Him is determined and finite. Imperfections are only present and indeed inherent through the modulation of being, where the former increases as the latter gradational process persists. Examples of these imperfections in delimited modalities of existence are compositional aspects that we noted earlier such as substance, body, accident, and other quantitative and qualitative traits. In denying all these ascriptions one is attesting to the simple pure immaterial reality of God. Since negative attributes are a negation of imperfections, they stand as a double negative (*salb al-salb*) and thus function in actuality as an *affirmation* of God's absolute existence and perfection. Thus, the negative attributes merely underscore and return to the positive attributes.[29] Some of the negational attributes included here are expressed by epithets such as Holiness (*quddūsiyya*), Singleness (*fardiyya*) and

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26 *Asfār,* VI, 118; Cf. al-Hillī, M.-I.-F. *Al-babu 'l-hadi ʿashar: A treatise on the principles of Shiʾite theology.* Miller, W. M. E. (trans.) London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1928: pp. 14-29.

27 Ṣadrā, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād.* Āshtiyānī J. (eds.) Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1976. (Henceforth, *Mabdaʾ*): p. 74.

28 *Asfār*, VI, p. 118.

29 *Asfār,*VI, pp. 114, 121.

Pre-eternality (*azaliyya*).[30] In the backdrop of his theory of ontological simplicity and the nature of negative attributes, it also becomes clear why for Ṣadrā all negations ultimately trace back to a single negative attribute which entirely subsumes them: the negation of contingency (*salb al-imkān*).[31]

The first sub-division of the positive attributes is where the delicate discussion concerning the relationship between the divine Essence and the intrinsic characteristics associated with it – such as Life, Knowledge, Power, etc., – becomes an important focal point. The major precept which Ṣadrā repeats and usually begins with is that God's attributes "are the same as His Essence."[32] Not only is there total existential unity between His being and His attributes, but also between the multiple attributes themselves. Any differentiation is only inferred conceptually without any substantive distinction in reality. Thus, existence being the fundamental fabric of reality again underlies Ṣadrā's entire theory on this theological matter.[33] The nature of existence is such that when it is stronger and more intense not only is it more simple in nature, but also contains in itself more meanings, or is more *meaningful*.[34] The conceptual nature of these meanings, however, means the singularity of pure existence that we see in God – or the univocal nature of being in general – is never compromised in any substantive manner.

> His existence, which is His reality, is itself the attributes of perfection...
> The attributes, despite their plurality and multiplicity, exist by a single

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30 *Mabda'*, p. 74.

31 *Asfār,* VI, p. 118. The negative attributes returning to the negation of contingency provides an example of Ṣadrā's influence in contemporary Shiʿi theological discourse. See al-Muzaffar M. R. *The Faith of Shīʿa Islam*. Beirut: Imam Ali Foundation, 1982: pp. 7-8; Gulpaygani, A.R. *Discursive Theology: Volume 1.* Qum: Al-Mustafa International Publication, 2013: p. 181. The latter attributes it to Ṣadrā's later and important commentator, Hādī Sabzavarī (ce. 1797-1873).

32 *Asfār*, VI, pp. 144, 284; *Mashāʿir* p. 59; *'Arshiyya*; pp. 103-104, *Mabda'*, p. 74.

33 Ibid.

34 "Whenever the intensity of existence is strong and [thus] simple, it collectively contains more meanings and effects." *Asfār*, IX, 61. While the first and foremost application of this is in relation to God's simplicity and pure existence, Ṣadrā's modulation of being allows him to identify it with the ontological hierarchy to/from God – subsuming the spiritual progression of contingents – according to their proximity (*qurb*) with Him: "Whatever is closer to Him [God] is more one/united (*waḥda*) and collectively contains more meanings." *Asfār*, VIII, p. 121. This naturally highlights an important element of Ṣadrā's onto-epistemology. For an elaboration of this concept in relation to the human soul, see his treatise 'On the Identity of the Intellector and the Intelligible' in *Majmūʿa-ye rasāʾil-e falsafī-ye Sadr al-mutaʾallihīn*. Tehran: Hikmat Publishers, 1999: pp. 90-91.

> existence, without there being any necessity for multiplicity, passivity, receptivity, and activity.[35]

God is existentially simple but (or rather, therefore) conceptually incorporates an infinite multiplicity of meanings that are inferred abstractly without compromising His ontological unity nor discarding the objective reality of those attributes. The association here of the intrinsic attributes to the Divine Essence is thus "metaphorical" (*majāziyya*) and goes back to negating any aspect of composition and multiplicity.[36] This notion can be compared to the distinction Ṣadrā makes between existence and quiddity, since the latter is merely a mental construct that is abstracted and does not itself correspond to anything in the external cosmos except what is the delimitation of existence, as we've seen. Here, it would be the duality between the divine essence and attributes which is merely conceptual while the latter remain objectively real.

In this way, he rejects the view of those among the Mu'tazila who, in their bid to uphold the oneness of God, negated the objectivity of the attributes, just as he rejected the Asha'rite position which wanted to affirm the reality and eternal nature of the attributes by separating them from God's Essence. Since existence wholly underlies reality, God's pure and perfect existence is itself all the attributes. God's Essence and God's attributes are of identical existential necessity.

The same principle applies between the intrinsic attributes themselves since they are "many in meaning and concept, [but] one in ipseity and existence."[37] Just as God's Being is pure existence in itself, it follows that His being is life itself, and is knowledge itself, and is power itself, and is all other perfections which inhere necessarily and by definition as one in a pure simple reality.[38] Anyone who finds difficulty in conceiving this has erred by way of their conceptualisation: "he conjectures that His oneness and the oneness of His essential attributes is numerical oneness, and that He is one numerically. But it is not the case. Rather, this oneness is another sort of oneness and is not numerical, nor of species, nor of genus, nor of conjunction, nor any other kind. Nobody knows this [oneness] except "those who are firm in knowledge" (Q 3:7)."[39] To assign a numerical sort of oneness to God would be to make Him relative and thus limit His being which, on the contrary, is absolute. This idea of God being one but not in number had already been an established principle by Ṣadrā's time and

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35 *Mashā'ir*, p. 59.

36 *Asfār*, III, p. 356.

37 *Asfār*, VI, p. 143.

38 *Asfār*, VI, p. 135.

39 *Mashā'ir*, p. 61. Translation adjusted.

associated with narrations attributed to the first Shīʿī Imām, ʿAlī bin abī Tālib, in the famous collection of sermons attributed to him.[40] For Ṣadrā, it harmonised fittingly into the major principles of his ontology and especially with his dictum that a simple reality incorporates all things. Furthermore, just as the negative attributes are all reducible to a single negation, an understanding of the intrinsic attributes of perfection also reveals that they revert back to one property: the necessity of existence (*wujūb al-wujūd*) since the attributes are concomitant with the primordial reality and necessity of existence itself.

The second sub-division of positive attributes are extrinsic in that they are only ascribed to the divine essence when considered with what is extraneous to it. In other words, they are purely relational between God and creation and have no substantive reality in themselves. These include the attributions of being the Originator (*Mabda'iyya*), Creator (*al-Khāliqiyya*), Sustainer (*al-Rāziqiyya*), etc.[41] As Ṣadrā states, they are "added" and "subsequent" to the divine essence but crucially without compromising divine oneness. This is because God's perfection and absolute transcendence are not caused by any of these relational attributes, but instead by His essence (which as we have just seen is the very same as His real intrinsic real attributes) from which these relational attributes spring forth and are derived. The multitude of these extrinsic attributes are, again, only in meaning and do not differ in their substantive nature. This is because just as the categories of attributes above are reduced to a single attribute, so too do the relational attributes return to a single meaning and single relation, namely God's Self-Subsistence (*al-Qayyūmiyya*) which signifies that all things are dependent upon Him for their own subsistence and sustenance. This is the sole relational attribute when understood with respect to God, but is *conceived* as multiple relations of distinct meanings with respect to creatures, such as His being their

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40   In the compilations of sermons attributed to ʿAlī bin abī Tālib, numerous examples can be cited, e.g. "He is One but not numerically" [*al-aḥad lā bi-ta'wīl ʿadad*]; "He is not confined by limits, nor counted by numbers" [*wa lā yuḥsabu bi-ʿaddin*]; "He who describes Him limits Him, he who limits Him numbers Him [*ʿaddahu*], he who numbers Him rejects His (pre-) eternity." See *Nahjul Balagha Vol. 1: Imam Ali bin Abi Talib's Sermons, Letters, and Sayings*, Ansariyan Publications, 2002: p. 555; Ibid., *Vol. 2*: p. 21. Conceiving divine oneness as something beyond numerical understanding seems unique to the Islamic tradition but only later develops into a mature ontological theory. Early philosophers such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā did not seem to consider it while Suhrawardī was one of the first to incorporate it as an important notion. By the time we come to Mīr Dāmād (ca. 1561 – 1631), the famed teacher of Ṣadrā, it becomes a fundamental idea in Islamic thought with the latter quoting and elaborating on the said narrations of ʿAlī bin abī Tālib in his major philosophical work, *al-Qabasāt*, Tehran University Press, 1977: pp. 138-140. The full significance of non-numerical divine oneness finds its place in Ṣadrā.

41   *Asfār*, VI, pp. 118-119, 128.

Creator, their Sustainer, their Provider, the Giver of life, etc.[42] But how is this category of divine attributes with its relation to contingent beings understood in Ṣadrā's wider metaphysical worldview?

While God's simplicity and intrinsic attributes had him predominantly engaged with precedents in the philosophical tradition and dialectical theology, his deliberations concerning creation took on a more Neoplatonist hue and the nomenclature of the Muslim rational-mystics. However, they were ultimately grounded in, and shaped by, his own ontological outlook.

Extended-Being and the Breath of the All-Merciful

The manner in which God's extrinsic attributes relates to contingent beings probes the perennial issue of the God-world relationship. In Ṣadrā, it naturally becomes a question of how pure simple *wujūd* engenders and interacts with the realm of multiplicity and quiddities. Ṣadrā's gradational ontology permits a fluid hierarchical cosmology which he delineates by endorsing the concepts found in the writings of Ibn ʿArabī. One of the terms borrowed from the latter's school of thought is *al-wujūd al-munbasiṭ* i.e. "unfolded" or "extended-being" which refers to the ontological relation or isthmus that both separates and brings together the being of God and the world of contingencies. Extended-being is the first emanation from Him in terms of the first self-manifestation of God's being, and, importantly, from which all other contingent beings derive their existence in gradational fashion. Hence, extended-being is also described as the "the reality by which creation occurs" (*al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi*). Its existential comprehensiveness extends to all the "temples of concrete things and the receptivities/tablets of quiddities," being the principle of the cosmos including "its life and its light," permeating everything in the heavens and the earth.[43] While this kind of existential cosmology preserves the distinction between God and creation, extended-being is not to be considered separate from Him. This is because while on the one hand it can be understood as an emanative reality, on the other hand it can be conceived of as a creative act. An act cannot be separated from its actor. Thus, Ṣadrā uses an oft-repeated analogy describing extended-being's relation to God's being as that of rays to the sun, shining upon the bodies of the heavens and the earth.[44]

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42 *Asfār,* VI, pp. 118-121. Ṣadrā quotes from Suhrawardī who identifies this exclusive single relation to God being the Originator or Origin (*al-Mabda'iyya*)

43 *Mashāʿir*, pp. 44-45; *Shawāhid*, p. 70 (in the latter, extended-existence is mentioned alongside its other synonym: Breath of the All-Merciful (*nafas al-Raḥmān*), which we turn to shortly); *Asfār*, II, p. 328, states "tablets (*alwāḥ*) of quiddities," while *Mashāʿir*, p. 9, states "receptivities (*qawābil*) of quiddities," both having the same import.

44 *Mashāʿir*, p. 45.

This dynamic (and quite abstract) cosmology in relation to the creative act of God has been expressed in more religious terminology by the Akbarian tradition that appropriated scriptural terms to denote the same emanative process, and which our philosopher again endorses. Ṣadrā states that *al-Raḥmān* (All-Merciful) is the divine name which necessitates the bestowal of extended-being upon all things.[45] This alludes to the key phrase which becomes a synonym for *al-wujūd al-munbasiṭ*: "the breath of the All-Merciful" (*nafas al-Raḥmān*), extracted verbatim from prophetic traditions and correlated with the Quranic verse: "My Mercy embraces all things"(Q 7:156).[46] The "breath" and "mercy", mentioned here from the hadith and Quranic verse respectively, both signify emanative existence that encompasses all created things yet in a manner not akin to particulars that are encompassed by a universal, but rather by way of expansion (*inbisāṭ*) and flowing (*sarayān*) upon the receptivity of quiddities in a manner that cannot be fully comprehended by the mind.[47] This existential flow is of course gradational for Ṣadrā, since the breath of the All-Merciful is one reality but incorporates different degrees (*marātib*) according to the "proximity and distance from the First."[48]

The underlying relational attribute of God upon which all contingent beings depend for their holistic subsistence, i.e. His Self-Subsistence (*al-Qayyūmiyya*) is precipitated through this very divine breath by which creation comes to be. But what is the impetus in employing the religious imagery of "the breath of the All-Merciful" as a mode for expressing the existential emanation in the creative act of God? Following Ibn ʿArabī, Mulla Ṣadrā provides the example of the human breath: when man speaks, his breath is the subtle air that arises from his inwardness or breast to produce sounds and letters that come together, giving rise to words and speech. Such a person not only speaks but also "writes" with the "pen of his power" on the "tablet of his breath."[49] Taking this analogy, the breath of the All-Merciful reveals a fundamental theme from Ibn ʿArabī's

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45   Ṣadrā, *Asrār al-Āyāt*, Khājavī M. (eds.) Tehrān: Iranian Academy of Philosophy (Henceforth, *Asrār*), 1981: p. 43

46   Two traditions in which this term is mentioned include: "Do not curse the wind, for it derives form the Breath of the All-Merciful," and "I find the Breath of the All-Merciful coming to me from the direction of Yemen." See Chittick, W.C. *The Sufi path of knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabi's metaphysics of imagination*. State University of New York Press, 1989: 127. For an example of Ṣadrā employing the Qurʾānic verse and hadith, see *Mashāʿir*, 44; *Asfār*, IX, p. 73, respectively.

47   *Mashāʿir* 9; *Shawāhid*, p. 7.

48   *Asfār*, IX, p. 75.

49   *ʿArshiyya* pp. 112-113; Ṣadrā, *Iksīr al-ʿārifīn* (The Elixir of the Gnostics: A parallel English-Arabic text). Chittick W.C. (trans). Brigham Young University Press (Henceforth, *Iksīr*), 2003: p. 27.

rational-mysticism that Ṣadrā dovetails into his dynamic cosmology: the role of divine speech.

God's Speech

The Perfect Words

Unsurprisingly, Ṣadrā's numerous discussions concerning divine speech are delineated with varying emphases since his dynamic metaphysical principles require such a theological matter to pervade ontological, cosmological and epistemological concerns. He begins with seemingly rudimentary observations that speech is an act that subsists through the speaker, and the speaker is one through whom the act of speech subsists by way of his breath.[50] The primordial reality of speech as an attribute of God is understood in terms of its function in the creative act of all existentiated things. Ṣadrā invariably begins his analysis of this dimension by employing the concept of the "Perfect Words" (*al-kalimāt al-tāmmāt*) another term borrowed from the hadith and appropriated by members of the rational-mystical tradition before him.[51] Not only did the world (*ʿālam*) become manifest by way of God's speech, the world itself *is* God's speech. From the breath of the All-Merciful arise twenty-eight stations (*maqāmāt*) and ranks (*manāzil*) – representing the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet – by which 'words' are formulated so that the cosmos is wholly constructed by these parts or divisions of speech. All creatures of any ontological status are articulated words of God that arise from the divine breath.[52] This explains why synonyms for the All-Merciful Breath include "the existential emanation" (*al-fayḍ al-wujūdī*) and one we already saw, "the reality by which creation occurs" (*al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi*) since the act of speaking is the act of creating in as much as things are brought into existence.[53]

Ṣadrā tells us the highest ontological level of speech is initiated by the single "existential-word" (*kalima wujūdiyya*) and Qur'ānic command "Be!" (*kun*)

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50   *Asfār*, VII, 3-4; *ʿArshiyya*, p. 112.

51   Hadith "I take refuge in all the perfect words of God from the evil of what He has created" Ṣadrā quotes numerously in his works. See for example, *Asfār*, XI, p. 294; *Asrār*, p. 74; *Mashāʿir*, p. 62.

52   *Asfār*, VII, p. 5; Ṣadrā, *Mafātīh al-ghayb*. 2 Vols. Khājavī M. (eds). Beirūt: Muʾassasa al-taʾrīkh al-ʿarabī (henceforth *Mafātīḥ*), 1999: pp. 93-94.

53   *Asfār*, VII, p. 5; *Mafātīḥ*, p. 100.

which instantiates, in the first stage, the Perfect Words.[54] It is fundamentally the establishment or configuration (*inshāʾ*) of these words that constitutes divine speech (*kalām*). These are luminous intermediaries between God and the created beings (*al-akwān al-khalqiyya*) so that the cosmos or creation (*khalq*) does not arise by way of the divine command itself, but instead through these very words.[55] These words are likely what Ṣadrā refers to as the first realities to emanate from God, being "by necessity the most majestic beings after Him... not possessing any contingency except to the extent of veiling from the First Being."[56] The ontological distinction between the Perfect Words and creation is that the former is of simple, immaterial, intellective substance that does not diminish or suffer from privation, and thus beyond time and space. By contrast, the corporeal world with its composite nature succumbs to change, disintegration and corruption. These ontic words are an "allusion to the luminous entities by which the emanation of existence (*fayḍ al-wujūd*) reaches the bodies and bodily things," so that the corporeal world is a shadow of the Perfect Words due to the gradual decrease in the intensity of being.[57]

As a result of this sublime ontological and axiological status, they are further and inevitably termed as being holy intellects (*ʿuqūl qudsiyya*) and exalted spirits (*arwāḥ ʿaliyya*), connected to the First Real as in the oft-repeated analogy of rays to the sun: the rays representing the perpetual emanation by these intermediary words between the illuminating essence (God) and the things which are illuminated (corporeal contingents).[58] This emanation is put in more theological terms by Ṣadrā in his voluminous Quranic commentary where he asserts that God's knowledge, power, and the permeation of His will and desire among the existent things, is actualised through the Perfect Words.[59] Ṣadrā explains how these intermediary entities of divine speech are described by various terms depending on the function or connection with which they are conceptualised:

> The names are many while the named is one, according to various perspectives: In accordance with realities being made-known (communicated) from God through them, they are called 'Words'

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54 *Asfār*, VII, p. 6; *Mafātīḥ*, p. 94; *Asrār*, p. 54.

55 Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-Karīm*. 7 Vols. Khājavī M. (eds). Qum: Intishārāt-i Bīdār (henceforth *Tafsīr*), 1987-90: 1/10; Asrār, p. 74.

56 *Mashāʿir*, p. 74.

57 *Asrār*, p. 74.

58 *Asrār*, p. 74.

59 *Tafsīr*, 1/9-10.

(*kalimāt*); in accordance with their necessitating the existence of existing beings – each at its moment – they are called 'God's Command' (*amr Allāh*) and 'Imposed Decree' (*qadāʾahu al-ḥatmī*); in accordance with the life of existent things being through them, they are called 'Spirit' (*rūḥ*): "Say, 'The Spirit is from the Command of my Lord'" (Q 17:85).

In their essence these (three names) are one: "Our Command is nothing but one" (Q 54:50). But (this one) is multiplied by the numerous types of effects: "And He revealed in each heaven its Command" (Q 41:12).

Or, with respect to the directions of their emanations upon things; or with respect to their connections to them, they become numerous through their numerosity – just as existence is one reality which becomes numerous through the numerosity of quiddities....[60]

By extension, this clarifies why the realm within which these primary ontological entities inhere is also characterised variously as the world of command (*ʿālam al-amr*), the world of decree (*ʿālam al-qadāʾ*), and the world of intellect (*ʿālam al-ʿaql*); the former two being preferred in the mystical tradition with the Muslim philosophical tradition – exemplified by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā – preferring the latter.[61] Further significance of these terms will be made apparent shortly.

For Ṣadrā, the meaning of two Prophetic traditions which he presents in relation to the Perfect Words now becomes clear in the backdrop of his onto-cosmology. The traditions tell of the Prophet seeking refuge with the Perfect Words of God from the evil of what He has created.[62] With gradation of existence that also equates ontology with axiology (that is, as regards value or 'goodness'), one should seek refuge in these words of God since they inhere in the high existential plane of "the world of command which is absolutely good with no evil in it." Since the hierarchy of being gradually leads 'down' to the debilitation and imperfection of existence by way of composition and privation, everything in the world of creation (*khalq*) such as bodies and their concomitants are subject to defects, affliction, and thus ultimately, "evil".[63]

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60 *Asrār*, p. 75.

61 It might be more accurate to say that the terms mentioned here represent certain aspects or nuanced stages in the higher immaterial tier of being. In this reading, *ʿālam al-ʿaql* would be within the lower ontological end of *ʿālam al-amr*.

62 Both traditions are mentioned in *Asrār*, p. 74. They are widely found in the traditional sources of narrations.

63 *Asrār*, p. 74.

But what does it precisely mean for a human being to seek refuge in the Perfect Words? Here, it might be prudent to delve into an epistemological perspective. One of the designations we saw Ṣadrā apply to these words was 'holy intellects' (*ʿuqūl qudsiyya*). The justification for applying this noetic identity can be seen in his assertions immediately prior: "every immaterial (thing) is a spiritual (*rūḥānī*) entity – its existence (*wujūd*) is the same as knowledge (*ʿilm*) and perception (*idrāk*)." The Perfect Words are not confined to being ontic entities in Ṣadrā's cosmological worldview; rather, they are of intelligible (*ʿaqlī*) substance which according to Ṣadrā's philosophy makes them both intellects (in that they actively 'intelligise') and intelligibles (in that they are passively intelligible).[64] The words of God are epistemic intelligible entities, accessible to humans by way of intellection and grounded on the general premise that existence is the very basis of meaning and perception. Knowledge is the unveiling and acquisition of modes of being that unites with the being of the perceptive self: "all forms of perception – be they intelligible or sensible – are one in their existence with the existence of the subject that perceives it."[65] Epistemology becomes a continuous process of ontology as self-transformation.[66] For Ṣadrā, human perfection corresponds to one's proximity to the world of intelligibles and the intense level of existence with which it is identified, compared to the weaker mode of the material realm and the sensible attachments associated with it. Traversing this existential and spiritual journey by climbing the stages of being corresponds exactly to growing in knowledge, or, rather, growing *as* knowledge *qua* existence.

Extending the principles we saw in the first part of this article, the simple and higher intellect in this cosmological hierarchy contains within it all the lower degrees and composite forms of existence. As the first realities to emanate from God and the most majestic beings after Him, the intelligibility of the Perfect Words is the apex of this onto-epistemic journey in human perfection, keeping the ineffable divine Essence distinct and beyond human reach and understanding. This is why Ṣadrā equates the Perfect Words with what the Peripatetics call the 'Active Intellect,' which is among the intellects that emerges from God, containing all knowledge in a simple unified state and being the origin of all intelligible human knowledge. In Ibn Sīnā, the mechanism of acquiring intelligibles is through 'contact' or 'conjunction' (*ittiṣāl*) between the human intellect and the Active Intellect by a process of mentation. In the

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64 "Every intelligible being is also intellecting" *ʿArshiyya*, p. 113. Translation adjusted.

65 *Mashāʿir*, p. 55. Translation adjusted.

66 For a good introduction on Ṣadrā's epistemology, see Kalin, I, *Knowledge in later Islamic philosophy: Mulla Sadra on existence, intellect, and intuition.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Prophet – due to his unique capacity – this process is instantaneous and gives him access to all intelligible knowledge of the Active Intellect by way of an intuitive illumination.[67] Mulla Ṣadrā takes this a step further, describing the mechanism not merely as 'contact' (*ittiṣāl*) but rather as unification and identity (*ittiḥād*) of the rational soul or human intellect with the Active Intelligence – something Ibn Sīnā vehemently argues against. Like the Peripatetic thinkers before him, Ṣadrā regularly connects this theme to more theological language related to the concept of revelation, "the Active Intellects (*al-ʿuqūl al-faʿālah*) are the Perfect Words of God which are never diminished nor exhausted – they are His angels of knowledge (*al-malāʾikatuhu al-ʿilmiyya*)," and identifies it with the Qurʾānic term 'Holy Spirit' (*rūḥ al-qudus*) which is traditionally understood as being employed to describe the source or process of prophetic revelation.[68]

With his sublime status as the Perfect Man and through divine designation, the Prophet unites with this noetic and angelic being, acquiring undifferentiated knowledge of the highest order and attaining to the "realities of existents."[69] But while the Prophet represents the summit of this onto-epistemic culmination, the path of this spiritual journey is open to all – albeit in accordance with their markedly different capacities. Thus Ṣadrā asserts:

> The words of God are a spiritual existent entity which confirms the Prophets by intimiation (*waḥy*), God says: "That is how We revealed to you a spirit by Our command" (Q 42:52); and it (His words) inspires (*ilhām*) God's saints (*awliyāʾ*) with providential acts (*karāmāt*); and enlivens (*muḥyī*) the hearts of the wayfarers among the believers through faith (*īmān*).[70]

Speech and Book

In the previous section we looked at divine speech defined by Ṣadrā in the first place as the configuration of the Perfect Words. Usually he follows this statement with a further definition of speech's reality as the descent or revelation (*inzāl*) of signs which are either definitive or similitudes (in reference to Qurʾān 3:7) in the

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67   Rahman, F. *Prophecy in Islam: Philsophy and Orthodoxy*. The University of Chicago Press, 2011: pp. 30-45.

68   *Asfār*, IX, 130; VII, 24; *Shawāhid*, p. 341.

69   *Asfār*, VII, pp. 18, 24.

70   *Asrār*, 75. Cf. *Shawāhid*, p. 349.

dress of words and expressions.[71] Therefore, "the descending speech (*al-kalām al-nāzil*) from Allah is (both) speech and book from (different) perspectives."[72]

He thus endorses the distinction made in the tradition of rational-mysticism between God's speech (*kalām*) and book (*kitāb*), which corresponds to speaking and writing respectively, and maps this onto his onto-cosmology. Firstly, speech is simple (*basīt*) while the book is composite (*murakkab*).[73] This immediately reveals how Ṣadrā views this distinction in terms of the gradation of being and his principle of simplicity: speech ontologically precedes and alethically (in relation to truth) encompasses the book since the latter is a more concrete manifestation of, and existentially weaker than, the former. It is no surprise therefore that while speech inheres in the realm of command (*ʿālam al-amr*), the book belongs to the world of creation (*ʿālam al-khalq*). This dichotomy between the two realms was commonly expressed by Ibn ʿArabī and his commentators, extrapolated from the Qurʾānic verse: "Look! All creation and command belong to Him" (Q 7:54), and extended to the worlds of the Unseen and Witnessed (*al-ghayb wa al-shahāda*).[74] Just as the sensible world is an instantiation and expression of the unitary principles found in the unseen, so too is the book a concrete expression of undifferentiated speech while being contingent upon it. Speech is an instantaneous entity while the book is gradual, but both possess different levels (*manāzil*) and stages (*marātib*).[75]

For example, Ṣadrā describes speech as incorporating both 'Qurʾān' and 'Furqān,' (two epithets employed in the scripture of the Quran) while both are distinct from the book. The epithets are stripped etymologically here in manner akin to the hermeneutical methodology of Ibn ʿArabī: rather than presupposing the trilateral root *q-r-a* meaning 'to recite' or 'to read,' the root associated here with Qurʾān is *q-r-n* denoting 'to unite' or 'bind together' which stands in contrast to *f-r-q* meaning 'to divide, separate, distinguish.'[76] Thus, while both Qurʾān and Furqān signify Divine Speech at the higher ontological tier, the former identifies it in a simple undifferentiated manner (*ijmālī*), while the latter identifies it at a more intelligibly detailed stage (*tafṣīlī*). On the other hand, the book also has stages as it

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71   *Asrār,* p. 52; *Shawāhid*, p. 57; *Mashāʿir*, pp. 61-62; *ʿArshiyya*, p. 226.

72   *Mashāʿir*, p. 62.

73   *Mafātīḥ*, p. 100.

74   For Ibn ʿArabī on this theme, see Chittick, W.C. *The self-disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-ʿArabi's cosmology.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998: p. 250.

75   *Mafātīḥ*, p. 100; *Mashāʿir*, p. 62.

76   Ibid. For this aspect in Ibn ʿArabī, see Ibn ʿArabi, *The Ring Stones of Wisdom: Fusus al-hikam.* Dagli, C.K. (trans., annot.) Great Books of the Islamic World, 2004: p. 42, and Dagli's footnote 24 on the same page.

acquires semi-immaterial characteristics and forms of the corporeal world during its descent until it reaches the lowest tangible stages of creation.[77]

All these stages and terms simply represent an existential continuum from a simple being to a more composite and delimited entity. Both the Qur'ān and Furqān in the sense just described are unchanging and beyond time while their dwelling is the human hearts and breast which have the potential to access them. The book is temporal and eventually perceived by everyone as it belongs to the world of creation.[78] Thus, speech is referred to in the scripture as "the Noble Qur'ān... no one touches it except the purified..." i.e. purified from spiritual contamination or blemish of the world of mortal man (*adnās ʿālam al-bashariyya*); while the very next verse "...a descending-revelation (*tanzīl*) from Lord of worlds" (Q 56:77-80) refers to the book. Speech is that which is internalised at the higher planes and degrees of being by those of purified heart and soul, accounting for the Prophets, saints, and wayfarers among the believers. The book, at its most basic and delimited stage, is that which "appears to everyone, discussed by all speakers, read by every reader, and heard by all hearers."[79]

Ṣadrā describes the process of this metaphysical articulation using, again, the analogy of the human breath in three stages: things have an existence in the soul (from where the process begins); an existence in the human breath (arising from the person's inwardness and corresponding to the creative divine breath); and an existence in writing (inasmuch as there is some form of "imprint," be it metaphysical or corporeal). These refer respectively to the soul's word (*qawl*), speech, and book. The first is referenced in the Qur'ānic verse: "Our word [*qawl*] to a thing when We intend it is but that We say to it, "Be," and it is" (Q 16.40); the second is referenced in the verse, "Grant him asylum until he hears the Speech [*kalām*] of God" (Q 9:6); and the third in the verse "*Alif Lām Mīm*. That is the Book, there is no doubt in it, a guidance to the God-wary" (Q 2:1-2).[80]

It is worth noting that Ṣadrā uses this ontological differentiation to mediate in perhaps the most contentious dispute between the Ashʿarites and Muʿtazila as to whether the speech of God is eternal or created. This issue becomes a non-issue

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77   The terms used here are *al-qadar al-dhihni*, and *al-qadar al-ʿayni*. See *Asrār*, p. 52.

78   Ibid; *ʿArshiyya*, pp. 110-111; *Mashāʿir*, p. 62.

79   *Asrār*, p. 53.

80   *Iksīr*, p. 27. Ṣadrā also subsumes both speech and book as being a form of "descending speech" at a more fundamental level, as we saw at the start of this section. In fact he asserts that in a certain respect, every speaker is a writer, while every writer is a speaker; so that every speech is a book and vice versa. Therefore, speech and book may both be applied to the various planes and levels of being described depending on the perspective at which they are conceived. This further underscores how conceptually things can be differentiated for a reality which is by nature one and univocal. See *Asfār*, XII, p. 12; *Mashāʿir*, p. 62; *ʿArshiyya*, pp. 112-113.

for our philosopher: when God's speech is conceived as eternal, it corresponds to speech at the higher ontological plane and viewed as an *act*, being inseparable from the speaker. But when conceived as created, it is viewed as a book and a separate articulation from the writer.[81] Understanding both perspectives in relation to the univocal and gradational nature of being reveals how both aspects are not mutually exclusive but rather form parts of a coherent process. The polarising views of the two schools are not only erred by the exclusive insistence of their own positions, but more fundamentally, due to the incorrect principles they were grounded upon as an extension of their theories on divine attributes which we saw our philosopher reject.

This differentiation also has implications for the salvific path. It is indeed *through* the book (and more generally, through the sensible realm by way of spiritual purification and religious injunctions) that one may gain access to some aspect of the higher ontological planes of speech and the unseen. This however, requires an engagement not just of the sensible human faculties, but their inward dimensions: "speech is perceived only through hearing, and book is perceived only through eyesight. So the Real's speech is (truly) perceived through inward (*bāṭin*) hearing, and His book is (truly) perceived through inward eyesight."[82] Thus, after sharing narrations where the Prophet states that members among his community are "spoken to and addressed," Ṣadrā asserts that true speech (*al-takallum al-ḥaqīqī*) is not conditioned by the dressing of words and expressions, nor must the speaker necessarily be in the form of a person, rather, "it is a spiritual speech (*kalām maʿnawī*) cast into the hearts of those listening to God: "Do not be like those who say, 'We listen', though they do not hear... Had Allah known in them any good He would surely, have made them hear..." (Q 8:21-23).[83]

Divine Speech and the Realms of Cosmology

From a certain perspective, speech and book conveys the full range of God's creative act and divine communication. But what brings together the higher and lower realms of existence that these terms signify? Quoting the Quranic verse that describes the spirit (*rūḥ*) as being from the Lord's command (*ʾamr*), Ṣadrā states, "it began to come from the world of the command at the hands of angels intermediary between His command and His creation."[84] The nature of this intermediary domain – between the two ontic realms described as 'command'

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81 *Asfār*, VII, pp. 10-13.

82 *Iksīr*, p. 26.

83 *Asrār*, pp. 55-56.

84 *Iksīr*, p. 84. Quranic verse is Q.17:85.

and 'creation' – where the said angels function has unique implications in our philosopher for divine speech and its gradational dimensions.

Theories concerning the nature of the cosmos and its hierarchical structure evolved substantially throughout the intellectual history of Islamic thought. Ṣadrā criticises the views held by early Muslim philosophers such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā in this area on two fronts: first, their apparent restriction of the cosmic realms to the two worlds of immaterial intellects and material bodies; and second, their limiting of the human imaginative faculty as being completely subjective and psychological, without any reference or correspondence to an objective imaginal world.[85] Despite this, Ibn Sīnā alludes to the mere possibility of the imagination playing a role after death for those who did not acquire intellectual perfection, so as to experience states of the hereafter that are vividly portrayed in scripture.[86] Although a vehement and sometimes harsh critic of Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī seemed to otherwise endorse this particular notion and further elevated the prominence of the imaginative faculty by asserting its necessity to connect with the purely immaterial realm by way of 'visions' such as those unveiled to the pious mystic. This connection to the divine world is therefore not exclusively reserved for the rational faculty as the philosophers would have it, but rather occurs by means of archetypal-images or semblances (*muthul*, sing. *mithāl*). These are similar to what one may experience in dreams and accounts for the soul's perceptions immediately following death such as the rewards and punishments in the grave.[87]

It was Suhrawardī, however, who was the first Muslim philosopher to posit a further independent 'realm of semblances' correlating to human imagination, providing a systematic theory for the phenomena experienced in dreams and mystical visions.[88] In a notable sub-chapter discussing the soul's separation from the body in his major work *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, he labels this realm as 'the world of suspended semblances' (*ʿālam al-muthūl al-muʿallaqa*) and 'the world of immaterial figures' (*ʿālam al-ashbāh al-mujarrada*).[89] Some decades later, Ibn ʿArabī would

85 *ʿArshiyya*, pp. 149-150; *Asfār*, IX, pp. 148-151; Rahman, *Prophecy*, pp. 36-45.

86 Ibn Sīnā, *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, trans. M.E. Marmura, Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005: pp. 355-356.

87 Hughes, A. Imagining the Divine: Ghazali on Imagination, Dreams, and Dreaming. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 70(1), 2002: pp. 33–53. Ṣadrā quotes Ghazali on a number of occasions related to this theme. See for example, *Asfār*, VIII, p. 320; IX, pp. 151-153.

88 For an exhaustive study, see Van Lit, L.W.C. *The World of Image in Islamic Philosophy: Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi, Shahrazuri, and Beyond*. Edinburgh University Press, 2017.

89 Suhrawardī, *The philosophy of illumination: A new critical edition of the text of Hikmat al-Ishraq*. Walbridge J. & Ziai, H. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1999: 150. (Translation adjusted).

make such a middle-realm a corner stone of his vast corpus of rational-mysticism, terming it the 'imaginal' world (*ʿālam al-khayāl*), and more rarely the world of semblances (*ʿālam al-mithāl*) which some of his later commentators would prefer.[90] He solidified it as one of the three realms of the divine creative act alongside the highest world of spirits (*ʿālam al-arwāḥ*) or intellect (*ʿaql*), and the lowest world of bodies (*ʿālam al-ajsām*). It was designated as the isthmus or the world 'in-between' the latter two i.e. *barzakh* – a term employed in the Quran and prophetic narrations. For Ibn ʿArabī, these three realms are reflected in the microcosm of man as his spirit (*rūḥ*), soul (*nafs*) and body (*jism*).

While the main impetus for these developments of the imaginal realm was to address a number of issues including the nature of mystical experiences and eschatological beliefs, in Ṣadrā it also becomes part of the ontological nature of divine speech and revelation in a distinctive manner. The subjective faculty of imagination in al-Fārābī served as the means for a Prophet to convert the abstract simple truths obtained by his intellect into sensible images and verbal renditions that would become the tangible message for his community. Ibn Sīnā endorsed and expanded on this function, adding that certain images flow into the soul by way of influence from the celestial bodies. Suhrawardī, in turn, agreed with this position when he posited an independent world of suspended images. Ṣadrā heavily criticised both latter philosophers for this attribution to the celestial spheres. He did so because firstly, for him, the spheres are part of the physical world of matter rather than part of a higher ontological plane; and secondly, the imaginative faculty is itself immaterial with no need for recourse to such celestial bodies.[91] This intermediary realm and the human faculty corresponding to it became a fundamental aspect in Ṣadrā's cosmological and anthropological worldview in terms of its function in the divine creative act and in the human journey towards God – both of which are underpinned by a teleological revelation. In a section where he recapitulates the main principles of his entire philosophy, he begins the final principle as follows:

> "the categories of worlds and configurations (*al-ʿawālim wa-l-nash'āt*) despite their innumerable multiplicity are reducible to three, although the abode of existence (*dār al-wujūd*) is (only) one, due to their interrelationship: the lowest is the world of natural forms subject to change and decay; the intermediate is the world of perceptive forms

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90   Chittick, *Sufi Path,* pp. 116-117; See also, Chittick, W. "Ibn ʿArabī," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2020 Edition). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/ibn-arabi/>

91   *Asfār*, IX, pp. 191-192.

disembodied from matter...[and] the highest is the world of intellective forms... the human soul is unique among all existents since it has (all) these three engenderings while remaining one individual person... [thus] he is a mortal human (*insān basharī*), then he gradually progresses in this existence becoming purer and subtler... [until] he is a 'soulish man' (*insān nafsānī*)... then he gradually progresses from this state of being so that an intellectual being occurs and he is an 'intellectual human' (*insān 'aqlī*)"[92]

Ṣadrā superimposes divine speech on to this three-tier ontological hierarchy. We can say that just as the modalities of being do not take away from its fundamental unity, so divine speech is in reality one, but discernable into three parts or stages. The highest form of speech is when that which is intended by it is the very speech and articulation itself, and nothing beyond this intention. Therefore, the ultimate purpose of communicating or to 'make-known' (*i'lām*) is simply the configuration of the entities which comprise speech such as its letters and words. This occurs by innovating or originating (*'ibdā'*) the world of command through the word "Be!" and nothing besides this. It includes the Perfect Words and primordial (*inniyāt*) intelligibles, as we have already seen. The intention in their configuration by God is nothing but His command. Ṣadrā correlates this to a principle he cites from the Plotinian text, *Uthūlūjiyā*, that he interprets by saying whatever is identified as its own reality, is therefore its own perfection and purpose.[93]

The second kind of speech is that which, apart from the purpose of the speech itself, has a further intended object which is obligated or necessitated by it. These include God's command to the angels of various ontological orders that manage and govern affairs within their domain. Thus, there are angels of the celestial realm who are tasked with managing affairs, movements, worship, and divine acts relating to other intelligible limits, and are referred to as those who "...do not disobey whatever God has commanded them" (Q 66:6), and obtain their benefit from the descent of speech at this level. It also includes angels presiding over the lower world of earthly and elemental bodies and natures, and who are tasked with managing mountains, seas, minerals, clouds, wind and rain. God's command can reach them either with or without the intermediary of another command (*'amr*) but not through the intermediary of natural creation (*khalq*). Again, these lower-worldly angels also obey God without any rebellion as Ṣadrā cites a verse in their case "and they do what they are commanded" (Q 16:50), commenting that it is delicate allusion to this level of speech. The most

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92   Ibid, p. 194.

93   *Asfār*, VII, p. 6.

characteristic aspect of this second kind of speech is that disobedience is not possible – all God's commands are carried out.

The lowest aspect of speech also has a further intended object like the second kind but it includes an element of volition on the part of the object; the content of the speech can either be obeyed or disobeyed, being as it is on the plane of composition, change and corruption. The possibility of commands not being carried out always exists at this level since it is not preserved from opposition and mistakes. This incorporates the divine commands that address those obligated to God – such as humans and jinn – through the intermediary of messengers sent down to them. Only commands without an intermediary or through the intermediary of another command are inevitably observed and obeyed. But this only characterises the first two kinds of speech. Human volition and self-determination are the unique concomitants of this lowest level of divine speech.[94]

Ṣadrā goes on to categorise each kind of speech according to their *type* of command, and equating them to their corresponding cosmological loci:[95]

1. He identifies the highest speech as the 'originative command' (*al-'amr al-'ibda'ī*) in the 'world of compelling decree' (*'ālam al-qaḍā' al-ḥatmī*), associated with the Quranic verse "Your Lord has decreed [*qaḍā'*] that you shall not worship anyone except Him" (Q 17:23). This world of decree corresponds to the intellective world.[96]
2. The intermediary speech is the 'engendering command' (*al-amr al-takwīnī*) in the 'world of determination' (*'ālam al-qadar*) and it is associated with the verse "Indeed We have created everything in a determined measure [*qadar*]" (Q 54:49). The world of determination corresponds to the soulish world and contains forms corresponding to their concrete manifestations in the nether realm.[97]
3. The lowest form of speech is its being sent-down (*inzāl*) to this lower plane of existence, with the prescriptive command of the sharia (*al-amr al-tashrī'*) and is correlated with the verse "He has prescribed [*shara'a*] for you the religion which He had enjoined upon Noah" (Q 42:13).[98]

It is through these three ontic realms and their characteristic material, semi-immaterial, and purely immaterial nature that divine speech – and the concept of revelation associated with it – takes various forms, and manifests according to the

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94   *Asfār*, VII, pp. 5-6.

95   *Asfār*, VII, p. 6.

96   *Iksīr*, p. 8.

97   Ibid.

98   *Asfār*, VII, p. 6.

existential intensity or weakness associated with it at any given plane of being. This applies to the continuum of the worlds in the descent of the creative act, and to the continuum of the human configurations and spiritual journey in their ascent, epitomised in the archetype of the Prophet: "The configurations are three and the worlds three – the configuration of the intellect, the configuration of the soul, and the configuration of sensation and nature. These parallel the world of this-world (*dunyā*), the world of the hereafter (*ākhira*), and the world of the command (*'amr*)."[99]

Conclusion

For divine speech to be understood as the creative force and substance of the hierarchical cosmos, as well as the revelatory form of communication to man, one is required to reevaluate the nature of divine attributes and the God-world relationship. This in turn necessitates a deconstruction of divine simplicity which posits the oneness of God in a new light under Ṣadrā's innovative principles. It permits a conception of divine speech that accommodates the univocal nature of existence and a monistic understanding of reality, while functioning in (or *as*) the diversity and differentiation inherent in the continuum of being. Divine speech manifests varyingly in conjunction with the descent and modalities of *wujūd*.

But what bearing does this have on our understanding of the Quran *qua* scripture which is understood conventionally as God's speech in Islam? We saw Ṣadrā apply a very specific etymological signification to the meaning of the word 'Qur'ān' earlier as the summit of divine speech and one of the highest entities of being. However, that served a particular perspective and its meaning is not limited by this interpretation. We also saw how he addressed the controversial issue concerning the nature of divine speech among the most polarised views of the theologians by differentiating between speech and book. The Quran, however, holds a central position incorporating the spectrum of modulated being, just as we see mirrored in the various internal levels of both the cosmos and the human being. As an entity, it subsumes this existential hierarchy precipitated by the creative process while also representing the product of revelation. It is a mode of existence, a ray of God's light, and its reality incorporates the dynamic ontology that is the very hallmark of Ṣadrā's philosophy:

> The Qur'ān, although it is one reality, has multiple levels in its descent (*nuzūl*) and various names in accordance with these levels. So in every

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99   *Iksīr*, p. 11.

world (*ʿālam*) and configuration (*nashʾa*) it is called by a name which corresponds to its specific station and its particular rank.[100]

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100 *Mafātīḥ*, p. 98.

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7

An Analysis of
the Quranic Presentation of Angels

Mahshid Turner

Introduction

In this chapter I aim to look at the concept of *malāi'ka* (angels) from a Quranic perspective. Accordingly, my main source will not be hadith, exegetical material or any literature written on the subject, but solely the Quran itself. I endeavour to use the Izutsian analytical method to understand what the Quran itself has to say about angels. In other words, the aim is to get as close to an 'interpretation of the Quran by the Quran'/*tafsīr Quran bi'l Quran* as possible.

This chapter will be in two parts. Part One will comprise a brief Quranic to familiarize the reader with the concept of angels. In this part, the Izutsian method will not be used, as the aim of this section is to present the overarching 'story' of angels in the Quran. This will require the study of all the verses where angels are mentioned.

The Izutsian method will be discussed in more detail in Part Two of this chapter. To give a very short description, Izutsian analysis involves the examination of the semantic category of key words which relate to "neighbouring words belonging to the same meaning field".[1] In practice it means looking at the words in the text which have a strong relation or connection with the word *malak* (angel). The aim is to go beyond obtaining a basic meaning and to arrive at a contextual meaning of the concept.

According to Burge, there is no systematic 'theology' of angels within the major monotheistic religions, as within each religious tradition, beliefs about angels may appear to be different and even in some cases contradictory. In the

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1   Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico Religious Concepts in the Quran* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007).

case of the Christian narrative, Stephen Burge gives the example of Karl Barth who describes angels as intermediaries between the divine and human realms, while other Christian traditions do not make such a sharp separation between the two realms.[2] Regarding Islamic literature, the complexity of hadith literature on the subject and the influence of folklore on angels, current in popular religion, seem to have blurred the significant role angels play in the cosmos.

It is mentioned in the Quran that even the pagan Arabs had their own image of angels and questioned the Prophet as to why he was in human form and why angels were not sent down instead of him.[3] This supernatural image that portrays angels as totally divorced from the structure of the universe and the lack of understanding of their cosmological role is very much an issue today.

Although the concept of angels has been discussed in classical hadith literature and exegesis of the Quran, as well as in other works, and in particular Sufi literature,[4] there is a dearth of modern scholarship on angels in Islam. This chapter aims to open the field for further work on angels by initiating a systematic analysis of the Quranic concept of angels using the Izutsian method.

Part One

Typology of the Word malak *in the Quran*

The word 'angel' comes from the Greek word *angelos,* meaning messenger (See *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*). The Hebrew word is *mal'āk*, similar to the Arabic word *malak*, which is said to be derived from *la'aka*, meaning 'to send on a mission' (See *The New Encyclopedia of Islam*). There are many other words for angels from different languages and cultures; however, it is the Quranic concept of *malak* which will be the subject of the study of this chapter.

Angels Named in the Quran

In the Quran there are three angels mentioned by name. These are the archangels Jibrāīl, Mīkā'il and Mālik. Jibrāīl was the vehicle by which the words of God

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(Quran) were communicated to the prophet Muhammad.[5] In the verse where it is indicated that the requirement of belief is to believe in the angels, the names of both Jibrāīl and Mīkā'il are distinguished from other angels.[6] The other angel, simply referred to as Mālik, has been given the duty to guard hell.[7] Other angels are not explicitly named but are described by their function such as the angel of death/*malak al-mawt*.[8] And there are angels described by their function without the word angel/*malak* in their name, such as the *ḥamālat al-'arsh*, namely, those who carry God's throne,[9] and the Recorders/*kātibūn*,[10] and the angel in charge of blowing the trumpet on the Day of Judgment.[11]

Nature of Angels

Without reference to hadith and exegetical material, it is possible to glean some information about the nature of angels from the Quran. The Quran describes the angel Gabriel as well as other angels as being Prophet Muhammad's assistants/*ẓaḥir*.[12] It also makes it clear that angels are genderless and that they should not be labelled as female.[13] Although belief in angels is the second most important fundamental of faith, believers are strongly warned that angels do not have a share in God's Lordliness (*rubūbiyya*), as God is the only Sustainer/*Rabb*[14] and angels are merely servants of God ('*abd lillāhi*) carrying out His commands.[15] It is God who inspires angels to do the things they are commanded to do.[16] Angels were commanded to prostrate to Adam, and all of them obeyed their Lord.[17]

In fact, there is no mention of angels disobeying their Lord, as they were sent down only with the truth/*ḥaqq*,[18] and every single angel prostrated/*sajada*,

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5   See Quran, 2:97.

6   See Quran, 2:98.

7   See Quran, 43:77.

8   See Quran, 32:11.

9   See Quran, 40:7

10   See Quran, 21:94.

11   See Quran, 36:53 and 39:68.

12   See Quran, 66:4.

13   For example, see Quran, 53:27.

14   See Quran, 3:80.

15   See Quran, 4:172.

16   See Quran, 8:12.

17   See Quran, 16:49.

18   Quran, 15:8.

signaling total obedience.[19] While all the angels praise and glorify God (*tasbīḥ/ taḥmīd/taqdīs*) humans have the ability to cause corruption and shed blood (*yufsid and yasfik*).[20]

As messengers (*rusul*) of God, angels play a central role in the interaction between God and human beings. They act as intermediaries, operating between the realm of the unseen (*malakūt*) and the seen world (*mulk*).[21] The Quran describes angels appearing in the seen realm in a form recognizable by humans,[22] as well as portraying them as having wings.[23] The presence of angels in this world, is strongly indicated in the fact that angels are witnesses (*shāhidūn*).[24]

Function of Angels

Angels are described as messengers (*rusul*), asked with communicating God's messages.[25] They descend from the unseen realm (*malakūt*) to the seen world (*mulk*) in order to convey God's signs in every matter (*amr*).[26] They are also described as witnesses in this visible realm (*'alam al-shahāda*). They testify to God's oneness through their very existence,[27] and bear witness to what has been sent down in this world.[28] As witnesses to what goes on in the individual lives of all human beings, angels have also been given permission to ask for forgiveness on their behalf,[29] but their intercession will be permitted only if God approves it.[30]

As well as all angels being witnesses, there are two angels referred to as the Honourable Scribes (*kirāmān kātibīn*) who have been given the specific task of recording every individual's deeds. The angel sitting on the right shoulder records the good deeds and the one on the left records the bad deeds.[31]

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19   Quran, 15:30 and 38:73.

20   Quran, 2:30.

21   See Quran, 22:75.

22   For example, see Quran, 19:17.

23   For example, see Quran, 35:1.

24   See Quran, 37:150.

25   See Quran, 22:75.

26   Quran, 97:4 and 7:37.

27   Quran, 3:18.

28   Quran, 4:166.

29   Quran, 42:5.

30   Quran, 53:26.

31   Quran, 82:10-12, 43:19, 43:80 and 50:17-18.

Another function of angels in this realm is to help individuals as decreed by their Lord, and to give assistance[32] or serve as reinforcements in battle.[33] Angels are also the bearers of good news, as exemplified in the verse where Zechariah's prayers are granted and angels give the good news about the birth of his son, John, who will become a prophet and will be among the righteous.[34] Another example is Mary, who was given the good news of the birth of Jesus.[35] However, in the case of wrong-doers who have been shown clear signs but choose to cover the truth, they will be cursed by everyone, including the angels.[36]

The angel of death (*malak al-mawt*) has been given the task of taking back the souls of those who leave this world.[37] Other angels also descend upon the righteous who are about to pass to the next realm, assuring them that they do not need to fear or grieve, and to give the glad tidings that they will receive what their Lord has promised them.[38] However, for those who are clearly aware of the guidance but choose to revert back to disbelief, the angels will not greet them in death, but will strike their faces and their backs.[39] Angels as witnesses are also given the task to respond to all unsound excuses and justifications.[40]

The day of judgment is characterized by the 'blowing of the horn'.[41] While there are angels who welcome the righteous to heaven,[42] there are also angels appointed by their Lord to be the wardens of the Fire (*aṣḥāb al-nār*).[43] These angels, described by the Quran as stern (*ghilāẓ*) and severe (*shidād*), will carry out what they are commanded by their Lord.[44]

Angels were also appointed to carry (*ḥaml*) the ark (*tābūt*), a remnant which was left by the family of Moses.[45] There are also angels who carry the Divine throne, and they are described by their function, namely 'those who bear the throne' (*yaḥmilūna al-'arsh*). The task of these angels is to surround the throne

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32   Quran, 66:4.

33   Quran, 3:124-125 and 8:9.

34   Quran, 3:39.

35   Quran, 3:45.

36   Quran, 3:86-87.

37   Quran, 32:11.

38   Quran, 41:30 and 16:32 and 21:103.

39   Quran, 8:50 and 47:25-27.

40   Quran, 4:97 and 16:28.

41   Quran, 39:68.

42   Quran, 13:23-24.

43   Quran, 74:31.

44   Quran, 66:6.

45   Quran, 2:248.

and glorify and praise their Lord. Additionally, these angels appeal to their Lord to forgive those who repent.[46]

There is a large body of hadith literature which gives greater detail about the above-mentioned angels, such as Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's *al-Ḥabā'ik fī akhbār al-malā'ik*.[47] But my task for Part One of this chapter has been to give an overview of the narrative of angels in the Quran. Part Two of this chapter comprises an analysis of the word *malak* in the Quran, using the Izutsian method.

Part Two

Part Two will focus on the semantic field of the word *malak*. Toshihiko Izutsu's analytical method will be used to consider terms which are closely linked to the concept of *malak* in order to obtain a contextual meaning rather than an atomistic one.[48] Izutsu argues that this method is conducive to a more scientific approach to the meaning of Quranic concepts, as it is an approach which decreases the possibility of the analysts' imposition of their own historical, cultural or political consciousness on the text. Ideally this would allow the story of *malak* to unfold more organically and in accordance with the general *Weltanschauung* of the Quranic text. The analysis will be carried out by gathering all the verses where *malak* is mentioned, comparing them with each other, as well as with other synonyms and antonyms, to hopefully reach an understanding which goes beyond a basic meaning. It is a method of analysis which enables the Quran to "interpret its own concepts and speak for itself."[49]

The meanings of words are either lost in translation or give only a literal or partial understanding, which is not only inadequate but also in some cases may be misleading. Izutsu gives the example of the word 'weed', which in one dictionary is defined as "a wild herb springing where it is not wanted".[50] This gives the impression that weeds are 'undesired' herbs, when in reality one cannot objectively label any herb as 'undesirable' outside of one's own personal requirements and purposes. Looking at it from a different perspective, some

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46 Quran, 40:7 and 39:75.

47 Al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn, *Al-Haḅ āik fī akhbār al-malā'ik*, ed. Abū Hājir Muḥammad al-Sac īd ibn Basyūnī Zaghlūl (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-c Ilmiyyah, 1408/1988).

48 Toshihiko Izutsu (1914-1993) was a professor at Keio University in Japan and author of many books on Islam and other religions.

49 Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico Religious Concepts in the Quran* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), p. 3.

50 Ibid., p. 9.

herbs may be considered as extremely desirable, owing to their healing and therapeutic properties. Our social surroundings may also influence a subjective interpretation of concepts. For example, for an English native, the word 'table' could be used for both a round and a square table; however, in certain non-Indo-European speaking countries, objects are more likely to be categorised in accordance with their form and shape, owing to the focus on the visual aspect rather than on the purpose. Therefore, according to this worldview a round table and a square table are totally different objects and cannot be put in the same category, thus requiring different names.[51] These examples show that all words in usage are largely historically and culturally polluted. It is for this reason that the Izutsian inductive method of analysis will be used, to avoid as much as possible influences that are subjective, political, cultural or historical.

Semantic Analysis

Izutsian linguistic analysis requires that the semantic categories of words be described in accordance with the conditions in which they are used, thus enabling the Quran to speak for itself and arguably resulting in a less biased interpretation. Izutsu defines semantics as:

> ...an analytic study of the key-terms of a language with a view to arriving eventually at a conceptual grasp of the Weltanschauung or worldview of the people who use that language as a tool not only of speaking and thinking, but, more important still, of conceptualizing and interpreting the world that surrounds them.[52]

Therefore, finding out about the concept of *malak* from the Quranic *Weltanschauung* would require the gathering of all the verses in the Quran where this word is mentioned, and then comparing and checking them against each other, as well as with other synonyms and antonyms of this word. The aim is, as Izutsu puts it, to obtain a 'word-thing' interpretation rather than 'a word-to-word' interpretation.[53]

Izutsu's semantic analysis is largely based on Ferdinand de Saussure and Leo Weisgerber's work on the interrelations between cultural and linguistic patterns. The origin of these studies – what we refer today as 'ethnolinguistics' – can be

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51   Ibid., p. 8.

52   Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran: Studies of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung* (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964), p. 11.

53   Izutsu*, Ethico Relgious Concepts in the Quran*, p. 25.

traced back to Edward Sapir.[54] Izutsu's contribution has been the unification of these theories and its application to Quranic hermeneutics.

Izutsu argues that the Quranic theocentric *Weltanschauung* has its own semantics. He gives the example of the word 'Allah', used by the pre-Islamic Arabs and in the Quran. While all semantic fields in the Quran are directly connected to the concept of Allah, as it is the central focus of all the words in the Quran, in the pre-Islamic era there were many gods rather than just one Allah. He also points to words which undergo a total change in meaning. For example, the word *karīm* as used by the pre-Islamic Arabs connoted the notion of 'noble birth' and 'extravagance of generosity to the point of squandering', while in the Quranic context, this word is closer to the term *taqwā*, which means 'God-awareness', and a noble person is not one who is extravagant to the point of squandering, but rather one who uses his/her wealth for the sake of God.[55] Thus, Izutsu demonstrates the importance of attempting to understand Quranic concepts from a Quranic worldview.

Izutsu also points out that each word in the Quran has its own basic or core meaning. He makes a differentiation between 'basic' and 'relational' meanings. The 'basic' meaning of a word is something inherent in the word itself and it carries that meaning wherever it goes, while a 'relational' meaning is more connotative, and its meaning may be changed depending on its position in a particular field. He gives the example of the word *kītāb*, which, in all contexts, at its basic level means 'book'. However, in the Quranic context, because of its close connection with the words revelation (*waḥy*), God (*Allah*), prophet (*nabī*) and so on, it must be understood within this new system, since it has now acquired new semantic elements. According to Izutsu, the 'relational' meaning is much more important than the 'basic' meaning, since it is only by examining the semantic structure of words that Quranic concepts can be comprehended.[56]

Izutsu is strongly criticised for not taking the historical context of Quranic verses into account.[57] However, he would argue that looking from a narrow historical context may taint rather than facilitate the understanding of Quranic

54 Stephen Ullmann, *Semantics: An Introduction to the Science of Meaning* (NY: Barnes & Noble, 1962), 7. See also Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (NY: Philosophical Library, 1959), and Izutsu, *Ethico-religious concepts in the Qur'ān*, p. 7.

55 Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, p. 45.

56 Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, p. 20.

57 See: William Montgomery Watt, 'Review of God and Man in the Koran and the Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology', *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 12, 1 (Spring 1967), 155-57, and Fazlur Rahman, 'Review of Izutsu's Book: God and Man in the Koran', *Islamic Studies* (June 1966) 5, 2, 221-224, and Norman Calder, 'Tafsir from Tabari to Ibn Kathir', in *Approaches to the Quran*, ed. by G.R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 105.

concepts. Although the Izutsian method may be criticised for its lack of reliance on secondary sources, nevertheless it will be a useful method, as its non-biased approach reduces the likelihood of any pre-set understanding such as those encouraged by engagement with theology, philosophy, jurisprudence and so on.

The application of the Izutsian method for understanding the concept of *malak* in the Quran will begin by gathering and comparing all the terms which resemble, correspond and oppose this concept and its derivatives. However, the analysis of semantic category of words is not an easy task, as Izutsu himself admits, and can easily lead to extensive work.[58] Therefore, following Izutsu's suggestion, verses which give little value for the purpose of semantic analysis will be left out,[59] and for the purpose of this study only a selection of key words will be used. Izutsu suggests seven cases where passages can be useful for semantic analysis.[60] These are:

1) Meaning of a word explained through verbal description.
2) Examining the semantic category of a synonym that may be used in the same passage.
3) Examining the opposite meaning of the word in question, such as 'good' and 'bad'.
4) Looking at the negative form, for example, 'people who do not possess trait X', which is helpful for understanding people who do possess that trait.
5) Words which are different but are related in meaning, such as 'wind' and 'blow'.
6) Rhetorical parallelisms.
7) Secular words in the Quran.

Izutsian Analysis of the Concept malak (Angel) in the Quran

The trilateral root of *malak* (*mīm lām kāf*) occurs 206 times in the Quran, in ten derived forms. It occurs 88 times as the noun *malak*, which means angel. All the other derived forms have meanings related to power, kingdom and sovereignty. In order to obtain a clearer understanding of the concept of angels and their role, I have categorized the relevant verses under four questions:

1) Why is belief in angels one of the fundamentals of faith?
2) What are the qualities of angels?
3) What are the functions of angels?
4) Which realm do angels occupy?

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58 Izutusu, Ethico Relgious Concepts in the Quran, p. 14.

59 Ibid., p. 37.

60 Ibid., pp. 37-41.

Why is Belief in Angels One of the Fundamentals of Belief?

The following verses point to the importance of belief in angels:

مَن كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِّلَّهِ وَمَلَـٰٓئِكَتِهِۦ وَرُسُلِهِۦ وَجِبْرِيلَ وَمِيكَىٰلَ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَدُوٌّ لِّلْكَـٰفِرِينَ ﴿٩٨﴾

> Whoever is an enemy to Allah and His angels and His messengers and
> Gabriel and Michael – then indeed, Allah is an enemy to the disbelievers.[61]

The key words in this verse are God, angels, messengers, Gabriel, Michael, enemy and disbelievers. The word enemy (*'adū*) is connected with *kāfirīn* (disbelievers). The word *kāfirīn* comes from the verbal root *kafara*, which means "to cover, deny, hide, renounce, reject, disbelieve, be negligent, expiate, darken".[62] The word *kafara* is the antonym of *āmana* (to believe), and it is also linked to a state of ingratitude when examined from a Quranic context.[63] The word *'adū* means "enemy, transgression and injustice" and the adjective of the triliteral root of this word (*'ayn dāl wāw*) means hostile. Thus, this verse clarifies that unbelief in God's angels equates to covering the truth and ungratefulness and is thus a transgression.

۞ لَّيْسَ ٱلْبِرَّ أَن تُوَلُّوا۟ وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ ٱلْمَشْرِقِ وَٱلْمَغْرِبِ وَلَـٰكِنَّ ٱلْبِرَّ مَنْ ءَامَنَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْءَاخِرِ وَٱلْمَلَـٰٓئِكَةِ وَٱلْكِتَـٰبِ وَٱلنَّبِيِّـۧنَ وَءَاتَى ٱلْمَالَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِۦ ذَوِى ٱلْقُرْبَىٰ وَٱلْيَتَـٰمَىٰ وَٱلْمَسَـٰكِينَ وَٱبْنَ ٱلسَّبِيلِ وَٱلسَّآئِلِينَ وَفِى ٱلرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتَى ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَٱلْمُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا عَـٰهَدُوا۟ۖ وَٱلصَّـٰبِرِينَ فِى ٱلْبَأْسَآءِ وَٱلضَّرَّآءِ وَحِينَ ٱلْبَأْسِ ۗ أُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا۟ۖ وَأُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْمُتَّقُونَ ﴿١٧٧﴾

> Righteousness is not that you turn your faces toward the east or the west,
> but [true] righteousness is [in] one who believes in Allah, the Last Day,
> the angels, the Book, and the prophets and gives wealth, in spite of love

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61 Quran, 2:98.

62 'Abdul Mannān 'Omar, *Dictionary of the Holy Quran*, 3rd ed. (United States & Germany: Noor Foundation 2005), p. 489.

63 For example, see Quran, 14:7, 27:40, 31:12 and 39:7.

> for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveller, those who ask [for
> help], and for freeing slaves; [and who] establishes prayer and gives *zakah*;
> [those who] fulfil their promise when they promise; and [those who] are
> patient in poverty and hardship and during battle. Those are the ones who
> have been true, and it is those who are the righteous.

Key words here are: *al-birra*/righteousness; believes/*'āmana*; the patient/*ṣābirīn*; righteous/*muttaqūn*.

In this verse 'righteousness' (*al-birra*) is equated with belief in the fundamentals of faith and the pillars of Islam. The word *taqwā,* also translated here as 'righteous', appears with the word *al-birra* in many other verses in the Quran.[64] The triliteral root of the word *taqwā is wāw-qāf-yā*. The first form verb formed from this root means to save or protect, while the third form verb means to become righteous, to fear (God) and to be God-conscious. Thus, being God-conscious, i.e. having *taqwā* is linked with the state of righteousness (*al-birra*), which as explained in the verse is belief in the fundamentals of faith, including angels, followed by submission to the five pillars of Islam.[65] Those God-conscious believers who question their own *nafs* (self),[66] and trust their Creator will be rewarded for their patience with bliss (*na'īm*).[67] Therefore, one can only be saved and obtain true pleasure or bliss if one sincerely attempts to be in a state of 'righteousness'.

What Are the Qualities of Angels?

How angels are perceived today is not really that different to the perception of angels at the time of prophet Muhammad. There are many verses in the Quran where fictional perceptions of them are ruled out. Some of these verses will be discussed below.

False Perception of Angels

The Quran mentions how Muhammad was rejected because he was just an ordinary man, one who "eats food and walks in the markets", and who does not appear in glamorous and dazzling splendour:

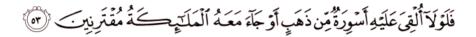
64 See Quran, 2:224, 2:189, 3:92, 5:2, 58:9 and 3:198.

65 See also Quran, 2:285, where it is indicated that all God's messengers have believed in the fundamentals of faith.

66 Quran, 2:44.

67 Quran, 82:13.

وَقَالُوا مَالِ هَٰذَا الرَّسُولِ يَأْكُلُ الطَّعَامَ وَيَمْشِي فِي الْأَسْوَاقِ لَوْلَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مَلَكٌ فَيَكُونَ مَعَهُ نَذِيرًا ﴿٧﴾

And they say, "What is this messenger that eats food and walks in the markets? Why was there not sent down to him an angel so he would be with him a warner?"[68]

فَلَوْلَا أُلْقِيَ عَلَيْهِ أَسْوِرَةٌ مِّن ذَهَبٍ أَوْ جَاءَ مَعَهُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ مُقْتَرِنِينَ ﴿٥٣﴾

Then why have there not been placed upon him bracelets of gold or come with him the angels in conjunction?[69]

Therefore, both angels and prophets were perceived in accordance with people's own fictional perception and in purely material terms. This expectation is invalidated in the Quran by the response that even if God had made Muhammad an angel, he would still be sent to this realm as a man.[70] The reason given for this is that if angels were clearly visible or sent in a form that humans were not used to, then there would be no test or trial, the matter would be ended, and human beings would not have the opportunity to be reprieved.[71]

Angels were also expected to be in the form of females. This portrayal of angels is totally rejected in the Quran, and those who name the angels with female names are associated with those who do not believe in the Hereafter.[72] The assertion that angels are female is further disproved because, the Quran avers, those who make such claims were not there to witness their creation:

وَجَعَلُوا الْمَلَائِكَةَ الَّذِينَ هُمْ عِبَادُ الرَّحْمَٰنِ إِنَاثًا ۚ أَشَهِدُوا خَلْقَهُمْ ۚ سَتُكْتَبُ شَهَادَتُهُمْ وَيُسْأَلُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

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68   Quran 25:7. See also 41:14, 25:7, 17:92, 15:7, 23:24, 11:12 and 12:31.

69   Quran, 43:53.

70   Quran, 6:9.

71   Quran, 6:8.

72   Quran, 53:27.

And they have made the angels, who are servants of the Most Merciful, females. Did they witness their creation? Their testimony will be recorded, and they will be questioned.[73]

Difference Between Angels and Adam and Iblīs

The Quran tells us that angels were informed about God's plans to make Adam God's vicegerent on earth:

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَٰئِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً ۖ قَالُوٓاْ أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَن يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ ٱلدِّمَآءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ ۖ قَالَ إِنِّيٓ أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority." They said, "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?" Allah said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know."[74]

From this verse we learn that God communicates (*qāla*) His plan to the angels, which connotes that there must be a reason for informing them, which in turn suggests that they may have a role to play in that plan.

The angels express their fear that this plan could lead to mischief and bloodshed on earth, while their role is distinctively to praise, glorify and sanctify God's name. It appears here that the angels are associating the words "vicegerent" and "earth" with mischief and bloodshed. This association is not denied by God, but what is strongly indicated in the following verse is that the statement of the angels is framed within their limited knowledge,[75] which they later acknowledge.[76] And so, when God asks the angels and Iblis – who is a jinn, but one who resides among the angels - to bow down to Adam, they readily do so. Iblis, however, refuses.[77]

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73   Quran, 43:19 and 37:150.

74   Quran, 2:30.

75   Quran, 2:31.

76   Quran, 2:32.

77   Quran, 2:34 and 15:30.

Thus we learn that Adam was given the capacity to learn/know (*'allama*) all God's Names (*asmā*), whereas when the same Names were placed (*'araḍa*) before the angels, they admitted that they did not have the capacity to understand them, given that their knowledge was limited to what was proportioned to them.

Key words: says (*qāla*), learn (*'allama*), God's Names (*asmā*), placed (*'araḍa*).

وَعَلَّمَ ءَادَمَ ٱلْأَسْمَآءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى ٱلْمَلَـٰٓئِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنۢبِـُٔونِى بِأَسْمَآءِ هَـٰٓؤُلَآءِ إِن كُنتُمْ صَـٰدِقِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

And He taught Adam the names – all of them. Then He showed them to the angels and said, "Inform Me of the names of these, if you are truthful."[78]

قَالُوا۟ سُبْحَـٰنَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَآ إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَآ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ﴿٣٢﴾

They said, "Exalted are You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, it is You who is the Knowing, the Wise."[79]

We therefore learn that Adam's viceregency is very much connected with his knowledge of all the Names, whereas angels were only aware of the Names placed before them.

Acknowledging their limited knowledge, when the angels are commanded by God to bow down to Adam, they readily carry out his command, but Iblis, who is a jinn residing among the angels, refuses to do so:

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَـٰٓئِكَةِ ٱسْجُدُوا۟ لِءَادَمَ فَسَجَدُوٓا۟ إِلَّآ إِبْلِيسَ أَبَىٰ وَٱسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ ٱلْكَـٰفِرِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾

And [mention] when We said to the angels, "Prostrate before Adam"; so they prostrated, except for Iblis. He refused and was arrogant and became of the disbelievers.[80]
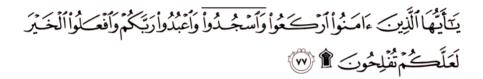
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78 Quran, 2:31.

79 Quran, 2:32.

80 Quran, 2:34.

$$\text{فَسَجَدَ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ كُلُّهُمْ أَجْمَعُونَ ٣٠}$$

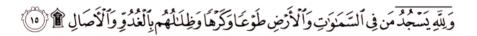So the angels prostrated – all of them entirely.[81]

Key words: prostrated (*sajada*), was arrogant (*astakbara*), one 'who rejects faith' (*min al-kāfirīn*), all of them entirely (*kulluhum ajma'ūn*).

In the following verse, the state of success (*falāḥ*) and happiness is connected with the word *sajada* (prostration):

$$\text{يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا ٱرْكَعُوا وَٱسْجُدُوا وَٱعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمْ وَٱفْعَلُوا ٱلْخَيْرَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ۩ ٧٧}$$

O you who have believed, bow and prostrate and worship your Lord and do good – that you may succeed.[82]

The following verse indicates that human beings are created as servants, and therefore their state or innate being is one of prostration, and that the only choice they have been given is the ability to deny this fact. In other words, whether we wish to accept it or not, our innate state is one of submission:

$$\text{وَلِلَّهِ يَسْجُدُ مَن فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَظِلَٰلُهُم بِٱلْغُدُوِّ وَٱلْءَاصَالِ ۩ ١٥}$$

And to Allah prostrates whoever is within the heavens and the earth, willingly or by compulsion, and their shadows [as well] in the mornings and the afternoons.[83]

Iblis's failure to accept his innate state as servant of God (*'abd*) is manifested in his refusal to carry out God's command to bow down (*sajada*) to Adam. His refusal is the outcome of his state of 'haughtiness' (*astakbara*) and of being one 'who rejects faith' and covers the truth (*min al-kāfirīn*).[84] The word *astakbara* is

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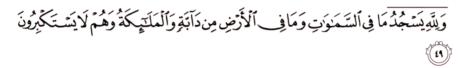81 Quran, 15:30.

82 Quran, 22:77.

83 Quran, 13:15.

84 Quran, 2:34.

the tenth form of *kā-bā-rā*, meaning 'was arrogant'. The adjective *kabīr* means 'great' and the word *mutakkabir* is one of God's Names, meaning 'Possessor of all Greatness'.[85] Therefore, by not obeying God and instead relying on his own limited knowledge, Iblis inevitably ends up usurping God's name 'Possessor of All-Greatness', whereas the angels did admit their limited knowledge and all of them obeyed God's command.

In the following verse, the prostration of the angels before God is strongly connected with not being proud. Thus, confirming the association of non-compliance of prostration (*sajada*) with unbelief/covering of the truth (*kufr*) and pride (*takabbur*) and that in contrast to Iblis, these qualities do not pertain to angels, as they all prostrated as commanded:

وَلِلَّهِ يَسْجُدُ مَا فِى ٱلسَّمَـٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ مِن دَآبَّةٍ وَٱلْمَلَـٰٓئِكَةُ وَهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ ٤٩

And to Allah prostrates whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth of creatures, and the angels [as well], and they are not arrogant.[86]

The words 'all of them entirely' shows emphatically that no angel refused to disobey God.[87] Although the word prostrated (*sajada*) is in the past tense, the use of past tense in the Quran may also refer to the future.[88] Therefore, the verse suggests that angels will always obey the command of God.

As previously discussed, in verse 2:98, the mention of angels follows the mention of Divine oneness. And the possessive word 'His', suggests that the angels, messengers, Gabriel and Michael, all act under God's orders. Apart from the noun *malak*, all the other derivatives of *mim lām kāf* in the Quran express distinctly that it is God who is the Master, Owner and Sovereign of the whole universe (heavens and earth/*samāwāt* and *'arḍ*).[89] Chapter 5 verses 17 and 120 explicitly spell out that everything in the heavens and earth, as well as what is between them, is under the command of God alone:

85 'Abdul Mannān 'Omar, *Dictionary of the Holy Quran*.

86 Quran, 16:49.

87 See also Quran, 17:61, 18:50, 20:116 and 38:73.

88 Al-Saleemi, E. *A Constrastive study of the verb systems of English and Arabic,* Durham theses, Durham University, (1987).

89 For example, see Quran, 2:107, 5:40, 9:116, 25:2, 57:2 and 57:5.

لَّقَدْ كَفَرَ ٱلَّذِينَ قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلْمَسِيحُ ٱبْنُ مَرْيَمَ ۚ قُلْ فَمَن يَمْلِكُ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ شَيْـًٔا إِنْ أَرَادَ أَن يُهْلِكَ ٱلْمَسِيحَ ٱبْنَ مَرْيَمَ وَأُمَّهُۥ وَمَن فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا ۗ وَلِلَّهِ مُلْكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا ۚ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَآءُ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١٧﴾

> They have certainly disbelieved who say that Allah is Christ, the son of
> Mary. Say, "Then who could prevent Allah at all if He had intended to
> destroy Christ, the son of Mary, or his mother or everyone on the earth?"
> And to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and
> whatever is between them. He creates what He wills, and Allah is over all
> things competent.[90]

These verses make it clear that God does not have a partner (*sharīk*) in His
creation. A connection can possibly be made here between the word *malak* and
all the other derivates of *mīm lām kāf* which all express the sovereignty of God
and a strong inference that the angels are not the source of communication, but
simply the means through which God carries out His commands.

In the Quran, it is clarified that angels do not possess any power of their
own, and the non-acceptance of God as the only Sustainer (*Rabb*) is equated
with *kufr* (unbelief or the covering of the truth:

وَلَا يَأْمُرَكُمْ أَن تَتَّخِذُواْ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةَ وَٱلنَّبِيِّۦنَ أَرْبَابًا ۗ أَيَأْمُرُكُم بِٱلْكُفْرِ بَعْدَ إِذْ أَنتُم مُّسْلِمُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

> Nor could he order you to take the angels and prophets as lords. Would
> he order you to disbelief after you had been Muslims?[91]

Key words: *amr* (order), *arbāb* (Lords), *kufr* (disbelief), *muslimūn* (Muslims).

The verse below further clarifies that it is God who is the Creator of the
heavens (*al-samāwāt*) and the earth (*al-ʿarḍ*) and that angels are appointed as
messengers (*rusul*):

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90   Quran, 5:17.

91   Quran, 3:80.

$$\text{ٱلۡحَمۡدُ لِلَّهِ فَاطِرِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ جَاعِلِ ٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ رُسُلًا أُو۟لِىٓ أَجۡنِحَةٖ مَّثۡنَىٰ وَثُلَٰثَ وَرُبَٰعَۚ}$$

$$\text{يَزِيدُ فِى ٱلۡخَلۡقِ مَا يَشَآءُۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىۡءٖ قَدِيرٞ ﴿١﴾}$$

> Praise be to Allah, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, Who appointeth the angels messengers having wings two, three and four. He multiplieth in creation what He will. Lo! Allah is Able to do all things.[92]

Key words: *Fāṭir* (Creator/opener), *samāwāt* (heavens), *ʿard* (earth), *jāʾila* (appointeth), *yazīd* (multiplieth), *khalq* (creation), *qadīr* (power).

Therefore, since angels are merely messengers and servants (*ʿabd*) of God,[93] and since they have all committed to this role, there can be no angel who is not acting under God's command. Furthermore, angels are only sent down "with truth" (*b'il-ḥaqq*), and so they cannot be accused of deception and used as justification for wrong-doing.[94]

Angels are also described as Muhammad's assistants, along with the archangel Gabriel and righteous believers:

$$\text{إِن تَتُوبَآ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ فَقَدۡ صَغَتۡ قُلُوبُكُمَاۖ وَإِن تَظَٰهَرَا عَلَيۡهِ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ مَوۡلَىٰهُ وَجِبۡرِيلُ}$$

$$\text{وَصَٰلِحُ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَۖ وَٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ بَعۡدَ ذَٰلِكَ ظَهِيرٞ ﴿٤﴾}$$

> If you two [wives] repent to Allah, [it is best], for your hearts have deviated. But if you cooperate against him – then indeed Allah is his protector, and Gabriel and the righteous of the believers and the angels, moreover, are [his] assistants.[95]

Key words: *Jibrīl* (Gabriel), **ṣāliḥ al-muʾminīn** (righteous believers), *malāʾika* (angels) and *ẓahir* (assistants).

In the above verse, and also in 66:4, the archangel Gabriel is mentioned separately from other angels, hence suggesting that he, along with the archangel Michael (*Mīkāʾil*) have different duties and ranks from other angels.

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92 Quran, 35.1.

93 Quran, 4:172 and 43:19.

94 Quran, 15:8.

95 Quran, 66:4.
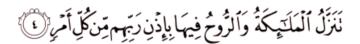
What Are the Functions of Angels?

In the following verse, it is stated that apart from selected individuals, angels are also chosen to be messengers. The fact that the two Names of God – the All-Hearing (*al-Samī'*) and the All-Seeing (*al-Baṣīr*) – are chosen signifies that there must be a close connection between these two Names and the concept of messengers (*rusul*), as well as the role of angels as witnesses:

$$\text{ٱللَّهُ يَصۡطَفِى مِنَ ٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ رُسُلًا وَمِنَ ٱلنَّاسِۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَمِيعُۢ بَصِيرٌ ٧٥}$$

> Allah chooses from the angels messengers and from the people. Indeed, Allah is Hearing and Seeing.[96]

Key words: *rusul* (messengers), *Samī'* (All-Hearing), *Baṣīr* (All-Seeing).

The verse below shows that along with the Spirit, the angels descend, or are sent down, by permission of their Lord for every matter:

$$\text{تَنَزَّلُ ٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ وَٱلرُّوحُ فِيهَا بِإِذۡنِ رَبِّهِم مِّن كُلِّ أَمۡرٍ ٤}$$

> The angels and the Spirit descend therein by permission of their Lord for every matter.[97]

Key words: sent down/descend (*tanazzala*), Lord (*Rabb*), every matter (*kulli 'amr*).

This verse seems to associate the sending down of all God's commands with the angels. It also connotes a connection between God's telling the angels of His plans and the role they have to play as conveyors of His commands.

The next verse also seems to confirm the association of the creation of the heavens and the earth with the role of angels as messengers:

$$\text{ٱلۡحَمۡدُ لِلَّهِ فَاطِرِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ جَاعِلِ ٱلۡمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ رُسُلًا أُوْلِىٓ أَجۡنِحَةٍ مَّثۡنَىٰ وَثُلَٰثَ وَرُبَٰعَۚ يَزِيدُ فِى ٱلۡخَلۡقِ مَا يَشَآءُۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىۡءٍ قَدِيرٌ ١}$$

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96 Quran, 22:75. For the role of angels as witnesses, see Quran, 4:166 and 3:18.

97 Quran, 97:4.

[All] praise is [due] to Allah, Creator of the heavens and the earth, [who] made the angels messengers having wings, two or three or four. He increases in creation what He wills. Indeed, Allah is over all things competent.[98]

Key words: *jā'il al-malā'ika rusul* (made the angels messengers), *Fāṭir* (Creator/Opener), heavens (*samāwāt*), earth (*'arḍ*), increases (*yazīd*), creation (*khalq*), and *qadīr* (relates to power as well as to determined measure).

The above verse seems to imply that angels have the spatially dualistic role of delivering messages from the heavens (*samāwāt*) to the earth (*'arḍ*). The affirmation that God made angels messengers is followed by the assertion that "God increases what He wills in creation", thus indicating the existence of numerous angels, who, as conveyors of messages, are tasked with bringing down those messages from the unseen world to the realm of multiplicity. As discussed previously, contrary to people's expectations, angels are veiled in a form familiar to human beings. Indeed, part of the examination to which human beings are subjected in this realm is to be able to conceptually 'unveil' the angels and attest both their existence and their function as Divine messengers.

Angels as messengers are also sent down to this realm to relay good news. In the following verse it is Zakariya who receives the welcome news that he will be blessed with an honourable son called John:

فَنَادَتْهُ الْمَلَٰئِكَةُ وَهُوَ قَآئِمٌ يُصَلِّى فِى الْمِحْرَابِ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكَ بِيَحْيَىٰ مُصَدِّقًا بِكَلِمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَسَيِّدًا وَحَصُورًا وَنَبِيًّا مِّنَ الصَّٰلِحِينَ ﴿٣٩﴾

So the angels called him while he was standing in prayer in the chamber, "Indeed, Allah gives you good tidings of John, confirming a word from Allah and [who will be] honorable, abstaining [from women], and a prophet from among the righteous."[99]

Key words: *nāda* (called), *bishāra* (glad tidings), *ṣāliḥīn* (righteous).

The presence of the angels in this realm is made clear by their communication with Zakariya. While he was standing praying in the chamber, they called him in order to attract his attention before delivering the good news to him.

The angels also speak to Mary, giving the good news that she has been chosen above all other women in the world, together with the glad tidings of the birth of Jesus:

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98   Quran, 35:1.

99   Quran, 3:39.

وَإِذْ قَالَتِ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ يَٰمَرْيَمُ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ ٱصْطَفَٰكِ وَطَهَّرَكِ وَٱصْطَفَٰكِ عَلَىٰ نِسَآءِ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٤٢﴾
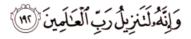
And [mention] when the angels said, "O Mary, indeed Allah has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of the worlds."[100]

إِذْ قَالَتِ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ يَٰمَرْيَمُ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكِ بِكَلِمَةٍ مِّنْهُ ٱسْمُهُ ٱلْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ٱبْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِيهًا فِى ٱلدُّنْيَا وَٱلْأَخِرَةِ وَمِنَ ٱلْمُقَرَّبِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾

[And mention] when the angels said, "O Mary, indeed Allah gives you good tidings of a word from Him, whose name will be the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary – distinguished in this world and the Hereafter and among those brought near [to Allah]."[101]

Key words: *qālat al-malā'ika* (The angels said), *yubashshiruk* (gives glad tidings).

In the above verses, the verb qālat indicates that the angels were present with Mary and that they spoke to her directly.

These verses in the Quran were also communicated to Prophet Muhammad by a messenger. The task of vouchsafing the messages that constitute the Quran was given to "The Trustworthy Spirit". Although some commentators identify the Trustworthy Spirit with the archangel Gabriel,[102] it is not clear in the Quran itself whether it is the same angel or a different angel altogether:

وَإِنَّهُ لَتَنزِيلُ رَبِّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿١٩٢﴾

And indeed, the Quran is the revelation of the Lord of the worlds.[103]
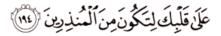
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100 Quran, 3:42.

101 Quran, 3:45.

102 See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Quran, A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), 921, foot note 192-93.

103 Quran, 26:192.

$$نَزَلَ بِهِ ٱلرُّوحُ ٱلْأَمِينُ ﴿١٩٣﴾$$

The Trustworthy Spirit has brought it down.[104]

$$عَلَىٰ قَلْبِكَ لِتَكُونَ مِنَ ٱلْمُنذِرِينَ ﴿١٩٤﴾$$

Upon your heart, [O Muhammad] – that you may be of the warners.[105]

Key words: *nazala* (brought/sent down), *al-rūḥ al-amīn* (The Trustworthy Spirit), *qalb* (heart).

What is indicated is that revelation is sent down, by God's command, and conveyed to the heart of the Prophet Muhammad by means of the Trustworthy Spirit. The key word here is 'sent down' (*nazala*). In the following verse, tranquillity (*sakīna*) was sent down (*nazala*) to the heart of Abū Bakr, the Prophet Muhammad's companion, when the enemy were looking for them outside the cave:

$$إِلَّا تَنصُرُوهُ فَقَدْ نَصَرَهُ ٱللَّهُ إِذْ أَخْرَجَهُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا ثَانِيَ ٱثْنَيْنِ إِذْ هُمَا فِى ٱلْغَارِ إِذْ يَقُولُ لِصَـٰحِبِهِۦ لَا تَحْزَنْ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ مَعَنَا ۖ فَأَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ سَكِينَتَهُۥ عَلَيْهِ وَأَيَّدَهُۥ بِجُنُودٍ لَّمْ تَرَوْهَا وَجَعَلَ كَلِمَةَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا ٱلسُّفْلَىٰ ۗ وَكَلِمَةُ ٱللَّهِ هِىَ ٱلْعُلْيَا ۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٤٠﴾$$

If you do not aid the Prophet – Allah has already aided him when those who disbelieved had driven him out [of Makkah] as one of two, when they were in the cave and he said to his companion, "Do not grieve; indeed Allah is with us." And Allah sent down his tranquillity upon him and supported him with angels you did not see and made the word of those

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104 Quran, 26:193.

105 Quran, 26:194.

who disbelieved the lowest, while the word of Allah – that is the highest. And Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise.[106]

In the above verse it states that it is God who 'sent down' (*nazala*) tranquillity to the heart of Muhammad's companion. The notion of tranquillity being sent down (*nazala*) is also mentioned in the following verse:

ثُمَّ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ سَكِينَتَهُۥ عَلَىٰ رَسُولِهِۦ وَعَلَى ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَأَنزَلَ جُنُودًا لَّمْ تَرَوْهَا وَعَذَّبَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ وَذَٰلِكَ جَزَآءُ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٢٦﴾

Then Allah sent down His tranquillity upon His Messenger and upon the believers ...[107]

Considering that it is the angels who are tasked with bearing every one of God's commands (*kulli 'amr*),[108] then everything that is created, including human experiences, are also sent down, in accordance with the command of the Creator, through the vehicle of His messengers to people's hearts – namely, the angels. Apart from tranquillity, other senses and feelings are also 'sent down' (*nazala*). The following verses point to other examples, such 'goodness' (*khayr*) and 'security' (*amāna*):

ثُمَّ أَنزَلَ عَلَيْكُم مِّنۢ بَعْدِ ٱلْغَمِّ أَمَنَةً نُّعَاسًا يَغْشَىٰ طَآئِفَةً مِّنكُمْ وَطَآئِفَةٌ قَدْ أَهَمَّتْهُمْ أَنفُسُهُمْ يَظُنُّونَ بِٱللَّهِ غَيْرَ ٱلْحَقِّ ظَنَّ ٱلْجَٰهِلِيَّةِ يَقُولُونَ هَل لَّنَا مِنَ ٱلْأَمْرِ مِن شَىْءٍ قُلْ إِنَّ ٱلْأَمْرَ كُلَّهُۥ لِلَّهِ يُخْفُونَ فِىٓ أَنفُسِهِم مَّا لَا يُبْدُونَ لَكَ يَقُولُونَ لَوْ كَانَ لَنَا مِنَ ٱلْأَمْرِ شَىْءٌ مَّا قُتِلْنَا هَٰهُنَا قُل لَّوْ كُنتُمْ فِى بُيُوتِكُمْ لَبَرَزَ ٱلَّذِينَ كُتِبَ عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلْقَتْلُ إِلَىٰ مَضَاجِعِهِمْ وَلِيَبْتَلِىَ ٱللَّهُ مَا فِى صُدُورِكُمْ وَلِيُمَحِّصَ مَا فِى قُلُوبِكُمْ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمٌۢ بِذَاتِ ٱلصُّدُورِ ﴿١٥٤﴾

106 Quran, 9:40.
107 Quran, 9:26.
108 Quran, 74:4.

Then after sorrow He sent down security upon you, a calm coming upon a party of you, and (there was) another party whom their own souls had rendered anxious;[109]

مَا يَوَدُّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ مِنْ أَهْلِ ٱلْكِتَـٰبِ وَلَا ٱلْمُشْرِكِينَ أَن يُنَزَّلَ عَلَيْكُم مِّنْ خَيْرٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَٱللَّهُ يَخْتَصُّ بِرَحْمَتِهِۦ مَن يَشَآءُ وَٱللَّهُ ذُو ٱلْفَضْلِ ٱلْعَظِيمِ ﴿١٠٥﴾

Neither those who disbelieve from the People of the Scripture nor the polytheists wish that any good should be sent down to you from your Lord. But Allah selects for His mercy whom He wills, and Allah is the possessor of great bounty.[110]

Angels were also sent down to help prophet Muhammad in battle:

إِذْ تَقُولُ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَلَن يَكْفِيَكُمْ أَن يُمِدَّكُمْ رَبُّكُم بِثَلَـٰثَةِ ءَالَـٰفٍ مِّنَ ٱلْمَلَـٰٓئِكَةِ مُنزَلِينَ ﴿١٢٤﴾

[Remember] when you said to the believers, "Is it not sufficient for you that your Lord should reinforce you with three thousand angels sent down?[111]

إِذْ تَسْتَغِيثُونَ رَبَّكُمْ فَٱسْتَجَابَ لَكُمْ أَنِّي مُمِدُّكُم بِأَلْفٍ مِّنَ ٱلْمَلَـٰٓئِكَةِ مُرْدِفِينَ ﴿٩﴾

[Remember] when you asked help of your Lord, and He answered you, "Indeed, I will reinforce you with a thousand from the angels, following one another."[112]

Key words: *madad* (help), *Rabb* (Lord), *malā'ika* (angels), *murdifīn* (following one another/ranks on ranks/in succession).

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109 Quran, 3:154.
110 Quran, 2:105.
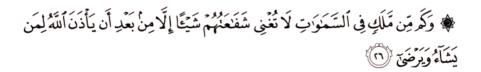111 Quran, 3:124.
112 Quran, 8.9.

According to the second of the above verses, Muhammad's prayers for help in battle were answered and he was reinforced with a thousand angels in serried ranks. The word *murdifīn* (following one another) has a relational meaning, or can be connected with the word *anzala* (sent down) and the words *kulli amr* (for every command) and *sajada* (prostrated), thus indicating that causes are purely a veil under which angels are sent down, and that they function in accordance with the command of their Creator (*Rabb*).

The word *rusul* (messengers) is also connected with the word gurardians (*ḥafaza*). These guardians have been given the task of protecting God's servants (*'ibād*).[113] As it is angels who are sent down (*anzala*) for every command (*amr*), then there is a strong indication that the messengers who are sent down with the task of guarding human beings are angels.

Angels also have a key role as witnesses. In the following verse, we learn that all that has been sent down to this realm is witnessed by angels, indicating their closeness or connection to all that is created here:

$$ لَّٰكِنِ ٱللَّهُ يَشْهَدُ بِمَآ أَنزَلَ إِلَيْكَ ۖ أَنزَلَهُۥ بِعِلْمِهِۦ ۖ وَٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ يَشْهَدُونَ ۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ شَهِيدًا ﴿١٦٦﴾ $$

But Allah bears witness to that which He has revealed to you. He has sent it down with His knowledge, and the angels bear witness [as well]. And sufficient is Allah as Witness.[114]

Having witnessed first-hand the trials and tribulations that people experience in this realm, angels as manifesters of God's names *Samī'* (All-Hearing) and *Baṣīr* (All-Seeing) can also intercede on behalf of human beings. However, their intercession will be accepted only if approved by God.

$$ ۞ وَكَم مِّن مَّلَكٍ فِي ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ لَا تُغْنِي شَفَٰعَتُهُمْ شَيْئًا إِلَّا مِنۢ بَعْدِ أَن يَأْذَنَ ٱللَّهُ لِمَن يَشَآءُ وَيَرْضَىٰٓ ﴿٢٦﴾ $$

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113 Quran, 6:61.

114 Quran, 4:166. See also Quran, 3:18.

And how many angels there are in the heavens whose intercession will not avail at all except [only] after Allah has permitted [it] to whom He wills and approves.[115]

Angels also ask their Lord to bless the believers and to forgive those on earth:

تَكَادُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتُ يَتَفَطَّرْنَ مِن فَوْقِهِنَّ وَٱلْمَلَٰئِكَةُ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَيَسْتَغْفِرُونَ لِمَن فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ أَلَآ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلْغَفُورُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ۝

The heavens almost break from above them, and the angels exalt [Allah] with praise of their Lord and ask forgiveness for those on earth. Unquestionably, it is Allah who is the Forgiving, the Merciful. [116]

هُوَ ٱلَّذِي يُصَلِّي عَلَيْكُمْ وَمَلَٰئِكَتُهُۥ لِيُخْرِجَكُم مِّنَ ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِ إِلَى ٱلنُّورِ وَكَانَ بِٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَحِيمًا ۝

It is He who confers blessing upon you, and His angels [ask Him to do so] that He may bring you out from darknesses into the light. And ever is He, to the believers, Merciful.[117]

Key words: *anzala* (sent down), *malā'ika* (angels), *yashhadūn* (bear witness), *al-samāwāt yatafaṭṭarna* (the heavens open), *yusabbiḥūn* (praise), *bi-ḥamd rabbihim* (glorifying their Lord), *yastaghfirūn* (ask forgiveness), *'arḍ* (earth), *yuṣallī* (confers blessing).

As servants of their Lord (*'abd lillāhi*),[118] angels are also inspired by their Lord to strengthen those who believe and to strike those who disbelieve:

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115 Quran, 53:26.

116 Quran, 42:5.
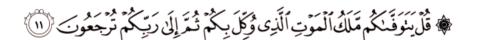
117 Quran, 33:43.

118 Quran, 4:172.

إِذْ يُوحِى رَبُّكَ إِلَى ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ أَنِّى مَعَكُمْ فَثَبِّتُوا۟ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ سَأُلْقِى فِى قُلُوبِ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ ٱلرُّعْبَ فَٱضْرِبُوا۟ فَوْقَ ٱلْأَعْنَاقِ وَٱضْرِبُوا۟ مِنْهُمْ كُلَّ بَنَانٍ ﴿١٢﴾

> [Remember] when your Lord inspired to the angels, "I am with you, so strengthen those who have believed. I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieved, so strike [them] upon the necks and strike from them every fingertip."[119]

Key words: *yūḥī* (inspired), *fathabbitū* (so strengthen), *āmanū* (believe), *qulūb* (the hearts), *kafarū* (disbelieved), *fa iḍribū* (so strike them).

Angels of Death

From the verse below, we learn that at the time of death, it is the Angel of Death who has been put in charge of taking the souls of those who die back to their Lord. The words *wukkila bikum*, meaning "entrusted with you" or "responsible for you", suggests that at the time of death, all individuals will be met by the angel of death who has been put in charge of them. And the words *ilā rabbikum turjaʿūn* (to your Lord you will be returned) suggests that they will go back from whence they came:

۞ قُلْ يَتَوَفَّىٰكُم مَّلَكُ ٱلْمَوْتِ ٱلَّذِى وُكِّلَ بِكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿١١﴾

> Say, "The angel of death will take you who has been entrusted with you. Then to your Lord you will be returned."[120]

Key words: Angel of death (*malak al-mawt*), responsible (*wukkila*), Lord (*Rabb*), returned (*turjaʿūn*).

In the following verses, the angels descend and give the good news of paradise to believers in accordance with the promise made to them. The verses indicate that angels enter from every door to meet and greet the believers to their final home, giving them the good news of the day that they were promised:

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119 Quran, 8:12.

120 Quran, 32:11.

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ قَالُوا۟ رَبُّنَا ٱللَّهُ ثُمَّ ٱسْتَقَٰمُوا۟ تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ أَلَّا تَخَافُوا۟ وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا۟ وَأَبْشِرُوا۟ بِٱلْجَنَّةِ ٱلَّتِى كُنتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

Indeed, those who have said, "Our Lord is Allah" and then remained on a right course – the angels will descend upon them, [saying], "Do not fear and do not grieve but receive good tidings of Paradise, which you were promised."[121]

لَا يَحْزُنُهُمُ ٱلْفَزَعُ ٱلْأَكْبَرُ وَتَتَلَقَّىٰهُمُ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ هَٰذَا يَوْمُكُمُ ٱلَّذِى كُنتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ ﴿١٠٣﴾

They will not be grieved by the greatest terror, and the angels will meet them, [saying], "This is your Day which you have been promised."[122]

ٱلَّذِينَ تَتَوَفَّىٰهُمُ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ طَيِّبِينَ يَقُولُونَ سَلَٰمٌ عَلَيْكُمُ ٱدْخُلُوا۟ ٱلْجَنَّةَ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

The ones whom the angels take in death, [being] good and pure; [the angels] will say, "Peace be upon you. Enter Paradise for what you used to do."[123]

جَنَّٰتُ عَدْنٍ يَدْخُلُونَهَا وَمَن صَلَحَ مِنْ ءَابَآئِهِمْ وَأَزْوَٰجِهِمْ وَذُرِّيَّٰتِهِمْ وَٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ يَدْخُلُونَ عَلَيْهِم مِّن كُلِّ بَابٍ ﴿٢٣﴾

Gardens of perpetual residence; they will enter them with whoever were righteous among their fathers, their spouses and their descendants. And the angels will enter upon them from every gate, [saying].[124]

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121 Quran, 41:30.

122 Quran, 21:103.

123 Quran, 16:32.

124 Quran, 13:23.

$$\text{سَلَٰمٌ عَلَيْكُم بِمَا صَبَرْتُمْ ۚ فَنِعْمَ عُقْبَى ٱلدَّارِ ﴿٢٤﴾}$$

"Peace be upon you for what you patiently endured. And excellent is the final home."[125]

Key words: *anzala* (descend), *abshirū* (receive good tidings), *yawm* (day), *wa'ada* (promised), *bāb* (gate).

Angels will also meet unbelievers at the time of death. However, unlike the believers, to whom the gates of heaven will be open, unbelievers will be barred from entering. Furthermore, they will not be greeted with the word *salām* (peace); instead the angels will return those guilty of covering the truth to their Lord, striking their faces and backs as they do so:

$$\text{يَوْمَ يَرَوْنَ ٱلْمَلَٰئِكَةَ لَا بُشْرَىٰ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُجْرِمِينَ وَيَقُولُونَ حِجْرًا مَّحْجُورًا ﴿٢٢﴾}$$

The day they see the angels – no good tidings will there be that day for the criminals, and [the angels] will say, "Prevented and inaccessible."[126]

$$\text{فَكَيْفَ إِذَا تَوَفَّتْهُمُ ٱلْمَلَٰئِكَةُ يَضْرِبُونَ وُجُوهَهُمْ وَأَدْبَٰرَهُمْ ﴿٢٧﴾}$$

Then how [will it be] when the angels take them in death, striking their faces and their backs?[127]

$$\text{وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذْ يَتَوَفَّى ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ ٱلْمَلَٰئِكَةُ يَضْرِبُونَ وُجُوهَهُمْ وَأَدْبَٰرَهُمْ وَذُوقُواْ عَذَابَ ٱلْحَرِيقِ ﴿٥٠﴾}$$

And if you could but see when the angels take the souls of those who disbelieved... They are striking their faces and their backs and [saying], "Taste the punishment of the Burning Fire."[128]

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125 Quran, 13:24.
126 Quran, 25:22.
127 Quran, 47:27.
128 Quran, 8:50.

Key words: *yawm* (day), *bushrā* (good tidings), *mujrimīn* (those guilty), *yaḍribūn* (striking), *wujūhum* (faces), *'adbārahum* (backs).

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ ٱفْتَرَىٰ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَوْ قَالَ أُوحِيَ إِلَيَّ وَلَمْ يُوحَ إِلَيْهِ شَيْءٌ وَمَن قَالَ سَأُنزِلُ مِثْلَ مَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذِ ٱلظَّٰلِمُونَ فِي غَمَرَٰتِ ٱلْمَوْتِ وَٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ بَاسِطُوٓاْ أَيْدِيهِمْ أَخْرِجُوٓاْ أَنفُسَكُمُ ٱلْيَوْمَ تُجْزَوْنَ عَذَابَ ٱلْهُونِ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَقُولُونَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ غَيْرَ ٱلْحَقِّ وَكُنتُمْ عَنْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ تَسْتَكْبِرُونَ ﴿٩٣﴾

> And who is more unjust than one who invents a lie about Allah or says,
> "It has been inspired to me," while nothing has been inspired to him, and
> one who says, "I will reveal [something] like what Allah revealed." And
> if you could but see when the wrongdoers are in the overwhelming pangs
> of death while the angels extend their hands, [saying], "Discharge your
> souls! Today you will be awarded the punishment of [extreme] humiliation
> for what you used to say against Allah other than the truth and [that] you
> were, toward His verses, being arrogant."[129]

From the above verse we learn that when the angels take away the souls (*nafs*) of the wrongdoers, they remind them about their arrogance and the things they used to say about God which were not true and just. Their arrogance can be likened to that of Iblis, whose pride (*takabbur*) also made him go against the truth and prevented him from obeying God's command. Moreover, the fact that the angels remind the wrongdoers of the things they used to say about God which were not true or just serves as an indication that they have proof of, or were there to witness, their arrogant attitude towards God's signs.

Key words: *nafs* (soul), *ẓālimūn* (wrongdoers), *ghayr al-ḥaqq* (other than the truth), *āyāt* (verses/signs), *tastakbirūn* (being arrogant).

In the verses below, the angels respond to those who deny their wrongdoings, and those who offer justifications for not following the right course, by stating that God has knowledge of all that they did. These verses also indicate the presence of angels as witnesses and the relevance of God's names All-Seeing (*Baṣīr*) and All-Hearing (*Samī'*).[130] In the last verse, angels are asked directly whether people worshiped them. In other words, God is asking if they, as God's servants who were tasked with conveying His messages, were worshipped in

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129 Quran, 6:93.

130 See Quran, 22:75.

place of their Creator. And if angels are not accepted as God's messengers, then there is a disconnection and the messages they are communicating are being ignored. In this case, all that would be recognised and ultimately worshipped would be the outer form or apparent causes of things. Thus the signs in creation themselves would be worshipped, rather than the One of Whom those signs are an indication:

$$\text{ٱلَّذِينَ تَتَوَفَّىٰهُمُ ٱلْمَلَـٰٓئِكَةُ ظَالِمِىٓ أَنفُسِهِمْ ۖ فَأَلْقَوُا۟ ٱلسَّلَمَ مَا كُنَّا نَعْمَلُ مِن سُوٓءٍۭ ۚ بَلَىٰٓ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلِيمٌۢ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ٢٨}$$

The ones whom the angels take in death [while] wronging themselves, and [who] then offer submission, [saying], "We were not doing any evil." But, yes! Indeed, Allah is Knowing of what you used to do.[131]

$$\text{إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ تَوَفَّىٰهُمُ ٱلْمَلَـٰٓئِكَةُ ظَالِمِىٓ أَنفُسِهِمْ قَالُوا۟ فِيمَ كُنتُمْ ۖ قَالُوا۟ كُنَّا مُسْتَضْعَفِينَ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ قَالُوٓا۟ أَلَمْ تَكُنْ أَرْضُ ٱللَّهِ وَٰسِعَةً فَتُهَاجِرُوا۟ فِيهَا ۚ فَأُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ مَأْوَىٰهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ ۖ وَسَآءَتْ مَصِيرًا ٩٧}$$

Indeed, those whom the angels take [in death] while wronging themselves – [the angels] will say, "In what [condition] were you?" They will say, "We were oppressed in the land." The angels will say, "Was not the earth of Allah spacious [enough] for you to emigrate therein?" For those, their refuge is Hell – and evil it is as a destination.[132]

$$\text{وَيَوْمَ يَحْشُرُهُمْ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ يَقُولُ لِلْمَلَـٰٓئِكَةِ أَهَـٰٓؤُلَآءِ إِيَّاكُمْ كَانُوا۟ يَعْبُدُونَ ٤٠}$$

And [mention] the Day when He will gather them all and then say to the angels, "Did these [people] used to worship you?"[133]

Key words: *ẓālimī 'anfusihim* (wronging themselves), *salam* (submission), *yawm yaḥshuruhm* (the Day of their resurrection), *ya'budūn* (worship).

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131 Quran, 16:28

132 Quran, 4:97.

133 Quran, 34:40.

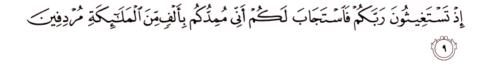## *Which Realm Do Angels Occupy?*

Angels Sent Down to This Realm

The following verses show that angels, as servants of God, are sent down to this realm to perform their specific duties as commanded by their Creator. In these verses, it is indicated that it is the angels and the Spirit who manifest those commands in the realm of multiplicity:

$$ تَنَزَّلُ ٱلْمَلَـٰٓئِكَةُ وَٱلرُّوحُ فِيهَا بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِم مِّن كُلِّ أَمْرٍ ۝ $$

> The angels and the Spirit descend therein by permission of their Lord for every matter.[134]

$$ ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ فَاطِرِ ٱلسَّمَـٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ جَاعِلِ ٱلْمَلَـٰٓئِكَةِ رُسُلًا أُو۟لِىٓ أَجْنِحَةٍ مَّثْنَىٰ وَثُلَـٰثَ وَرُبَـٰعَ يَزِيدُ فِى ٱلْخَلْقِ مَا يَشَآءُ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ۝ $$

> [All] praise is [due] to Allah, Creator of the heavens and the earth, [who] made the angels messengers having wings, two or three or four. He increases in creation what He wills. Indeed, Allah is over all things competent.[135]

$$ مَا نُنَزِّلُ ٱلْمَلَـٰٓئِكَةَ إِلَّا بِٱلْحَقِّ وَمَا كَانُوٓا۟ إِذًا مُّنظَرِينَ ۝ $$

> We do not send down the angels except with truth; and the disbelievers would not then be reprieved.[136]

$$ إِذْ تَسْتَغِيثُونَ رَبَّكُمْ فَٱسْتَجَابَ لَكُمْ أَنِّى مُمِدُّكُم بِأَلْفٍ مِّنَ ٱلْمَلَـٰٓئِكَةِ مُرْدِفِينَ ۝ $$

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134 Quran, 97:4.
135 Quran, 35.1.
136 Quran, 15.8.

[Remember] when you asked help of your Lord, and He answered you, "Indeed, I will reinforce you with a thousand from the angels, following one another."[137]

إِذْ تَقُولُ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَلَن يَكْفِيَكُمْ أَن يُمِدَّكُمْ رَبُّكُم بِثَلَٰثَةِ ءَالَٰفٍ مِّنَ الْمَلَٰئِكَةِ مُنزَلِينَ ﴿١٢٤﴾

[Remember] when you said to the believers, "Is it not sufficient for you that your Lord should reinforce you with three thousand angels sent down?"[138]

The verses below show that the continuous acts of creation we encounter in this realm are affirmed by the nature of the angelic role, which is to descend to this realm at every command (*amr*) issued by God, as well as ascending to Him continuously in order to return the deeds – and indeed ultimately the souls – of human beings to their Creator:

تَعْرُجُ الْمَلَٰئِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ إِلَيْهِ فِى يَوْمٍ كَانَ مِقْدَارُهُۥ خَمْسِينَ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ ﴿٤﴾

The angels and the Spirit will ascend to Him during a Day the extent of which is fifty thousand years.[139]

هَلْ يَنظُرُونَ إِلَّا أَن يَأْتِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ فِى ظُلَلٍ مِّنَ الْغَمَامِ وَالْمَلَٰئِكَةُ وَقُضِىَ الْأَمْرُ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ ﴿٢١٠﴾

Do they await but that Allah should come to them in covers of clouds and the angels [as well] and the matter is [then] decided? And to Allah [all] matters are returned.[140]

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137 Quran, 8.9.

138 Quran, 3:124.

139 Quran, 70:4.

140 Quran, 2:210.

Angels in the Next Realm

The previous verses indicated the continuous descent and ascent of angels. The following verses also affirm the spatially dualistic roles of angels, operating under God's command both in this realm and the next:

<div dir="rtl">

۞ قُل يَتَوَفَّىٰكُم مَّلَكُ ٱلۡمَوۡتِ ٱلَّذِى وُكِّلَ بِكُمۡ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمۡ تُرۡجَعُونَ ﴿١١﴾

</div>

Say, "The angel of death will take you who has been entrusted with you. Then to your Lord you will be returned."[141]

<div dir="rtl">

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ قَالُوا۟ رَبُّنَا ٱللَّهُ ثُمَّ ٱسۡتَقَـٰمُوا۟ تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيۡهِمُ ٱلۡمَلَـٰٓئِكَةُ أَلَّا تَخَافُوا۟ وَلَا تَحۡزَنُوا۟ وَأَبۡشِرُوا۟ بِٱلۡجَنَّةِ ٱلَّتِى كُنتُمۡ تُوعَدُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

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Indeed, those who have said, "Our Lord is Allah" and then remained on a right course – the angels will descend upon them, [saying], "Do not fear and do not grieve but receive good tidings of Paradise, which you were promised."[142]

<div dir="rtl">

وَمَنۡ أَظۡلَمُ مِمَّنِ ٱفۡتَرَىٰ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَوۡ قَالَ أُوحِىَ إِلَىَّ وَلَمۡ يُوحَ إِلَيۡهِ شَىۡءٌ وَمَن قَالَ سَأُنزِلُ مِثۡلَ مَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ وَلَوۡ تَرَىٰٓ إِذِ ٱلظَّـٰلِمُونَ فِى غَمَرَٰتِ ٱلۡمَوۡتِ وَٱلۡمَلَـٰٓئِكَةُ بَاسِطُوٓا۟ أَيۡدِيهِمۡ أَخۡرِجُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَكُمُ ٱلۡيَوۡمَ تُجۡزَوۡنَ عَذَابَ ٱلۡهُونِ بِمَا كُنتُمۡ تَقُولُونَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ غَيۡرَ ٱلۡحَقِّ وَكُنتُمۡ عَنۡ ءَايَـٰتِهِۦ تَسۡتَكۡبِرُونَ ﴿٩٣﴾

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…And if you could but see when the wrongdoers are in the overwhelming pangs of death while the angels extend their hands, [saying], "Discharge your souls! Today you will be awarded the punishment of [extreme] humiliation for what you used to say against Allah other than the truth and [that] you were, toward His verses, being arrogant."[143]

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141 Quran, 32:11.

142 Quran, 41:30.

143 Quran, 6:93.

وَلَوۡ تَرَىٰٓ إِذۡ يَتَوَفَّى ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ ٱلۡمَلَـٰٓئِكَةُ يَضۡرِبُونَ وُجُوهَهُمۡ وَأَدۡبَـٰرَهُمۡ وَذُوقُواْ عَذَابَ ٱلۡحَرِيقِ ﴿٥٠﴾

> And if you could but see when the angels take the souls of those who disbelieved... They are striking their faces and their backs and [saying], "Taste the punishment of the Burning Fire."[144]

Conclusion/Discussion

The Izutsian analysis has served as an important tool for the identification of words in the semantic category of *malak*. As discussed previously this methodology can produce volumes of work, as ultimately all the words in the Quran are somehow linked. Therefore, only some of the concepts which have a direct relational meaning with angels have been examined. Readers may revisit the groupings of 'key words' extracted from the Quranic verses studied in order to gain some insight into just how involved and intricate an exhaustive study of the word *malak* would be, given much more time and scope.

The semantic analysis of the concept of angels has shown that their story begins with the word *sajada* (prostration). We learn that without exception, all the angels (*kulluhum ajma'ūn*) obeyed God's command (*amr*) and prostrated to Adam; for this reason, they were all described as not being arrogant (*mutakabbir*). The attitude of the angels can be contrasted with that of Iblis, who refused to obey God's command, considering as he did that Adam was of inferior status.[145] His attitude is described as that of one who is arrogant (*astakbara*), and one who rejects faith (*min al-kāfirīn*) or covers the truth.

The concept of the 'fall' (*hubūṭ*) began with the first prophet, Adam. But the Quran makes an important distinction between the fall of Iblīs and the fall of Adam. While Adam was in a state of forgetfulness when he succumbed to Iblis's deception, tasted the forbidden fruit and consequently fell from heaven, Iblīs relied on his own limited reasoning and consciously and willingly

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144 Quran, 8:50.

145 Iblīs, was a jinn who resided in heaven among the angels. He was a believing servant of God who fell from paradise and was cursed because he refused to bow down to Adam. He used his own reasoning to argue with God, claiming that his status was higher than that of man since he – Iblīs – had been made from 'smokeless fire', while man was made from clay. See Quran, 2:34, 15:32, 17:61, 18:50 and 38:74.

disobeyed God. Furthermore, while Adam repented for his momentary lapse, Iblīs remained proud and failed to submit to God's will.[146] Although both Adam – i.e., by extension, all human beings – and Iblīs fell from heaven, because of his repentance, Adam was given the potential to rise consciously to the highest level in creation. However, despite Iblis's refusal to bow down to Adam, he was nevertheless compelled to do so, and in fact he was forced to become the key player for Adam and, by extension, all human beings, to potentially reach the highest level in creation as vicegerents of God. The status of vicegerent could be reached through remaining in a state of righteousness (*al-birra*), and by remaining God-conscious (i.e.having *taqwā*) at all times through belief – belief, of course, being an investigative understanding and acceptance of the six principles of faith, together with submission to the five pillars of Islam.

Therefore, the state of prostration (*sajada*) is in fact the default setting, for as it is stated in the Quran, whatever and whoever is within the heavens and the earth prostrates to God, willingly or unwillingly.[147] Thus, apart from human beings and jinn, all other creatures, including angels, are by default in a state of prostration and submission. The Quran tells us that all the angels as servants of God (*'abd lillāhi*) obeyed God's command and prostrated to Adam.[148] Therefore, in short, both Iblis and the angels prostrated – and continue to prostrate – to Adam. However, the former prostrates unwillingly while the latter do so willingly and consciously.

The belief in angels as one of the main pillars of faith, second only to belief in God, and the fact that human beings are told that the angels prostrated to Adam, must be somehow connected to the role that human beings play in this realm. The Izutsian analysis carried out in this chapter under the four categories outlined earlier has hopefully served to some extent to uncover and highlight their significanc.

As discussed, the verses in the Quran that we have studied point to the importance of belief in angels and equates unbelief in God and His angels with the state of 'covering the truth' 'ungratefulness', both of which constitute transgression.[149]

With regard to the qualities of angels, there is a marked difference between them and human beings. Firstly, while Adam was taught all the Names of God, the Names were placed before the angels in proportion to, and in accordance with, their particular functions in the realms they were commanded to occupy.[150]

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146 Quran, 7:11-25.

147 Quran, 16:49 and 13:15.

148 Quran, 172.

149 Quran, 2:98.

150 Quran, 2:31.

As we have seen, arrogance is a characteristic associated with disobedience, and one that we know cannot be predicated of angels, since all of the angels, without exception, obeyed God's commands.[151] Furthermore, the word *kafara* (covering the truth) is also never used for angels; rather, the emphasis is always on their role as obedient messengers who convey the truth (*ḥaqq*).[152] Therefore angels, as servants of God who are the vehicle through which God's will and power are manifested in the realm of multiplicity, cannot deceive.

The relevance of the affirmation of belief in angels and their acceptance as messengers of God becomes clearer from the verses that detail the spatially dualistic role of angels, that is in their bringing down messages from the heavens (*samāwāt*) to the earth ('*ard*).[153]

There are many verses in the Quran where the specific tasks of angels are described. For example, angels were sent down (*anzala*) by God to Zakariya to convey the good news that he would be blessed with an honourable descendant.[154] Other examples include the angels who were set down to Muhammad to help him in battle,[155] and Mary, who was given the good news of the birth of Jesus by an angel.[156] However, angels are not just sent down to perform particular duties. Angels are commanded by God to deliver *all* messages from the heavens to the earth, that is, for every single matter (*amr*) and not just for specific tasks.[157]

As discussed, apart from the word *malak* (angel), all other derivatives of the triliteral root *mīm lām kāf* are words which express the absolute sovereignty of God, thus allowing us to infer that angels are not the source of communication, but rather simply the means whereby God's commands are manifested in the realm of multiplicity. Belief in the one, transcendent God, who is non-spatial and atemporal, demands the existence of angels in order that He can be known and worshipped. If God is the source of all that is created and has no partners in His creation, then everything in the cosmos is a sign (*āya*) and a message brought down through the vehicle of angels. Just as rain sent down from the heavens to the earth is a sign for people who listen,[158] then everything in the cosmos is a sign to be read and internalised – even, as discussed, the very feelings we experience as humans.[159]

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151 Quran, 16:49.

152 Quran, 15:8.

153 Quran, 35:1.

154 Quran, 3:39

155 Quran, 3:124-125 and 8:9.

156 Quran, 3:45.

157 Quran, 97:4.

158 Quran, 16: 65.

159 For example, see: Quran, 9:26 and 3:154.

To sum up, angels are the means by which God manifests His Names and attributes in creation. We learn how *rubūbiyya* (God's lordliness) is manifested in creation by the way everything is sustained and nurtured with perfect harmony, order and balance (*'adāla*). Thus, angels are ubiquitous, present at every Divine command (*amr*) and in a constant state of prostration (*sajada*) in the service of their Creator. Angels are therefore very much a part of the human experience and require much more than a mere affirmation of their existence. Hidden in every command sent down by the Creator of the universe is a message, brought down by angels. And with the guidance of revelation and prophets, human beings have been given the task of unveiling and seeing beyond the veil that is cause and effect. Only in this way can the endless messages conveyed by the Sustainer of the cosmos through the vehicle of angels be read and understood in the correct way.

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8

In Search of a Nursian Angelology

Colin Turner

Introduction

Belief in the existence of beings known as angels is common to most of the world's religions, but only in Islam has it been accorded the status of 'article of faith', second only, some would claim, to belief in God. Despite its lofty doctrinal status, however, belief in angels is arguably the forgotten article of faith as far as Muslims are concerned. This chapter aims in part to help compensate in its own very brief and humble way for the paucity of Muslim theological material on angels by offering some insights into the angelology of one of the contemporary Muslim world's most esteemed and prolific thinkers and theologues, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (d. 1960). I believe it is no exaggeration to claim that Nursi says more about angels and their cosmic significance in one short treatise from his *Risale-i Nur* collection than can be found in most of the works of his scholarly peers put together. Eschewing the historical development of what can only be described as 'Muslim angelologies', this present chapter will focus on Nursi's approach in general, and on certain hitherto undiscussed and, dare I say, contentious, aspects of his approach in particular.

Despite the integral role that angels play in Quranic cosmology, medieval Muslim theologians had relatively little to say on the subject, while modern Muslim scholars – with a few notable exceptions – tend either to avoid it completely or refer interested parties to the stock scriptural discussions or to the few secondary sources available. Religiously uninclined academics generally evince a certain amount of unguarded bepuzzlement whenever my personal interest, or the interest of my students, in angelology is mentioned. This does not surprise me in the least, given that angels were more or less extirpated *en masse* from the Western imagination as part of the early modern project to secularise the universe, beginning with the scientific revolutions spearheaded

by Copernicus, Galileo, Newton et al. and culminating, *inter alia*, in the Cartesian bifurcation of reality into *res extensae* and *res cogitans*. The general inability – or, perhaps, unwillingness – of people in general to take angelology seriously is of course not helped by the overly accommodative approach of Muslim apologists and their attempts to rationalise angels, either by framing them as metaphors or by objectifying them as phenomena belonging to the sub-atomic or quantum realm.

Thus it is not difficult to understand why some might think that the subject of angels is a rather difficult one with which to engage on a rational-intellectual level. Of course, as angels were driven out of the West's collective religious consciousness by the forces of secularity and scientific advancement, it could be argued that humankind's innate and perhaps subconscious appreciation for the true theological and existential utility of angels found expression in other ways and through other channels. While angels were no longer seen as being absolutely indispensable to creation, simulacra of the real thing were retained by the collective cultural consciousness, where they endure as symbols of purity, protection and romantic sensibility. The angel as epitome of goodness and purity is a popular cultural symbol, used even by those who might disavow its religious connection. The words 'angel' and 'guardian angel' are part of the universal lexicon, and find expression among believers and unbelievers alike.

While historically the portrayal of angels as corporeal beings with recognisably human attributes is largely a Judaeo-Christian construct, the way angels have been understood in Muslim theological tradition and, indeed, by the Quran itself, is not that far removed from the approach of other monotheistic religions. Unfortunately, artistic imagination has tended to anthropomorphise angels to the extent that their true essential natures have been almost airbrushed out completely, as the bare-bottomed cherubs which adorn countless Baroque paintings – and modern greetings cards – attest. The reduction of what are basically spiritual entities and denizens of the 'unseen realm' to winged babies with beatific smiles or statuesque paragons of beauty with radiant halos has tended to amplify the fact that angelology is a somewhat problematic field of enquiry, even for believers.

Said Nursi's treatment of angels attempts, as we shall see, to rationalise the existence of angels in a way which lifts what is essentially a non-rational subject out of the realm of the fantastical and repositions it in the realm of the reasonable. But before we explore his angelology, a very brief excursus into how the subject is approached by the Quran may be instructive.[1]

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1   The Quranic approach to angels is discussed at length in Chapter 7 of this volume.

Angels in the Quran

The word *malak* (angel, pl. *malā'ika*) is derived from the triliteral root *m-l-k*, which occurs over 200 times in the Quran in ten derived forms. Among these derivatives are the verbal nouns malik (king or sovereign), *mālik* (owner or possessor), *mulk* (kingdom) and *malakūt* (dominion).

Angels are, as the cognates *malakūt* and *mulk* suggest, connected with both the unseen realm and the visible realm. The Quran describes them in one verse as 'messengers' that bring, among other things, revelation and inspiration from behind the veil of the unseen to the seen world.[2] As entities who originate in the unseen realm, angels are considered to be among the *mujarradāt*, or those beings that are 'disengaged' from matter, although they are understood traditionally to have been created from light.[3] When angels bring their 'messages' from the unseen to the seen realm, however, they are said to take on forms that can be grasped by those to whom the 'messages' are addressed. The angle Gabriel, for example, was said on some occasions to have appeared to Muhammad in human form.[4]

The Quran depicts angels as being perfectly obedient servants of God, each angel having its own 'known station'.[5] Angels are described as being arranged 'in ranks', which suggests a hierarchy, with different individual angels or groups of angels tasked with different duties, such as recording the deeds of men or taking their souls at death.[6] Angels are seen as unswerving executors of the Divine will, carrying out His commands to the letter; they are also described as 'bearers of the Divine Throne', which is understood traditionally to symbolise Divine power.[7] Their centrality to Islamic cosmology is such that, after belief in the unity of God, belief in angels is second in the list of the six 'articles of faith' affirmed by the Quran.[8] Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to say that those narratives in the Quran which deal with the creation of mankind, the descent of revelation, the administration of cosmic phenomena and the concept of resurrection and the

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2 For the angels as 'messengers', see: Quran: 7:37.

3 Sachiko Murata & William Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (I.B.Tauris: 1994), pp. 89-90.

4 For a brief but intriguing neuro-theological account of Gabriel's appearance to Muhammad, see: Peter Verhagen, Herman M. Van Praag, Juan Jose Lopez-Ibor, Jr., John Cox & Driss Moussaoui (Eds.), *Religion and Psychiatry: Beyond Boundaries* (Wiley-Blackwell: Oxford, 2010), p. 553.

5 Quran, 37:164.

6 Quran, 8:9; 25:25; 37:1; 78:38; 89:22 and 4:97 provide but a few examples of the different ranks and functions of the angelic hierarchy.

7 Quran, 39:37; 40:7; 69:17.

8 Quran, 2:177.

hereafter cannot be understood without reference to the existence of angels. Nursi's discourse on angels goes some way to explaining exactly why this should be.

Towards a Nursian Angelology

Nursi's treatment of angels consists of his attempt to provide a rationale for their existence together with a description of their functions and the role that they play in the cosmic scheme. He devotes little time to describing them or outlining their hierarchies, although these things are indicated or alluded to on occasion.

According to Nursi, both reality and wisdom require that, like the earth, the whole of the rest of the cosmos be populated by conscious entities, with forms of existence suited to their different cosmic environments. Such entities are, in the language of the Quran, known as angels (*malā'ika*) and spirit beings (*rūḥāniyāt*), and their existence, Nursi says, is as definite as that of humans and animals.[9]

> Reality requires it to be thus. For despite the earth's smallness and insignificance in relation to the heavens, its being filled with intelligent beings and from time to time being emptied and then refilled with new ones suggests that the heavens too, with their majestic constellations like adorned palaces, are filled with animate creatures, the light of the light of existence, and conscious and intelligent creatures, the light of animate creatures. Like man and the jinn, those creatures are spectators of the palace of the world, deliberators upon the book of the universe and heralds of this realm of dominicality.[10]

From the existence of conscious beings on earth, Nursi infers that the heavens too – space and the whole panoply of celestial bodies which fill it – must also be populated by animate entities with consciousness. Standing alone, this extrapolation appears less than convincing. However, when Nursi's argument becomes properly theological, and he outlines the reason why the 'book of the universe' was written, the case he presents for a cosmos filled with living beings endowed with consciousness and the powers of intellection becomes more tenable. According to the 'hidden treasure' Tradition, the whole of the cosmos is created in order that its Creator be known, loved and worshipped. The 'book of

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9   At no point does Nursi actually spell out precisely what he means by 'spirit beings', although it may be inferred from the context of his exposition that it refers primarily to the spirits of dead human beings, as well as different categories of angel. It may even include jinn.

10   Nursi, *The Words*, p. 521.

the cosmos' was written in order to be deliberated upon, so that its writer might be acknowledged and his artistry admired. Acknowledgment and admiration require consciousness and intellection, and since every sentence, word and letter of the 'cosmic book' is there to be read, understood, pondered and assimilated, it follows on that there can be nowhere in the cosmos that is devoid of beings who are able to interpret this 'book' and bow down in awe at the majesty of its author's writing. Nursi elaborates:

> The nature of the universe surely points to their existence. For since it is embellished and decked out with uncountable numbers of finely adorned works of art and meaningful decorations and wise embroideries, it self-evidently requires the gazes of thoughtful admirers and wondering, appreciative lovers; it demands their existence. Yes, just as beauty requires a lover, so too is food given to the hungry. Thus the sustenance of spirits and nourishment of hearts in this boundless beauty of art looks to the angels and spirit beings; it points to them. For while this infinite adornment requires an infinite duty of contemplation and worship, man and jinn can perform only an infinitesimally small part of that infinite duty, that wise supervision, that extensive worship. This means that boundless varieties of angels and spirit beings are necessary to perform those duties, and to fill and inhabit the mighty mosque of the world with their ranks.[11]

The existence of conscious beings throughout the cosmos is thus in a sense necessitated inexorably by the nature of cosmos itself, which, as a gallery displaying countless works of art brought into being by its owner, must of necessity be acknowledged and appreciated by those who are able to admire them. Since the spatiotemporal reach of human beings and jinn is limited, and the field of contemplation and adoration unbounded, it follows that there must be a limitless number of other conscious entities in the cosmos who are created in order to permeate the whole of the cosmos with worship. The duty of these beings – angels in particular – is thus conscious worship, pure and simple, and they are deemed to be truly ubiquitous.

> Indeed, angels are present in every aspect, in every sphere of the universe, each charged with a duty of worship. It may be said according to both the narrations of hadiths and the wisdom in the order of the world that from lifeless planets and stars to raindrops, all are ships or vehicles for a kind of

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11   *Ibid.*, p. 522.

angel. The angels mount these vehicles with Divine permission and travel observing the Manifest World; they represent their praise and glorification.[12]

Nursi makes it clear in this passage that there is not a realm, sphere or aspect of the cosmos which is devoid of angelic presence: angels are, quite literally, everywhere, tasked solely with the duty of worship.[13] What this means in practice, we will discuss shortly. Suffice here to say that according to Nursi, all created entities are 'vehicles' for one kind of angel or another, and have one 'face' turned towards the visible world. In other words, as we shall see, angels in a sense connect the unseen realm to the visible realm, where they 'represent' – or, more correctly, 're-present' – the praise and glorification of entities, particularly those which are inanimate. The notion of a conscious being – the angel – representing a presumably nonconscious or inanimate being is an important part of Nursian angelology, as we shall see later.

Life (*ḥayāt*) Necessitates the Existence of Angels

Having posited that the creation of angels is in necessitated by the very creation of the cosmos itself, Nursi now revisits the phenomenon of life and argues that it, too, demands the existence of angels.

> The perfection of existence is through life. Rather, the true existence of existence is through life. Life is the light of existence, and consciousness is the light of life. Life is the summit and foundation of everything. Life appropriates everything for living beings; it is as though it makes one thing the owner of everything. Through life, a living thing may say: "All these things belong to me. The world is my house. The universe is my property, given to me by my owner." Just as light is the cause of things being seen and, according to some, of the existence of colours, so is life the revealer of beings: it is the cause of their qualities being realized. Furthermore, it makes an insignificant particular general and universal, and is the cause of universal things being concentrated in a particular. It is also the cause of all the

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12 *Ibid.*

13 Prophetic Traditions seem to confirm this. For example, Ibn Abi Ḥātim narrates on the authority of Ka'b, who said: "There is no place [the size of the eye of a needle without an angel being responsible for it, raising knowledge about it up to God and the angels of heaven. [The angels] are more numerous than the number of specks of dust and as small." See: S. R. Burge, *Angels in Islam: Jalāl al-Suyūṭī's al-Ḥabā'ik fī akhbār al-malā'ik* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2012), p. 117.

perfections of existence, by, for example, making innumerable things co-operate and unite, and making them the means of unity and being endowed with spirit. Life is even a sort of manifestation of Divine unity in the levels of multiplicity, and a mirror reflecting Divine oneness.[14]

Broadly speaking, Nursi describes life in terms of the Aristotelian ascending hierarchy of being, moving from the lowest forms of existence – the inanimate objects – and up through the plant and animal worlds, culminating in humankind.

Consider the following: a lifeless object, even if it is a great mountain, is an orphan, a stranger, alone. Its only relations are with the place in which it is situated, and with the things which encounter it. Whatever else there is in the cosmos, it does not exist for the mountain. For the mountain has neither life through which it might be related to life, nor consciousness by which it might be concerned.[15]

Inanimate objects such as the mountain form the most basic level of existence, lacking both life and consciousness. While Nursi says that it does have relations with whatever happens to encounter it, in lacking life and consciousness, an inanimate object such as a mountain can neither engage actively with other living beings nor enjoy any awareness of the rest of the cosmos of which it is part. Compare this, he says, with a living creature such as the bee:

The instant life enters the bee, it establishes such a connection with the universe that it is as though it concludes a trading agreement with it, especially with the flowers and plants of the earth. It can say: "The earth is my garden; it is my trading house." Thus through the unconscious instinctive senses which impel and stimulate it, in addition to the five external senses and inner senses of animate beings, the bee has a feeling for, and a familiarity and reciprocal relationship with, most of the species in the world, and they are at its disposal.[16]

If life connects the humble bee to most of the other animate creatures across the face of the globe, in man – the pinnacle of creation – its nature is so refined that it connects him to the whole of the cosmos, with regard to both its inner and outer faces (*mulk wa malakūt*).

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14 *Ibid.*, p. 523.

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*

> If life then displays its effect thus in the tiniest of animate beings, certainly when it rises to the highest level, that of man, it will be revealed and extended and illumined to such a degree that just as a human being is able to move through the rooms of his house with his consciousness and mind, which are the light of life, so he may travel through the higher and the spiritual and corporeal worlds with them. That is to say, just as that conscious and animate being may go in spirit as though as a guest to those worlds, those worlds too come as guests to his mirror-like spirit by being reflected and depicted there.[17]

Life, then, enables man to move not only in a physical sense but also in a spiritual one, allowing him to embrace realms and dimensions of being that cannot be accessed by less sophisticated and spiritually capable beings. The difference between human life and that of plants and animals is that in man, life is a force which makes him by default a locus of manifestation for all of God's Names and allows him, should he so wish, to display those names consciously and in a spirit of worshipfulness. As far as animate beings on earth are concerned, then, existence, life and consciousness find their most subtle expression in what Nursi often describes as God's choicest creation, the human being.

Given that existence without life is not really existence, Nursi says, and that life without consciousness is not really life, one may conclude that if other worlds exist, their existence too must be real existence, with real life and real consciousness:

> In short it may be said that if there were no life, existence would not be existence; it would be no different from non-existence. Life is the light of the spirit, and consciousness is the light of life. Since life and consciousness are important to this great extent; and since there is self-evidently an absolutely perfect order in the universe, and a masterly precision and most wise harmony; and since our lowly, wretched globe, our wandering earth has been filled with uncountable numbers of animate beings, intelligent beings and beings with spirits – it may be concluded with decisive certainty that those heavenly palaces, those lofty constellations also have animate and conscious inhabitants appropriate to them.[18]

Moreover, Nursi avers, if Divine power can create beings with spirits – man, for instance – from the basest of materials such as earth, why should He not make

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17   *Ibid.*, p. 524

18   *Ibid.*

use of more subtle matter, such as light, to fashion spiritual entities appropriate to the supra-mundane realms?

> Moreover since, as is plain to see, pre-eternal power creates innumerable animate beings and beings with spirits from the most common substances and densest matter, and, giving it great importance, transmutes dense matter by means of life into a subtle substance; and since it strews the light of life everywhere in great abundance, and gilds most things with the light of consciousness; with such flawless power and faultless wisdom, the All-Wise and All-Powerful One would certainly not neglect the other floods of subtle matter such as light, which is close to and fitting for the spirit; He would not leave them without life, without consciousness, inanimate. Indeed, He creates animate and conscious beings in great numbers from light, which is also matter, and even from meanings, air and even words. Just as He creates numerous different species of animals, so from these torrents of subtle matter He creates numerous different creatures.[19]

There is no form of matter, then, Nursi tells us, which cannot be used by Divine power as a substrate for the creation of entities. Light, which is itself a form of matter possibly closer than any other to the purely immaterial, is, according to Muslim tradition, the substrate for the creation of angels.

To demonstrate how self-evident and rational he believes it is to accept the existence of angels, and how irrational it is to disbelieve in them, Nursi allegorizes.

> There were two men, an uncouth villager and an intelligent city dweller, who made friends and travelled to Istanbul. In a distant corner of that civilized and magnificent city they came across a dirty, wretched little building, a factory. They looked and saw that the strange factory was full of miserable, impoverished men working. All around the building were various other animate beings and beings with spirits, but their means of livelihood and conditions of life were such that some were herbivorous, living only on plants, while others were piscivorous, eating nothing but fish.
>
> The two men then looked into the distance, where they saw thousands of adorned palaces and lofty castles. Among the palaces were spacious workshops and broad squares. Because of either the distance or defects in the men's eyesight, or because the inhabitants of those palaces had hidden themselves, those inhabitants were not visible to the two men. Moreover,

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19   *Ibid*., pp. 524-25.

the terrible conditions which the men had witnessed in the wretched little factory were not to be seen in the palaces. Consequently, the uncouth villager, who had never before seen a city, declared: "Those palaces have no inhabitants: they are empty, and completely devoid of animate beings or entities with spirits."

To this garbled nonsense the second man replied: "O you miserable man! This insignificant little building you see here has been filled with beings endowed with spirits, with workers, and there is someone who continually employs and replaces them. Look, there is not an empty space all around this factory, it has been filled with animate beings and beings with spirits. Do you think it is at all possible that there would be no high-ranking and suitable inhabitants in that orderly city, in those wisely adorned palaces so full of art which we can see in the distance? Of course they are occupied, and the different conditions of life there are appropriate for those who live there. In place of grass they eat pastries, and in place of fish, cakes. Their not being visible to you because of the distance, or your weak eyesight, or their hiding themselves, does not mean that they are not actually there. The fact that a thing is not seen is no indication of its non-existence."[20]

The 'wretched little building' in the allegory is the globe of the earth, while the palaces and castles of Istanbul represent the celestial bodies and supra-mundane realms of the cosmos. Now if a 'wretched little building' like the earth, which is just one out of an unfathomably large number of realms in existence, is home to beings endowed with life, consciousness and spirit, it makes absolute good sense, Nursi argues, that the vast celestial realms outwith the earth should be full of entities possessing life, consciousness and spirit. Nursi makes it clear, however, that their form will be appropriate to their creational location:

For there are different kinds of angels, just as there are different kinds of corporeal beings. Indeed, the angel who is appointed to a raindrop will not be of the same sort as the angel appointed to the sun.[21]

But Nursi's point in this section is not merely to affirm the existence of conscious beings – angels in particular – in those vast celestial reaches which lie beyond the globe of the earth. The visible world (*ʿālam al-mulk*) includes the sub-atomic as well as the galactic, and so according to Nursi's argument, those realms of the

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20   *Ibid.*, pp. 525-26.

21   *Ibid.*, p. 526.

material world which are inaccessible to the unaided human senses – the atoms in the human eye, for example – must be as filled with conscious, living entities as their vaster celestial counterparts. In short, wherever there is existence, on whatever scale, there is life. And wherever there is life, there are living, conscious entities capable of appreciating the vitality of existence in all of its forms.[22]

Nursi concludes the section by affirming the primacy of existence – and, by extension, life – over matter, thus paving the way for his assertion that even in those realms which are supra-material, such as the world of the unseen, life is still ubiquitous.

> As may be established empirically, matter is not essential so that existence may be made subject to it, and be dependent on it. Rather, matter subsists through a meaning, and that meaning is life, it is spirit. Also, as may be established through observation, matter is not the thing served so that everything may be ascribed to it. It is rather the servant; it renders service to the process of the perfection of a truth. And that truth is life. And the fundament of that truth is spirit. Also, as is self-evident, matter is not dominant so that recourse may be made to it or perfections sought from it. Rather, it is dominated; it looks to the decree of some foundation and is in motion in the way that that decree dictates. And that foundation is life, it is spirit, it is consciousness. Also, as is necessary, matter is not the kernel, it is not the foundation, it is not a settled abode so that events and perfections may be affixed to it or constructed on it. Rather, it is a shell prepared to be split, rent, dissolved; it is a husk, it is froth, it is a form.[23]

In stressing that it is life, together with spirit and consciousness, which has ontological primacy over matter, Nursi is conducting an argument that is analogous, and indeed not unconnected, to the one put forward by Mullā Ṣadrā

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22 Classical scholars corroborate the sheer multitudinousness of angels with reference to various Prophetic Traditions and narratives from the Companions and other sources. For example, Dīnawārī in his *al-Mujālisa* quotes Abd al-Raḥmān b. Zayd b. Aslam as follows: "There is nothing more numerous in God's creation than the angels: [for] none of the sons of Adam are without two angels, the driver who drives him an, and the watcher, who watches him; therefore, there are twice the number of the sons of Adam; then in addition to that, the heavens [and the earth] are crammed with them], and beyond the heavens are still yet [more]: those around the Throne are more numerous than those which are in the heavens." See: S.R. Burge, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

23 *Ibid.*

for the primacy (*aṣāla*) of existence (*wujūd*) over quiddity (*māhiyya*).[24] According to Ṣadrā, the existence of a thing precedes its essence and is thus foundational, since entities have to exist first before they can have an essence or quiddity. Essences or quiddities are determined and variable according to their existential 'intensity', in line, it may be argued, with Ṣadrā's notion of the 'gradation of existence' (*tashkīk al-wujūd*).[25] Entities are, therefore, nothing more than 'forms' of existence.

While no claims are made here which would place Nursi in the same transcendental existentialist camp as Ṣadrā, there are commonalities between the former's approach to life and the latter's approach to existence that are undeniable. For Nursi, it is not matter which is foundational (*aṣl*) that life should be a property of it; rather, it is life through which matter subsists. Matter is not only something which moves and behaves in accordance with the 'decree' issued by life, Nursi says, but it is also nothing more than a 'form' (*ṣūra*). And although Nursi does not spell out explicitly exactly what it is that gives rise to this 'form', from the context one may conclude that the source of matter is life itself, in exactly the same way that for Ṣadrā, entities are nothing more than different forms of existence (*wujūd*).

Nursi proceeds to explain the correlation between life and matter in slightly greater detail.

> Consider the following: a creature so minute it can only be seen with a microscope has such acute senses that it can hear its friend's voice and see its sustenance; it has extremely sensitive and sharp senses. This demonstrates that the effects of life increase and the light of the spirit intensifies in proportion to the reducing and refining of matter. It is as though the more matter is refined and the more we become distanced from our material existences, the closer we draw to the world of the spirit, the world of life and the world of consciousness; and the more intensely the heat of the spirit and the light of life are manifested.[26]

That life and matter are thus linked inextricably is clear, although the correlation between them is at first glance different conceptually to the correlation

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24 For an insightful introduction to the subject of the primacy of existence over the primacy of essence, see Ahmad Ahmadi's 'The fundamentality of existence or quiddity: a confusion between epistemology and ontology', in *Topoi*, Vol. 26, No.2 (2007), pp. 213-19.

25 Colin Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed: A Critical Analysis of Said Nursi's Epistles of Light* (Gerlach Press: Berlin, 2013), pp. 68-70.

26 Nursi, *The Words*, pp. 526-27.

which exists between existence and entities in Ṣadrā's scheme. In the Nursian conceptualisation of life and matter, the less matter there is in an entity, the easier it is to see – in superficial terms, at least – the workings of the phenomenon of life. Nursi uses the example of a microscopic being, the materiality of which is minimal when compared, say, with a huge, lumbering beast such as an elephant. Both beings are imbued with life, but in the microscopic being, the material 'veil' beneath which the phenomenon of life is at work appears to be virtually transparent. From one perspective, Nursi seems to be saying, it is as though we can almost see in this minute being the unveiled existence of life itself.

Naturally, this does not mean that a micro-organism such as a dust mite is any more alive than a huge pachyderm such as an elephant. What it does mean, however, is that since the tangibility of life and its effects appears to increase in proportion to the refinement of matter, it is clear that it must be life, and not matter, that is primordial. Nursi elaborates further:

> Is it therefore at all possible that there should be this many distillations of life, consciousness and spirit within this veil of materiality, and that the inner world which is beyond this veil should not be full of conscious beings and beings with spirits? Is it at all possible that the sources of these numberless distillations, flashes and fruits of meaning, spirit, life and the truth apparent in this material existence in the Manifest World should be ascribed only to matter and the motion of matter, and be explained by it? God forbid! Absolutely not! These innumerable distillations and flashes demonstrate that this material and manifest world is but a lace veil strewn over the inner and spirit worlds.[27]

Matter, then, which makes up the visible, material world or 'realm of dominion' (*'ālam al-mulk*) is clearly not the driving force behind the motions and behaviours that it exhibits. What propels matter, Nursi argues, is the phenomenon of life, which, together with consciousness and spirit, 'decree' the motion of matter from beyond the 'veil' of materiality in the unseen realm. The source of life, consciousness and spirit, therefore, is the unseen rather than the visible realm, and from this Nursi is able to conclude that the unseen realm must, of necessity, be teeming with beings endowed with all three properties. Such beings include *malā'ika* or angels.

Nursi then invokes the agreement which he claims exists among all Muslim scholars on the reality of angels and spirit beings to provide an 'argument from authority':

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27   *Ibid.*, p. 527.

> It may be said that all the scholars of the speculative and the scriptural sciences have, knowingly or unknowingly, united to create a consensus in affirming, despite difference of expression, the existence and reality of the angels and spirit beings. One group of Peripatetic philosophers of the Illuminist School even, who made much progress in the study of matter, without denying the meaning of the angels, stated that each realm in creation has a spiritual, incorporeal essence. They described the angels thus. Also, a group of the early philosophers who were Illuminists, being compelled to accept the meaning of the angels, were only wrong in naming them the 'Ten Intellects and Masters of the Realms of Creation'.[28]

Belief in angels – or in forces analogous to angels – is evidenced in all of the revealed religions, Nursi asserts, and a form of such belief exists even among those who claim no religion and who adhere to various different materialist doctrines.

> Through the inspiration and guidance of revelation, scholars of all the revealed religions have accepted that each realm of creation has an angel appointed to it, and have named them the 'mountain angel', the 'sea angel' and the 'rain angel', for example. Even the materialists and naturalists, whose reasoning is restricted to what is immediately apparent to them and who have in effect fallen from the level of humanity to that of inanimate matter, rather than being able to deny the meaning of the angels, have been compelled to accept them in one respect, though naming them the 'flowing forces' (*quwwa-i sāriyya*).[29]

Consensus regarding the existence of supra-mundane beings known as angels exists among all Muslim scholars, regardless of their disciplinary or doctrinal leanings. Furthermore, the existence of beings which are recognisable as angels in the Quranic sense of the word is affirmed by all of the revealed religions: Christianity, for example, has a well-developed angelology, as indeed does Judaism. And even among non-believing naturalists, there are certain forces in the natural world which are described by them in terms which are not that far removed from the description of the nature and function of the *malā'ika* in the Quran, the *ḥadīth* and in Muslim theological tradition.

That angels – or forces which carry out tasks akin to those which pertain to angels – figure in different forms in the worldviews of believers and unbelievers

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28 *Ibid.*

29 *Ibid.*

alike is, for Nursi, evidence of their reality so compelling that it leaves no room for meaningful opposition.

> To those who are reluctant to accept the existence of angels and spirit beings, I would say this: on what do you base your view? What facts do you rely on that you oppose the conscious or otherwise unanimity of all the scholars concerning the existence and reality of the meaning of the angels and the real existence of spirit beings? And since, as was proved earlier, life is the revealer of beings, indeed, is their consequence, their quintessence; and since all the scholars are in effect unanimous in their acceptance of the meaning of the angels; and this world of ours has been filled to such a degree with animate creatures and beings with spirits; is it at all possible that the vastness of space and the rarefied heavens would remain empty of dwellers, have no inhabitants? Since the scholars of religion and philosophy, and of the speculative and scriptural sciences, have in effect agreed that beings are not restricted to this Manifest World; and since, despite being inanimate and inappropriate for the formation of spirits, the visible Manifest World has been adorned to such an extent with beings with spirits; existence is surely not limited to it. There are numerous other levels of existence in relation to which the Manifest World is an embroidered veil.[30]

Nursi consolidates his appeal to authority by invoking the Quran, which, he says, is the source *par excellence* of clear and firm knowledge regarding the form, reality and function of angels.

> Furthermore, since, just as the sea is appropriate for fish, and the 'world of the unseen' and the 'world of meaning' appropriate for spirits, and this necessitates their being filled with them; and since all commands testify to the existence of the meaning of the angels; certainly and without any shadow of a doubt, the most beautiful form of the angels' existence and spirit beings' reality, and the most rational view of their nature which sound intellects will accept and acclaim, is that which the Quran has expounded and elucidated. For the miraculous Quran states that: "The angels are honoured slaves. Never contesting a command, they do whatever they are commanded. The angels are subtle, luminous beings, and are divided into different kinds."[31]

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30 *Ibid.*, p. 528

31 *Ibid.*

But Nursi's appeal to authority in the context of the adherents of the revealed religions is not based solely on the strength of their belief in angels; rather, it also looks to the phenomenon of angels as an experiential reality. There are narratives which exist in all faith histories that tell of meetings between pious individuals and angels, or of visionary experiences and instances of indubitable inspiration which can be attributed only to those entities described in the revealed texts as angels. Indeed, says Nursi, the sighting by one prophet or sage of a single angel is enough to allow us to conclude that their existence is universal.

> The question of the angels and spirit beings is one of those questions in which the reality of a universal may be inferred from the existence of a single particular. If a single individual is seen, the existence of the species may be concluded. Whoever denies it, denies it as a member of the species to which it belongs. While whoever accepts the single individual is compelled to accept its whole species. Since it is thus, consider the following: Have you not seen and heard that all the scholars of the revealed religions throughout the ages from the time of Adam until now have agreed on the existence of the angels and the reality of spirit beings? The different groups of mankind have concurred in having seen and conversed with angels and in their narrations concerning them, as though they were discussing and narrating events about one another. Do you think that if a single angel had not been seen, and the existence of one or numerous individuals not been established through observation, and their existence not been perceived clearly, self-evidently, that it would have been at all possible for such accord and such a consensus to continue, and to continue persistently and unanimously in such an affirmative and positive manner, based on observation? Furthermore, is it at all possible, rational or feasible that the unanimous testimony of the prophets and saints, who are like the suns, moons and stars in human society, concerning the existence of the angels and spirit beings and their actually seeing them, should be prey to doubts or be the object of suspicion? Especially since they are qualified to speak in this matter. It is obvious that two people who are qualified to speak on a matter are preferable to thousands who are not. Moreover, in this question they are affirming a matter, and people who affirm a matter are preferable to thousands who deny or reject it.[32]

Nursi then turns to the notion of angels as beings which 'represent' the glorification of other entities in the cosmos. Again, it is important here that we

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32   *Ibid.*, pp. 529-30.

unpack Nursi's exposition carefully, for from this point onwards his discourse throws light not only on the nature of angels themselves but also on the nature of external existence as a whole.

> If the creatures of the universe are observed with care, it may be seen that like particulars, universals have collective identities, each of which appears as a universal function; it is apparent that each performs a universal duty. For example, just as a flower as itself displays an embroidery full of art, and with the tongue of its being recites the Creator's Names, so the garden of the globe resembles a flower, and performs an extremely orderly, universal duty of glorification. And just as a fruit issues a proclamation expressing its glorification of God within an order and regularity, so does a mighty tree in its entirety have a most well-ordered natural duty and worship. And just as a tree glorifies God through the words of its fruits, flowers and leaves, so do the vast oceans of the heavens glorify the All-Glorious Creator and praise the Sublime Maker through their suns, moons and stars, which are like words, and so on.[33]

An entity such as a flower may have many practical functions which follow on solely from its physical existence as a flower. It may provide nectar for bees, foodstuff for animals or humans, or aesthetic pleasure for those who may paint it, perhaps, or place it in a vase to admire. From the 'Other-indicative' (*ḥarfī*) perspective, however, its duty – and the duty of all other flowers, together with which it forms what Nursi calls a sort of 'universal flower' – is solely to 'glorify' God. Glorification, then, is the purpose for which all beings are created, be they flowers, trees, oceans or galaxies.

But in what does this glorification consist? For Nursi, the glorification expressed by a flower, for example, consists in its being a locus of manifestation for certain configurations of Divine names, such as order, artistry, wisdom and beauty. The flower 'glorifies' God by acting as a mirror which 'reflects' these names and makes them visible to, and readable by, other creatures. It 'glorifies' God as Provider, for example, through the 'word' of the nectar that it gives to the bee. It 'glorifies' God as Orderer through the 'words' of its symmetry and equilibrium, and as Possessor of Beauty through the 'word' of its own aesthetic appeal, and so on.

What, then, is the role of angels in this glorification? Nursi goes on to explain:

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33   *Ibid.*, p. 530.

> Although external entities are outwardly inanimate and unconscious, they all perform extremely vital, living and conscious duties and glorification. Of a certainty, therefore, just as angels are their representatives expressing their glorification in the World of the Inner Dimensions of Things, those external beings are the counterparts, dwellings and mosques of those angels in the external and manifest world. With their universal and comprehensive worship, they represent the glorification of the large and universal beings in the universe.[34]

The 'external entities' that Nursi is talking about in particular here are those, he says, which lack both life and consciousness. Crystals, the sea, stars, planets, clouds – the list is virtually endless – are all examples of inanimate objects which, despite being inanimate and unconscious, all act purposefully and, Nursi claims, 'glorify' God through their 'conscious duties'. How does Nursi square the inanimateness of entities with the notion of conscious glorification?

For Nursi, the problem with naturalism and scientism is that its exponents acknowledge the apparent purposefulness of the interplay of the constituent parts of the 'natural' world yet deny that there is an overarching telos behind the existence of the cosmos. That there appears to be an element of design, for example, in the process known as 'natural selection', is not refuted by evolutionists; however, they are careful to point out that it is an illusion and nothing more.[35] Others talk about the propensity of inanimate objects in nature to 'self-organise', citing phenomena such as the structure of planets and galaxies, cloud formations, second-harmonic generation in non-linear optics, and so on, as examples.[36] This 'self-organisation', however, is for them precisely what it says it is: things organise themselves, and no reference to a 'cosmic organiser' outside the system is deemed necessary.

For the non-theist, this poses a dilemma – albeit one which is spirited away by what Nursi might have dismissed as pure sophistry. How is it possible for things which are inanimate and thus unconscious to display what appears to evidence of purpose, intelligence and design? The simplest solution is, of course, to appeal to naturalistic explanations – which, for Nursi, are not explanations at

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34   *Ibid.*

35   Richard Dawkins has coined the word 'designoid' to denote any living being which has the appearance of having been designed but which in fact is simply a product of the evolutionary process. See: Richard Dawkins, *The Ancestor's Tale: A Pilgrimage to the Dawn of Evolution* (Mariner Books: New York, 2005), p. 601.

36   See: F. Heylighen (2003), 'The science of self-organisation and adaptivity' in L. D. Kiel (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems* (EOLSS Publishers: Oxford, 2003).

all – and dismiss any indications of design, intelligence and purpose in nature as mere illusions. After all, this is what evolutionary biologists such as Richard Dawkins do with alacrity all the time.

For theists such as Nursi, however, the dilemma is not solved so easily. In Nursi's eyes, the inability – or unwillingness – of unbelievers and sceptics to attribute creation to such a being forces them inevitably to attribute it to creation itself. Thus, he contends, creation itself and the 'natural' causes which work within it, are in effect credited with possessing attributes such as omnipotence and omniscience; yet, paradoxically, they are also portrayed as being purposeless and, ultimately, the result of pure chance and cosmic accident. Nursi's argument is that while the building blocks of creation are, for all intents and purposes, nothing more than insentient units of matter, they act as though they possess knowledge, power and purpose. Their apparent possession of these attributes, he argues, is down to the fact that the created world is an assemblage of Divine – and therefore purposeful – acts which are spiritual in origin but 'translated' into corporeality by beings known as *mala'ika* (angels) – entities which, Nursi says, inhabit the 'mosques' that are inanimate entities.

This, it may be argued, is what Nursi means when he says that the angels 'represent' the glorification of inanimate beings. If inanimate beings appear to function with purpose and consciousness, it is on account of the angelic presence which imbues their existence. Just as angels are, as we have noted, messengers from the realm of the unseen which 'carry' the creative command of God and manifest it in the phenomenal world in the form, say, of a snow crystal, those same angels are responsible not only for the apparent purposefulness exhibited by the snowflake in its function as a snowflake, but also for the glorification expressed by that snowflake as a locus of manifestation for one or more of the names of God. The angels tasked with what we may venture is the 'ushering into external existence' of the snowflake from the realm of the unseen are, at the same time, responsible for 'representing' the glorification of the snowflake – the outward expression of the names of God – once it comes into existence.

This of course raises an important question. If the Quran is correct when it asserts that all created beings glorify God, why does a snow crystal or a cloud formation or a rock in the Nevada desert need angels to 'represent' – or, more precisely, to 're-present' – the names of God they embody outwardly in order to glorify Him? If the apparent purposefulness and the apparent consciousness of the snow crystal are in fact nothing more than the actual purposefulness and the actual consciousness of the angel or angels which 'bear' the creative command that brings the snow crystal into existence in the visible realm, what is left that we can actually attribute to the snow crystal? Is there, in fact, any difference at all between the snow crystal and the 'snow crystal angel' which both 'escorts' it

from the unseen realm to the visible realm and then 'represents' its glorification by exhibiting purposefulness and consciousness through it? We saw earlier how Nursi described everything "from lifeless planets and stars to raindrops" as 'vehicles' which angels mount in order to represent their glorification in the visible world of created phenomena. In the following passage, however, Nursi seems to blur the distinction between angel and 'vehicle' to the point where the two become virtually indistinguishable.

> Angels resemble human beings insofar as they know the universal aims of the All-Glorious Maker and conform to them through worship, but they are also contrary to them. For being beyond sensual pleasure and some partial wage, they consider sufficient the pleasure, perfection, delight and bliss they experience through the All-Glorious Maker's attention, command, favour, consideration and name, through their perception of Him, connection with Him and proximity to Him. They labour with the purest sincerity, their duties of worship varying according to their different kinds, and according to the varieties of the creatures in the universe.[37]

Angels, then, are of diverse kinds, and their kinds are as numerous as the varieties of creature in the universe.

> Like in a government there are various officials in the various offices, so the duties of worship and glorification vary in the spheres of the realm of dominicality (*rubūbiyya*). For example, through the power, strength, reckoning and command of God Almighty, the Archangel Michael is like a general overseer of God's creatures sown in the field of the face of the earth. If one may say so, he is the head of all the angels that resemble farmers. And, through the permission, command, power and wisdom of the All-Glorious Creator, the incorporeal shepherds of all the animals have a head, a supreme angel appointed to the task.[38]

The sheer diversity of created beings means that there is also a diversity of creational functionality — different entities behave in different ways to multifariously different ends — and so it follows that there must be a diversity of ways in which 'glorification' is expressed. This lends further credence to the notion, intimated but not spelt out explicitly by Nursi, that angelic forces are for all intents and purposes of the same creational 'stuff' as the beings whose

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37   Nursi, *The Words*, p. 531.

38   *Ibid.*

glorification and worship they 'represent'. Nursi gives the example of the Archangel Michael (Mīkā'il), who is associated traditionally with rain, thunder and lightning. Nursi describes him as the overseer of all that is grown in the earth, and as chief of all those angels that 'resemble farmers' – an allusion to the forces or material causes which facilitate the production of crops and any other foodstuffs that emerge from the soil as a result of rainfall. Thus the rain cycle and all of its sub-systems, together with horticulture, agriculture and all of their attendant processes, are depicted as being 'overseen' by a hierarchy of angels, with Mīkā'il at its apex. Nursi cites a Prophetic narration which may serve to further illustrate the notion of creational systems as phenomena driven by, and imbued with, the consciousness, purposefulness and glorification of countless angels, each individual angel in its own particular form and its own particular place or rank in the greater system or hierarchy of which it is part.

> Thus, since it is necessary for there to be an angel appointed over each of these external creatures in order to represent in the 'world of the inner dimensions of things' the duties of worship and service of glorification which it performs, and to present them knowingly to the Divine Court, the way the angels are described in the narrations of the Prophet (PBWH) is certainly most appropriate and rational. For example, he declared: "There are some angels that have either forty, or forty thousand, heads. In all the heads are forty thousand mouths, and with the forty thousand tongues in each of those mouths they glorify God in forty thousand ways."[39]

An angel with forty thousand heads, six trillion tongues and over forty thousand trillion ways of glorifying God is a rather difficult creature to envisage, and would seem to befit the plot of a science fiction novel rather than the Traditions of Muhammad. As Nursi develops the theme, however, the symbolic nature of the corporealization of the angelic forces becomes clear.

> There are certain mighty corporeal beings that perform their duties of worship with forty thousand heads in forty thousand ways. For example, the heavens glorify God with the suns and the stars. While the earth, which is a single being, performs its duty of worship, its dominical glorification with a hundred thousand heads and with the hundreds of thousands of tongues in each mouth. Thus the angel appointed to the globe of the earth has to be seen in this way in order to display this meaning in the 'world of the inner dimensions of things'.

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39   *Ibid.*

> I myself, even, saw a medium-sized almond tree which had close on forty large branches like heads. When I looked at one branch, I saw it had nearly forty smaller branches like tongues. Then I looked at one tongue of one of those small branches; forty flowers had opened on it. I studied the flowers, considering the wisdom in them, and saw in each one close on forty exquisite and well-ordered stamens, colours and arts, each of which proclaimed one of the All-Glorious Maker's Names and their constantly varying manifestations. Is it at all possible that the All-Wise and Beauteous One, Who is the All-Glorious Maker of the almond tree, would impose this many duties on an inanimate tree, and not mount on it an appointed angel appropriate to it, to be like its spirit, to understand and express its meaning, proclaim it to the universe and present it to the Divine Court?[40]

On a purely physical-corporeal level, the almond tree in Nursi's example may be seen from two perspectives. It may be seen in its entirety, as a whole, that is, as an almond tree, or it may be seen as a holistic arrangement of closely interconnected and mutually dependent parts – its trunk, branches, leaves, blossoms and fruits. Each of the parts which make up the whole may in turn be understood to be a whole in its own right, while the entire tree is, without doubt, considerably more than simply the sum of its parts.

On the level of the supra-mundane, however, the entity known as the almond tree becomes transparent and the 'world of its inner dimensions' becomes apparent. Nursi's argument here is that on the level of the supra-mundane, the almond tree ceases to be just another unconscious botanical entity and becomes, instead, a vast conglomeration of differently structured and differently functioning angelic messengers which, through their mutual dependency and cooperation, form what is for all intents and purposes a single angelic entity which represents the glorification of the being we know in the phenomenal world as the almond tree. Nursi's conceptual framework of 'angelic representation' means that from the perspective of the visible realm, all beings are as we see them: a raindrop is a raindrop, a desert is a desert and the planet Jupiter is the planet Jupiter. From the perspective of the unseen realm or the 'world of the inner dimension of things', however, entities are nothing more than conglomerations of angels or realms of angelic activity.

As for the question posed earlier – namely whether there is actually any tangible difference between the physical entity and the angel which 'mounts' it in order to represent its glorification – the answer, one may contend, is yes

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40   *Ibid.*, pp. 531-32.

and no, depending on the perspective from which it is viewed. As far as its 'outward face' is concerned, the almond tree is a material being. With regard to its 'inner face', however, the almond tree is nothing more than the creative command of God which has been 'carried' by an angel or angels and 'translated' into external existence. That material entities may be seen as material beings from one perspective and as supra-material conglomerations of angelic forces from another is supported by Nursi's own approach to the dual nature of beings: now 'vehicles' for angels, as he puts it, and now angels made corporeal. Taking this argument to what may be argued is its logical conclusion, it would not be unfair to say that what we in the phenomenal world perceive as matter is, in fact, nothing more than the manifestation of Divine names through the medium of angelic activity.

But while Nursi intimates this, he never actually articulates it explicitly. The closest he comes to declaring that the cosmos is, in fact, nothing but a vast array of innumerable and variously structured configurations of angels is in the section of his work in which he looks at the *malā'ika* in the context of causation.

Angels as the Undergirding Substructure of Cause and Effect?

Even the most cursory study of the *Risale-i Nur* will reveal that Nursi regards material causes as nothing more than 'veils' that cover the 'hand of God', and which are in a sense draped over the creative acts of the Divine. Similarly, those things known as 'natural laws' are for him merely abstractions: they are human descriptions of how natural phenomena behave, made possible by observation and examination. Laws, then, have no extramental existence, and since they lack externality and physicality, they, like causes, cannot be said to have any effect. We have also seen, in the above passages, how the very stuff of the universe has been described by Nursi as the outcome of the workings of supramundane entities known as angels. In this final section, Nursi ties all of these threads and offers a novel explanation of cause and effect which, although contentious, is arguably the most thought-provoking and absorbing facet of his angelology.

> You should never think that the laws in force in this creation are sufficient for the universe to be alive, because those governing laws are insubstantial commands; they are imaginary principles; they may be considered as non-existent. If there were no absolutely obedient creatures called angels to represent them, make them apparent, and take their reins into their own hands, those laws could not be defined as existent, nor be represented as having a particular identity, nor be an

external reality. Whereas, life is an external reality, and an imaginary command cannot sustain an external reality.[41]

The 'laws of nature' are not the reason that phenomena exist or that animate creatures are alive, Nursi says: the 'laws of nature' are merely descriptions of how phenomena behave and how animate creatures live. As such, they have no external existence: you cannot capture a law in a test-tube or dissect it with a scalpel. Laws are nothing more than principles which are abstracted by humans from their repeated observations of how the cosmos works. In short, a law describes what a phenomenon does; it does not make the phenomenon do it. Laws are thus descriptive; they are not prescriptive.

For Nursi, how phenomena behave depends on the creative command of God, and so 'natural laws' are in effect nothing more than verbal depictions of the way God creates; they are a kind of mundane semiotic shorthand for the supra-mundane *sunna* or habitual creative practice of God.

> Just as mankind is a nation and human beings are the bearers, representatives and embodiments of the Sharia or code of divine laws which proceeds from the attribute of Divine speech, so are the angels a mighty nation, and those of them who are workers are the bearers, representatives and embodiments of the 'code of laws pertaining to creation, which proceeds from the attribute of Divine will.' They are a class of God's slaves who are dependent on the commands of the creative power and pre-eternal will, which are the true effective agent, and for whom all the heavenly bodies are like places of worship, like mosques.[42]

For Nursi, then, angels are the 'bearers' not only of the Divine Names but also of the 'creational laws' decreed by Divine will. In other words, the ways in which phenomena are seen to behave, described by scientists as 'the laws of nature', are for Nursi nothing more than the ways in which angels behave as they carry out their duties, 'bearing' the commands of God. From a Nursian perspective, then, that which is called 'cause and effect' is in fact the result of the coming and going of angels as they 'translate' God's names and creative commands continuously into tangible beings in the visible realm.

To sum up, Nursi's angelology depicts the *malā'ika* as conscious, supra-material beings that act in a sense as the interface between the 'world of dominion' (*'ālam al-malakūt*) or the 'hidden realm', and the 'world of the kingdom' (*'ālam*

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41   *Ibid.*, p. 528.

42   *Ibid.*, pp. 528-29.

al-mulk) or the 'visible realm'. In other words, they act as a kind of isthmus or bridge between the unseen realm of the Godhead and the seen realm of the physical world accessible to sense perception.

Angels thus play what can only be called an intermediary role in the creative process, although one must be careful not to infer from this any actual creative power on their behalf. In accordance with the concept of continuous creation, which Nursi discusses in numerous places throughout the *Risale-i Nur*, things which are created cannot themselves create: power belongs only to One. Similarly, knowledge – and with it, consciousness – cannot be attributed to inanimate creation in any meaningful sense of the word.[43] And that which lacks power and knowledge cannot be said to have any discernible sense of purpose. But if we dismiss inanimate particles as unconscious, and their functions as purposeless, how do we account for the myriad wondrous new shapes and forms they bring into being? It would appear that only by bringing 'angels' into the equation does Nursi begin to make sense of this dichotomy.

For angels are 'bearers' of Divine 'commands'. According to the Quran, when God decrees that a thing come into existence, all He has to do is say 'Be!' and that thing appears. The angels are, in one sense, the 'mirrors' which are held up to the Divine Essence so that the attributes of God may 'shine' into them directly. Human beings cannot perceive God directly, and know Him only through the reflection of the names that they view in the 'mirror' provided by the angels. The angels, then, act as the interface between God and humankind.

The word 'interface' may of course be seen as a problematic here, given its connotations of other seemingly problematic notions in the vocabulary of angelology such as 'messengers' and 'intermediaries'. The term 'messengers' when applied to angels is, of course, wholly Quranic,[44] although the surprise of otherwise clued-up theology students when realising what the practical entailments of angelic messengership actually are can often be striking. Far more challenging is the term 'intermediary', with its negative undertones and implications of associationism. For the interposal of a being with apparent agency – the agency to intermediate – between God and the rest of creation has for some at least serious implications for the primacy of Divine power. Consequently, when the subject of angels is broached, many immediately suspect that we are talking about some kind of helper, some kind of 'middle-man', some kind of 'go-between' that in some way makes God's job easier. Clearly, we need to dismiss this suspicion immediately. If it were the case that

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43 On the Nursian – and hence Quranic – concept of *creatio continua*, see: Turner, *The Quran Revealed*, pp. 81-84.

44 Quran, 22:75

angels were there to do thing that God will or cannot do Himself, why is it, given the irrefragably anti-associationist thrust of the Quran, God quite freely talks of angels as 'messengers'? And what are messengers if not intermediaries.

One may even go so far as to posit angelic messengers as 'helpers'. But whom are they helping? It is self-evident from the Quranic emphasis on Divine oneness and self-sufficiency that God does not need help to do what He does. It is clear from the Quran's insistence on the absoluteness of Divine power that God does not need intermediaries or go-betweens or 'middlemen' − servants, if you wish, or people to run his errands and help Him with His chores. It is a theologically facile idea and not one that anyone could entertain with any seriousness. However, the fact remains without angels, it is impossible for us to know God. Angels are essential; they are an indispensable part of the architecture of creation. What we need to bear in mind, however, is that their indispensability is occasioned on account not of Divine need but of the need and existential poverty of created beings themselves. It is not God who needs the 'help' of angels, it is we, as human beings and vicegerents of God who need them.

The sun is used by Nursi in many parts of the *Risale-i Nur* as a helpful allusive tool in his construction of analogies concerning Divine unity, and we are able to take a leaf from his book here by using it to show why it is the created realm − and humankind in particular − that needs angels. As anyone knows who has tried to stare at the sun, either as a matter of course or, for example, during a solar eclipse, it is clear that we cannot look at the sun directly without risking serious damage to our eyes. This is particularly so when the sun is at its highest and brightest, in the middle of the day. Astronomers have come up with different methods of observing the sun directly, and all of these methods involve the use of some kind of filter that is placed on the viewing device in order to obviate any damage from the sun's blinding light.

There are many different kinds of filter which enable astronomers and laypersons to look at the sun without risking permanent eye damage. Now, if we were to ask why the sun needs filters so that we can look at it safely, the question would be dismissed as an absurdism. It is obvious that the sun does not need filters for us to look at it directly; it is we who need them.

Given that God's attributes are absolute in nature, it is self-evident that a finite and limited being will be unable to apprehend them without the appropriate 'filter'. What Nursi appears to be implying is that the angels represent such a 'filter'. They are the conceptual and creational filter through which the sun of Divine unity may be glimpsed by us in a manner that comports both with God's absoluteness and our finitude. Thus it would be facile of us to ask whether God needs this filter or whether we are the ones who need it. It is clear that God is as He is, and can look at us directly. We, on the other hand, are limited and finite,

and as result are unable to apprehend One Who is unlimited and absolute. Hence the need for the angelic intermediality – a need without which we would neither be able to glean the existence, nor understand the nature and function, of the Divine names and attributes.

Finally, it should be emphasised that while angels are not said to possess freedom of choice (*ikhtiyār*), they certainly possess their own kind of awareness, even if it is not, as in the case of humankind, self-awareness in the strict sense of the term: their obedience is unwavering but it is never blind. The apparent consciousness of an otherwise seemingly blind, inanimate being, e.g. a so-called 'natural' or proximate cause – can therefore be conceptualised as the actual consciousness of the angels, who 'bear' the creational commands which constitute that being's external existence. Facing God directly, the angel, equipped with the ability to reflect one or more of the Creator's 'names', receives God's command and proceeds to 'bear' it. Angels 'carry' the names from the unseen realm and display them in the manifest realm, which is where the names of God are given a sort of material existence in the form of created beings.

Nursi's angelology is quite unique in modern Muslim theological discourse, the engagement of which with the subject of angels is, not to put too fine a point on it, somewhat meagre. Muslim writers do not ignore angels totally, but when they do have cause for mentioning them, it is often in passing, and with none of the conceptual or discursive rigour employed by Nursi in his meditations.

Nor, to my knowledge, has anyone but Nursi explored in any great depth the notion of angels as pseudo-partners in the actual creation of everything that is 'other than God' (*mā siwā Allah*). Nursi accords the angels a position in the cosmic scheme far more significant and momentous than the remit that is mentioned traditionally when Muslim writers turn their attention to the purpose of angels, namely the recording of human actions, acting as invisible guardians, bearing the 'Throne of God', and so on. Some offer more detailed resumes, but none apart from Nursi suggests with unalloyed alacrity that angels are necessitated by God's creative act itself.

However, while Nursi's cogitations on the agential aspect of angels may be *sui generis* as far as the modern Muslim scholarly milieu is concerned, they are unmatched in their tone, tenor and connotations in any absolute sense. Christian angelology is arguably much more well-developed than its Muslim counterpart, and while modern Christian works on angels also suffer from a certain paucity, the subject is at least being discussed – even if most of the books produced on the subject approach it from a decidedly populist and at times openly 'new age' perspective.[45]

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45   This is not to suggest that discussions about angels in Islam are conspicuous by their total absence, just that substantive discursive material by Muslim theologians on the subject is

Among contemporary publications, however, one work stands out, and is mentioned here only because of the commonalities its basic thesis shares with that of Nursi in the *Twenty-Ninth Word*. Matthew Fox, a Christian theologian, and Rupert Sheldrake, an acclaimed biologist, came together in the mid-1990s to write *The Physic of Angels: Exploring the Realm where Science and Spirit Meet*, which records a series of dialogues the pair had on angels from a theological and scientific perspective.[46] The discussions which comprise the book focus on the ideas and beliefs of a number of early and medieval Christian authors, and came, as Fox and Sheldrake themselves admit, on the back of what was then their perception of a significant 'grassroots revival' of interest in angels in the West in particular.

A distillation of the significant takeaways gleaned by Fox and Sheldrake from their discussions of the works of Dionysius the Areopagite, St Thomas Aquinas and Hildegard of Bingen reveals an angelic resume that would be immediately recognisable by both the classical Muslim scholarly milieu and the author of the *Risale-i Nur*. What Fox and Sheldrake have learned from their deliberations is that angels exist in unimaginably large numbers, and that they represent a consciousness that is other than human consciousness. Angels have been present from the very beginning of creation and exist in a hierarchy of nested levels within levels, depending on their particular nature and functions.[47]

Angels, Fox and Sheldrake aver, have a special relationship, the sources show, with light, fire, flames and photons; this is particularly apposite in the context of Muslim angelology, which claims that angels were created from light. There are, say Fox and Sheldrake, "astonishing parallels" between St Thomas Aquinas and Albert Einstein with regard to the nature of angels and of photons, be it in terms of their locomotion and mode of movement, their being massless or their being ageless.[48]

Fox and Sheldrake also point out the primary role of angels is praise; this too comports well with Nursi's insistence that angels are, by nature, 'glorifiers' of God, representing in particular the praise offered by inanimate beings. Furthermore, while they do not have material bodies, they are able to assume

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very thin on the ground. It is telling that the most expansive academic works on Muslim angelology in the past decade or so have emerged mostly from the pens of scholars working outwith the Muslim tradition. Two examples that spring to mind are Stephen Burge's magisterial work on Suyutian angelology, *Angels in Islam,* and a collaborative volume entitled *The Intermediate World of Angels: Islamic Representations of Celestial Beings in Transcultural Contexts*, edited by Kuehn, Leder and Pokel. Bibliographical details of both works can be found at the end of this chapter.

46   Matthew Fox & Rupert Sheldrake, *The Physics of Angels* (Monkfish Publishing: New York, 2014).

47   *Ibid.*, p. 185.

48   *Ibid.*, pp. 185-186.

temporarily the appearance of human beings "or other bodies" for the sake of communicating with and helping human beings.[49]

Most interestingly, however, is the conclusion reached by Fox and Sheldrake, based on their understanding of their three chosen Christian thinkers, that angels are the "governing intelligences of nature." [50] Talking of Dionysius the Areopagite's sense of the omnipresence of God expressing itself through angels and all other creatures, Sheldrake suggests a role for the angels that can be superimposed almost exactly on the very same role arrogated to them by Nursi. It is worth quoting in full:

> He [i.e. Dionysius the Areopagite] seems to imply that each kind of organization in nature, including light and fire, wind, and the life of animals, is perfused with consciousness; not an undifferentiated or transcendent divine consciousness, but a differentiated consciousness appropriate to each kind of organization.

> Nature is organized by fields, and these fields are the realms of activity that bind and order the energy or power. If divine power flows through and into all things, if it is the energy of all things, and if it is channeled through the angels, then the fields that give this power its differentiated forms are associated with consciousness and intelligence. The angels are, as it were, the consciousness of the fields operating at all levels of nature, as in the flow of the winds and in the powers of living beings such as animals. The generative powers of nature are associated with intelligence.[51]

While Nursi has little time for the notion of 'nature', preferring instead to talk about 'the creation' or 'created beings' (*makhlūqāt*), his tacit insistence that if the universe seems purposeful, it is down to the wise purpose manifested in and through the functions of angels, seems to be more or less in conformity with Rupert Sheldrake's modern recasting of Dionysius the Areopagite's take on the decidedly agential aspect of the angelic function. Given the tantalising congruence between this particular aspect of Nursi's angelology and that of his Christian counterparts, both medieval and modern, there is surely room for some kind of comparative study in the future.

For now, however, we must conclude. In the final analysis, for Nursi, angels exist for a multitude of functions. However, their existence helps more than

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49   *Ibid.*, p. 186.

50   *Ibid.*, p. 185.

51   Fox & Sheldrake, *The Physics of Angels*, pp. 71-72.

anything else to explain to us as human beings why matter behaves with such apparent purposefulness while at the same time exhibiting absolute ignorance, impotence and dependence. Yet there is more to Quranic – and, by extension, Nursian – angelology than merely serving to explain why material causes do not actually create anything. For if we follow Nursi's conceptual trajectory to its logical terminus, we have to conclude that the reflection of God's names onto the 'angels' brings into existence nothing less than the corporeal world of which we are part. Wherever we look, we see angels, but in the form of the countless corporeal and immaterial beings that comprise the material multiplicity that is a veil for Divine unity and unicity. One might say that Nursi's angelology depicts the angelic host as numberless 'conscious prisms' – or 'filters', as we saw earlier – which receive the white light of God and refract it into the myriad colours of material existence, so that humankind may come to know and comprehend its true Source. Angels exist as 'messengers' and 'intermediaries', then, not for the sake of God, who is by default above all need, but for the sake of man, for whom recognition of the Divine names would, without the mediating role played by the angelic forces, be impossible.

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Prophetology and Islamic Spiritual Care: The Spiritual Teachings of the Prophet Muhammad as a Model for Spiritual Formation and Caring for Souls

Feryal Salem

How Can Theories and Methods of the Transmission of Islamic Spiritual Care in the Past Enrich Our Frameworks of Spiritual Care in Contemporary Contexts?

Prophetology is not only an integral element of the Islamic belief system, but it also shapes every aspect of Islamic religious practice. Muslims believe not only that the Prophet Muhammad taught monotheism and ethics, but also that his teachings were infused with a profoundly transformative spirituality that has been transmitted by Muslims throughout generations. From the perspective of spiritual care and chaplaincy, this Muhammadan spirituality has been a framework through which religious meaning has been derived and compassionate lived theologies of Islamic practice have been inspired.

Carrie Doehring writes in her foundational text, *The Practice of Pastoral Care*, that "radical compassion" is a key component embodied by effective spiritual care givers. Doehring defines compassion as "being moved by another's suffering with the motivation to help."[1] She writes:

> Radical compassion and respect is more likely to be expressed through one's body if one regularly uses spiritual practices to experience self and other compassion. Such practices help caregivers be receptive by following

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1   C. Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Post-Modern Approach*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015, p. 40.

the lead of the care seeker. If listening means emphatically receiving the care seeker's pain, then spiritual practices will help caregivers receive this pain with care and concern rather than fear and withdrawal.[2]

A close examination of the Prophet Muhammad's teachings as they were preserved in the memories of the early Muslim community reveals a rich source of consistent models of compassion-oriented spiritual care through which Muslim caregivers can root their theologies of caregiving. The Quran describes the essence of the Prophet Muhammad's existence as an embodiment of the type of radical compassion. Doehring highlights when the Quran says that he was sent as a "mercy for humanity (*raḥmatan li-l-ʿālamīn*)." In this spirit, Muslim chaplains find inspiration for a framework for their theologies of spiritual care through embodying the ways in which the Prophet gave spiritual care to his own community.

One of the foundational principles at the heart of this Muhammadan model for spiritual care is to do no harm. If one considers the immense responsibility that faith leaders possess by virtue of their positionality in their roles, one might argue that one of the greatest harms a religious leader can do is to be the cause of distancing a care seeker from their faith. The caregiver has a responsibility to self-monitor their communication style through the scale of its impact on the care seeker in terms of potential harm—or what Doehring refers to as "life-limiting" as opposed to "life-giving" frameworks of care. Furthermore, the Prophet Muhammad was never known to have reciprocated harm with harm. From this, the legal principle "do not harm or reciprocate harm (*lā ḍarar wa lā ḍirār)*" was derived.[3]

The Prophet also instructed his followers to speak to people at the level of their understanding. Hadiths mention that the Prophet answered people differently when asked "What is Islam?" based upon whom the person asking was. As a spiritual guide, the Prophet Muhammad was also known to be more lenient in his expectations from certain individuals while holding others who were closest to him to higher standards of behavior. He taught spiritual caregivers to meet people where they are and not where one might think people should be.

The Prophet made personal connections before offering religious guidance and prioritized the preservation of each individual's dignity. The often-cited account of the man who came to the Prophet saying that he wished to become a Muslim but loved to fornicate recounts the way in which the Prophet responded. He neither demeaned the man nor admonished him. The Prophet Muhammad

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2   Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care,* p. 56.

3   Narrated by ʿUbadah bin Samit: The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm." (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Vol. 3, Book 13, Hadith 2340).

began his pastoral care by first helping the man change his mindset by thinking about the negative impact of fornication on society. He asked the man if he would like this for his mother, daughter, or sister. The Prophet then placed his hand on the man's heart and prayed for him. Rather than ridiculing or condemning this individual, the Prophet exhibited both respect for the man's dignity and radical compassion, while gently guiding the man to step into the emotional experiences of others for whom fornication had negative consequences.

In the life of the Prophet Muhammad, we find that for spiritual caregivers he modeled an understanding of a faith tradition that is neither hard nor harsh. He is reported to have said in a well-known hadith, "Make things easy and do not make things difficult. Give good news and do not turn people away." [4]He impressed upon the various ambassadors and religious representatives he dispatched the importance of conveying religious teachings with ease and making flexibility and diplomacy the cornerstone of their missions. When the Companions of the Prophet, Muʿādh b. Jabal and Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī, were sent to teach and guide a new convert community in Yemen, the Prophet advised them to "Be lenient with people and do not be hard on them. Give people good tidings and do not repulse them."[5]

This advice of making Islam easy for people to practice historically played a dominant role in the leadership models that Muslims attempted to embody as they expanded to new lands and diverse cultures. The ideal of the Prophet Muhammad's compassionate spiritual care model is also reinforced in the Quran where he is told that, "It is from the mercy of God that you are lenient with them. If you had been hard or harsh with people, they would have dispersed from round about you."[6] This Muhammadan model of caring for souls was embodied in Islamic religious leadership and would be passed down through the generations of Muslims who came after the Prophet Muhammad.

If Islam has such a rich philosophy of religious leadership and spiritual care embedded in its own distinct tradition, what were the ways in which these methods of Muhammadan pastoral care were transmitted by Muslims throughout the ages? We find that Muslims developed a number of channels through which not only the spirit of the Prophet's teachings, but also the wisdom through which he provided spiritual care, could be passed on and handed down throughout the centuries.

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4   Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, *al-Adab al-mufrad*, trans. Anas ibn Malik, Book 26, Hadith 473 (In-book reference: Book 26, Hadith 12), accessed June 11, 2024, <Sunnah.com>.

5   Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Malik Ibn Hishām. *Sīrat al-nabawiyya*, eds. Muṣtafa al-Saqqāʾ, Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī, and ʿAbd al-Ḥāfīẓ Shalabī, Cairo, Turāth al-Islam, 1955, vol. 2: 590.

6   Q 3: 159.

The Transmission of Knowledge and Spiritual Formation in Islam

The first mode of transmission of Islamic leadership models is via the gatherings of learning. The term *majlis* or 'sitting' embodies Muslim perspectives on the impact of company on the soul. The Companions of the Prophet are known as "*ṣaḥāba*" which comes from the root "ṣ-ḥ-b", meaning 'companionship'. This reflects the Islamic view that the Prophet's greatest means of transforming those around him was through his 'ministry of presence'. The importance Muslims placed on the transformative companionship of the Prophet Muhammad's presence is reflected in the way in which the Companions were accorded a distinctive rank within the Muslim community.

The medium through which spiritual transformation and the transmission of prophetic wisdom was conveyed was through gatherings of learning. In fact, knowledge, learning and Muslim leadership have been consistently intertwined in the Islamic vision of leadership. The Prophet Muhammad is cited as having emphasized the foundational nature of learning and knowledge to the Islamic faith in various reports. In one report, he is said to have stated that, "I have been sent as a teacher."[7] In another, the Prophet asserted that "seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim, male and female." Muslims also note the symbolism behind the first verse being revealed of the Quran as being, "Read!"[8]

It is with this perspective that gatherings of learning or *majālis al-ʿilm,* were regarded as deeply spiritual practices with specific courtesies (*ādāb*) associated with them, such as attending gatherings in a state of ritual purity, wearing clean clothes and perfume, and showing respect to teachers. Burhān al-Dīn al-Zarnūjī is among the many scholars who wrote about the inward and outward courtesies that seekers of knowledge are to exhibit as a part of their process of formation through study.[9]

Furthermore, the term for student in Islamic world is *ṭālib* which means 'seeker'. This framing is reflective of the Muslim perspective of knowledge being that which is sought after. This is evident in the many biographic dictionaries such as al-Dhahabī's *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ* or al-Mizzī's thirty-four volume *Tahdhīb al-kamāl fī asmāʾ al-rijāl* which Ibn Ḥajar trimmed down to a mere twelve volumes in his *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*. Countless texts such as these trace the culture of travel for the sake of knowledge (*riḥla fī ṭalab al-ʿilm),* which became

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7 Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, *Sahih Muslim*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam Publishers, 2007), Hadith no. 1478.

8 Q 96:1

9 For example see: B. Zarnūjī, *Instruction of the Student: The Method of Learning*, trans. G.E. von Grunebaum, New York, King's Crown Press, 1947.

a hallmark of the Islamic tradition as the networks of teachers and students throughout the Muslim world were meticulously documented.

Those Muslims who carried, taught and preserved knowledge are regarded as more than mere repositories of information. They are considered as inheritors of the spiritual and ethical teachings of the Prophets. The often-referenced hadith, "The scholars are the heirs of the Prophets," is one of the sources of this perspective. As a result of this orientation, Muslims have regarded religious authority as inseparable from epistemic authority. In other words, Muslim leadership is perceived as being rooted in religious learning, since learning is a formative process through which inner spiritual light is transmitted. In fact, Muslim traditions from early Muslim scholars often equate knowledge with light.[10] Furthermore, we see that epistemic authority is linked directly to prophetology. Seekers of knowledge are believed to be transformed through their *ṣuḥba* or companionship of those scholars who have inherited not only the words and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad in their outward forms, but who are also regarded as embodying the spiritual guidance of the Prophet Muhammad in particular, and of other prophets in general.

Thus, genuine knowledge has commonly been perceived by Muslims as entailing both an understanding of the outward elements of praxis and belief as well as the inner, spiritual wisdoms that are acquired through the process of learning. Furthermore, even the spiritual benefits of outward acts of devotion are dependent on proper practice, which is also acquired through learning. Thus the ritual prayer or the ritual fast is experienced by Muslims as a source of spiritual nourishment for souls and a means of strengthening one's inner connection to God. However, one must know *how* to perform these rituals, e.g. the Friday prayer, the Ramadan fast, the ritual ablutions and so on, in a manner conducive to deriving spiritual benefit from them.

This makes the knowledge of the *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) of worship a means whereby the acts of outward worship may serve to bring into alignment the worshipper's body, mind and soul. The obligation to precede worship with intention (*niyya*) is not only a requirement for its juridical (*fiqh*) validity but also serves as a means through which mindfulness and inward focus can be attained. When one pauses before prayer to state one's intention to perform the prayer, the mind is stilled and becomes focused on the outward rituals one is about to perform. This focused presence of mind, cultivated through a statement

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10   For example, the famous lines attributed to Wakīʿ b. Jarrāḥ when he instructs al-Shāfiʿī in the poem, "I complained to Wakīʿ regarding my inability to retain knowledge. He guided me to abandon sin. He said that knowledge is but a light. And the light of knowledge is not granted to the sinful."

of intention to worship, thus facilitates the mind's connection to the bodily movements of ritual. Furthermore, the mindfulness that manifests through this presence and attention to proper ablutions and to the perfection of ritual acts – mindfulness that is possible only with the requisite knowledge of *fiqh* – serves to cultivate a sense of submission to God. This submission obtains in the soul through the realization that questions such as, for example, whether one places one's right hand over one's left while praying, or one's left over one's right, really matter. And the sole reason that they matter is simply because Muslims believe that it is an act of devotion to the One who commanded that they engage in this particular form of outward worship.

An analogy of the mind, body and soul connections found in outward forms may be found in traditional yoga as it manifests in its religious context. Inner peace is cultivated in a similar way when the mind, soul, and body merge in particular poses. Within the Islamic framework, the different postures adopted in the ritual prayer are acts which connect the spirit to its divine source. If we define Sufism as the cultivation of the soul within the framework of an Islamic worldview, then *fiqh* is the proper outward practice of ritual worship that becomes a key to achieving the ideals of Sufism. Thus, this sophisticated connection of the mind, body, and soul in the Islamic tradition is initiated through Islamic learning. Al-Ghazālī attests to this in his work, *Revival of the Religious Sciences,* when he discusses the inner dimensions of Islamic ritual worship.

It is not uncommon to find that the appropriation of Christocentric cognitive frameworks for viewing religious leadership is often unexamined and internalized in Euro-American contexts by non-Christians and Christians alike. Such internalized biases of what religious leadership models should look like may at times lead to Western Muslims defining Islamic leadership roles through Christian models. This can be seen more specifically when we consider that a significant element of Christian ministry is performative. Christian leadership is derived through training based upon a structure of an ordained clergy system which is endowed through a central authoritative assembly that allows its ordained members to perform acts such as leading Sunday services, performing communions, baptisms, last rights, and marriages.

This is in contrast to Muslim practice, where clergy are not required to perform any of these types of rituals. Marriages and circumcisions are not sacraments and hence do not necessitate an Imam to enact them. Similarly, rituals associated with birth and death can be equally performed by anyone the Muslim community chooses to lead such rituals. Ordainment and clerical training to perform religious rituals are not paths to religious leadership in mainstream Muslim practice. This means that an observant Muslim can spend an entire

lifetime practicing all of the lifecycle rituals without ever interacting with an Imam, whose role may be relegated to only leading prayers in a mosque.

Without a centralized church or clergy system, Muslim leadership is selected by grassroots Muslims who formulate their own visions of competency and piety based on the inherited wisdom passed through the gatherings of learning mentioned previously. Thus, authority in Muslim communities is established through the possession of knowledge that is recognized horizontally by peers of other learned scholars and vertically by the congregants of a community who affirm a leader's religious observance and piety. In this way, religious authority is not derived for Muslims by training related to the performance of outward rituals since these can be performed by any pious community member, but rather religious leadership in a community is derived through the formation that occurs through having spent time in gatherings of learning in which text study and reflection is intended to impact the soul.

It is taken for granted that such individuals will by default become conversant in religious rituals in the process. But it is not the familiarity with these rituals *per se* that will give such individuals religious authority in their communities. It is the manifestation of the inner transformation that is expected to occur in the process. This transformation is often referred to in pastoral care as the professional and spiritual integration of a caregiver. The *majlis* or the gatherings of learning have traditionally been places where contextual knowledge of lived theologies are learned through the integration that occurs through the spiritual companioning (*ṣuḥba*) of those who model this type of integration in their ministry of presence (*ḥuḍūr*). Doehring writes:

> In order for self-reflexivity to become theological, caregivers need to do their own integrative work within relationships of support and accountability…. They need to know how to care for themselves with spiritual practices that connect them with goodness. They also need to be in spiritual care relationships and theologically reflexive communities that help them explore when and how values, beliefs, and practices are life-giving. They need to use spiritual practices fostering compassion in order to make the spiritual discipline of radical compassion an authentic part of their identity.[11]

Muslim models of religious leadership share many commonalities with Jewish leadership which is similarly centered upon learning and teaching. The term rabbi means a teacher or someone who is a learned master. For both Muslims and Jews,

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11   Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care*, p. 86.

learning and study are a means through which the spiritual formation needed for spiritual caregivers takes place. Communities of learning are the modes through which the reflexivity highlighted by Doehring above is enhanced and learners help one another explore the application of religious wisdom contextually. Martin Jaffee describes the significance of rabbinic learning communities, writing:

> In basic structure, then, the rabbinic model of oral tradition recapitulated – and drew to their ultimate conclusions – the pedagogical assumptions of non-rabbinic, Greco-Roman predecessors and contemporaries. The transformative power of the Sage's teachings depended upon more than his personal charisma. It could become effective only to the degree that it carried forward an unbroken line of transmission within a privileged community of traditional learning. Those who might read the texts of rabbinic teaching in isolation from the discipleship experience had neither the complete text nor any Torah. For properly transformative knowledge could not be gained by discursive understanding of any text on its own – not even that of the Torah inscribed in Scripture. Rather, it was won existentially by living a life open to dialogue with the Sage, in whom Torah was present as a mode of his embodied existence. For Torah to be present the Sage must be present as its unmediated source and embodiment in word and deed.[12]

Theology of Islamic Medicine

Prophetology in Islamic leadership models also extends to the work of Muslim chaplains in health care settings. If we regard spiritual leadership as an extension of the leadership models emulating the Prophet Muhammad, then the way in which it extends to healthcare chaplaincy is worthy of consideration. The distinctive contributions and/or theologies of suffering that the Muslim intellectual heritage brings to the field of healthcare chaplaincy is evident when examined within the broader framework of the history of the emergence of hospitals and hospital chaplains in Euro-Christian contexts.

The term "hospital" is derived from the Latin root "*hospes*" which means a stranger or a guest. Hospitals at the turn of the first millennium in medieval

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12   M. Jaffee, 'The Oral-Cultural Context of the Talmud Yerushalmi: Greco-Roman Rhetorical Paideia, Discipleship, and the Concept of the Oral Torah,' in Y. Elman and I. Gershoni (eds), *Transmitting Jewish Traditions: Orality, Textuality, and Cultural Diffusion.* New Haven. Yale University Press, 2000, p. 54-55.

Europe were essentially an extension of the Catholic church. Infirmary halls that kept the sick and indigent were structurally built to model chapels and churches in terms of layout.[13] Many times an altar would be present in the infirmary and be central to the layout of the building.[14] Furthermore, illnesses were regarded as punishments for sins. The ill were believed to be in need of penitence and confession of their sins to clergy in order to heal.

In medieval European hospitals there were distinct roles between the physicians of the body and the physicians of the soul. The physicians of the soul were the clergy and the chaplains that were responsible for managing hospitals. So-called physicians of the body were supposed to urge the sick to repent and see a priest before beginning physical treatment. Swift writes, "It is the task of the medical doctors to 'to warn and persuade' the sick to see a priest before medical treatment begins, as sickness may sometimes be the result of sin, and if the priest can remove the 'cause' then the person will respond better to bodily treatment."[15]

As hospitals began to develop into their own separate institutions, they maintained their original structure modeling Christian monasteries. The chaplain or another member of the clergy was the foremost person in the hospital who managed its affairs. Many people came to the hospital close to death and the most important task for the salvation of their souls was seen as penance and confession. Thus, the chaplain was the most important member of the hospital workers whose job it was to ensure the penance of the ill and fulfill their last rights.

Furthermore, the poor who were kept in medieval hospitals were regarded as components of what was at the time an "economy of salvation and the role of purgatory."[16] This meant that the poor were expected to offer prayers on behalf of the dead belonging to wealthy families who had the means to sponsor these prayers. This act was known as chantry in medieval Europe and chantry chapels often existed within hospitals. Swift writes:

> The underlying structure of the day continues to be that of the monastery, with its many offices. Into this world the sick were admitted, re-clothed in a hospital livery (often with a cross motif) and out to bed in the hospital infirmary...Within this religious economy of the hospital the chaplain was the key figure. Rawcliffe cites St. Leonard's at York, and later papal letters, which stipulate that chaplains should patrol the infirmary to ensure that those at the point of death and when death is expected receive

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13   C. Swift, *Hospital Chaplaincy in the Twenty-First Century*, New York, Routledge, 2016, p. 10.

14   Swift, *Hospital Chaplaincy in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 10.

15   Swift, *Hospital Chaplaincy in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 10.

16   Swift, *Hospital Chaplaincy in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 9.

opportunity for confession and absolution. This was a place of religious immersion, an opportunity to demonstrate the faithful life a Christian could aspire to under religious direction. The silent presence of hospital buildings, like the constant appearance of clergy, reminded the sick-poor of the eternity for which this life was simply a preparation. Hospitals also served a valuable purpose for the rich by getting them to pray for their endangered souls. They were institutions that extended the influence of the Church out of the monasteries and into the towns and cities alongside parish churches, providing the poor with shelter, food, and basic care. Within all these functions and relationships, the chaplain was a central figure, ensuring the regular conduct of worship and usually overseeing the distribution of goods donated or purchased for the hospital.[17]

Through the Reformation in Protestant parts of Europe and the modern era, many changes occurred in the hospital system and the roles of chaplains therein. As the power of the church was suspended at times in history, hospitals too were closed down or heavily curtailed due to their close affiliation with the church. As Europe began to make progress in science and move away from superstition in their visions of healing illnesses, so too did the roles of doctors become more professionalized, where barbers for example could no longer do small surgeries aside from pulling teeth and doctors had more specialized training in healing the sick.

In the modern era some hospitals were secularised and others came under the control of the state, as in the United Kingdom, which meant that the hospitals were affiliated with the Church of England. Chaplains and doctors in the modern era now have separate roles and specialties in a hospital. In acknowledging the religious diversity of Europe, the United States, and Canada, hospitals in these regions have also made initiatives to diversify spiritual care departments by having a number of faiths represented by their spiritual care givers. Some hospitals in American settings may be directly affiliated with a particular denomination like for instance a Methodist or Catholic Hospital while, other hospitals may have no connection to religion and do not have spiritual care departments.

This history remains significant to a Muslim chaplain to understand because even with the many developments that have evolved from Euro-American Christianity to today, there remain many assumptions and cognitive frameworks as remnants of this chaplaincy role that are often unexamined. For instance, it may be assumed in various modern hospital contexts that a patient is in need of penitence and confession, while chaplains are there to give final rights and take confessions. Suffering and illness is regarded by some as either

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17   Swift, *Hospital Chaplaincy in the Twenty-First Century,* p. 12.

redemptive or indicative of a lack of divine favor. Other presumptions may include the hierarchical relationship between hospital chaplain and patient that is often taken for granted by many without regard to the Christo-centric model from which this relational structure is derived. For this reason, we must consider how perspectives that are indigenous to the Islamic intellectual history perceived theologies of healthcare and care for the spirits of those who are ill. How can the Islamic faith and its theology of healing provide an alternative model to theologies of spiritual care that enrich healthcare chaplaincy by providing alternative frameworks of hospital chaplaincy? In doing so, we also seek to understand the extension of the Prophet Muhammad's leadership style or his prophetology in health care leadership.

Muslim Hospitals and Islamic Theologies of Illness, Suffering, and Healing

A question to consider as more Muslim chaplains become integrated into healthcare spaces is what can Islamic theologies of illness and suffering offer the evolving field of healthcare chaplaincy as it integrates non-Christian traditions and the non-Christian cognitive frameworks that come with this integration? We can begin by examining the philosophy behind the way hospitals were structured in the Muslim world before the contemporary period. The architecture of Muslim hospitals and the way in which they functioned reflect a distinct theology of illness and spiritual care. The two most important aspects of this distinction are the way in which illnesses were believed to be contracted and the religious dimension of illness and suffering.

The common placement of science and religion as opposing poles in modern discourse is rooted in the trajectory of the history of European Christianity and its relationship with science. Such experiences are not shared by Middle Eastern Christians or Muslims and hence the tendency to universalize a supposed dichotomy between science and religion imposes Eurocentric models of perceiving the role of religion and health care which leads to a failure to conceive of alternative possibilities. David Tschanz writes in his essay, "The Islamic Roots of the Modern Hospital,"

> In early medieval Europe, the dominant philosophical belief held that the origin of illnesses was supernatural and thus uncontrollable by human intervention. As a result, hospitals were little more than hospices where patients were tended to by monks who strove to assure the salvation of the soul without much effort to cure the body. Muslim physicians took a completely different approach. Guided by the sayings of the Prophet

Muhammad (hadith) like, God never inflicts a disease unless He makes a cure for it," collected by Bukhari, and "God has sent down the disease and the cure, and He has appointed a cure for every disease, so treat yourselves medically," collected by Abu Darda, they took as their goal the restoration of health by rational and empirical elements.

The ninth to fourteenth centuries saw a golden age of science and medicine in the Muslim world where the causes of illnesses and their cures were researched through empirical methods. While the physicians in the earliest hospitals in Baghdad were not exclusively Muslim, Islam and its openness to reason, at a time when science and rationalism were regarded with suspicion in other parts of the world, made the Islamic faith an essential element to the advancement of medicine. Scientists such as Jābir b. Ḥayyān were the first to develop theories of chemical elements and made significant advances in pharmacology and the scientific cures to illnesses.[18]

From the lens of spiritual care, this is significant in that a science-centered treatment of disease allowed for a theology that did not blame the patient or sin for illnesses. Rather, natural causes were perceived to be the reason patients fell ill and hence the conceptions of illness being a source of divine punishment as it had been in medieval Europe were not common beliefs in the Muslim world. This resulted in a completely distinct theology of illness and healing in which science and religion were regarded as complementary realms that were not in tension with one another. Hospitals simultaneously tended to physical ailments through empirical means based in science while also tending to the mental and spiritual health of a patient.

In Islamic medicine, wellness was believed to take a holistic form in which the wellness of the body, mind, and soul were interconnected and not mutually exclusive. In other words, disease was not regarded to be caused by spiritual shortcomings such as sin. Similarly, the wellness of the body did not exclude the role of spiritual and mental wellness. Furthermore, distinctions were made in Islamic medicine between mental illness and spiritual illness.

Mental illnesses were treated through the construction of structures that took into consideration how space, light, time, and sound impact mental health. Detailed studies of music and their tones (*maqāms*) were developed with theories of how they impact the mind. Music therapy was prevalent in Ottoman hospitals

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18   D.W. Tschanz, 'The Islamic Roots of the Modern Hospital,' *AramcoWorld*, March/April 2017, <https://www.aramcoworld.com/Articles/March-2017/The-Islamic-Roots-of-the-Modern-Hospital>, (accessed 27 June 2022).

dedicated to the mentally ill. Meanwhile, the recitation of the Quran and other litanies were regarded as means to restore spiritual health. Moreover, mental health and spiritual health were not regarded as the same in Islamic medicine or even religious practice. Evidence of this is seen in *fiqh* texts for instance that set mental stability (*ʿāqil*) as a condition for accountability (*taklīf*). A mentally unstable individual who misses prayers or performs other actions that may otherwise be forbidden for a person of sound mind is considered to be excused of these obligations. This is viewed as separate from the spiritually ill whose ailments rest in the spiritual heart that is studied in the field of Sufism.

This brings us to a related point regarding Islamic perceptions of illness from a religious perspective. Christian and Muslim theologies of illness and suffering impact the frameworks through which healthcare chaplaincy is practiced by chaplains themselves. A person who is suffering through illness is regarded as in a state of purification from sins and elevation in their connection to God. Rather than a theology of guilt in which disease and the diseased are seen as being punished for sins, Muslims regard the ill as being rewarded for every difficulty they endure. Rather than the ill needing prayers from the clergy to intervene on behalf of the sinful souls of the sick, Muslims perceive those who are suffering to have their veils removed between them and God and that it is in fact the healthy who are encouraged to seek the prayers of those who are undergoing health challenges. Rather than a chaplain visiting the sick to pray *for* them, Muslim chaplains visit the sick to pray *with* them and seek mutual prayers. The Muslim chaplain commonly believes every person who is ill to be a potential saint free of flaws due to God's forgiveness attained through patience with hardship. The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said in a hadith often cited by Muslims: "...Nothing pricks a believer except that he is rewarded."[19]

Similarly, the birth pangs of a woman in childbirth are not regarded by Muslims to be punishment for original sin but rather a source of purification in that a mother after childbirth is considered to be spiritually purified in the way visiting the holy sites of Mecca for Ḥajj is believed to purify the pilgrim from sin. In fact, it is customary in parts of the Muslim world for women to have a list of prayer requests from friends before they go into labour, in much the same way that other Muslims going on a pilgrimage to the Kaʿba will collect prayer requests to make at this sacred precinct.

The distinct way in which illnesses are viewed in the Islamic tradition has much to offer the philosophy of healthcare chaplaincy through modeling a religious framework in which the sick are elevated through their being

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19   *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-marḍā: mā jāʾa fī kaffarat al-marḍā*, hadith no. 5640. See: <https://www.bukhari-pedia.net/book/matn_bukhari/8396>

regarded as saints rather than sinners. Such a radically alternative perspective also restructures the hierarchical relationship often perceived by chaplains who come from traditions that have clergy by making the chaplain's role one which is supportive and from a place of equal standing. The Muslim hospital chaplain regards the prayers of the sick of equal weight as those of the chaplain. The chaplain is there to support and serve the sick in the sick individual's direct connection to God rather than be a liaison to God.

The value of Islamic theologies of illness and their conceptions of mental as well as spiritual health has been taken up by the Stanford Muslim Health's medical doctor and psychiatrist, Dr. Rania Awaad, in her project called Maristan. Maristan seeks to highlight the many ways in which Islamic civilization has made significant contributions to the development of medicine and its integration of religiously positive models of treating mental illness. Achievements in medicine have been a distinguishing characteristic of Islamic civilization, which is a legacy inherited by Muslims to this day in which some of the most successful doctors and scientists follow in the footsteps of the Muslim physicians of the past. Though Muslims make up only about 1% of the U.S. population, they are estimated to make up at least 10% of U.S. doctors and health care workers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Muslim scientists were at the forefront of research and were first among those to discover a vaccine. Hence the spirit of the Muhammadan way of a science-centered approach to medicine and an empathetic conception of the ill, who are regarded as saintly in their ranks, is transmitted to this day through lived theologies of centuries of Muslim physicians who have maintained the traditions of Islamic medicine inherited by their predecessors.

Islamic Art as Art Therapy

Art has always been an integral element of spiritual formation for Muslims throughout many centuries and vast geographic centers. Muslims often cite the prophetic tradition, "God is beautiful and loves beauty"[20] as one of the many ways in which Islamic scripture has inspired Muslims to create Islamic art. Another verse from the Quran states that "And whoever honors the symbols of God, it is certainly out of the piety of the heart."[21] The verse highlights how true spiritual piety, rooted in the heart, is reflected in the reverent treatment of sacred objects. This mirrors the dedication of Islamic civilization to creating and adorning Islamic monuments with great care and precision.

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20   *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Kitāb al-īmān,* hadith no. 171.

21   Q 22: 32.

Each element of Islamic architecture conveys spiritual significance to the faithful. Exposure of the senses to the outward beautification of religious symbols is believed to beautify the soul through its beauty. Peace, symmetry and majesty are common themes of Islamic architecture throughout vast geographic regions of the Muslim world. Gardens are divided into the familiar four sectional components that are designed to bring tranquility to the soul and remind one of God's wonders. Natural beauty is exhibited in the trees and flowers which ornament Islamic gardens. They merge cultural histories of these gardens with the Islamic faith through infusing new meaning in the simple pleasures of gazing upon select fauna that are arranged in patterns that dazzle the eye. Such gardens have become rooted into the arts of Islam and can be found in regions ranging from Morocco through Iran, Central Asia and India.

Water and light are used in creative ways to instill inner connectedness to God and the rituals that are intended to bring one closer to Him. Fountains are placed in the centers of Islamic gardens and inner courtyards to create the relaxing sounds of flowing water that reminds one of the flowing rivers of Paradise mentioned throughout the Quran. The Alhambra is famed for its garden that engages multiple senses at once through the sight of the splendor of its design, the senses of hearing through the peaceful sounds of water flowing in the fountains, and the sense of smell through the fragrant fruits and flowers found throughout the garden.

Light is another significant theme of Islamic art. The symbolism of light is derived from the various references in Islamic scripture that compare the presence of light to the presence of the Divine. Well cited hadiths report that the Prophet made the supplication, "O God, give me light in my heart, light on my tongue, light in my hearing, light in my vision, make light from behind me, light from before me, light from above me, light from below me and give me light in [my soul]."[22] "The Light" or *al-Nūr* is also considered one of the ninety-names of God. The Quran also makes reference to God using the metaphor of a lamp that gives light in the verse, "God is the light of the Heavens and the earth. The likeness of His light is as a niche in which is a lamp..."[23]

Allusions to light in Islamic art and architecture are commonplace throughout the Muslim world. They are reminders of the light that enters the soul when in harmony with the Creator of the universe and with all living beings which are believed to be in remembrance of God through their own individual forms. The Quran mentions in an oft-cited verse, "The seven heavens, the earth,

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22   Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, *Kitāb ṣalāt al-musāfirīn wa qaṣrihā,* hadith no. 227.

23   Q 24: 35 and see M. Badawi, *Spiritual Significance in Islamic Architecture*, London, IV Publishing, 2020, p. 238.

and all those in them glorify Him. There is not a single thing that does not glorify His praises—but you simply cannot comprehend their glorification. He is indeed Most Forbearing, All-Forgiving."[24] It is with this context that the many lanterns that appear in Islamic designs and placed in prayer niches throughout these structures can be understood. Images which evoke the rays of the sun are also ubiquitous in the designs of Islamic structures. They might take the forms of geometrically aligned opposite colors in arches or ribbed patterns protruding from a common center that represents the sun.[25]

Harmony is also evoked through symmetrical shapes and their continuous repetition throughout a space. The rhythmic repetition of motifs creates an ambience which Mustafa Badawi describes as visual music. This in turn is intended to create a calming effect in the viewer who enters a prayer space and hence the ambience facilitates in cultivating mindfulness in meditation and prayer.[26] Titus Burkhardt writes about this element of Islamic art saying:

> The arabesque, with its rhythmic repetition serves quite a different artistic purpose than does pictorial art. It is a direct contrast to it, as it does not seek to capture the eye to lead it into an imagined world, but, on the contrary, liberates it from all preoccupations of the mind, rather, like the view of flowing water, fields waving in the wind, falling snow, or rising flames. It does not transmit any specific ideas, but a state of being, which is at once repose and inner rhythm. This is abstract art, without any subjective, semi-conscious tentativeness about it; it is composed by entirely conscious rules.[27]

The Therapeutic Process of Islamic Art Production

Art therapy has become an increasingly prevalent mode of self-care in recent decades. In a shift away from commonly held perceptions shaped by Cartesian models of valuing art for its final product without significant attention to its means of production, art therapy has been adopted as a method of spiritual care and healing by an increasing number of therapists, counselors, and mental health professionals. Among the benefits of art therapy cited are the regulation of blood pressure and heart rate as well as its capacity to increase self-esteem and help

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24   Quran, 17: 44.

25   Badawi, *Spiritual Significance in Islamic Architecture*, p. 222-228.

26   Badawi, *Spiritual Significance in Islamic Architecture*, p. 287.

27   T. Burckhardt, *Moorish Culture in Spain*, Louisville, Fons Vitae, 1999, p. 206.

deal with depression. The Canadian Counseling and Psychotherapy Association writes in its article titled "The Psychological Benefits of Art Therapy":

> Art therapy is used with children, adolescents, adults, older adults, groups, families, veterans, and people with chronic health issues to assess and treat the following: anxiety, depression, and other mental and emotional problems; substance abuse and addictions; family and relationship issues; abuse and domestic violence; social and emotional difficulties related to disability and illness; trauma and loss; physical, cognitive, and neurological problems; and psychosocial difficulties related to medical illness.[28]

While art therapy or the focus on the process of creating art to uplift the soul and facilitate mental health is relatively new in the West, it has been an integral element of spiritual formation within the wisdom of traditional societies of the East. A prime example of this can be found in the history of the practice of calligraphy in Muslim societies. Calligraphy is an art form that is passed on through apprenticeship through a teacher and student relationship. Much like the process of knowledge transmission discussed earlier, or the chains of spiritual transmission (*silsilas*) of Sufi paths, the art of calligraphy is also passed on through a chain of transmission known as an *isnād*.

Also parallel to models of Islamic spirituality found in Sufi traditions is the centrality of the personal affinity or "*munāsaba*" between the calligraphy master and the student of calligraphy before they set out on what is a lifelong relationship of mentorship through the vehicle of producing calligraphy. In other words, a teacher may reject or accept a student based upon this "affinity" that they sense for the student. The ability of a student of calligraphy to succeed is also dependent upon her or his love and affinity for the calligraphy master, which in turn will give them the capacity to undergo a long and arduous process of apprenticeship. The completion of one's training in calligraphy is marked with being granted a certificate known as the *ijāza*. This once again parallels the *ijāzas* granted in Islamic sciences such as Hadith, Quranic recitation, theology etc. In this similarity we find that both learning and art share the same results of character formation through the process of transmission that is traced in the *ijāza*.

The process of learning to produce and later producing calligraphy itself, is central to the value of this art form in Muslim societies. The first piece of writing every novice in the Ottoman calligraphic tradition begins with is the

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28   A.D Brown, 'Psychological Benefits of Art Therapy', Counselling Connect [web blog], 28 February 2012, <https://www.ccpa-accp.ca/psychological-benefits-of-art-therapy/> (accessed 27 June 2022).

phrase "*Rabbī yassir wa lā tuʿassir. Rabbī tamim bi-l-khayr*" which means "My Lord, make it easy and not difficult. My Lord [help me] complete [this] in goodness." The novice will begin by writing this phrase over and over day and night for an entire week before presenting her work to her teacher. The master will inevitably find numerous imperfections that only the fine eye of the master calligrapher can detect. The practice draft will be marked to show where the novice has erred and she will go back to spending the rest of the week, all day every day, practicing. This kind of dedication and perseverance to perfect one's calligraphic penmanship cultivates spiritual discipline where one is forcing one's mind to focus and stay with a task for long hours despite boredom and frustration. With practice of overcoming these feelings, the novice builds within himself the capacity to control emotions and distractions. This in turn cultivates another spiritual strength in the form of mindfulness. Through controlling one's desires in long hours of practice, one eventually becomes in control of one's *nafs* or lower self, which is averse to silent perseverance with a pen and paper. Thus in mastering the pen, the calligrapher learns to master her soul.

The phrasing is also significant in that the first phrase that the novice will repeat may be repeated thousands of times before moving on to anything else, which engrains in the mind of the writer that success and failure ultimately come from God and not one's own talents. This realization, along with the willingness to submit to a teacher and be corrected in one's writing, has another important impact on the spiritual formation of the calligrapher and this is namely the cultivation of humility. It is believed that only one who has mastery over one's ego, demonstrated by their willingness to accept instruction and correction, will be able one day to be worthy of leading others.

This is akin to other ancient wisdoms of the East that found their way into pop-culture in the form of the *Karate Kid* trilogy, where Mr. Miyagi starts Daniel's training with practicing to "wax on" and "wax off" while cleaning cars. When Daniel is frustrated after doing this for a week, believing it has nothing to do with karate instruction, he is taught a lesson by his teacher who makes him see that before mastering the art of karate, Daniel must master his *nafs* through hours of boring manual labor. In silent repetitive exercises, Daniel cultivates an inner awareness of his own soul that then becomes essential for his maintaining both posture and self-control during the karate finals. This is part of the perennial wisdom of the east that Muslim societies shared through the ages. Muslims who produced breathtaking masterpieces of art and architecture did so with the belief that living in beauty and creating beauty results in the beautification of the soul.

Bilal Badat is a scholar who writes about the process of the making of a master calligrapher. His work highlights the relationship between what he

refers to as "character, craft, aesthetic, and cultural production."[29] Having been through the lengthy process of learning from one of the foremost calligraphy masters of our time and acquiring an *ijāza,* Badat notes the primary role that character formation played in his learning process. Furthermore, he states that his teacher explicitly stated that he would not grant an *ijāza* to a person of foul character such as a liar. This type of formation of character and the consideration of character in the decision to grant one a licence of proficiency in the form of an *ijāza*, is a significant distinguishing trait of the forms of apprenticeship in the Islamic tradition that emphasizes the process and the moral fortitude of the individuals seeking to learn. While calligraphy has been detailed here, the above-mentioned principles apply to an array of Islamic crafts such as ceramics, woodworking, and illumination (*tadhhīb*). This was historically the rationale behind the emphasis that each person in the Muslim community used to be expected to have a craft that they mastered.

Spiritual care or pastoral care as it later manifested in the Protestant tradition is also one that was originally based upon apprenticeship in which one acquired the skills of pastoral care through shadowing a skilled pastor. Clinical pastoral education also functions on this foundation in which a supervisor is called to mentor new chaplains in training through mirroring for them appropriate pastoral skills. The study above highlights that this form of spiritual formation is not one which is new to the Islamic tradition, but rather integral to the foundations and spread of Islam throughout its social history.

Through focusing on learning, medicine, and art, this study demonstrates the way in which the Islamic tradition used methods of refining the soul as conditional and preliminary to the work of spiritual care giving to Muslims. An examination of traditional spiritual care in Islamic contexts models Islamic cognitive frameworks of centering the spiritual heart and Islam's emphasis on the ministry of presence as opposed to outward performance. A question to further explore is in what ways can the Islamic tradition of spiritual formation and spiritual care enrich current models of spiritual care with alternative models of the practice of mindfulness, spiritual discipline, and inner connection to God?

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29   B. Badat, 'Arts in Isolation Podcast: The Making of a Master Calligrapher', *Arts in Isolation Series* [podcast], interview with Seif Rashidi, Asia House, <https://asiahousearts.org/arts-in-isolation-podcasts-2/the-making-of-a-master-calligrapher-bilal-badat-and-seif-el-rashidi>, (accessed 27 June 2022).

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10

An Epistemic Justification
for Establishing Proofs in Argumentation:
A Critical Analysis of Prophetic Discourse as
a Manifestation of God-talk

Ismail Latif Hacinebioglu

Introduction

This chapter comprises a discussion on 'Prophetic discourse' as a unique form of communication that imparts divine wisdom and authority. It examines Prophetic discourse as a crucial framework for asserting valid and truthful religious claims and arguments, and considers the elements necessary to develop a dependable and rational epistemology. Furthermore, it highlights the Prophet Muhammad among all other prophets as the quintessential representation of Prophetic discourse.

The discussion on prophetology within Islam is centred around two core concepts: the imperative of divine revelation to the Prophet; and the authenticity of the Prophetic message. These concepts hinge on the truthfulness of Prophetic discourse as a means of divine communication with humanity. The initial concept explores the rationale behind the need for 'prophethood' and 'revelation.' The latter concept, while acknowledging the former, scrutinizes the role of Prophetic discourse in substantiating true knowledge as the cornerstone of faith. This chapter will primarily focus on the latter concept.

Arguably my key aim is to illustrate how Prophetic discourse serves as evidence for the prophethood of Muhammad. Prophetic discourse encompasses the speech of Prophet Muhammad, who stands as an 'exemplary and truthful guide' (*uswa ḥasana*)[1] for humanity to understand and accept the truths he conveys. It represents his authentic engagement with the divine, delivering God's

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1   Quran, 33:21.

word to people of his era and beyond. Prophet Muhammad's transmission of God's word is distinct from his personal speech, offering clear evidence of divine communication.

The term 'proof' (*burhān*) is associated with Prophet Muhammad, the Quran and God, signifying the most compelling form of truth. Prophet Muhammad's role as a 'proof' validates the authenticity of God's word. Prophetic discourse applies to various domains – ontological, epistemological, ethical – to substantiate their concepts and arguments. While this chapter does not cover all aspects of Prophetic discourse, it acknowledges that miracles and the inimitability (*i'jāz*) of God's word are universally recognized by Muslims as affirming both prophethood in general and Muhammad's role as the final prophet in particular. The validation of miracles is part of the broader verification of Prophetic discourse, certified by Prophet Muhammad's truthful presentation of reality.

This chapter also examines the 'truth-value' of Prophetic discourse, which can be discerned through clear, straightforward and precise statements that deliver a truthful message. The 'word of the Prophet' serves as a living testament to Prophetic discourse, laying the foundational knowledge and language for Islamic concepts, propositions and arguments. This is predicated on the belief that Muhammad is both a servant and a messenger of God (*'abduhu wa rasūluhu*), embodying the divine ideal in conveying the 'truth of reality' to humanity through God's command and wisdom.

The proposition here is that Prophetic discourse provides a valid epistemic basis for argumentation. The discussion proper begins with a subsection titled 'Prophethood, Prophets and the Final Prophet,' which sets the stage for understanding Prophetic discourse within the epistemic framework of prophethood. Subsequently, the focus shifts to the truth-value of 'Prophetic Discourse as Special Talk' and 'Prophetic Discourse as God Talk,' emphasizing its role as a unique and truthful form of communication that affirms the veracity of the divine message.

The narrative then addresses the need for Prophetic discourse to reconcile the dichotomy of 'truth' and 'falsity' in its claims, under the section entitled 'Prophetic Discourse as Truth versus Falsity.' Following this, 'Prophetic Discourse as a Source of Justification' is discussed, underscoring its role in underpinning justifications.

The exploration of Prophetic discourse continues through various other subsections, including 'Prophetic Discourse as Witnessing and Being Witnessed'; 'Prophetic Discourse as proof of Prophethood' (which discusses both discourse as proof of prophethood and the prophets themselves as proof of the prophethood of Muhammad); 'Prophetic discourse in Validity versus Invalidity'; 'Prophetic Discourse and the God-talk of the Prophets'; 'Prophetic Discourse as Assertion of

Affirmation' (alternatively, 'Language of the Prophet and Prophetic Language'); 'Prophetic Discourse as a Language Tool'; and, finally 'Preservation of Prophetic Discourse as Knowledge in Words'.

Prophethood, Prophets and the Final Prophet

In the Islamic tradition, prophethood (*nubuwwa/risāla*) is revered as the wellspring of divine knowledge, with prophets serving as God's true messengers. This lineage of prophets, extending from Adam to Muhammad, consistently delivered a unified message about the ultimate reality, urging people to heed their veracious words. Prophetic discourse, therefore, is both the origin and the primary means of discussing God and His divine communication with humanity.

The necessity of prophethood has been a subject of extensive discourse among Muslim philosophers. Notable works such as Farabi's *Madīnat al-fāḍila* (The Virtuous City), Ibn Sina's *Ithbāt al-nubuwwa* (Proofs of Prophethood), Mawardi's *A'lām al-nubuwwa* (Signs of Prophethood), Shahrastani's *Nihāyat al-iqdām* (Summa Philosophiae) and *al-Milal wa al-niḥal* (On Sects and Creeds), Fakhr al-Din Razi's *'Iṣmat al-anbiyā* (The Impeccability of Prophets) and *Nihāyat al-'uqūl* (The Bounds of Reason), and Ibn Taymiyya's *Dar' ta'āruḍ al-'aql wa al-naql* (Refutation of the Conflict between Reason and Revelation), to name but a few, have articulated the arguments for and against the necessity and veracity of prophethood. These debates often centre on the need for God's message and whether knowledge of God necessitates a prophetic intermediary. Such discussions are particularly pertinent in the context of Muhammad as the final prophet, necessitating a clear and comprehensive exposition of Prophetic discourse.

To affirm Prophetic discourse as a foundational element in the articulation of reality, it is crucial to define its role as an epistemic guide and reference within Islam, where it stands as a central pillar. Recognizing and validating prophethood, especially the specific and notable role of Muhammad as a true prophet, serves as evidence of his genuine prophetic status. These validations, known traditionally as *dalāi'l al-nubuwwa*, underscore the authenticity of Muhammad's prophethood.[2]

Prophethood is viewed not only as a divine institution but also as a 'vocation' assigned by God to a prophet. This role entails the duty to extol and disseminate God's message. Consequently, Prophetic discourse is a responsibility inherent to the prophet. The prophet, through his innate personal and prophetic qualities,

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2   On *dalāi'l al-nubuwwa*, see: Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayḥaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa*. 5 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1985.

stands as a tangible and unequivocal sign, or a component of the evidential proof, affirming his prophetic mission.[3]

Addressing the certainty of prophethood's epistemic grounding raises significant questions. One must consider how the collective experience of prophets substantiates the veracity of their truth claims with certainty. Furthermore, the credibility of a prophet's message demands justification, given its profound implications.

Prophethood is the fountainhead of divine, prophetic and angelic discourse, providing insights into the nature of reality. It is therefore essential to continually examine the defining and consistent attributes of prophets, the universal truths they promulgate, and the shared messages they deliver. Additionally, assessing the epistemic value of each prophet's message within the continuum of prophethood is vital.

The methods and nuances of divine communication are diverse, and the discourse surrounding the validity of prophethood, particularly that of Muhammad, involves intricate arguments. Understanding the profound implications and interconnectedness of this divine communication is crucial for a comprehensive grasp of prophethood.

In the study of religious history, a central theme is the concept of 'divine speech' and its impact on prophets and believers who receive and engage with this sacred knowledge. Prophets are unique individuals whose thoughts, words and actions are shaped by divine guidance, preparing them for direct communication with the divine. This form of communication, particularly when manifested in sacred texts such as the the Torah, the Psalms, the New Testament and the Quran, represents the most profound interaction between God and humanity. Prophets have experienced this divine dialogue both verbally and, at times, through written scriptures. Notably, some prophets, like Moses, are said to have conversed directly with God. Muhammad, considered the final prophet, is believed to have had an intimate direct dialogue with God during his celestial journey, known as *Isrā* (night journey) and *Mi'rāj* (ascension).[4] Additionally, the *tahiyya* or glorification supplication recited during formal prayers is viewed as a reenactment of the direct exchange between the Prophet and God on the night of *Mi'rāj*.

Prophetic discourse refers to the manner in which Prophet Muhammad communicated the divine message, providing clarity, detail and context to ensure

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3   M. Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy*. London, George Allen and Unwin LTD, 1958, pp. 11-29.

4   The 'night journey' and 'ascension' are discussed primarily in the 17th sura of the Quran, al-Isrā.

the word of God is comprehensible to humanity across various situations.[5] This discourse shapes the understanding and practical application of God's message. Prophet Muhammad, the final prophet in a long line of messengers, was initially an ordinary human being (*bashar*) known for his integrity and devoutness.[6] His status transformed upon receiving divine revelation (*waḥy*) through the Archangel Gabriel, after which he declared himself the 'messenger' (*rasūl*) of God and urged people to embrace the truths he shared. His prophetic mission was characterized by his assertion that he was conveying God's word with absolute truthfulness. Thus the essence of Prophetic discourse is its role as a special and wholly unique form of divine communication or 'God-talk'.

Prophetic Discourse as 'Special Talk'

Communication encompasses a wide range of interactions, starting with everyday speech that reflects personal expression and meaning. Through these interactions, the depth and richness of understanding are enhanced. Muhammad ibn Abdullah was, as we have seen the Quran affirm, an ordinary human being (*bashar*), living a life similar to others, engaging in daily activities such as eating, sleeping and socializing. This highlights the significance of human connection with the divine through knowledge and language. Muhammad's erstwhile ordinariness underscores his extraordinary response to God's call and his reception of divine revelation, which led to his recognition as 'the best of humanity' for his ability to convey the truth.

The Quran suggests that if the intended recipients of Divine revelation were angels, an angelic prophet would have been sent.[7] However, Muhammad was human, and never claimed angelic status. Questions raised about his humanity, such as why he wasn't accompanied by an angel to validate his message, emphasize the importance of clear communication in the language of ordinary people.[8] After all, one who speaks a language effectively "determines the meaning."[9] Muhammad's

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5 T. Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Quranic Weltanschauung*, Kuala Lumpur, Islamic Book Trust, 2008, pp. 11-31.

6 This is affirmed in the Quran (18:110): Say, "I am only a man like you, to whom has been revealed that your god is one God. So whoever would hope for the meeting with his Lord – let him do righteous work and not associate in the worship of his Lord anyone."

7 Quran, 17:24.

8 See: Quran, 25:7 – And they say, "What is this messenger that eats food and walks in the markets? Why was there not sent down to him an angel so he would be with him a warner?"

9 Donald Davidson, 'Truth and Meaning'. *Synthese* Vol. 17, No. 3, 1967, p. 320.

role as 'a man among them' facilitated a direct and relatable connection with his audience, particularly through their shared Arabic language.

Prophets, as messengers of God, are identified by key attributes that validate their divine mission. These attributes include:

Truthfulness (*ṣadāqa*): A prophet must embody absolute honesty in receiving and conveying God's message.

Perfect intellectual acumen (*faṭāna*): A prophet's intellectual capacity is crucial for understanding and fulfilling divine responsibilities.

Trustworthiness (*amāna*): Prophets are reliable custodians of the divine message, ensuring its integrity.

True impeccability (*'iṣma*): Prophets maintain purity, free from any deficiency in their claims or actions.

Right delivery (*tablīgh*): The message received from God is delivered accurately and faithfully.

These characteristics are essential and non-negotiable for a prophet, particularly for the Prophet Muhammad, who is regarded as the final messenger with these qualities in their most perfect form. His prophetic discourse is deeply intertwined with these attributes, establishing a foundation for knowledge and the proper use of language to convey truth.

The debate over whether Muhammad possessed these attributes before or after his prophethood is secondary to the fact that his proclamation of truth and his role as a prophet were affirmed after he began his mission. Despite not being a scholar, preacher or poet, and lacking literacy, Muhammad's profound inclination towards truth-seeking is evident in his contemplative retreats at Mount Hira prior to the reception of revelation. His illiteracy is sometimes considered a testament to his genuine prophethood, reinforcing the authenticity of his divine discourse. Prophetic discourse, therefore, is not just communication; it is a divine conversation meant to convey God's message to humanity.

Prophetic Discourse as 'God-talk'

Prophetic discourse is a multifaceted communication that involves various aspects of life and divine principles. It is essential to understand this discourse as 'God

talk' – a form of communication that is from God, about God, and for God. Prophet Muhammad exemplifies this mode of discourse, which is characterized by his unique titles, attributes and features that underscore his role in conveying God's message.

He is known by many titles and attributes in the Quran and Prophetic tradition, such as 'warner' (*nadhīr*) and 'bearer of good news' (*bashīr*), reflecting his mission to impart significant divine news (*khabar*) that holds profound importance for understanding the truth of both this world and the hereafter. His mission serves as a call to awareness, urging individuals to heed the potential consequences or benefits in this life and beyond.

Muhammad's prophethood is marked by several distinct roles that highlight his personal identity and his divine mandate, including:

- Messenger
- Verbal testament to the truth
- Bearer, embodiment and deliverer of the message
- Trustworthy witness
- Educator
- Mentor
- Role model
- Logical evidence (of the truth)
- Representative of universal truths
- Leader of all saints
- Leader of all prophets
- Guiding light
- Guardian

These are just a few of the many designations and characteristics that define his prophetic personality and his sacred duty to communicate and embody the divine message.

Prophetic discourse involves various practices and aspects that are integral to its expression. When the Prophet Muhammad is recognized as the epitome of these qualities, he is often referred to as *the* exemplar of a particular title or attribute. For instance, he is lauded as the foremost in worship and praise of God.

Delving deeper, the concept of his being a 'talking proof' (*burhān-i nāṭiq*) serves as a living testament to the Prophet's role in imparting knowledge through speech and language. For adherents of Islam, it is believed that the Prophet Muhammad received God's words directly and conveyed them to the people as divine revelation, unaltered by personal interpretation or interpolation.

Quranic verses such 46:7-12[10] and 21:1-8[11] affirm that he did not distort any divine message.

From the Prophet's time to the present, those who engage with the Quran are said to access God's word exactly as it was vouchsafed to, and articulated by, the Prophet Muhammad. Furthermore, Muhammad himself informed the faithful that the Quran is the eternal Word of God, revealed to him with precise Arabic articulation and meaning, as indicated in verses such as 2:151[12] and 12:2.[13]

The Quran describes the Prophet Muhammad as a 'caller to God with His permission and an illuminating lamp'.[14] His discourse consistently conveys messages that elucidate, expand upon, or elaborate on the word of God. Al-Kātibī, in his work *Ḥikmat al-'ayn*, underscores the necessity of prophethood,

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10 When Our Clear Signs are rehearsed to them, the Unbelievers say, of the Truth when it comes to them: "This is evident sorcery!" Or do they say, "He has forged it?" Say: "Had I forged it, then can ye obtain no single (blessing) for me from Allah. He knows best of that whereof ye talk (so glibly)! Enough is He for a witness between me and you! And he is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." Say: "I am no bringer of new-fangled doctrine among the messengers, nor do I know what will be done with me or with you. I follow but that which is revealed to me by inspiration; I am but a Warner open and clear." Say: "See ye? If (this teaching) be from Allah, and ye reject it, and a witness from among the Children of Israel testifies to its similarity (with earlier scripture), and has believed while ye are arrogant, (how unjust ye are!) truly, Allah guides not a people unjust." The Unbelievers say of those who believe: "If (this Message) were a good thing, (such men) would not have gone to it first, before us!" And seeing that they guide not themselves thereby, they will say, "this is an (old,) falsehood!" And before this, was the Book of Moses as a guide and a mercy: And this Book confirms (it) in the Arabic tongue; to admonish the unjust, and as Glad Tidings to those who do right.

11 Closer and closer to mankind comes their Reckoning: yet they heed not and they turn away. Never comes (aught) to them of a renewed Message from their Lord, but they listen to it as in jest, – Their hearts toying as with trifles. The wrong-doers conceal their private counsels, (saying), "Is this (one) more than a man like yourselves? Will ye go to witchcraft with your eyes open?" Say: "My Lord knoweth (every) word (spoken) in the heavens and on earth: He is the One that heareth and knoweth (all things)." "Nay," they say, "(these are) medleys of dream! – Nay, He forged it! – Nay, He is (but) a poet! Let him then bring us a Sign like the ones that were sent to (Prophets) of old!" (As to those) before them, not one of the populations which We destroyed believed: will these believe? Before thee, also, the messengers We sent were but men, to whom We granted inspiration: If ye realise this not, ask of those who possess the Message. And We did not make the prophets forms not eating food, nor were they immortal [on earth].

12 A similar (favour have ye already received) in that We have sent among you a Messenger of your own, rehearsing to you Our Signs, and sanctifying you, and instructing you in Scripture and Wisdom, and in new knowledge.

13 We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran, in order that ye may learn wisdom.

14 Quran, 33:46

highlighting the need for a figure who connects with God through speech and intellect.[15]

The credibility of divine revelation – and by extension, the talk of God – hinges on the acknowledgment of the prophet's integrity. The prophet's self-declared truthfulness can be seen as a clear, distinct and validated self-evident proof. The prophetic assertion regarding the veracity of God's word can be articulated through logical argumentation, simplified as follows:

- The individual in question does not lie.
- This individual is truthful in their declarations.
- The statements made are not false; hence, they are truthful.

These assertions are substantiated by self-evident proof. Moreover, if the third statement is intrinsically justified, it reinforces the truth-claim and bolsters the veracity of the initial premise.

Conversely, if reality contradicts these propositions, the argument's claims may not align with factual truth. Prophetic discourse must represent reality through justified reasoning.

Following this line of self-evident truth:

- The statements made by this individual are true.
- In this instance, the individual must be speaking the truth.
- It is possible that the individual speaks the truth in other situations.
- The individual consistently speaks the truth in various contexts.
- It is empirically validated that the individual's statements are true. Thus, the truth is evidently spoken by this person, affirming the authenticity of what has been said. Ultimately, the individual's declarations are truthful, reflecting their genuine nature.

The distinction between a false and a correct 'self-evident claim' should be grounded in the 'affirmation' and 'approval' of perceived reality. The affirmation of the truth of God's word, as received through the Prophet Muhammad, can be examined by posing questions about his identity as a man and a prophet, the content of his teachings, and the evidence supporting the veracity of his words.

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15 Najm al-Dīn 'Alī ibn 'Umar al-Qazwīnī al-Kātibī (1204-76) was a Persian Muslim philosopher and writer on the natural sciences who helped found the famous observatory at Maragheh along with Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī. His *Ḥikmat al-'ayn* is a classic work of metaphysics. See: Najm al-Dīn 'Alī ibn 'Umar al-Qazwīnī al-Kātibī, *Ḥikmat al-'ayn*. Danishgah-i Firdawsi Publications, 1974.

These inquiries are fundamental to the legitimacy of his prophetic claim. If answered positively, each question reinforces the others:

- If he is truthful as a person, then his claim to prophethood is credible.
- If he is authentic as a prophet, then the message he conveys is trustworthy.

Conversely, if his message is genuine, it affirms his integrity as both a man and a prophet.

Thus, the truthfulness of the Prophet can be assessed through three interconnected aspects:

- Truthfulness of the man (personal integrity)
- Truthfulness of the prophet (authenticity of the messenger)
- Truthfulness of the message (divine revelation)

In essence, then, the Prophet's truthfulness is substantiated by the self-evident nature of his claim to prophethood.

The essence of self-evident claims must be articulated with clarity and precision to be properly understood. In this context, the prophet distinctly differentiated between his own words and the Word of God, affirming that the latter is the true Word in every aspect, including its utterance and meaning. Ibrahim Madkour highlights Farabi's view on the prophet's intellectual capacity, which allowed him to comprehend and communicate the exact Word of God. Madkour notes, "The prophet emerges with divine knowledge and executes the 'prophetic job' with immaculate innocence."[16]

The Prophet's explicitness in his words, the substance of his messages, and the indications of what was divinely revealed to him were consistently apparent in the verses as the Word of God. The contexts and reasons for revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) and Prophetic discourse (*asbāb al-wurūd*) provide insights into the origins and motivations behind the divine communications. It is axiomatic to state that the Word of God is precisely that, and it cannot be anything but itself; that is, the Word of God is distinct from the words of the Prophet Muhammad.

There is no necessity to reiterate the numerous instances where the Prophet extolled the supreme reality of the Word of God, as documented in the works of Bukhārī and Tirmidhī, among others. Consequently, the discourse of God and the Prophet's discourse are distinctly delineated and categorized, eliminating any potential for ambiguity. While the Prophet's discourse is influenced and shaped by

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16   Ibrahim Buyumi Madkour, *Naẓariyyat al-nubuwwa 'ind al-Farabi*, Muharrrur al-Adabi, n.d. pp. 10-15.

divine revelation, it does not equate to the Divine discourse – the revelation – as presented in the Quran. This differentiation is also explored and applied in various classical Islamic scholarly debates and analyses.

Prophetic Discourse as Truth versus Falsity

The processes for determining 'truth and falsity' (*ṣidq* vs. *kidhb*) are crucial for assessing the authenticity and validity of prophethood, particularly that of the Prophet Muhammad. The core issue is the epistemic recognition and judgment of the veracity of prophetic claims. True prophets of God are characterized by their unwavering commitment to truth and their rejection of any falsehoods concerning God. Prophetic discourse is not a collection of haphazard predictions or the ramblings of an unstable individual; rather, it is a considered and deliberate communication of divine truths.

From the Quranic viewpoint, it is essential to highlight that prophets speak about reality with absolute truthfulness, staunchly opposing those who make false assertions. The Quran states that the prophet brought forth the truth, dispelling all false beliefs and claims: "The truth has come, and falsity has perished, for falsity is by nature bound to perish."[17]

Consistency in speech and claims is a vital component in demonstrating the logical robustness of truth. For instance, the Prophet Muhammad was known as 'Muhammad al-Amīn,' meaning 'Muhammad the Trustworthy,' even before he proclaimed his prophethood. In contrast, Musaylima, a false prophet from southern Hijaz, Yemen, was given the label al-Kadhdhāb – 'the biggest liar' – during the latter part of Muhammad's life.[18] This contrast underscores the importance of integrity and truthfulness in establishing the credibility of a prophet's message.

The Epistemic Contrast between True and False Prophets

The credibility of claims hinges on their epistemic foundation and the justification for their assertions about reality. The Prophet Muhammad is noted for his meaningful, coherent and consistent discourse, underpinned by his evident sincerity, truthfulness, trustworthiness and other virtues. In stark

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17   Quran, 17:81

18   For more information on Musaylima, see: Al Makin, *Representing the Enemy: Musaylima in Muslim Literature* (Peter Lang, 2010).

contrast, Musaylima al-Kadhdhāb's attempts to mimic Muhammad's words and actions were marked by oddity, insincerity, incoherence and inconsistency.

Discussing the miraculous nature (*i'jāz*) of the Word of God and the extraordinary elements of Prophetic discourse is a complex task, particularly in the context of validating knowledge and language as representations of truth. Records of Musaylima's attempts to replicate verses of the Quran, such as his flawed imitation of sura 105 (*al-Fīl*), illustrate his inability to match the profundity and justifiable truth of the Divine Word. His proposal to the Prophet Muhammad to divide the religion and land was inherently flawed, as it contradicted the principles of someone who cherishes and upholds the truth with the utmost care and sincerity.

Prophetic Discourse as a Source of Justification

The epistemic value of prophetic discourse must be substantiated and relevant to contemporary reality. The legitimacy of any discourse is contingent upon the structure and substance of its statements, which encompass ideas (*taṣawwurāt*) and convictions (*taṣdīqāt*), as both Farabi and Ibn Sina have discussed. Prophetic discourse is argued to possess epistemic value, supported by logical and linguistic elements. It should therefore maintain consistent epistemic truth-value across different contexts, subjects and times.

If prophetic discourse is founded on solid principles and recognized as manifestly truthful, then all related communications should be considered accurate and devoid of errors or falsehoods, serving as enlightening guidance.[19] The Prophet's private and public dialogues, routine addresses, sermons and casual conversations are in fact all integral to his prophetic discourse. These have been orally transmitted and documented in written form, as seen in the canonical compilations of Prophetic Traditions known as the 'Six Books' (*al-kutub al-sitta*), among others.

Therefore, in the case of the Prophet Muhammad, the truth value of prophetic discourse – regarding the precision of truth – is uniformly applied without gradation. The authenticity of the 'chain of narration' is a separate consideration in Hadith studies. Determining the strength of association between any discourse and the Prophet is a critical matter, following the initial affirmation of the 'truth of the Prophet' in all of his acta and dicta.

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19   Elmira Akhmetova, 'Al-Farabi and Said Nursi on the Civilising Mission of the Prophets', *Intellectual Discourse*, Vol. 25, Special Issue (2017), pp. 453-475.

Prophethood as a Source and Framework of Knowledge

The assessment of knowledge concerning prophethood (*nubuwwa*) involves an epistemic classification and justification, which is achieved by examining the prophets' communication through their words and actions. The scriptural and logical foundations of prophethood, particularly that of the Prophet Muhammad, form a critical part of the belief systems and declarations within Islamic philosophy. In a similar vein, prophetic figures and the concept of prophethood in the Judeo-Christian tradition hold significant differences and particular emphases.[20] The commonalities and distinctions in the concept of prophethood underscore the vital role of prophetic discourse in shaping religious frameworks. In Islam, prophethood is distinguished by unique attributes of the prophets. Specifically, the Prophet Muhammad is a pivotal figure in developing key concepts and arguments that establish the structure of the religion, including ontological, epistemological and ethical principles related to belief, practice and worship. Furthermore, prophethood is considered complete with the last Prophet, who is recognized in Islam as the primary source of robust, precise and divinely grounded knowledge. This knowledge, conveyed through prophetic discourse, calls for the word to be embraced and acted upon with conviction and justice by the faithful.

The foundational epistemic principle of prophethood, which is a common thread among all true prophets and reaches its zenith with the last prophet Muhammad, rests on divine knowledge imparted through their prophetic discourse, manifested in revelation (*waḥy*) and inspiration (*ilḥām*). Individuals may either embrace this as truth (*taṣdīq*) or dismiss it as falsehood (*takdhīb*), as these two are inherently incompatible. A believer in this epistemic framework is inclined to accept the prophet's guidance. Indeed, 'Islam' represents the enduring religion of all God's prophets, affirming the messages they conveyed to humanity,[21] while divine authority rejects the man-made distortions of religion propagated by impostors and false prophets.[22]

Prophets articulate reality through universally comprehensible and straightforward lines of thought. The certainty of knowledge is predicated on the justification of its accuracy (*ṣiḥḥa*), authenticity (*ḥaqīqa*), verification (*taḥqīq*-producing *ḥaqīqa*), certainty (*yaqīn*), and endorsement (*taṣdīq*) or rejection (*takdhīb*), all of which hinge on evidence (*dalīl*). This evidential basis is crucial for assessing the soundness of any justification. It is imperative to

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20   See: Keith Ward, *Christ and Cosmos*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

21   Quran, 3:84.

22   Quran, 3:85.

understand the knowledge-based claims and explanations that yield verifiable and substantiated evidence (*dalīl*). From this standpoint, prophets are bound to the truth exclusively. Consequently, a prophet does not engage in baseless conjecture, ambiguous claims, deceptive illusions or erroneous forecasts. These assertions must be factually accurate. Within this framework, it is posited that the prophetic mode of reasoning and discourse is anchored in precise, reliable and legitimate assertions across all discussions. Thus, prophetic discourse emerges as a call for all to acknowledge the veracity of its claims and to challenge any contrary arguments.

Prophetic discourse encourages rational scrutiny of baseless claims about truth. It asserts that prophetic knowledge, which is divinely inspired, upholds the veracity of its claims. This discourse emphasizes the equitable nature of reality and the correct alignment of facts and their truth-values. Conversely, the term 'prophecy' can imply dubious or false predictions. The Quran strongly defends the prophet against allegations of being a soothsayer (*kāhin*), magician (*sāḥir*), poet (*shā'ir*), lunatic (*majnūn*) or false prophet, as evidenced by Quranic verses such as 37:35-37; 34:7-8; 44:13-14; 68:1-8 and 61-52; 26:192-93 and 210-223; 46:7-12; 41:44 and 21:1-8.[23] Distinguishing a true prophet from a false one hinges on their respective truth-values.

A true prophet's role is to validate the truth-value of reality, contrasting with the unfounded, invalid or inconsistent claims that define a false or illusory reality. In Islamic thought, the vigour of epistemic inquiry is reflected in the justifications for prophethood, particularly regarding the last prophet Muhammad, through theoretical and declarative discourse. An instance of the Prophetic discourse's strength is its clear and truthful communication, often referred to as 'evident speaking proof'.

Prophetic discourse, as exemplified by the last prophet Muhammad, is often described as a 'talking proof' or 'living evidence' (*burhān-i nāṭiq*),

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23 A few explicit examples, merely by way of illustration, are 37:35-37 – For they, when they were told that there is no god except Allah, would puff themselves up with pride and say: "What! shall we give up our gods for the sake of a Poet possessed?" Nay! he has come with the (very) Truth, and he confirms (the Message of) the messengers (before him); 34:7-8 – The Unbelievers say (in ridicule): "Shall we point out to you a man that will tell you, when ye are all scattered to pieces in disintegration, that ye shall (then be raised) in a New Creation?" "Has he invented a falsehood against Allah, or has a spirit (seized) him?" – Nay, it is those who believe not in the Hereafter, that are in (real) Penalty, and in farthest error; and 41:44 – Had We sent this as a Quran (in the language) other than Arabic, they would have said: "Why are not its verses explained in detail? What! (a Book) not in Arabic and (a Messenger an Arab)?" Say: "It is a Guide and a Healing to those who believe; and for those who believe not, there is a deafness in their ears, and it is blindness in their (eyes): They are (as it were) being called from a place far distant!"

signifying its truthfulness. Muhammad stands as the ultimate link in the chain of true prophets. According to classical logic, particularly within the Aristotelian tradition as discussed by Farabi, a demonstration (*burhān*) represents the pinnacle of evidential proof, grounded in certainty (*yaqīn*) and validated by reason and the senses.[24]

The Ottoman scholar and theologue, Bediüzzaman Said Nursi (1876-1960), in his exploration of prophetic discourse, attributes several titles - including that of 'talking proof ' – to the prophet Muhammad to illustrate the inexhaustible nature of his knowledge and linguistic prowess in making Islamic assertions and arguments.[25] The concept of the prophet as a 'talking proof' suggests that Muhammad's divinely inspired discourse serves as a fundamental verbal confirmation of his claims about reality. This 'talking proof ' is recognized as clear, robust, valid and coherent, consistently endorsed by rational thought and sensory experience. Muhammad's life, with its experiences, declarations and actions, was – and still is – open to scrutiny and serves as a living embodiment of Prophetic discourse – a self-evident 'talking proof '. Prophethood (*nubuwwa*) is thus seen as a divine mandate that has established a steadfast and reliable channel of communication from God to humanity since the dawn of time.

Nursi employs the concept of *burhān* to illustrate that the Prophet Muhammad is both a testament to God's existence and vice versa. This is in line with the classical logic of *burhān-i innī* . This is usually employed as part of a binary of proofs – *innī* and *limmī* – to argue for the existence of God. The *burhān-i innī* considers the creation itself as an effect that necessitates a cause, namely a creator. The *burhān-i limmī* indicates a logical proof, suggesting that a cause will inevitably have an effect.

In the context of prophethood, Nursi focuses chiefly on the burhān-i innī, arguing that the Prophet Muhammad himself constitutes compelling evidence for the existence of God, while God's existence is seen reciprocally as compelling evidence for the existence of the Prophet Muhammad. Furthermore, it posits that if there is a messenger, there must be one who sends the message. These intertwined corroborations, encapsulated in the declaration *La ilāha illā Allāh, Muḥammad rasūlullāah* ('There is no god but God and Muhammad is God's Messenger') affirms that Muhammad's teachings and actions are in harmony with the oneness of God and His attributes. This harmony further lends credibility

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24 See: Abū Naṣr Muḥammad al-Fārābī *Kitāb al-burhān wa-kitāb al-sharā'iṭ al-yaqīn* (*Book of demonstration and book of conditions of certainty*), Majid Fakhry (ed.), Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1986.

25 Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Mesnevi-i Nuriye*. Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları. (2021), p. 33.

to Muhammad's assertions about ontological and epistemological reality. Nursi thus uses *burhān* to validate the foundational beliefs of the faith.[26]

Prophetic Discourse as Witnessing and Being Witnessed

Prophetic discourse is considered a robust evidential proof that necessitates 'witnessing' (*shahāda*) and, by extension, one who witnesses (*shahīd*). The Quran uses the concept of witnessing to affirm the truth-value of reality, as seen in the verse "O prophet, we send you as a witness".[27] A witness, by definition, is someone who sees and knows an event or phenomenon, indicating they possess knowledge about it.

In the realm of Prophetic discourse, a witness is a dependable source of knowledge that validates the truth. Prophethood highlights the existence of a singular ultimate reality, which the Prophet represents and manifests in this world, with profound implications for the afterlife. The knowledge surrounding this reality must be pursued and elucidated to justify the truth-claims that are witnessed.

Muhammad is presented as the primary witness to the truths he proclaims, such as the oneness of God. This message, believed to have been delivered consistently by all prophets, collectively reinforces its veracity. The collective witnessing by '124,000 prophets' as part of a unified prophetic tradition further strengthens Muhammad's statements. The Quran emphasizes equality among truthful witnesses, including prophets.[28]

Prophetic discourse also invites other righteous, devoted and rightly guided individuals to bear witness to the same truths. The Quran calls for joining Prophet Muhammad's testimony: "O Lord, register us amongst the witnesses to truth".[29] The choice to accept or reject the role of witness is of course a personal one, based on one's belief in the truthfulness or the falsity of the proposition.

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26   Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness: The Inimitability of the Quran's Conciseness*. Istanbul: Sözler Publications (2004), pp. 160-170.

27   Quran, 33:45.

28   Quran, 2:136 – Say ye: "We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another of them: And we bow to Allah (in Islam)."

29   Quran, 3:53.

Prophetic Discourse as a Proof of Prophethood, and Prophets as Proofs of the Prophethood of Muhammad

The personal qualities of prophets, such as truthfulness and virtuous behaviour, are believed to underscore the credibility of their messages about God's commandments. Prophets themselves indeed embody the message, sharing a common epistemic status with others who faithfully and reliably convey God's message.

Discussing the evaluation of truth in prophetic discourse is crucial. While some accept it as justified truth, others reject it. However, the number of believers or sceptics does not determine the truth-value of prophetic statements. Prophets maintain their focus on their message regardless of acceptance levels.

This bolsters the notion that the acceptance of prophetic discourse is not about the number of followers but, rather, about the substance of the truth presented. The Prophet Muhammad, like his predecessors, sought no personal benefit from his teachings and upheld a message he deemed just. Had his virtuous character and actions not been evident, this lack would have stoked opposition. His consistent personality and message thus further affirm his trustworthiness and sincerity.

The integrity of prophetic discourse is anchored in the harmony between the prophets' actions and words. They must substantiate their divine revelation claims with ample evidence. Muhammad's prophethood shares distinct traits with other prophets, albeit in what is believed to be a more refined and elevated way. These traits fall into four categories:

Personal Features: Prophets are distinguished by their truthfulness and virtuous behaviour, mirroring their devotion to God's message. They serve as models for comprehending and adhering to divine directives.

Message Content: Prophets deliver a universal, enduring and pertinent message from God, articulated with clarity, wisdom and eloquence.

Message Responses: Prophets encounter varied responses, from acceptance to rejection. Yet they remain steadfast in their mission, knowing that truth is not swayed by the number of adherents or critics.

Prophetic Expectations: Prophets are not driven by personal gain or recognition but by their love for God and humanity, demonstrating humility, sincerity and selflessness.

Muhammad, like his prophetic predecessors, exemplified the utmost righteousness and virtue in his conduct.[30] His consistent persona validated his trustworthiness and the sincerity of his message.[31] Any discrepancy between his actions and words would have undermined his message's credibility.

The legitimacy of a proposition hinges on its epistemic justification. Prophetic discourse gains validation from evidence supporting the prophet's truth claims and is invalidated without it. Prophets offer various proofs of their divine mandate, including their testimony to God's unity, the cornerstone of their message. Only God, as the sole arbiter of prophethood, can affirm or refute such claims.

Prophethood may be corroborated by several types of evidence:

The Word as proof: The message should be inherently truthful and lucid.

The Prophet as proof: The prophet should exemplify at all times truthfulness and virtue.

Miracles as proof: Evidentiary miracles signify divine endorsement and might.

Facts and phenomena as proof: Observable realities should align with the prophetic message.

Righteous individuals as proof: Virtuous people should bear witness to and support the message.

The truth-value of prophetic words rests on specific epistemic foundations, inviting acceptance of divine wisdom. A prophet's legitimacy is tied to the veracity of his message. For instance, Muhammad, akin to other prophets before him, earnestly embraced, practiced and manifested God's directives, sharing them through his prophetic discourse. He also validated the authenticity of other prophets' assertions,[32] being the primary believer in, and practitioner of, his own ethical teachings.

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30 See: Quran, 33:21 – Ye have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the Praise of Allah.

31 See: Quran, 6:90 – Those were the (prophets) who received Allah's guidance: Copy the guidance they received; Say: "No reward for this do I ask of you: This is no less than a message for the nations."

32 Quran, 37:37 – Nay! he has come with the (very) Truth, and he confirms (the Message of) the messengers (before him).

Prophetic discourse encompasses the teachings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad, the final messenger and seal of the prophets. His prophethood is affirmed by evidence such as miracles, prophecies and testimonies. A key source of validation is the knowledge 'chain' (*silsila*), which ensures the transmission of his teachings through generations by credible individuals. These individuals are characterized by their virtue, sincerity, scholarship, devotion, sacrifice, truthfulness and knowledge. One may argue that there are four such corroborative 'chains' which substantiate and validate both Muhammad's prophethood and his truth-claims. These 'chains' are as follows:

The chain of prophets: This *silsila* includes all of the prophets from Adam to Muhammad who were recipients of divine revelation.

The chain of the Prophet's family: This *silsila* comprises the *Ahl al-Bayt*, the kith, kin and descendants of the Prophet, who inherited and preserved his wisdom.

The chain of Prophetic Tradition (hadith): This *silsila* includes companions of the Prophet and narrators and followers from subsequent generations who documented and authenticated the Prophet's sayings and actions, preserving them in the form of the Hadith collections, most notably the 'Six Books' mentioned earlier in the chapter.

The chain of scholars and other 'witnesses': This *silsila* includes *'ulamā* (scholars), *awliyā* (saints), *aṣfiyā* (purified souls), *shuhadā* (martyrs and other 'witnesses' to the truth) and *ṣiddiqin* (the righteous) – anyone, in fact, who bears witness to the truth and works to propagate and enrich the Islamic tradition and Muslim scholarship.

These chains collectively safeguard the prophetic discourse, maintaining and corroborating its precision and integrity. They are believed to stand as witnesses to its truth, underscoring the universal and enduring relevance of Muhammad's message as the envoy of God and a mercy to all.

Prophetic Discourse and the 'God-talk' of the Prophets

Prophetic discourse represents the words and actions of prophets who deliver God's message to people. This discourse began with Adam, acknowledged in Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions as the first prophet. Subsequent

prophets, from Adam to Muhammad, appeared across various eras and locations, communicating knowledge of the divine and guidance. These prophets, including Ibrahim, known as 'friend of God' (*khalīlullāh*),[33] and Isa, referred to as 'word of God' (*kalimatullāh*),[34] are celebrated for their unique titles reflecting their relationship with the divine. Muhammad had many such titles himself, including most saliently that of 'beloved of God' (*ḥabībullāh*). These titles indicate both a relationship and a dialogue between the messenger and the message-giver, an exchange between an Addresser and His intimate addressees.

While the expression of prophetic discourse can differ based on cultural and contextual factors, its fundamental beliefs, such as the oneness of God and the existence of the hereafter, have remained unchanged. Muhammad, considered the 'Seal of the Prophets' (*khātam al-anbiyā*), reiterated the messages of his predecessors, affirming the consistency and coherence of prior prophetic teachings. The collective endorsement of these messages by all prophets, including their support for Muhammad, is believed to serve as evidence for the credibility and acceptance of their roles as prophets also.

Of course it is language that serves as the essential vehicle for prophetic discourse, facilitating the transmission of divine knowledge to humans. It is commonly accepted that prophets used their native languages to communicate with their communities. Toshihiko Izutsu's work on the semantic foundations of Islamic concepts supports the notion that prophets received divine messages in languages which they and their communities were able to understand.[35] Mastery of language is vital for grasping the nuances of divine communication and the knowledge it imparts.

The Quran recounts various prophetic narratives, supplications and verbal encounters with the Divine, as seen in suras such as those entitled *Yūsuf*, *Maryam*, and *Muhammad*.[36] One can see in these suras that prophets maintained ongoing conversations with God and their followers, employing diverse methods of communicating God's message. It is believed that engaging in meaningful dialogue with people was a key prophetic responsibility, aimed at effectively delivering their divine messages. The Quran illustrates that prophetic messages were directed to all individuals, irrespective of social standing, wealth, sex or abilities, as exemplified in Muhammad's interaction with a blind man in sura *'Abasa*[37] or Moses's discourse with

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33   Quran, 4:125.

34   Quran, 4:171.

35   Izutsi, *God and Man in the Quran*, pp. 11-31.

36   Suras 12, 19 and 47 respectively.

37   Quran, 80:1-4.

Pharaoh in sura *A'rāf*, among other places.[38] Prophetic discourse is characterized by its simplicity and clarity, underscoring a profound understanding of reality that transcends societal distinctions in accessing divine messages.

The concept of miracles is essential in affirming the truth of Prophet Muhammad's claims. While the scope of this chapter will not allow me to analyse them in detail here, particularly the verbal miraculousness attributed to him, it is understood that miracles are divine confirmations of a prophet's message, designed to substantiate their rightful claims and counter any objections. These miracles, both rational (*'aqlī*) and sensory (*ḥissī*), are not self-serving acts; rather they are evidentiary phenomena designed to indicate the truthfulness of prophethood, and as such they are made manifest solely by God's will.

An example is when the Prophet Muhammad performed a miracle before a sceptic, emphasizing that such events happen only if God wills; this is reflected in sura *Kahf*, which reiterates the truth that nothing happens without Divine fiat.[39] Moreover, logical and empirical support for the prophets' miracles further corroborates their prophethood, complemented by the testimonies of numerous upright and reliable individuals.

Among Muslims, it is unanimously recognized that Prophet Muhammad's most significant miracle is the Quran itself, the Word of God. This divine scripture affirms Muhammad ibn Abdullah's prophethood and, reciprocally, his own words validate the truth and sanctity of the Word of God. This mutual confirmation, at the heart of Muslim epistemology, unveils the glorification of God's oneness and His religion. The Prophet's imparted knowledge forms the epistemic foundation, affirming divine instructions and verifying his assertions. The truthfulness of his words, justifiable and observable, resonates with those who embrace this knowledge and find contentment in the Divine discourse or 'God-talk'.

It should go without saying that authentic prophetic discourse is not a product of invention by any prophet. It is a misconception to view prophets as originators of their respective religions, crafting unique systems of belief and practice. The Quran states that a true prophet does not found a religion; such an act would be characteristic of a false prophet. Therefore the Prophet Muhammad, being the 'seal of the prophets', did not fabricate any religious doctrine or philosophical system for advancing truth-claims. Prophets are not creators of beliefs, rituals or any other aspects related to the nature and veracity

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38   Quran, 7:103-106.

39   See: Quran, 18:23-24 – Nor say of anything, "I shall be sure to do so and so tomorrow" – Without adding, "If Allah wills!" and call thy Lord to mind when thou forgettest, and say, "I hope that my Lord will guide me ever closer (even) than this to the right road."

of their proclamations. Instead, they are tasked with conveying and exemplifying God's religion through their actions, as human embodiments and communicators of the 'Word of God'.

Were any prophet to concoct the foundational knowledge or arguments undergirding his claims, inconsistencies would almost undoubtedly arise. However, prophetic discourse in the context of Muhammad and his predecessors is marked by consistent and precise assertions that capture the essence of their message in a clear and straightforward manner. This message is presented for all to see and consider, despite the inevitable rejection by some. As with previous prophets, Muhammad faced denials and accusations of falsehood regarding his truth-claims.[40]

Prophet Muhammad, in his prophetic discourse, dismissed all erroneous beliefs, conjectures and superstitions concerning existence and reality. He unequivocally affirmed 'the truth' grounded in the same epistemic foundation upheld by all prophets who bore the responsibility of representing the word of God. This duty was a divine mandate carried by all messengers, from Adam through Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and culminating with Muhammad. They all emphasized, renewed and revitalized the divine discourse, each speaking the word of God in the common vernacular of their communities.

The unbroken line of prophethood is synonymous with the unbroken chain of 'God-talk', which carries a consistent message: the affirmation of God's oneness, His attributes, and His guidance for life in this world and the hereafter. Muhammad, as the recipient of the final divine communication through the Quran, stands as the ultimate messenger of God's word. His pronouncements are held in the highest regard, transcending mere opinions or subjective perceptions. They are integral to the divine discourse, foundational to the whole notion of God-talk, and embody the essence of God's communication with humanity.

Prophetic Discourse as Assertion of Affirmation: The Language of the Prophet and Prophetic Language

Prophetic discourse is closely tied to the concept of truth-values, with assertions embedded in various dialogues to affirm the veracity of statements and propositions. The integrity of prophetic words hinges on the prophet's unwavering commitment to truth. Any deviation could compromise the

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40   See: Quran, 6:34 – Rejected were the messengers before thee: with patience and constancy they bore their rejection and their wrongs, until Our aid did reach them: there is none that can alter the words (and decrees) of Allah. Already hast thou received some account of those messengers.

foundational justification of his words, whether divinely-revealed or personal. The everyday, personal language of the prophet has to be distinguished from the speech that is received, i.e. the direct word of God – the Quran – and yet their truth-values are interconnected and vital for discourse.

According to Said Nursi, divine talk is directed towards the Prophet, humanity and the whole of the universe, encompassing ontological, epistemological, ethical and aesthetic dimensions based on God's relationship with creation. God-talk and prophetic discourse can be categorized as follows:

God-talk: Divine revelations delivered to creation. These are known as *tanazzulāt-i ilāhi* (Divine condescension) and are conveyed by prophets, including Muhammad.

Creation-talk: The created world's responses to God, acknowledging His sovereignty and his oneness. These are known as *tasbiḥāt-i subḥānī*.

Muhammad-talk: The Prophet Muhammad's devout, personal reactions to divine communication through prayer, praise and supplication.

Human-talk: Humanity's response to God, modelled and instructed by the Prophet through prayers and glorification.

Both prophetic discourse and the Quran advocate sincere communication that honours the remembrance of God, inviting all to partake in these dialogues of truth. The universe itself, through its own unique language, is said to affirm the divine reality, echoing the sentiment that all existence glorifies God, as exposited in sura *Ḥadīd* (57:1-29).

Prophetic Discourse as an Epistemic Justification: The Diversity of Divine Communication

It cannot be stressed enough that the authenticity of prophetic discourse is paramount as it serves as an epistemic foundation, affirming the truth of divine messages. The participants in this divine dialogue are varied, encompassing prophets, spiritual entities such as angels and jinns, and all beings in the created realm, which the Quran frequently references. God communicates with and through everything that He creates, imparting His guidance and will. The whole realm of existence and all that is in it constitutes the Words of God that are being constantly revealed, in ever fresh configurations and permutations.

Prophetic speech, particularly that conveyed by the prophets to humanity and the created realm in general, is distinct and purposeful, reflecting specific linguistic choices that align with the epistemic value of truth. Prophet Muhammad, as the final messenger, disclosed God's eternal message, a revelation believed to have been received from the 'preserved tablet' (*lawḥ-i maḥfūẓ*) via the archangel Gabriel. Muhammad's duty was to relay God's words faithfully, enhancing them with his own prophetic insights. The Quran's words, as divine speech, are safeguarded within Muhammad's prophetic narrative and perpetuated by the faithful, underscoring the importance of preserving and validating these words through time.

Prophetic dialogues serve both private and communal objectives, including the Prophet's personal communications with God, which are then shared with others to elicit individual and collective responses to the divine message. Such interactions between God and creation possess distinct communicative qualities, exemplified by the Quranic verse from sura *Yā-Sīn*, which encapsulates God's creative command: "Be! and it is!" (*kun fa yakūn*).[41]

Prophetic Discourse as an Epistemic Justification: The Language of the Prophet and the Prophetic Language

The Prophet Muhammad, akin to other prophets, addressed a multitude of topics and narratives in his teachings, providing numerous examples. This current chapter represents a scholarly pursuit to discern truth-values within each narrative. While exploring the full breadth of these topics exceeds this chapter's scope, it is crucial to acknowledge and explore each distinct event, instruction, and practice for the diverse insights and lessons they offer. Concurrently, each instance and occurrence lends epistemic weight to one another, establishing a robust, precise and credible foundation that upholds the veracity of prophetic discourse. For instance, discussions on the oneness of God and the afterlife are rooted in shared tenets of prophetic discourse, encompassing belief statements that mutually reinforce their truth-values based on shared epistemic principles. This examination may further lead to understanding how 'witnessing reality' integrates into the epistemic framework of prophetic discourse.

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41   Quran, 36:82.

Prophetic Discourse as a Language Tool

In Islamic scholarship, there is a profound link between prophetic discourse and divine communication. Various Islamic disciplines, including the principles of hadith (*uṣūl al-ḥadīth*) and the biographical study of the Prophet's life (*sīra*), explore the grounding of divine messages as conveyed by Prophet Muhammad. The term 'hadith' holds a special place as a revered expression (*ḥadīth-i sharīf*), since it encapsulates the words (*qawl*) and deeds (*ḥāl*) of God's Prophet, which are foundational to prophetic discourse.

While the 'Speech of God' and the 'Speech of the Prophet' are distinct, separating them for analytical purposes within Islamic justification is challenging. The speech of the Prophet is acknowledged as a source of knowledge, safeguarded and sanctified by God, as affirmed in the Quran: "Nor does he speak from [his own] desire."[42] Islamic sciences such as exegesis (*tafsīr*), linguistics (*lugha*), and philosophy (*falsafa*) engage methodologically with these different kinds of speech to evaluate, conceptualize and substantiate their epistemic value.

Prophetic discourse and divine communication are understood to share the same foundational truth and reality, aiming to convey a consistent message without contradictions. This concept is part of broader discussions on the 'goals and objectives of external practice or Sharia' (*maqāsid al-sharī'a*), as discussed by scholars such as Shāṭibī in his *al-Muwāfaqāt*.[43] The term *shāri'* refers to the one who establishes the framework of knowledge and its practical application. God, as the ultimate source of all knowledge and decree, appointed the last prophet as the chosen one (*muṣṭafā*) to impart divine knowledge. Thus, the Prophet also acts as a *shāri'*, grounded in a robust foundation of knowledge for all humanity.

Prophetic discourse underscores universal tenets such as the existence and unity of God (*tawḥīd*) and the concept of the afterlife (*ākhira*). These are key truth claims that provide an epistemic basis for other universal principles. The discourse employs ontological and epistemic approaches to formulate arguments across various domains, including ethics, aesthetics and jurisprudence. It also advocates for the pursuit of truth, goodness, beauty, justice and other concepts both universal and specific, which form the basis for evaluating the truth-value of prophetic assertions.

Classical Islamic sciences pay particular attention to the interplay between language, knowledge and truth. They explore the essence of language, thought and speech, as well as the relationship between subject and signification, to conduct logical-epistemological analysis of the ontological status of discourse. The

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42 Quran, 53:3.

43 See: Ibrāhīm ibn Mūsā Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *Al-Muwāfaqāt fī Uṣūl al-Sharī'a*, Vol. 1, trans. Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee (London: Garnet Publishing, 2019).

connection between reality and the truth-value of representation is critical for the expression of language in any statement or assertion – as seen, for example, in the traditions of Porphyry's *Isagoge* and Akhḍarī's *al-Sullam* – and classical treatments of language aim to affirm or challenge truth, suggesting that the expression of truth-claims through statements, propositions, justifications and reasoning is tied to reality. The existential roots of these truth-claims underscore their accuracy within the preferred semantic frameworks and epistemic structures of knowledge. In the case of the Prophet Muhammad, the content and justification of reality are anchored in his direct relationship with God, as experienced and confirmed by those who engaged with his knowledge and language.

In the domain of logical and analytical studies, prophetic discourse is framed epistemically, illuminating specific facets of language use and epistemic inclinations that affirm truthfulness. Such a truth claim, involving the reality of language and the scrutiny of knowledge, manifests as a tangible experience in the external world, aligning with its intrinsic reality. It may be contended that this hinges on the focus given to epistemic evaluations of language and its logical-linguistic underpinnings, which ascertain the necessary, potential and impossible aspects (modality) of their epistemic bases. Knowledge sources are accessible for discerning one's engagement with the acceptance or dismissal of prophetic discourse, gauged by the truth-value of the prophet's language, which conspicuously contributes to the evidence supporting prophetic discourse.

Prophetic Discourse as Knowledge in Words

The safeguarding and validation of prophetic discourse are crucial, as it encompasses the authentic words of Muhammad, forming the basis of religious truth-claims. The science of hadith principles (*uṣūl al-ḥadīth*) plays a pivotal role in this, evaluating the veracity of prophetic discourse through concepts such 'accuracy', 'validity' and 'consistency', paralleling the logical and linguistic sciences that assess the truth-value of knowledge.

The concept of the 'chain of transmission' (*isnād*), serves as a testament to the meticulous preservation of hadith, ensuring a reliable record of narrations traced back to the Prophet Muhammad. This significance of the *isnād* in hadith scholarship underscores the importance of protecting the precise source of knowledge, as exemplified in al-ʿAynī's *ʿUmdat al-qārī*. [44] It is essential to

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44   See: Badr al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad Maḥmūd ibn Aḥmad al-ʿAynī, *ʿUmdat al-Qārī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Abdullah Mahmud Muhammad Umar, 25 Vols. (Beirut: Dar Kutub al- al-ilmiyah, n.d.).

trace how prophetic discourses have been meticulously preserved and conveyed through generations in an unblemished linguistic form. As one of the earliest methods of documenting knowledge, the process of verifying and safeguarding the authenticity of Muhammad's prophetic discourse – whether as divine words or his own teachings and actions – is vital for maintaining a consistent and credible religious foundation. It is imperative to ascertain the veracity of these claims, distinguishing genuine prophetic words from potential fabrications. Prophetic discourse must be firmly rooted in robustly verifiable claims.

Prophetic discourse as encapsulated in hadith texts and their chains of transmission is also a crucial tool with which Muslims are able to epistemically ground their thoughts. The 'word of God' as revealed in the Quran was memorized meticulously by certain of his Companions during the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime and carefully documented. While these discourses were retained in memory, not all of the Prophet's own words were transcribed. This early effort to preserve those words both orally and in writing aimed to capture the knowledge and language of the prophetic discourse as a whole during Prophet Muhammad's era.

In the Islamic tradition, it is a core tenet of faith to accept and be convinced by the truth and accuracy of what the Prophet Muhammad conveyed, as his words are seen as authentic expressions of reality. This pursuit to understand the Prophet's expressions, references and indications provides foundational guidance for constructing meaningful and justified religious knowledge.

The predominantly oral tradition of preserving the Prophet's words was later augmented by the committing to paper of his discourse through the methodological science of hadith narration. These records have been meticulously preserved, forming a robust and vital body of knowledge, often referred to as 'true knowledge' (*'ilm*). Chain of transmission study, the discipline governing the classification of hadith narrators, ensures the authenticity of the Prophet's words, which have been collated in numerous hadith collections, the most significant being the canonical 'Six Books' mentioned earlier.

Conclusion

Prophetic discourse serves as a vital source for religious understanding. It is grounded in the justification of truthfulness, which encompasses accuracy, soundness, consistency, coherence and validity. These are anchored in the self-evident truth-claims made by the Prophet Muhammad, who is believed to be the final representative in a divinely guided lineage of prophets.

The veracity of the Prophet Muhammad's prophetic discourse is intrinsically linked to the truth-value of his prophethood, his truthful representation

through his words, and his reception of divine truth. The combined authority of the 'Word of God' and the 'Word of the Prophet' corroborates the truth-claim concerning reality. Discovering truthfulness within prophetic discourse involves identifying clear, simple and precise assertions that articulate the oneness and uniqueness of God and elucidate the essence of this world and the afterlife.

As the final prophet, Muhammad lays down the epistemic foundations and sets precedents for prophetic discourse. While this chapter has not been able to delve into all facets and pertinent issues of prophetic discourse, it is hoped that light has been shed effectively on the importance of understanding and recognizing its truth-value.

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11

A Muslim Pastoral Theology:
"God Did Not Send a Prophet
but Shepherded Sheep"

Bilal Ansari

The notion of pastoral care in Islam is rooted in a theology that affirms an omnipresent God who sent prophets with revelation. These prophets impeccably articulated and demonstrated how to avoid breaching God's boundaries to humanity.[1] The prophets' covenant was to be shepherds entrusted with guidance over the believers who were also responsible to shepherd their covenants and trusts. It was prophesied that in the end of times this pastoral plot of ultimate concern would become strange: humanity would be estranged from belief in God as a result of widespread denial of His prophets. Estranged from revelation, like the Hebrew and Christian scriptures that by which this prophetic model of the shepherd was invoked, both the Quran as the final revelation and sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad would too be denied.

This chapter is written to assist in listening attentively to the final revelation and prophet of God for what is termed in English a "pastoral" voice. The English word "pastoral" comes from the Latin root *pastor* meaning "shepherd." Thus, when we speak of the "pastoral theology" of Islam or its application in "pastoral care," we are invoking the Quranic basis for these notions found in the identical revelations in Quran 23:8 and 70:32 which describe what it means to pastor

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1   M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, 'Early Islamic Theological and Juristic Terminology: *Kitāb al-Ḥudūd fī 'l-uṣūl*, by Ibn Fūrak,' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 5, 1991, p. 54. Lexically, *ḥadd* (pl. *ḥudūd*) means a limit or boundary of a land or territory; technically, it has many meanings (s.v. El), the earliest of which is that used in the Quran in the plural for the restrictive ordinance of Allah which should not be transgressed (e.g., 2: 229; 65:1)."

or to "shepherd" for Muslim believers.[2] The explication of these two identical revelations is found in several *aḥādith* (Hadith) that have been transmitted to support this particular idea or image of care of the relationship between prophets and believers.[3] Although the apprehension of the word "*pastor*" and its meaning shepherd has become in the opinion of many strange in our times, we take a closer look at pastoral care and theology in the final revelation, and we find it is undeniably affirmed and embodied by Prophet Muhammad in word and deed.[4]

The roots of Islamic pastoral care are found in the opening chapter of *The Quran* for it is the primary source of self-care and care of others in our tradition. The Islamic frame of shepherding can be best understood by reflecting on the theoretical and practical implications of these words in the opening chapter of the Quran: "Guide us to the straight path. The path of those You have blessed, not of those against whom there is anger, nor of those who are misguided."[5] The commentator Al-Qurtubi says it is a request for guidance which implies being led by God Himself and thus a desire for intimacy with Him. Ibn A'jiba says the straight path connotes a way of life that combines the outward way of the Law with the inward way of spirituality, or the exoteric with the esoteric, so that one's inner nature is free. One of the earliest commentators, Ibn Abbās, a companion of the prophet Muhammad, referred to those on the straight path in "*those You have favored*" as being the prophets.[6]

God as Shepherd, has warned that humanity tends to stray in two camps: a failure of those (earned His wrath) who fail to commit to following the Law

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2   Quran 23:8 and 70:32; M. M Pickthall (trans), *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran: An Explanatory Translation*, New York, USA, Alfred. A. Knopf, 1930. "And who are shepherds of their pledge and their covenant."

3   M.J. Adler, *Ten Philosophical Mistakes: Basic Errors in in Modern Thought – How they came about, their consequences, and how to avoid the*m, Kindle edn., New York, USA, Touchstone, 1985/1997, pp. 11-12. "Whatever can be properly called an idea has an object. Perceptions, memories, imaginations, and concepts or thoughts are ideas in this sense of the word, but bodily feelings, emotions, and sensations are not. We apprehend them directly. They do not serve as the means whereby we apprehend anything else."

4   Two Prophetic Traditions we should keep in mind here: "Islam initiated as something strange, and it would revert to its (old position) of being strange. So good tidings for the stranger."; And, "'O 'Abdullah, be in this world like a stranger, or one who is passing through, and consider yourself as one of the people of the graves.'"

5   Qu'ran 1:6-7. (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 1 in English: History,' *ClearQuran*, <https://www.clearquran.com>, accessed 14 October 2021).

6   A. I. Abbas and I.Y al-Firuzabadi, *Tafsir Ibn-Abbas: Great Commentaries on the Holy Qur'an*, trans. M. Guezzou, vol. 1, Louisville, KY, USA, Fons Vitae, 2008, pp. 2-3. "The Religion of those whom You have blessed with the Religion and who are the followers of Moses" and "It is also said [the path of those whom Thou hast favoured] refers to the prophets

and those (gone astray) who fail to integrate the Law with a balanced inward way of life of spirituality.[7] These human tendencies have shown up in revelatory communities and prophets were unable to guide them due to their detachment from God as Shepherd, on which the Quran comments:

> And how could you disbelieve, when God's revelations are being recited to you, and among you is His Messenger? Whoever cleaves to God has been guided to a straight path.[8]

The divine communication centers the attribution of God as Shepherd, prophets as models of shepherding, and some continuum of estrangement or straying away as a metanarrative and eschatological plot of ultimate concern.[9] The Quran continues and expands upon the archetype of the shepherd found in the previous Jewish and Christian scriptures of the Torah, the Psalms, and and the Gospels.[10] The image of the shepherd in these scriptures connotes

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7   S.H. Nasr et al., *The Study Quran: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary*, San Francisco, CA, USA, HarperOne, 2015, p. 9. See Ibn Ajiba's commentary on The Straight Path: "From a religious perspective, it is a middle way that avoids worldliness, on the one hand, and extremes ascetism, on the other. It connotes a way of life that combines the outward way of the Law with the inward way of spirituality, or the exoteric with the esoteric, so that one's nature is in servitude, while one's inner nature is free."

8   Qu'ran 3:101. (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 28 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/003.html>, (accessed 14 October 2021).

9   Quran, 7: 180 and 17:110. "To God belong all the Most Beautiful Names, so call on Him by them,"; Say, "Call Him God, or call Him the Most Merciful. Whichever name you use, to Him belong the Best Names. And be neither loud in your prayer, nor silent in it, but follow a course in between." Attributes in Quran that center God as Shepherd: (*Raḥīmiyya and Raḥmāniyya*; 1:1); (*al-Qayyūm*; 3:2); (*al-Qadir*; 2:284); (*al-Rabb, al-Bārī, al-Khāliq*; 59:24); (*al-Razzāq*; 22:58); (*al-Baṣīr*; 22:61); (*al-'Alīm*; 22:52,59); (*al-Ghafūr*; 22:60); (*al-Nāṣir*; 22:78); (*al-Qahhār*; 13:16); (*al-Malik*, 1:3); (*Ghāfir al-Dhanb*; 40:3); (*Dhī al-Ma'ārij*; 70:4). Qu'ran 7:180. (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 7 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/007.html>, accessed 14 October 2021). Qu'ran 17:110. (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 17 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/017.html>, accessed 14 October 2021).

10 1. Primordial, 7:172 (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 7 in English: History,' ClearQuran <https://www.clearquran.com/007.html>, accessed 14 October 2021); 2. Prophetic Primordial, 3:81(Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 3 in English: History,' ClearQuran <https://www.clearquran.com/003.html>, accessed 14 October 2021); 3 Prophetic, 33:7 (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 33 in English: History,' ClearQuran <https://www.clearquran.com/033.html>, accessed 14 October 2021); 4. Children of Israel, 2:83 (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 2 in English: History,' ClearQuran <https://www.clearquran.com/002.html>, accessed 14 October 2021).

the immanent divine attribute of God as the Ultimate Guardian, the Lord as Shepherd, and as the Merciful Source of Attentive Guidance.[11] Moreover, the Quran portrays the conveyors of these previous scriptures as prophets who emulated these attributes as Guardians, Guides and Shepherds commissioned as God's emissaries.[12] This divine emulation is the first priority of care and responsibility of those leading or guiding others. At the same time, God in the Quran calls attention to the opposite attributes, the attributes of those who reject the prophets and prophethood or the centrality of their shepherding role in conveying the Divine guidance:

> If they deny you – before them the people of Noah, and Aad, and Thamood also denied. And the people of Abraham, and the people of Lot. And the inhabitants of Midian. And Moses was denied. Then I reprieved those who disbelieved, but then I seized them. So how was My rejection? How many towns have We destroyed while it was doing wrong? They lie in ruins; with stilled wells, and lofty mansions. Have they not journeyed in

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11   T. Winter, 'Lecture Two,' Introduction to Islamic Theology (TH-646), Hartford Seminary, 2007. This fundamental tension between transcendence and immanence, or, as Muslims put it, between "affirming difference" (*tanzīh*) and "affirming resemblance" (*tashbīh*), became intrinsic to the structuring of knowledge in the new civilisation. As one aspect of this it could be said, at the risk of very crude generalisation, that the Koran's theology of transcendence was explored by the kalam folk, and its theology of immanence by the Sufis, which is why, perhaps, we should seek for Islam's greatest theologians among those who emphasised the symbiosis of the two disciplines. It may be thus, rather than for any unique originality, that Ghazali came to be called the "proof of Islam", and Ibn 'Arabi the "greatest shaykh". Their apparent eclecticism was in fact a programmatic attempt to retrieve an original unity, which is why scripture was so central to their respective manifestos."

12   12   T. Winter, 'Lecture One,' Introduction to Islamic Theology (TH-646), Hartford Seminary, 2007. Turning now to Islamic thinkers, it is well-known that Ghazali was one of the leading exponents of what the Prophet himself called *al-takhalluq bi-akhlāq Allah* – taking on the character-traits of God. In his book on naming God, Ghazali appends, beside each of the conventional ninety-nine divine names, some remarks on how human beings can conform themselves to the divine perfection by adopting them. By knowing God's attributes, we come to love them; and by loving them we are automatically characterised by them in some way. As with Dionysus and Aquinas, this yields a hierarchy of perfections defined by degrees of nobility and proximity. When the human being is fully adorned by the names, he or she knows God, and becomes a divine agent in the world, as the Koran tells the Prophet: 'You did not throw when you threw, but God threw' (8:17). This process Ghazali frankly refers to as *ta'alluh*, literally theosis.

> the land, and had minds to reason with, or ears to listen with? It is not the
> eyes that go blind, but it is the hearts, within the chests, that go blind.[13]

From this verse, it is clear that prophets before Muhammad were denied by their people. What does it mean to deny a prophet or to deny the role of prophethood today? What do such denials have to do with blindness in the hearts of people? Why does God talk about this human condition or perception problem as a common pastoral concern faced by prophets? How do these verses relate to negating the shepherding role of prophets as models of pastoral care and for those who would provide spiritual care to people today? These verses unequivocally state that the root cause of denying the role of prophethood is an inability to reflect, reason, or listen to God.

Moreover, the invitation is to observe the outcome of this disbelief and to ponder the decimation of communities preserved as historical markers of wrong belief and behavior. The Prophet Muhammad is reminded as a caregiver about some of the key elements of previous acts of denial of prophets in the stories of the people of Noah, Aad, Thamud, Abraham, Lot, Shu'ayb, and most extensively, the denial of Moses. God comments in strong language on Moses's people's denial of him as a prophet and their rejection of prophethood, significantly citing their inattentiveness to the conditions of their hearts.

When one reflects on the pastoral concern emphasized in these verses, one cannot ignore the psychological and sociological "aversive consequences" suffered by prophets as caregivers and believers as care seekers. Is there healing for communities whose hearts are in denial of their prophets and the shepherding role of the prophets?[14] I ask this to point out the problem posited by the Quran of those who reject the notion of Divinely favored/mandated "pastoral

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13   Quran 22:42-46. (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 22 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/022.html>, accessed 14 October 2021).

14   J. Cooper, "In Search of the Motivation for Dissonance Reduction: The Drive to Lessen Aversive Consequences" in E Harmon-Jones (ed.), *Cognitive Dissonance: Reexamining a Pivotal Theory in Psychology*, American Psychological Association, 2019, p.175. Joel Cooper's social-psychological theory will frame our conversation about the perception of the role of prophethood and how this is represented in the image of the shepherd: "We defined an aversive consequence as the real or potential result of behavior that a person would rather have not brought about. The emphasis in this definition is on the actor who determines, by his or her experience of an event, whether it is wanted or unwanted. What makes a consequence aversive is the way an outcome of an act is perceived by the actor. If the actor perceives the consequence as unwanted, then it successfully meets the test of being an aversive consequence." (Cooper, 177)

(shepherding) care" and "pastoral theology" in favor of post-modern models that jettison both the notion of "pastoral" and "theology."

The People of the Book gave various answers to God's rhetorical question, "So how was My rejection?" Christian theologians differentiated based on the role of the self as either the subject or object of their pastoral concern.[15] However, I offer a Muslim pastoral theological response that posits that an integration of both Christian pastoral theological models of care might ideally be what the Quranic notion of Muslim pastoral care is. This integrated theory of pastoral care is both related to the subject of caregiving and the object of care-seeking in the prophet's role of shepherding human hearts and the shepherding role of prophethood. More specifically, it relates to how the prophets as shepherds develop their capacity of taking care of the human self in the Quran.[16]

Thus, I offer a prophetological approach to caregiving that I call Muslim Pastoral Theology (MPT) which is rooted in the final Divine Revelation, the Quran. MPT has as one of its primary objects or models the belief in prophethood, the formative preparation of prophets by God in their words, their actions, and their congregational leadership. We consider what it means to affirm a full prophetology, and at the same time I ask what it means to deny this concept of shepherding to prophet.

Since there is no prophet that God talks more about in the final revelation of the Quran than Moses, we will follow his story as a shepherd and his role of shepherding his people. In this analysis, I look at his psychological and sociological development and its implications for Moses's heart. God's "pastoral education" of Moses was his prerequisite for the development of a prophet in fulfilling his role as a shepherd under another prophet (Shu'ayb), who also was a shepherd. Moses's story will be the lens through which we look at the pastoral or shepherding role of God and prophets from the Quran. This Shepherding can be seen in history as God's nurturing intervention (*rubūbiyya*) and His protection and care of the prophets (*'iṣma*):[17]

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15 R. C. Dykstra, *Images of Pastoral Care: Classic Reading*, St. Louis, MO, USA, Chalice press, 2005, p. 11. Dysktra discusses the way the act of caregiving and care seeking is perceived by Christian Pastoral Theologians. He said "[a]lso evident to readers will be tensions among the authors and images regarding who or what is perceived to be the subject or object of pastoral concern."

16 Aš-Šabrāwī 'Abd al-Ḫāliq *The Degrees of the Soul: Spiritual Stations on the Sufi Path*, trans. M. al-Badawi Cambridge, UK, Quilliam Press, 1997, pp. 20-21. See also, A. H. Al-Ghazali translated by A. F. Shaker *Al-Ghazali on Vigilance & Self-Examination (Ghazali series) Kitāb al-murāqaba wa'l-muḥaṣaba, Book XXXVIII of The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, Ihya' 'ulum al-din, Cambridge, UK, Islamic Texts Society, 2015, p. 14.

17 A. Nooruddin, A. M. Omar, & A.R. Omar, *Exegesis of the Holy Quaran, Commentary and Reflections*, 1st ed., Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan, Noor Foundation International Inc., 2015. See

We inspired the mother of Moses: "Nurse him; then, when you fear for him, cast him into the river, and do not fear, nor grieve; We will return him to you, and make him one of the messengers.[18]

And not only the physical but also the psychological provision of care: "The heart of Moses' mother became vacant. She was about to disclose him, had we not steadied her heart, that she may remain a believer."[19] And Moses faced several sociological snares and sinister challenges as a young man:

Once he entered the city, unnoticed by its people. He found in it two men fighting – one of his own sect, and one from his enemies. The one from his sect solicited his assistance against the one from his enemies; so Moses punched him, and put an end to him. He said, "This is of Satan's doing; he is an enemy that openly misleads."[20] [28:15]

After Moses recognized that his people can be cunning and manipulative, and he can be led the wrong way (*ḍalāl*) by evil incitement. He turned seeking God then God sent assistance by way of a caregiver with sincere advice (*naṣīḥa*):

And a man came from the farthest part of the city running. He said, "O Moses, the authorities are considering killing you, so leave; I am giving you good advice."[21]

God had clearly intervened on Moses's behalf. Moses recognized both the psychological and sociological difficulty with being in the company of wrongdoing people. He realized his own inclination, vulnerabilities and weaknesses, and he said, "My Lord, deliver me from the wrongdoing people."[22] As Moses headed

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also A. Schimmel, *And Muhammad (S.A.W.) Is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety*, Chapel Hill, NC, USA, The University of North Carolina Press, 2022.

18   Quran 28:7 (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 28 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/028.html>, accessed 14 October 2021).

19   Quran 28:10. (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 28 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/028.html>, accessed 14 October 2021).

20   Qu'ran 28:15. Quran 28:21. (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 28 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/028.html>, accessed 21 October 2021).

21   Qu'ran 28:20. Quran 28:21. (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 28 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/028.html>, accessed 21 October 2021).

22   Quran 28:21. (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 28 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/028.html>, accessed 21 October 2021).

towards the land of Median, some say he departed with no direction, provisions, or money.[23] Moses with complete dependance, reliance and with a good opinion of God, says, "Perhaps my Lord will guide me to the right way."[24] Immediately upon arrival at a watering place in Median, Moses is drawn to two women, shepherdesses unable to water their flock because male shepherds were watering theirs and not allowing the shepherdesses and their sheep any access. He asks about their situation, and they explain their marginalization or positionality of being incapacitated due to their father's old age. "So, he drew water for them, and then withdrew to the shade, and once again supplicated, "My Lord, I am in dire need (*faqīr*) of whatever good you might send down to me."[25]

What provisions did God send down after Moses's act of service or provision of care and turning to God alone for His assistance? God guided him to another social challenge that also presented an injustice and this time he directed his masculine strength in what scripture calls a balanced way.[26] This pastoral action led Moses to a means of earning lawful income as a shepherd, to marry a wife who was a shepherdess, and the blessing of a father-in-law who was a shepherd and prophet of God.[27]

In the Quranic verses about the attributes of the Prophet Shu'ayb's people, one notices some key similar elements in the role of the self in Moses's community. Moses shepherded sheep before his prophethood and in the process, he was favored with the grace of being educated on how to remain on the balanced way (*sawā al-sabīl*).

Religious leaders must acquire knowledge of how to avoid both their own psychological inclinations and people who are socially manipulative. This traditionally is referred to as *tarbiyya* or the internal work of preventing one's heart from going astray either in deficiency or excesses of character. The implication of the quality of pastoral education in Moses's story can be derived from insights from the different pastoral formation of Moses and Aaron. Aaron, blessed with prophethood as a mercy from God, receives his pastoral education and preparation to be a shepherd or leader over people by being required to

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23   Quran 28:22 fn 22 (Translated by Nasr, The Study Quran).

24   Quran 28:22 (Translated by Itani, 'Quran Chapter 28 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/028.html>, accessed 21 October 2021). Moses prayed for guidance both for his heart and worldly situation in this verse described as the Sawa as Sabil.

25   Quran 28:24 (Translated by Itani, 'Quran Chapter 28, <https://www.clearquran.com/028.html>). Faqir concept in Tasawwuf.

26   *Sawā al-sabīl* again describes this symbiotic interior and exterior guidance.

27   Quran 28:22 (Translated by Itani, 'Quran Chapter 28, <https://www.clearquran.com/028.html>).

develop "on the job" both intellectually and in terms of spiritual refinement.[28] Moses got his education as a shepherd by a shepherd before his prophethood thanks to the intimate knowledge and experience of the Prophet Shuʿayb.

Shuʿayb had few followers with little influence and power who believed in surrendering to the oneness of God in *tawḥīd* (affirmation of Divine unity). He faced a hostile and manipulative elite, those who know better but who still spread economic corruption and exploitation; those who know better but intentionally distorted, disrupted and disallowed a path to Godd.[29] Shuʿayb asked his people to theologically reflect on his role as their prophet and attempted to shepherd them to a right way, saying: "And I am not a guardian over you."[30] What Moses would face with his people was something Shuʿayb had already dealt with, and he was responded to in an obfuscating and twisted manner with derision of his role as their prophet and guardian:

> They asked ⌜sarcastically⌝, "O Shuʿayb! Does your prayer command you that we should abandon what our forefathers worshipped or give up managing our wealth as we please? Indeed, you are such a tolerant (*ḥalīm*), sensible man (*rashīd*)!"[31]

They threatened Shuʿayb's life[32] and called him a liar until he retorted in a firm and strong pastoral voice, saying:

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28   Quran 25:35 "We gave Moses the Scripture and appointed his brother Aaron as his assistant." [Quran, 28:96} He said, "I saw what they did not see, so I grasped a handful from the Messenger's traces, and I flung it away. Thus my soul prompted me." Quran 25:35 (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 25 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/025.html> (accessed 21 October 2021). Quran 28:21. (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 28 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/028.html>, accessed 21 October 2021).

29   Quran 7:88, 7:90, 11:84, and 11:91 Quran 7:88,90. (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 7 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/007.html>, accessed 14 October 2021). Quran 11:84,91. (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 11 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/011.html>, accessed 14 October 2021).

30   Quran 11:84 (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 11 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/011.html>, accessed 14 October 2021). Hafeeth

31   Quran 11:87. (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 11 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/011.html>, accessed 14 October 2021).

32   Quran 11:91. (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 11 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/011.html>, accessed 14 October 2021).

> Oh my people! Persist in your ways, for I ⌜too⌝ will persist in mine. You
> will soon come to know who will be visited by a humiliating torment and
> is a liar! And watch! I too am watching with you!"[33]

These Quranic passages show that the pastoral leadership development and
preparation of Moses came from a prophet who was similarly denied. What
then prevents some Muslims from affirming this concept of pastoral theology
and this role or image of care of a shepherd caring for a flock? What does it
indicate about the condition of our own hearts to deny revelation? What about
the quality of religious educator who states that "pastoral" care is not a Muslim
concept and that the preferred term is "spiritual" care? Is this not denying rather
than affirming this prophetic role found in the Quran? Especially, given that it
is reported that the Prophet Muhammad asserted the significance of this role to
all whom God favored with grace, saying: "'Allah did not send any prophet that
did not shepherd sheep.' His companions asked him, 'Did you do the same?' The
Prophet replied, 'Yes, I used to shepherd the sheep of the people of Mecca for
some Qirats.'"[34]

Furthermore, important narrations of the Prophet Muhammad frame this
chapter's Muslim Pastoral Theological argument. God's rhetorical question, "So
how was my rejection?" implies God's pastoral concern about what fountain and
mansion we are seeking and how are we watching over our hearts? Are we doing
so in such a way that allows us to follow the prophets to the eternal source
of water and home?[35] Do we take to heart the central historical shepherding
narrative of Moses and Shu'ayb and the many lessons and reminders in the final
Revelation? How can our hearts not be strengthened with absolute resolve about
the place of pastoral care in Islam? How important is it not to deny what is
narrated to us from our prophet? God says:

> "Everything We narrate to you of the history of the messengers is to
> strengthen your heart therewith. The truth has come to you in this, and
> a lesson, and a reminder for the believers."[36]

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33   Quran 11:93. (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 11 in English: History,' ClearQuran,
      <https://www.clearquran.com/011.html>, accessed 14 October 2021).

34   Sahih al-Bukhari 37:3 (Translated by Sunnah.com, Chapter 2: To Shepherd Sheep for Qirat,'
      Sunnah.com, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:2262>, accessed 21 January 2021).

35   Quran 57:25; fn. 25 Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *The Study Quran: A New Translation with Notes
      and Commentary*. HarperOne, 2015. Shari'ah is one of the legal definitions exegetes give to
      The Balance a way to water and akhirah eternal home.

36   Quran 11:120. (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 11 in English: History,' ClearQuran,
      <https://www.clearquran.com/011.html>, accessed 14 October 2021).

God said, "Everything", which indicates in the Quran that it should be understood that the pastoral lesson is that each community that denied their prophet was eventually seized by their own wrongdoing. And about the theological truth, God says, "It was not God who wronged them, but it was they who wronged their own selves."[37] Each prophet gave the warning and shared the glad tidings for those who themselves had a responsibility to shepherd their covenants and trusts.[38] It is reported that our Prophet Muhammad gave this clear and vivid pastoral warning choosing the metaphor, parable and example of revelation concerning the shepherd's responsibility over his flock:

> Each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for his flock. The imam who is over the people is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock; a man is a shepherd in charge of the inhabitants of his household and he is responsible for his flock; a woman is a shepherdess in charge of her husband's house and children, and she is responsible for them; and a man's slave (an employee) is a shepherd in charge of the business owner's property, and he is responsible for it. So, each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for his flock.[39]

This narration of Prophet Muhammad centers the concept "pastor" as he chooses the metaphor of a shepherd for how everyone is responsible for something in God eyes. God explains that denial of this is due to a lack of proper education as to why some reject his metaphors, parables, and examples. He says: "These examples – We put them forward to the people; but none grasps them except the learned."[40]

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37 Quran 29:40. (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 29 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/029.html>, accessed 14 October 2021).

38 Prophetic Primordial, 3:81; Prophetic ,33:7 Quran 3:81; 33:7. (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 3 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/003.html>, accessed 14 October 2021). Quran 33:7 (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 33 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/033.html>. accessed 14 October 2021).

39 Mishkat al-Masabih 3685, Book 18, Hadith 25. (Translated by <Sunnah.com>, 'Chapter The Offices of Commander and Qadi: Sunnah.com, <https://sunnah.com/mishkat:3685>, accessed 21 January 2021). Hadith literature is plentiful with these shepherd and flock narratives warning caretakers about their pastoral responsibilities. For examples, see Sahih Muslim, The Book on Government, Chapter: "The Merits of a Just Ruler and Demerits of a Tyrant Ruler," Sahih Muslim 1818, Book 33, The Book on Government, Hadith: 4493, 4494, 4496, 4500, 4502 and 4504. <https://sunnah.com/muslim/33> (accessed 21 January 2021).

40 Quran 29:43. (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 29 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/029.html>, accessed 14 October 2021).

The Foundational Aspects of Muslim Pastoral Theology[41]

Next, we consider the foundations of knowledge in the pastoral vision presented in such hadiths. One hadith narrated by Al-Nu'mān bin Bashīr presents the Islamic theological nature of the concept of shepherding of Muslim Pastoral Theology. He reports that the Prophet Muhammad said:

> What is lawful is clear and what is unlawful is clear, but between them are certain doubtful things which many people do not recognize. He who guards against doubtful things keeps his religion and his honor blameless, but he who falls into doubtful things falls into what is unlawful, just as a shepherd who pastures his animals round a preserve will soon pasture them in it. Every king has a preserve, and God's preserve is the things He has declared unlawful. In the body there is a piece of flesh, and the whole body is sound if it is sound, but the whole body is corrupt if it is corrupt. It is the heart.[42]

When one looks at this hadith, considering it is one of three or four foundations of Islam, pivots of din, and the principles of the sunna according to the highest authorities in the science of hadith, it is remarkable that Muslims today deny the notion of "pastoral" care in light of the tradition of a shepherd's care for a flock in the religion.[43] The concept and application is central to this hadith. The famous hadith of Nu'mān b. Bashr explains how the Quranic understanding is

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41   Haleem, 'Early Islamic Theological and Juristic Terminology,' pp. 5-41. *al-mabādi' al-'ashara*, "The Ten Introductory Aspects" as handed down by the ancient tradition, were points to be considered when embarking on each *fann* (branch of knowledge). They said: "it is incumbent upon him who sets out to expound a book to deal in the introduction with certain things before he begins with the intended subject matter." 1. The first *mabda'* is *al-ḥadd*, the definition of a given subject. 2. *al-ism*, the name of the particular *'ilm*; 3. *al-mawḍū'*, the subject matter of the *'ilm*; 4. *al-thamara*, the benefit obtained from learning it; 5. *al-masā'il*, the issues with which it deals; 6. *al-istimdād*, the sources of such *'ilm*; 7. *al-wāḍi'*, the founder of the *'ilm*; 8. *nisbatuh*, its relation to other subjects; 9. *al-rutba*, its status among other subjects; 10. *ḥukm al-shar'ī*, how the *sharia* views the learning and application of such *'ilm*. The *mabādi'* were seen as a sound starting point which from the outset gave the reader a clear picture of the subject he was about to study and its context. This was considered to be an essential part of the approaches preferred in the method of education in traditional Islamic education.

42   *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ* 2762, Book 11, Hadith 4. (Translated by Sunnah.com, 'Chapter Business Transactions.: Sunnah.com, <https://sunnah.com/mishkat:2762>, accessed 21 October 2021).

43   I. R al Hanbali, *The Compendium of Knowledge and Wisdom*, trans. A Clarke, London, UK, Turath Publishing, 2007, pp. 2-3.

to be navigated as a theological concept of the shepherd's lack of care of his flock and what happens when the limits of God are transgressed.

Boundaries are defined and described, again, with the chosen and preferred metaphor of the providential pasture of God. It is his *ḥimā* or pasture representing his legal rulings represent theology rooted in law which are made clear by the Quran. The implication of this is that we should avoid anything doubtful due to the ontological effects it has on one's heart. So, the ability to integrate this as a provision of care both as care seeker and caregiver is dependent on one's ability not to be a heedless shepherd.[44] Further to the point, therefore, those who are guided are able to master the inward and outward boundaries of this theological care.

This hadith, therefore, is one of four on which the entire body of legal, theological, and spiritual care and practice all pivot. Its centrality to our faith tradition, therefore, cannot be overlooked in literally any religious question or matter. It emphatically requires having a pastoral vision as a foundation for understanding law, theology and spirituality as Muslims. The knowledge of how to integrate this in one's provision of care is Muslim Pastoral Theology when you are doing comparison to other religious traditions of pastoral care.

The "Muslim" in MPT describes anyone who says, 'There is no God but God, Muhammad is the Messenger of God', without categorically contradicting this, according to the theological treatise *Fayṣal al-tafriqa*.[45]

The term "pastoral" in MPT is a description of the act of shepherding or being attentive and observant in fulfilling one's trust and covenant as caregivers and care seekers.[46] The Muslim pastoral concern describes one's approach to care

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44   Raba AM. *Major Personalities in the Quran*. A.S. Noordeen, 2001, p. 172. Raba explains heedlessness as a "type of people mentioned in the Qur'an *(al ghafilun)* as a group of those who do not use their hearts to understand what they feel, they do not use their eyes and their ears in order to think and learn from what they see and hear." See al-Qur'an, Al-raf 7:179, Ali 1992. Here this group of people are compared to being worse than livestock due to their heedless disregard of guidance. Ghaflah is a spiritual assessment term used in the Quran and by Muslim pastoral theologians. It is the opposite of being an attentive shepherd of one's heart.

45   A. H. al-Ghazali, '*Fayṣal al-tafriqah bayna al-Islām wa al-zandaqah*' [The Decisive Criterion for Distinguishing Islam from Masked Infidelity], in trans. S. Jackson, *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam: Abu Hamid Al- Ghazali's Fayṣal al-tafriqa*, Oxford, UK, 1910, p. 112. The pastoral advice says, "you restrain your tongue, to the best of your ability, from indicting the people who face Mecca (on charges of Unbelief) as long they say,... without categorically contradicting this. And for them to contradict this categorically is for them to affirm the possibility that the Prophet Muhammad, with or without an excuse, delivered lies..

46   See Quran 23:8 and 70:32. Quran 23:8. (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 23 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/023.html>, accessed 14 October 2021). Quran 70:32. (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 70 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/070.html>, accessed 14 October 2021).

which is rooted in a belief that affirms God's final revelation and does not deny His final prophethood by categorically contradicting him by entertaining any possibility that the Prophet Muhammad "delivered lies."[47]

The term "theology" in MPT is derived from the inspiration provided by Imam Ghazali from a theological maxim that states: "Speculative matters (*al-naẓariyyāt*) are of two types. One is connected with the fundamental principles of creed, the other with secondary issues. The fundamental principles are acknowledging the existence of God, the prophethood of his Prophet, and the reality of the Last Day. Everything else is secondary."[48]

MPT acknowledges these two types of speculative matters, but it focuses on the practical theological element embedded in the fundamental principles of creed. This chapter articulates an argument for the practical elements and implications of Islamic theology. It considers what it means to have an approach to care rooted in the Muslim faith tradition and that is integrated with a theory of professional practice which acknowledges the existence of God, the prophethood of Muhammad, and the reality of the Last Day.[49]

Thus, Muslim Pastoral Theology derives its name and definition from the shepherding (pastoral) concept found in the revelation and prophetic narration at the root of the Islamic religious tradition. While similar in its theory of professional practice, MPT is different in the application or integration of the concept of shepherd from the previous Abrahamic scriptures. It is similar in that it connotes the Hebrew and Latin agrarian concept of a shepherd's care for their flock. And it is different in that, additionally, it involves the essential notion that believers seek and give care only in ways that affirm and do not categorically contradict the integrative models of excellence of God's apostles.[50]

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47   See Quran 23:8 and 70:32. These two verses ground our integrated theory of practice of pastoral care. The prophets were those who modeled how to shepherd one's trust and covenant with God. The Arabic word for pastoral is ra'un which is identical in the content and context of previous scriptures. Quran 23:8. (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 23 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/023.html>, accessed 14 October 2021). Quran 70:32. (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 70 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/070.html>, accessed 14 October 2021).

48   al-Ghazali and Jackson (trans.), 'The Decisive Criterion,' p. 112.

49   al-Ghazali and Jackson (trans.), 'The Decisive Criterion,' p. 112.

50   al-Ghazali and Jackson (trans.), 'The Decisive Criterion,' p. 112. See also The Bible Ezekiel 34:23 (Translated by New International Version, 'The Bible in English: History,' Biblehub. <https://www.biblehub.com/ezekiel/34-23.htm> (accessed 14 October 2021). The Bible Jeremiah 3:15 (Translated by New International Version, 'The Bible in English: History,' Biblehub. <https://www.biblehub.com/jeremiah/3-15.htm>, accessed 14 October 2021). The Bible John 10:16. (Translated by New Living Translation, 'The Bible in English: History,'

The founders of MPT are the prophets in scriptures that God commissioned for the unique responsibility of guiding their particular flock and all of humanity.[51] The Quran gives descriptive names to several prophets but for the sake of illustration, we can examine those about Prophet Muhammad that highlight various functions or attributes of shepherding. These names call attention to Prophet Muhammad's role as caretaker over His creation by the means which God loves. Annemarie Schimmel in *And Muhammad Is His Messenger* points out that he is called "Witness, 33:45; Well Guided, 11:78; Bringer of Good Tidings, 7:88; Warner, 33:45; Caller, 33:46; He Who Guides Right, 13:7; Full of Concern for You, 9:128; Mild, 9:128; Trustworthy, 26:107, 81:21; Seal of the Prophets, 33:40; Adopting a Middle Course, 35:32; Well-informed, 7:187; God's Servant, 17:1, 53:10"[52] With all of these appellations, God in the Arabic scripture continues to highlight the importance of this notion of shepherding as a function and role of the prophets.

However, the Islamic tradition connects this universal concept of pastoral theology to anyone who shepherds their trust and covenant with God.[53] MPT is, therefore, a prophetology that studies the descriptions of acts of care by prophets

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Biblehub. <https://www.biblehub.com/john/10-16.htm>, accessed 14 October 2021). The Bible, Ezekiel 34:23; Jeremiah 3:15; John 10:16.

51   *Al-Adab Al-Mufrad* 30:577 (Translated by Sunnah.com, 'Chapter 261: Camels are a cause of pride in their owners,' Sunnah.com, <https://sunnah.com/adab:577>, accessed 29 April 2021). Narrated Jabir bin `Abdullah: We were with Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) collecting Al-Kabath at Mar-Az-Zahran. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Collect the black ones, for they are better." Somebody said, (O Allah's Messenger (ﷺ)!) Have you ever shepherded sheep?" He said, "There has been no prophet but has shepherded them."; Sahih al-Bukari 70:82 (Translated by <Sunnah.com>, 'Chapter 50: Al-Kabath,' <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:5453>, accessed 10 June 2021). 'Abda ibn Hazn said, "The people of camels and the people of sheep vied with one another for glory. The Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, 'Musa was sent, and he was a shepherd. Da'ud was sent, and he was a shepherd. I was sent, and I used to herd sheep for my people at Ajyad.'

52   See Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger*, p. 257. "Witness, 33:45; Well Guided, 11:78; Bringer of Good Tidings, 7:88; Warner, 33:45; Caller, 33:46; He Who Guides Right, 13:7; Full of Concern for You, 9:128; Mild, 9:128; One Who Declares the Truth, 2:101; Lamp, 24:35; Sincere, 19:45; Trustworthy, 26:107, 81:21; Seal of the Prophets, 33:40; Adopting a Middle Course, 35:32; Well-informed, 7:187; Clear Evident, 15:89; Generous, 81:19; *Munīr*, 33:46; God's Servant, 17:1, 53:10."

53   The Qu'ran 23:11 (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 23: The Believers,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/023.html> (accessed 10 June 2021); The Quran 70:32 (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 70: The Ways of Ascent,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/070.html>, accessed 10 June 2021)

for themselves and congregations.[54] Muslim scholars have chronicled this science about the prophetic action of care and guidance in the following integrative ways of wellness: *ilm al-sulūk* (knowledge of [spiritual] wayfaring), *'ilm al-iḥsān* (knowledge of excellence), *'ilm al-tarbiyyya* (knowledge of cultivation) or *ilm al-tazkiyya* (knowledge of purification).[55]

One of the first parables in the Quran is about how one should perceive the aversive consequences of rejecting these ways of knowing God and it is contextually connected to denying prophets. God talks about the flock (humanity) who deny the calls and cries of the shepherd – referring to prophets –, saying: "The example of the disbelievers (not responding to the Messenger's warning) is like a flock not comprehending the calls and cries of the shepherd. (They are willfully) deaf, dumb and blind so they have no understanding."[56]

This explains why the preservation of this specific scriptural prophetic image of the shepherd's care for their flock must not be contradicted, denied or overlooked for an ambiguous rather than religious, imageless call to spiritual care over pastoral care.[57] The term 'pastoral' is a scriptural concept that integrates the embodiment of the letter and spirit of the Law of God with the office of prophethood. The Muslim application of the pastoral image of a shepherd's care conjures up and interiorizes how prophets established boundaries (*ḥudūd*) on

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54 'A'idh b. 'Amr told that he heard God's Messenger say, "The worst shepherds are those who are ungentle." <https://sunnah.com/mishkat:368>.

55 T. Winter, *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 34-35. Khalid Blankenship says: "Originally connected, for the most part, with the events of the Prophet's multidimensional career, the Quran's revelations are replete with exhortations to action as well as counsels on human relationships. Some of this advice is couched in the form of exhortations and recommendations, coupled with a general insistence on justice (4:58; 5:8; 6:115, 152; 7:181; 16:76, 90; 42:15; 49:9), which urge the earliest believers to concentrate their minds on the inherent rightness of their actions, rather than on their utility to their tribes, and to insist on such rightness in their rulers, and this is stressed far more than issues of doctrine or ritual."

56 The Qu'ran 2:171 (Translated by Dr. Mustafa Khattab, 'the Clear Quran, Chapter 23 The Cow,' <https://www.quran.com/al-baqarah/171>, accessed 10 June 2021).

57 E. Y. Lartey and H. Moon (eds.), *Postcolonial Images of Spiritual Care Challenges of Care in a Neoliberal Age,* Kindle edn., Eugene, USA, Pickwick Publications, 2020. In the introduction, Lartey and Moon argue against the term pastoral: "this pastoral care/shepherding model was very much a top-down, hierarchical, patriarchal, and paternalistic model of care." They discard it because they conclude, "The image of shepherding that is associated with pastoral care, then, is extremely problematic, racist, and colonizing." See B. Ansari, "Muslim Pastoral Theology: A Reflection of Black Shepherds and Black Sheep", in Lartey, *Postcolonial Images of Spiritual Care*, as my chapter marked the counter argument.

a clear path (*sharia*) that led to the spiritual resources of a sound heart.[58] The pastoral concept promotes how prophets attach people to the rope of God, in order that they grasp a stronger understanding and firmer relationship with God and remain safe on the path to God.[59]

Muslim Pastoral Theology ultimately articulates how our belief in prophets refines hearts and heals souls, and therefore demonstrates how our approach to spiritual care is a pastoral one. It is the study of the internal as caregivers and care seekers (*taṣawwuf*).[60] Therefore, I argue that the subject matter of MPT is primarily a theological action of care rather than a spiritual action of care. The shepherd's care conceptually illustrates the integrated role of prophets as caregivers and models for communities seeking God's care.

Understanding the depth and breadth of MPT is essential for caregivers because it centers the theological responsibility of keeping one's covenant and trust with God in the way that the prophets modeled in their exemplary care for self and others.

The source of MPT comes from the cumulative wisdom and integrated practices of care derived from the Quran, the prophetic example, and the wisdom traditions about how prophets cared for their communities. Some of our greatest scholars describe this source as the well-trodden path for the seekers, caregivers and masters of this tradition.[61] These legal scholars show that MPT and Muslim pastoral care are of two kinds in the legal sense: that it is *farḍ 'ayn* (individually obligatory) to know, since all human beings are susceptible to straying off the

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58 Mishkat al-Masabih 11:4 (Translated by Sunnah.com, 'Chapter 1a: Earning and seeking what is lawful,' Sunnah.com, <https://sunnah.com/mishkat:2762>, accessed 2 May 2020); The Quran 26:89 (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 26: The Poets,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/026.html>, accessed 2 May 2020).

59 See Ghazali's discussion of true faith (al iman al rasikh) in Jackson, *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance*, p. 125.

60 A. Laraki, 'The Principles of Tasawwuf and the Guide to Gnosis,' in *The Practical Guidebook of Essential Islamic Sciences: A Commentary on Ibn Ashir's Al-Murshid Al-Mu'In*, Leicester, UK, Meem Institute, 2012, pp. 139-157.

61 The Muwatta, one of the oldest and most revered Sunni hadith collections and one of "the earliest surviving Muslim law-book[s]," in which Malik attempted to "give a survey of law and justice; ritual and practice of religion according to the consensus of Islam in Medina, according to the sunna usual in Medina; and to create a theoretical standard for matters which were not settled from the point of view of consensus and sunna." Composed in the early days of the Abbasid caliphate, during which time there was a burgeoning "recognition and appreciation of the canon law" of the ruling party, Malik's work aimed to trace out a "smoothed, well-trodden path" (which is what al-muwaṭṭaʾ literally means) through "the far reaching differences of opinion even on the most elementary questions."

path except for prophets.[62] For care seekers, Imam Abū Ḥasan al-Shadhilī said, "Who does not truly acquire this discipline will die persisting on major sins without being aware."[63] As we noted from revelation previously, only after persistence in wrong actions are people harmed.

Therefore, caregivers or shepherds given this responsibility have a *farḍ al-kifāya* (a communal responsibility) to know since when one fulfills the requirements of the appropriate provision of knowledge, one can accompany others without causing harm or being harmed. Likewise, the revelation story of Moses and Shu'ayb, Muhammad and Gabriel who modeled this accompaniment (*ṣuḥba*) along a journey, proper conduct and prophetic identity is essential to *The Way*.[64]

The people of prophetic character, those who cultivated and purified their hearts, then lead and remove the obligation on others administering the inherited trust of the prophetic mantle.[65] These scholars speak of means of character refinement to address how shepherds maintain a *balanced way* for the development of private and public virtues.[66] Those granted favor by God work to maintain a good character and demonstrate the essential elements of the religion such as sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*); truthfulness (*ṣidq*); religious cautiousness (*wara'*);

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62 Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger*, p. 56. In Chapter Three, 'Muhammad's Unique Position', "One important chapter in Islamic prophetology concerns the 'iṣma of the Prophet. This term means basically "protection or freedom (from moral depravity)" and connotes virtually automatically not only perfect moral integrity but even impeccability. For, as Islam teaches, God protects His prophets from sin and error lest His Divine word be polluted by any external stain upon its human bearer."

63 M. Al-Yaqoubi, Muhammad, 'The Basics of Tasawwuf,' Living Islam: Islamic Tradition, <https://www.livingislam.org/m/tsw_e.html> (accessed 10 July 22).

64 D. Grefe, P. McCarroll and B. Ansari, 'Meaning Making in Chaplaincy Practice: Presence, Assessment, and Interventions' in W. Cadge and S. Rambo (eds.), *Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care in the Twenty-First Century: An Introduction*, Kindle edn., Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2022. p. 102, Location 1224.

65 M. Ali, O. Bajwa, S. Kholaki, J. Starr, *Mantle of Mercy*. S.l.: TEMPLETON PRESS, 2022, p. 3.

66 M. Umaruddin, *The Ethical Philosophy of Al-Ghazali*, Delhi, India, Adam Publishers & Distributors, 1996/1962, p. 197. Citing Al Ghazali's Ihya and Mizan, Umaruddin says, "The fundamental elements of the inner constitution of man are reason or wisdom ('Aql or Hikma), self-assertion (Ghadab), and appetition (Shahwa). To form a beautiful character these elements must work together in harmony, observing the golden mean, each being in the correct proportion. Further, justice ('Adl) is the power which directs these elements to achieve the golden mean and to preserve their harmony. When self-assertion and appetition develop in excess and get out of control, knowledge is easily exploited by them. The best development of self-assertion and appetition consists in their subservience to wisdom, that is, in their activity according to the dictates of reason and the religious law."

conscious awareness (*khushū'*); reliance (*tawakkul*); asceticism (*zuhd*); love (*'ishq*); and, similarly wrong development produced their opposites.[67]

MPT is the approach to care that is related to the shepherding story of every prophet that describes the best development of how they listened, observed and took care of demonstrating beautiful character in fidelity to God. They then sought to guide others to this way so that hearts did not go blind with insincerity, hypocrisy, arrogance and greed – in both individual and communal times of ease and crisis. MPT addresses the obscure and subtle spiritual subjects within the context and in relation to the law, theology, and the integrative application of ethical decision making.

MPT finds a rich resource in the biographical literature of prophets and their communities to understand group dynamics and the social psychology involved in pastoral care. For example, we have several prophetic narratives that offer deep insights into what in common parlance would be called cognitive dissonance, aversive consequences, and groupthink.

Ultimately, the primary concern and source of MPT is the engaged experience and practical application of the wisdom tradition of prophets who successfully traveled to God. One of its most important subjects is the cognitive attentiveness to God (*dhikr*) that helps people avoid breaching boundaries by the unmindful and heedless instigation of the lower self and full assault whispering that gets into human hearts from Satan.[68] The prophets constantly kept the company of angels and disliked anything that interrupted their companionship.[69]

These narrations offer insight to both caregivers and care seekers on keeping in the company of the angels despite one's condition. To understand why an angel would depart our company is prophetic wisdom. Prophets intimately knew everything that would jeopardize or undermine excellent character (*adab* and *akhlāq*) and that these cognitive breaches would be barriers to their communion and proximity to God. Embracing a full prophetology does not look suspiciously

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67 Umaruddin, *The Ethical Philosophy*, p. 197. "Their right development produces qualities which are conducive to the spiritual progress of the self; while their excess or deficiency produces traits which hinder and frustrate its growth. The inter-action of intellect, self-assertion and appetition produces virtues and vices…"

68 Quran 7:17. "Then I will come at them from before them, and from behind them, and from their right, and from their left; and you will not find most of them appreciative." Quran 7:17 (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 7 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/007.html>, accessed 14 October 2021).

69 Sunan Abi Dawud 4896. (Translated by <Sunnah.com>, 'Chapter 49: Regarding taking revenge.' <https://sunnah.com/abudawud:4896>, accessed 5.2.2020); "The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) replied: An angel came down from Heaven and he was rejecting what he had said to you. When you took revenge, a devil came down. I was not going to sit when the devil came down."

at the term "pastoral" as a means of care or Muslim theology. There is no denying that every prophet experienced the profession of shepherding; in addition, Muslims do not confuse Christian supposititious and rational assumptions, and nor do they prioritize the popular notions and concepts of the post-modern age over scriptural referent concepts.

As I hope to have made plain, the term "pastoral" relates directly to the "shepherding" role of prophets and is not unique to Judaism and Christianity as argued by both modern and postmodern pastoral theologians and Islamic Studies academics.[70] Any attempt to discard the term "pastoral," I argue, contradicts and denies the prophetic authority, identity, conduct and role of prophethood, and shows unawareness of the theological application, implication and integration of this concept in the Muslim tradition. A good example of this opposing view can be found in the foreword and introduction of *Postcolonial Images of Spiritual Care: Challenges of Care in a Neoliberal Age.* In the foreword, Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im argues for a progressive Sufi Muslim decolonized human "entitlement" approach to spiritual care. He says:

> ...I argue that spiritual care includes the concept of mutuality: spiritual care as reciprocal self-liberation, whereby both sides are at once recipients and providers of care to each other and to wider society for reaffirming the value of spiritual care. I see this as mutual self-liberation because all sides are contributing to their own liberation by providing spiritual care for other persons in exchange for the care they receive.[71]

An-Na'im explains the rational assumptions and source of his epistemology, how his human rights perspective contributes to the "mutuality" or suppos.tious means to spiritual care.[72]The claim is that this conception and practice is devoid of the presumptions of the hierarchical relationship of a "compassionate" care provider to a passive care recipient.[73] The Prefatory Reflection of *Postcolonial*

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70 Dykstra and Doehring both capture and carry on this idea in their works, *Images of Care and Postmodern Pastoral Care, 2005.*

71 Lartey EY, Moon H. *Postcolonial Images of Spiritual Care Challenges of Care in a Neoliberal Age*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020. P. xiii

72 Lartey EY, Moon H. *Postcolonial Images of Spiritual Care Challenges of Care in a Neoliberal Age*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020. P. xiii, An-Na'im underscores the centrality of mutuality in spiritual care in that he sees "spiritual care as self-liberation, whereby both sides are at once recipients and providers of care to each other."

73 Lartey EY, Moon H. *Postcolonial Images of Spiritual Care Challenges of Care in a Neoliberal Age*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020. P. xiii An-Na'im argues for mutuality, reciprocity, and deep listening as a decolonized human rights approach to the practice of

Images immediately after An-Na'im's foreword, written by Omid Safi, argues for the opposite. In fact, Safi, Klein, Legagneur and Ansari in *Postcolonial Images* argue for a compassionate care provider who has some responsibility to assist those in need, Safi summarizes, "Let us remember not to ask anything of someone who is drowning."[74]

The editors of *Postcolonial Images*, Lartey and Moon, have their own response to Robert Dykstra's *Images of Pastoral Care*, a classic Christian pastoral theological book. Lartey and Moon argue for a change in the terms used to refer to the provision of care to make it more inclusive for all cultures, communities and spiritual practices. Therefore, they "give preference to the terminology of spiritual care, over that of "pastoral care."[75] Lartey and Moon in the same way center An-Na'im's human rights approach by which "it embraces the human in human rights."[76]

This substitution of words is intended to create a decolonized spiritual care for mutuality, reciprocity and deep listening. Lartey and Moon's argument against Dykstra's is that the shepherding model of care was a colonial tool of conquest; that the term "pastoral," historically, has been associated with a hierarchical, top-down Linnaean classification of humans over animals framework that leads to environmental and cultural oppression. In sum, Lartey and Moon's postcolonial critique of the provision of care chooses to "rehabilitate" and "problematize" this notion of care. They write:

> The alleged superior mind of the West was rationale for engaging in a civilizing "pastoral" mission to shepherd and guide the allegedly less enlightened (sub-human) peoples. The image of shepherding that is associated with pastoral care, then, is extremely problematic, racist, and colonizing.[77]

Consciously or not, such thinking categorically contradicts and denies the prophets as exemplars of care, failing to apprehend how Muslim caregivers, integrating secular approaches that are rooted in faith, methods, and sources

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spiritual care of self and others. rather than patriarchal and paternalistic pastoral care." This is done without regard for the demonstrated care and consideration of the role of prophets.

74 Lartey EY, Moon H. *Postcolonial Images of Spiritual Care Challenges of Care in a Neoliberal Age*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020. P. xiii

75 Ibid., p. 2

76 Ibid., p. 2

77 Ibid., p. 2

of care embrace both a "decolonized" and prophetically faithful model of care.[78] Lartey and Moon attempt to decolonize spiritual care as defined by a Hegelian understanding of spirit and history. They have good reason to do so, citing Hegel's mistaken understanding:

> Hegel's account of race is embedded in his conception of personhood, where he believed in biological distinctions between persons. He saw the soul as embodying racial distinctions. According to Hegel, Europeans/ White subjects were seen as the very paradigm/model of freedom and rationality because of their biology. He states, "It is in the Caucasian race that spirit first reaches absolute unity with itself,"[79]

Lartey and Moon, of African and Asian descent respectively, take umbrage at how this Hegelian understanding has been constituted as the Western understanding of what "religion" or "spiritual" care is:

> Hegel saw Africans and Asians as inferior – with regard to Mongolians and Chinese (et al.), he critiqued their religious practices as unworthy of free persons because they did not embody a "faith" tradition.[80]

Unfortunately, Lartey and Moon's effort to decolonize history recolonizes Islam, for they write: "Most of the non-white world did not believe in a monotheistic G*d or Savior (until the period of colonizing conquests in the 1500s)." While statistically they may be correct, they ignore the monotheistic Muslim world that thrived in large numbers before Christian Western conquests, a world that extended from Andalusia to Indonesia. Lartey and Moon's human rights decolonizing approach is explicated by Abdullahi An-Naim, a Muslim Sufi human rights law professor who offers a "self-mutuality" theory of care, which he proposes as the tool to liberate spiritual care. Lartey and Moon explain their atheistic project in decolonizing spiritual care:

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78 See case study in B. Ansari, 'Chapter 7, Muslim Pastoral Theology' in Lartey, *Postcolonial Images of Spiritual Care*, p. 92.

79 Lartey EY, Moon H. *Postcolonial Images of Spiritual Care Challenges of Care in a Neoliberal Age*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020. P. 4

80 Lartey EY, Moon H. *Postcolonial Images of Spiritual Care Challenges of Care in a Neoliberal Age*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020.Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020. P.4

"Today, atheists and humanists have to constantly defend their right to
spiritual care (to convince others they have spiritual needs and to argue
that they can be providers of spiritual care as well)."[81]

This is a descriptive judgment based on an alternative to faith and religious
tradition that asserts, 'Humanity ought to have a right to spiritual care that
is really good for all and nothing else.' Lartey and Moon explain why their
postcolonial preference for spiritual care is a good and correct fulfillment of this
human right:

We do not think for a practice to be pastoral and/or spiritual, it must also
be corporate or linked to and rooted in a faith community and its traditions.
We understand that "religious traditions" are socially constructed or
invented European categories, which are constantly changing.[82]

This leads to a prescriptive judgment that involves the categorical contradiction
that asserts the possibility that the Prophet, with or without an excuse, conveyed
lies. This postcolonial view offers an alternative moral philosophy, a belief system,
which subscribes to atheistic judgments and currently in-vogue theories of care
based on subjectivity and relativity. Montaigne's relativistic values of good and
evil are preferred to those of Moses; Hume and Kant's right or wrong is preferred
to Moses and Muhammad's; Mill's utilitarianism of what ought or ought not to
be done, and social constructivism claims that a "'religious tradition" can only be
validated by individuals and consensus- thinking.[83]

Another problem with An-Naim's characterization of the pastoral
model is the assumptions implied in his conception of the caregiver as active,
compassionate, and therefore setting himself up in a hierarchial relationship with
the care recipient he imagines to be "passive." Robert Dykstra's book *Images of
Care* is actually more inclusive in thought despite its white Protestant mooring.
His diversity of images of caregivers includes shepherds, Samaritans, Healers,
Clowns, Strangers, Ascetics, Diagnosticians, Coaches, Storytellers, Midwives,
and Gardeners. Any pastoral theologian knows how central the agency of the
care recipient is seen to be in the clinical pastoral education field. Both Boisen's

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81   Lartey EY, Moon H. *Postcolonial Images of Spiritual Care Challenges of Care in a Neoliberal
     Age*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020. P. 5

82   Lartey EY, Moon H. *Postcolonial Images of Spiritual Care Challenges of Care in a Neoliberal
     Age* Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020. P. 5.

83   Adler, *Ten Philosophical Mistakes*, Locations110-113

Living Human Document and Bonnie McLemore's *Living Human Web* make the care recipient active, central and the lead in the caregiving relationship.

A similar pastoral theology of the care recipient is found in the prophetic model of care. Aisha bint Abu Bakr's classic descriptive model of the Prophet Muhammad as "The Qur'an Walking" has similar pastoral theological parallels to Boisen. The stories of the prophets that describe the care recipients in *al-'Ankabut* (The Spider) also have similar pastoral theological parallels to Bonnie Mclemore's Living Human Web's marginal community focus.

To reiterate and conclude, Muslim pastoral care adheres to the well-trodden path of the final prophet of God, who in revelation is described as a "compassionate" care provider sent by God to all of humanity. The Quran says about the pastoral identity and conduct of Prophet Muhammad: "There has come to you a messenger from among yourselves, concerned over your suffering, anxious over you. Towards the believers, he is compassionate and merciful."[84] In the Quran, God plainly speaks of "shepherding one's trust and covenants" and this theological action of care is well documented as a continuation of the previous revelations.

Thus, I argue that both our revelatory sources, the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad, present a primordial, prophetic and theological call of pastoral concern. Prophets in the Quran – in their identity, integrity and methods of care – share commonalities with Biblical prophetic models. The image of the shepherd's care for the flock is most significant and cannot be denied without rejecting the Revelation itself.[85] I attempt to affirm – and not attribute a lie, wittingly or unwittingly to – the Prophet Muhammad, who said, "God did not send any prophet but (who first formatively) shepherded sheep."[86]

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84 Quran 9:128 (Translated by T. Itani, 'Quran Chapter 9 in English: History,' ClearQuran, <https://www.clearquran.com/009.html>, accessed 14 October 2021).

85 *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ* 3685, Book 18, Hadith 25. (Translated by <Sunnah.com>, 'The Offices of Commander and Qadi: <https://sunnah.com/mishkat:3685>, accessed 21 January 2021). Hadith literature is plentiful with these shepherd and flock narratives warning caretakers about their pastoral responsibilities. For examples, see Sahih Muslim, The Book on Government, Chapter: "The Merits of a Just Ruler and Demerits of a Tyrant Ruler," Sahih Muslim 1818, Book 33, The Book on Government, Hadith: 4493, 4494, 4496, 4500, 4502 and 4504. <https://sunnah.com/muslim/33> (accessed 21 January 2021).

86 Sahih al-Bukhari 37:3 (Translated by Sunnah.com, 'Chapter 2,' <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:2262>, accessed 1 January2021).

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