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IPOP 4

# Classic Issues in Islamic Philosophy and Theology Today



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CLASSIC ISSUES IN ISLAMIC  
PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY TODAY

# Islamic Philosophy and Occidental Phenomenology in Dialogue

## VOLUME 4

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# Classic Issues in Islamic Philosophy and Theology Today

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## PREFACE

With some exceptions, there is not a real interest in Islamic philosophy and theology in Western institutions today. This largely ignored area has the potential to present enlightening insights into the development of the Western thought and to contribute to contemporary discussions in philosophy and theology in general. Scholars working in Islamic thought usually focus on its medieval background and consider it to be mainly of a historical interest and far away from the intellectual world of today. Showing its contemporary relevance is an important task by which the status of Islamic philosophy can be elevated to its proper station.

By considering these points in mind, the University of Kentucky organized an international graduate student conference on Islamic philosophy and theology with an emphasis on its contemporary relevance which was held between the 28th and 30th September 2007. This book emerged out of the conference by adding more chapters relevant to the main theme of the book. This book presents analyses and discussions of different topics in Islamic philosophy and theology by relating them to contemporary debates and ideas in four main areas: epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of religion and value theory. There are ten chapters in sum. Some of the chapters are written by graduate students and some of them by experienced scholars. Each chapter presents considerable insight into its relevant topic but does not represent the opinion of anybody except the author.

I would like to thank the University of Kentucky, especially the Interfaith Dialogue Organization at the University, Oliver Leaman who actually came up with the idea of such an unusual conference and supported it with his all energy, Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka for her diligent efforts in preparing this book and all the participants of the conference together with the additional authors who contributed to this project with their chapters.

Nazif Muhtaroglu

INTRODUCTION: TOWARD THE NEW  
ENLIGHTENMENT

As diverse in nations, languages, and regions of the world as is Islamic culture, its core remains uncontestably theological, metaphysical, and philosophical. These three perspectives have played their role from the early Middle Ages in debates, like those of Avicenna, Ibn Arabi and others, with Christian thinkers – responding to the deepest human concern to understand existence and truth. Following divergent routes of civilization for several centuries, Islamic thinkers have cultivated several specific convictions along these lines, expanding the core insights into the human being, the cosmos, and the All, sustaining the revelation of the Divine. But while this core was always maintained, in subsequent periods the dialogical links with other culture's responses to the common innermost concerns of humanity came to be attenuated or lost altogether.

Furthermore, although the issues and ideas proposed in the great systems of the Islamic historical inheritance remain vivid in historical research, in the last century, as William Chittick deplores, stagnation has occurred in creative Islamic thinking, which he attributes to the contemporary developments in world civilization. After slow but steady development over the last few centuries, scientific and technological discovery has exploded so in its scope and in its effect on our lives that our attention has turned away from the values of personal interiority before existence toward preoccupation with well-being, practical efficiency, and comfort. Human standards are now so permeated by these pragmatic concerns that our appreciations, valuations, and orientations are diminished in their aims in matters concerning personal, communal, and social life. The classic concern to appreciate human existence for its role within the unity-of-everything-there-is-alive and in relation to universal principles and the truth of the All, to thereby give meaning to individual existence and its destiny, has ceded place to the immediate satisfaction of life. The search for truth is overridden by our seeking out means to secure this satisfaction. And yet the great issues that were dealt with in the classic periods of thought – Islamic, Christian, and other – cannot be obliterated from human life. It is of no matter that human capacities have expanded and are constantly growing with progress. The crux of human being remains the same. In the contemporary expansion and enrichment of human knowledge, the nature of our race's very evolving hangs on our addressing the core concerns of old.



Issuing progressively from the Occidental development of pragmatic reason, the empirical reductionistic bent of mind has penetrated all the cultures of the globe. But spiritual longings that characterize the human mind fully considered – as comprising not only the presently favored intellectual rational faculties but also the deep passionate ground of the soul with its imaginative and creative powers – prompt us to take up again the essentially human concern with Truth. Life's place in the cosmos, human ties with the All, and the perduring meaning of existence rise up before us again as the everlasting concerns of humanness.

We may be strongly tempted to take a pessimistic view of the human prospect – and what if we were willy-nilly to let the universal scientific and technological consciousness monopolize thought and define practice in all the dimensions of the human life? But these great issues concerning human existence within its cosmic positioning and its transcendent horizons are being revived across cultural barriers. There is a new wind sweeping through the crevices in the seeming consistency of the pragmatic attempt to deconstruct the core of essential wisdom; new insights surge and new perspectives emerge that take advantage of the evolutive acquisitions of human progress.

We seem, indeed, to be entering into a New Enlightenment in which full-fledged human reason is undertaking a full critique of life's *ontopoiesis* and liberating itself from the chains of pragmatic preconceptions, as the full logos of life, the everlasting Logos, opens the horn of plenty.

The present collection of essays manifests vivid interest in the issues that have animated the minds of great thinkers through the centuries. Our authors focus on the major questions that dominate the discussions of those thinkers, but not out of mere historical interest or to compare ideas and delineate their filiation. Nay, it appears that their probings are motivated by the urgency of present day concerns. They see today's questions as having been fore-traced/formulated in classic Islamic thought – and seek the contemporary relevance of the answers then given. However, in addition to this rekindling of the great Islamic formulations of humanity's innermost insights, spurred by the urgency of the present day existential concerns, these scholars also leave the territory of their tradition to carry on, as did their forebears in the Middle Ages, a reflective encounter with various Christian/Occidental frameworks of thought. Participating in the today's universal intermingling of cultures, our authors converse with Occidental authors in a dialogical spirit of sharing in wisdom and truth.

The spirit awakening in our Islamic research participates in the New Enlightenment that is contributing to a revival of full human existence. We begin with a crucial question of theology, that of the justification of knowledge of the divine,

in a controversy over the parts external cognition and immediate (inner) awareness play, a question so crucial for Islamic as well as Christian theistic belief. Upon that question several of our authors focus (Baldwin, Yazdani). These reflections have the inheritance of Islamic theory at their heart but open a space for dialogue with contemporary Occidental thinkers.

Historic Islamic debates over free will versus the absolute ordination of God, which find resonance in the debates of contemporary Occidental philosophers like Searle and Ryle, are reviewed by Muhtaroglu, who proposes a personal solution in human responsibility. Ground for the reconciliation of revelation and reason, a great and vastly ramified issue for Islam and Christianity, is herein found in a comparison made between Ibn Arabi and Leibniz (Vannatta). Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of the self enlightens the concept of the "privacy" of the self in a discussion by Ahsen. A medieval Islamic debate over the distinction between the "God of the philosophers" and the "God of religion" – one taken up again by the present Roman Catholic pontiff – is illuminated by Wittgenstein's contemporary theory of language (Sidiropoulou). Nursi, a contemporary Turkish theologian, opens a new theological approach to theodicy that is grounded in the Islamic "Divine Names Theology" (Coban), a contemporary reflection on the timeless preoccupation with human suffering and the sources of good and evil.

Oliver Leaman offers us a penetrating perspective on poetry and aesthetics, upholding its cognitive role even though the emotional, uniquely personal import of aesthetics differs from the logical thrust of ideas, which have universal significance in Islamic Falsafa and the Divine message of God to the Prophet about the world and life. Hence we move to a meditation on the experience of catharsis that sees it not as being uniquely proper to art but as founded by moral value and its realization in action (Turker).

Our final essay of the collection is a rethinking of the acutely actual issue of gender and its role in culture at large by Kennedy-Day, who re-examines the feminine role of women in a multi-gendered society.

## SECTION I

AN INTERNALIST MODEL OF IMMEDIATE  
AWARENESS OF GOD FROM AN ISLAMIC  
PHILOSOPHY PERSPECTIVE

**Abstract:** The purpose of this chapter is to argue that we human beings can have immediate and direct awareness of God through knowledge by presence. This sort of immediate and direct knowledge can provide justification for belief in God. I shall show how knowledge by presence works in this regard, and how important the role of knowledge by presence is in a religious epistemology. I shall offer an internalist model of immediate knowledge of God through knowledge by presence from an Islamic philosophy perspective. Then I shall deal with some important criticisms of the possibility of this sort of immediate knowledge of God.

**Key words:** Externalist theories of knowledge, epistemic justification, knowledge by presence, knowledge by representation, internalist model, belief in God, immediate awareness of God, Islamic philosophy

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades externalist theories of knowledge and justification have been developed by Anglo-American philosophers. Some philosophers have offered an externalist approach to immediate natural knowledge of God. What are so significant in a theory of justification, particularly in epistemic justification, are the facts that qualify as justifiers of belief. These facts must exist in such a way that the agents can readily know how to obtain or not to obtain them. The main concern in an externalist theory of justification is that a cognitive agent might not be in a position to know the external facts, whereas internal facts are facts that cognitive agents can know readily. However, the role of external facts is not deniable at any rate. So, they can be the right sort of facts for justification. I shall offer an internalist model of immediate knowledge of God through knowledge by presence from an Islamic philosophy perspective.

## 2. KNOWLEDGE BY PRESENCE AS AN INTERNALIST APPROACH TO TRUTH

Some epistemologists hold that epistemic justification is internal and immediate, and justifier facts must be directly knowable by the cognitive agent. Chisholm, for instance, said:

The concept of epistemic justification is . . . internal and immediate in that one can find out directly, by reflection, what one is justified in believing at any time.<sup>1</sup>

Obviously, the approach to epistemic justification should be based upon something like the directness qualification to be convincing. I will show that this directness qualification could be knowledge by presence. Consequently, the fact that the agent can readily know through knowledge by presence could be counted as a justifiers of belief. This knowledge is a priori and not based on any empirical factors from the external world; we are aware of this sort of knowledge by considering our conscious state of mind. Some Islamic philosophers have attempted to employ knowledge by presence to acquire truth in philosophy, particularly in epistemology. Although, some thinkers before Mulla Sadra<sup>2</sup> utilised this sort of knowledge, Sadra was the first philosopher who tried to establish a philosophical system for this approach to truth. Sadra holds that the most complete knowledge is knowledge by presence. He remarked “. . . knowledge of [the reality] is either by presentational observation (*mushahada huduri*) or by reasoning to it through its effects and implications, but then it is not apprehended except weakly.”<sup>3</sup>

I concur with Sadra that the reality of knowledge is nothing but existence. He says “knowledge is not something negative like abstraction from matter, nor is it a reciprocal relation, rather it is an existential fact . . . it is a pure actual being unmixed with nothingness. Insofar as knowledge is purified from mixing with nothingness, it is all the more knowledge.”<sup>4</sup> So contrary to Avicenna’s theory<sup>5</sup> that knowledge is to be considered as a process of abstraction from the material, Sadra maintains that the acquisition of knowledge would be possible only when an object is present for our mind. The existential relation between objects and the faculty of imagination entails mental forms of objects. Without this presentational relation no knowledge will be acquired. Since knowledge is a presentational fact, the value of any knowledge is based upon knowledge by presence. However, an account of “presentational knowledge” (*al-’ilm al-huduri*) appeared for the first time in the history of the Islamic tradition in Suhrawardi’s illuminative philosophy. Suhrawardi<sup>6</sup> has based the illuminative philosophy upon the dimension of human knowledge that is identical with the very ontological status of being human. Suhrawardi’s main question in this regard was: what is the objective reference of “I” when we

say “I think,” “I have done it,” and the like. Suhrawardi’s doctrine of knowledge by presence is based on the hypothesis of self-awareness. He maintained that the self must be absolutely aware of itself without any representation. That is to say, consciousness is the knowledge of one’s own existence. Everyone knows himself or herself immediately and consciously. Nobody can doubt their own existence; even the materialists do not deny this kind of knowledge, because it is self-evident for everyone. Accordingly, it seems that Descartes’s argument *Cogito ergo sum*, namely, I think thus I exist, is not correct, because one’s own existence is more evident than thinking, thinking is the result of one’s own existence; and we need nothing to know our own existence, because there is a kind of privileged access to our own states of consciousness. As Chisholm contended, self-presenting propositions are directly evident.

If seeming to have a headache is a state of affairs that is self-presenting for S at the present moment, then S does now seem to have a headache and, moreover, it is evident to him that he seems to have a headache.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. KNOWLEDGE BY PRESENCE AND THE SUBJECT–OBJECT RELATION

Since all differences between knowledge by presence and knowledge by representation go back to the subject–object relation, it is time to move on to this issue to examine how this relationship works. The notion of knowledge involves at least two elements: a *subject* capable of knowing, and an *object* that can possibly be known. Cognition is the result of a relation between the subject and object of knowledge. In the tradition of Islamic philosophy, particularly Sadra’s philosophy, knowledge is divided into two kinds: *knowledge by presence* (immediate knowledge), and *knowledge by representation* (mediate knowledge). Knowledge by presence can be attained without any mediation between subject and object, the object is present for the subject immediately. By contrast, knowledge by representation needs mediation to make a connection between subject and object that is called *mental form*.

In other words, knowledge by representation is where the concept and form of the object is present before the subject, like knowledge of external objects, such as tree, sky, car, human etc. Knowledge by presence is where the existential reality of the object is present for the subject, as with knowledge of the self or the mental status of the self. In knowledge by presence the existence of subject and the existence of object are united. In fact there is one thing that is subject and at the same time object, whereas, in knowledge by representation there are three things, subject, object, and mental forms as mediation between the subject and the object. In knowledge by representation, the first

thing which the subject finds is the very concept and mental form. These concepts and mental forms have special characteristics that represent the external objects.

Knowledge by presence has all its relations within the framework of itself, without any external objective reference. The subjective object is united with the objective object. In other words, in the case of knowledge by presence the objective object and the subjective object are one and the same. In contrast, in knowing by correspondence, the subjective object is different from the objective object; there is a correspondence relation between these two objects. Contrary to knowledge by presence, the external object plays a major role in knowing by correspondence. In fact, the subjective object is an essential object, while the objective object is an accidental object. Now to clarify what essential objects and accidental objects are let me explain the components of knowledge in more detail. If we consider the proposition "S knows P," in analyzing the components of knowledge, three components can be understood:

- a. S is the subject who knows P.
- b. P is the object which is known by S.
- c. The act of knowing p has been operated by S.

Sadra remarked:

The forms of things are of two kinds, one is the material form, the existence of which is associated with matter and position and is spatiotemporal. With respect to its material condition placed beyond our mental powers, this kind of form cannot possibly be "actually [and immanently] intelligent," nor for that matter "actually [and immediately] sensible" except by "accident." And the other is a form which is free and separate from matter, from position, and from space and location. The separation is by a complete abstraction, like an "actual intelligible," or by an incomplete abstraction such as an "actual imaginable" and an "actual sensible objects."<sup>8</sup>

According to Sadra's philosophy, an object can be essential only if it is existentially united with, and present in the mind. Therefore, there is a difference between immanent and transitive objects. The relation of these two distinct objects is through correspondence, and not identity. The immanent object is without any sensible or imaginable matter and depends on the degree of our mental power of apprehension. The transitive object is an external, material or immaterial form of the object, which is existentially independent of the state of our mentality. One can only communicate with the transitive object through representations in one's mind. Therefore, since the object is nothing but the immanent and essential, the meaning of the objectivity is the manifestation of the very constitution of knowledge. The transitive object, on the other hand, is constitutive only when the knowledge of the external object is in question. We may call this latter knowledge "knowledge by correspondence."

#### 4. SOME KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF KNOWLEDGE BY PRESENCE

Now I will deal with some characteristics of knowledge by presence. One of the main characteristics of knowledge by presence is its freedom from the dualism of truth and falsehood, because there is no correspondence between the knower and external object. In fact, there is no external object in the case of knowledge by presence. The principle of correspondence that has been widely accepted as the criterion for truth can be applied only in the case of knowledge by correspondence. The dualism of truth and falsehood requires the correspondence relation between the subjective-essential object and the objective accidental object, whereas there is no application for such a dualism in knowledge by presence, thus there is no mediation in this sort of knowledge.

But in the case of knowledge by correspondence, as mentioned earlier, there is a twofold sense of objectivity; one is a subjective object, and the other is an objective object. In this sort of knowledge the subjective object represents, by means of conceptualizing, the reality of the external object. Since the correspondence relation is accidental, our knowledge may or may not correspond with external reality, according to the logical dualism of truth and falsity. If our subjective object truly corresponds to the objective object, our knowledge of the external world holds true and is valid, but if the condition of correspondence has not been obtained, the truth of our knowledge will never come about. Therefore, knowledge by presence is incorrigible, whereas knowledge by representation is corrigible. That is to say, one of the divisions which has been widely accepted by the Islamic epistemologists is the distinction between “subject” and “object,” the knower and the thing which is known. Again one of the logical consequences of this distinction was the distinction between “subjective object” – mental object – and “objective object” – external object. The term “subject” refers to the mind that performs the act of knowledge and the term “object” refers to the thing or the proposition that is known by that subject. The term object has two different senses, one is immediate and dependent on the existence of the knower; and the other is mediate and independent of the existence of the knower.

Another characteristic of knowledge by presence is that this knowledge is not subject to the distinction between knowledge by conception and knowledge by affirmation. Avicenna has made this distinction in his *Kitab al-Najat*:

Every piece of knowledge and apprehension is either by conception (*tasawwur*) or affirmation (*tasdiq*). Knowledge by “conception” is the primary knowledge which can be attained by definition or whatever functions as definition. This is as if by definition we understand the essence of human beings. Knowledge by “affirmation” on the other hand is that which can be acquired by way of “inference.” This is as if we believe the proposition that “for the whole world there is a beginning.”<sup>9</sup>



If one say knowledge by presence can be expressed in the form of propositional knowledge, as I am aware of myself (knowledge by presence). I can form the concept of my ego, "I" (conceptual knowledge) and express it by saying that I exist (propositional knowledge) I would say that to say that knowledge by presence can be expressed by propositional knowledge is not to say that it is subject to distinction between knowledge by conception and knowledge by affirmation, because conception and affirmation are two characteristics of conceptualism which belong to meaning and representation. But the alleged reality of knowledge by presence does not involve any sense of conceptualism and representation.

Knowing by presence is personal, but this is not to say that it is private, for all humans are able to have such knowledge although in a great diversity of levels. Knowing by presence is non-transferable. This is to say that I cannot have your awareness and you cannot have mine. However, we may have similar awareness which we can describe to one another. Knowing by presence admits of degrees and development. This is illustrated in that it makes sense to speak of knowing something or someone better. Many people may have a minimal knowledge of metaphysical objects presentationally, but the maximum level of this sort of knowledge can be acquired by those who have special insight and practice. The Mystics have maximal knowledge of God by presence, for instance; they might see God's hand in their lives, and might see God's presence everywhere in the universe.

In knowledge by representation, the reality of knowledge is different from the reality of object; when we have knowledge of a certain building, for instance, the reality of knowledge is the mental form of that building, while the reality of object is the reality which exists in the external world independently from our existence. But in knowledge by presence, the reality of object is the same as the reality of knowledge; the existence of the object is the same as the existence of knowledge.

##### 5. KNOWLEDGE BY PRESENCE AS THE ORIGIN OF ALL KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge by presence is the origin of all knowledge. That is to say, there is a faculty in human beings whose function is to take a picture of external objects. All of our mental forms which are recorded in our memory have been taken by this faculty so that we may call it the faculty of imagination. Since this faculty has no independent existence, and is a part of the human soul, it can make a link to the external object and take a picture providing that the human soul

makes an existential relation with that external object. Accordingly, the chief condition to create the mental form is its presentational relation to the reality of the soul. This presentational link causes the soul to know the reality through knowledge by presence. In fact, the faculty of imagination converts the knowledge by presence to knowledge by representation. In other words, when the soul finds the object presently, the faculty of imagination creates a mental form of it (knowledge by presence) and transfers it to the memory. Therefore, the origin of all knowledge is knowledge by presence. Moreover, our knowledge of mental forms is knowledge by presence, not knowledge by representation. There is no mediation between subject and mental form; otherwise there would be a fallacious regress. That is to say, if our knowledge of mental form needs another mental form, and the second mental form needs another one, then the third mental form needs another one, *ad infinitum*. As a result, we could not reach any knowledge.

### 5.1. *The Truth of Knowledge by Presence Through Illuminative Relation (al-idafat al-ishraqiyya)*

As mentioned earlier, knowledge by presence is based on the hypothesis of self-awareness. In fact, one of the best arguments to show the truth of knowledge by presence is through self-awareness. If we consider the awareness of the self, we would know that we have immediate knowledge by means of the awareness of the self. When I consider myself, I will find that I am truly aware of myself in such a way that I can never miss myself. This state of self-certainty indicates that it is the very performance of “I” as the subject in the reality of myself who knows myself. If the subject “I” is known to itself, and it is the knowing subject who knows itself immediately, then the knowing subject knows itself by presence. This point entails that knowledge by presence has creative priority over knowledge by correspondence.

Descartes also remarks that “*cogito ergo sum*” (I think therefore I am) in rejecting scepticism, he said, “I am really doubting; whatever else may be doubtful, the fact that I doubt is indubitable.”<sup>10</sup> By this Descartes means that the existence of the self is knowledge by presence. Before Descartes, Sadra was aware of this issue; he held that the awareness of the existence of the self is prior to the existence of any phenomenal state of mind; in his *al-Hikmat al-Muta‘aliyya* he said:

No particular sense-perception or phenomenal state of mind, even though in the form “I” can ever bear witness to the truth value of the existence of myself. This is because any phenomenal event which I attribute to myself, such as my feeling cold, warmth, or pain etc., must be, and is presupposed by an underlying awareness of myself, with this underlying awareness alone can I appropriate cold, warmth, pain, pleasure, etc. to myself. If I suffer from severe cold weather, or

escape from the flame of a burning fire, it is only because I already am aware of something which, in one way or another, belongs to myself.<sup>11</sup>

As we may understand from Sadra's view here, we can argue for personal identity through knowledge by presence. Accordingly, to know the existence of the self we need no representation of the self such as doubt, feeling, or knowledge of others; rather we are aware of the existence of the self immediately through knowledge by presence without any mediation. Sadra also argues:

Were it the case that I, through my own action, whether it is intellectual or physical, could become aware of myself, it would be as if I should bring forth from myself evidence to bear witness to myself. It would obviously be a vicious circle in which the knowledge of my action functions as a cause of my knowledge of myself which is itself already implied in, and serves as the cause of the knowledge of my own action.<sup>12</sup>

### *5.2. The Truth of Knowledge by Presence Through Empirical Awareness and Empirical Sensations*

Another argument to show the truth of knowledge by presence is empirical awareness. Awareness of one's sensation and feelings is an example of one's empirical awareness. One knows by presence that he is in pain. This awareness gives one a high degree of sense-certainty; when I am aware that I am in pain there is no way to doubt this awareness. This knowledge is free from the dualism of truth and falsehood, as Russell remarked in his theory of knowledge by acquaintance:

Thus in the presence of my table I am acquainted with the sense-data that make up the appearance of my table, its colour, shape, hardness, smoothness, etc., all these are things of which I am immediately conscious when I am seeing and touching my table . . .<sup>13</sup>

Suhrawardi argued for knowledge by presence through an empirical illustration and contended that "we do have some kinds of apprehension which need not take any form of representation." He says:

One of the things that supports our opinion that we do have some kind of apprehension (*idrakat*) which need not take a form of representation (*sura*) other than the presence of the reality (*dhat*) of the thing apprehended (*mudrak*), is when a man is in pain from a cut or from damage to one of his organs. He then has a feeling of this damage. But this feeling or apprehension is never in such a way that that damage leaves in the same organ of the body or in another a form of representation of itself besides the reality of itself. Rather, the thing apprehended is but that damage itself.<sup>14</sup>

Suhrawardi holds that the pain is absolutely present in the mind or in some of the mental powers without any representation or sense-data. Of course, I can see and touch my broken leg, for instance, and get acquainted with the sense-data but this sort of acquaintance is different from the knowledge I have already

had with my pain itself. Therefore, according to Suhrawardi's approach, we do have some kind of apprehension or knowledge that is not attained by any representation or sense-data, rather it is through presence.

Consequently, as I have argued we have some kind of knowledge that is immediate and direct with a high degree of justification and a high degree of incorrigibility. This sort of knowledge, that is knowledge by presence, is the most complete knowledge and the origin of all knowledge. This knowledge is *a priori* and not based on any empirical factors from the external world; we are aware of this sort of knowledge by considering our conscious states of mind.

#### 6. IMMEDIATE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD BY PRESENCE

The God whom I mean here is the God of the main world religions, that is a person with necessary being, who is immaterial and eternal, is omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good, and the creator of the universe. We human beings can have innate and immediate knowledge of God. This immediate knowledge and our awareness of such immediate knowledge is through knowledge by presence which is infallible. As we have knowledge of the self, of our conscious states, and of our actions presently and consciously and there is no room to doubt, we can also have knowledge of the Transcendent Being, that is, God presently and consciously; this knowledge is incorrigible and certain. In responding to the question of "can belief in God be self-evident?" we may argue that belief in God is self-evident, even with respect to the classical foundationalist criterion we may take belief in God as self-evident.

As mentioned earlier, one of the best arguments to show the truth of knowledge by presence is the argument through self-awareness and conscious states of mind. This conscious awareness is the origin of conscious propositions that are self-evident propositions, like "I exist," "I feel pain in my hand," "I am aware of God." These propositions originate from knowledge by presence. Accordingly, knowledge of God by presence in the form of "I am aware of God," or "I perceive God" is self-evident. We need no further evidence and argument for its truth. Since this belief originates from a conscious proposition that is one of the self-evident propositions, it would be contended that belief in God is based upon a self-evident and basic belief, and self-evident belief is itself evidence, the most confident and most certain to show the truth of the belief. Therefore, we have immediate knowledge of God's presence; however, this knowledge does not include the character of God's existence or God's essence. Since this knowledge is accessible to human nature, the belief in God based on such presentational knowledge in appropriate circumstances would be justified. In fact, our presentational knowledge of God is immediate

and direct, and this immediacy can provide justification for belief in God. The object in this direct presentation is immediately present to the subject and even more direct than directly seeing or hearing external objects. Alston remarked in his *Perceiving God*: “our own states of consciousness are given to us with maximum immediacy, not given to us through anything.”<sup>15</sup> One can reach the high levels of knowledge of God by presence by purifying his or her soul and avoiding sins. An appropriate environment, practical commitment and spiritual practice could help one to reach the target properly, as religious experiences can help believers to have better spiritual life with better purified insight. At the highest level of this knowledge, one feels that there is no distinction between subject and object in immediate and direct awareness of God. Indeed, there is no duality in immediate awareness at all, as William James quoted from *Gulshan-Raz*:

Even man whose heart is no longer shaken by any doubt, knows with certainty that there is no being save only One . . . in his divine majesty the *me*, and *we*, the *thou*, are not found, for in the one there can be no distinction. Every being who is annulled and entirely separated from himself, hears resound outside of him this voice and this echo: *I am God*. He has an eternal way of existing, and is no longer subject to death.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, this level is the highest level of knowledge of God by presence, and that is worth researching, but I have no place to discuss it here. So an immediate knowledge of God can be grounded in the direct non-sensory perceptual awareness of God, that is, knowledge by presence. This immediate knowledge is not only basic, because it does not come from other beliefs or sources, but it is also properly basic, because it is acquired in a basic way, and it is accessible to human nature. Thus, if *S* believes *P* based on his innate tendencies and he is aware of these tendencies through knowledge by presence and his natural cognitive system is functioning properly, consequently, his belief is rationally justified. However, one might be ignorant of this presentational knowledge due to inappropriate circumstances or inappropriate mental states. Therefore, if there are some people in some societies either in the past or present that do not have such presentational knowledge of God, then this is due to obstacles and inappropriate circumstances. In other words, the innateness of such presentational knowledge does not necessitate that everybody has this knowledge actually when he is born; rather it means that human beings have this knowledge potentially and are able to actuate it in appropriate circumstances.

One may object: how do you know the universality of this immediate knowledge? If all human beings have the knowledge of God by presence naturally why do many people doubt such knowledge? I would say that the contention is not that all human beings have this knowledge actually, however, they have this knowledge potentially; the contention is the possibility of actual knowledge of God by presence. Those people whose innate knowledge has not been

actualised may deny presentational knowledge of God. So, we do not need to argue for universality of this knowledge, as non-universality of this knowledge does not affect negatively the possibility of this kind of knowledge.

This model of immediacy is capable of being presented to any community and culture; it is not restricted to a certain religious community, because the basis of the model is the epistemic analysis of presentational knowledge of human nature. Accordingly, belief in God is properly basic and could be rationally justified without any philosophical argumentation; however, the argument and evidence is useful in some circumstances to convince others or to respond to the objections. It has to be noted that belief in God should not be based upon the philosophical argumentation, because philosophical arguments are subject to flaw, objection and corrigibility, whereas faith ought not to be based upon fallible foundations.

#### 7. CRITICISMS OF THE POSSIBILITY OF IMMEDIATE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

There might be a number of objections to the possibility of immediate knowledge of God, most of them based on the supposition that knowledge is always represented; knowledge by presence differs from representation. It should be noted that although there are good rejoinders for the criticisms of immediate knowledge of God by presence, I do not contend that there is no outstanding sceptical criticism of this model of immediate knowledge, or there are public philosophical arguments for the model to convince any philosophers, atheist or theist with any attitude. However, my contention is that this model is one of the best explanations of how an immediate knowledge of God can be justified epistemically. This model seems more effective epistemically with fewer problems than other accounts for the rationality of belief in God.

One may ask: what is the reason that one does really have presentational knowledge of God. The view of the possibility of immediate knowledge of God depends on what we mean by reason. Reason is not restricted to metaphysical and propositional arguments for the existence and nature of God. As we do not seek metaphysical and propositional argument for sense perception to be justified, we do not seek metaphysical arguments for presentational knowledge of God to be justified. As we have immediate knowledge of an external physical object, we have immediate knowledge of God's presence. Immediacy of this knowledge is self-justifying, and so it is basic; no further evidence and argument is needed.

One may say that there are many people who fail to have presentational knowledge of God. In other words, this fact that only some have such knowledge suggests that awareness of God is very different from other sorts of

knowledge. This difference indicates that there is no stable innate knowledge of God for human beings. We may say that differences in the ability of perceiving God does not require differences in human nature. Differences in religious awareness are thereby cast in terms of differences in the development of certain skills or of practices as they depend upon environments and obstacles.

#### 8. IS PRESENTATIONAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD SUBJECTIVE?

In responding to the question, one may say that in order for knowledge of God to qualify as objective, it is necessary that it admits of the veridical-unveridical distinction. Since in this sort of knowledge of God the object is supernatural, there is no way to determine who will have such a knowledge and under what conditions. So immediate knowledge of God is not even a candidate for being a source of justification for beliefs about any objective reality, because there is no physical body for God so that we can identify Him.

One of the differences between knowledge of physical objects and knowledge of God that shows the disanalogy between these two sorts of knowledge is that in sense perception we encounter physical objects, whereas when the religious believer claims he knows God by presence, it does not mean he has encountered God's body, because God does not have a body. So because of this difference some conclude that immediate knowledge of physical objects is contrasted with knowledge of God. We can use Alston's view here that "the identification of objects of sense perception does not typically involve the sensory presentation of features that uniquely identify the object. Instead we use background knowledge (belief) to connect what is presented with what we take the object to be . . . I suggest that we use analogous background knowledge (belief) to identify God on the basis of relatively sketchy experiential presentations."<sup>17</sup> However, we may say that the criterion of knowledge by presence is not having a physical body, rather it is the presence of the object for the subject immediately, and this is the same in both cases.

This sort of knowledge is subjective, because in order to have immediate knowledge of God it is necessary and sufficient to have a state of consciousness presenting itself to the subject. The view that for knowledge to be truly knowledge it must be objective is not correct. There are many epistemological problems with objectivity in knowledge, but I have no place here to discuss them. However, the discussion of justification of belief in God as a religious belief is concerned with the existence of subjects, not objects, and what it is to be a subject can be studied subjectively, not objectively. It is true that the religious environment is an objective phenomenon, and it is an objective aspect of human life, but what we consider as religious beliefs are interpretations of this

objective aspect of human life. These interpretations of religious phenomena are subjective. In other words, our sources to understand and interpret religion are human subjective factors. Even in an external objective analysis we need subjective factors. We come to understand religious beliefs only when we experience them in our own subjectivity as states of our subjectivity. In this approach, we may perceive God through the content of certain conscious states rather than from the activity of God in the human and non-human environment in which we live. It seems to me that the evidence for the rationality of belief in God should be convincing evidence subjectively, even if it might be inadequate evidence objectively. It has to be mentioned that an epistemologist can only talk about the subjective evidence with which one reaches truths, whether it fits with the objective truth or not, as Kant distinguished between grounds for belief as subjective evidence and objective evidence. From Kant's point of view, knowledge is a cognitive attitude that is both subjectively and objectively certain: the knower knows that the grounds of his knowledge are adequate. But belief or faith is based on grounds that are subjectively convincing.<sup>18</sup>

One may object that the subjectivity of religious beliefs requires merely the private confession of the feeling, attitudes, and ideas without having universal validity. In other words, the inner states of consciousness have no general validity; they are not subject to evaluation. So, there is no possibility of understanding the data of private subjectivity. In responding to this objection, we may say that an epistemological analysis of the nature and structure of human subjectivity can provide such an evaluation. Islamic philosophers like Sadra attempted to show such a general mechanism of consciousness in human nature through the analysis of knowledge by presence which I dealt with in this chapter. The minimum level of this consciousness is obtainable for everybody through self-knowledge which has self-justification. As I mentioned earlier, although this approach is personal, it is not private, for all humans are able to have such knowledge, however, in a great variety of levels.

One may say that knowledge by presence cannot be counted as reliable evidence, for it is best regarded as feelings or sensations that do not allow one to draw any such substantial conclusion. If we might reach a conclusion about the sensations it is because we have a secure, justified view about how our sensations, for instance, are shaped by external objects. We have no such reliable referential content for presentational knowledge. It will be answered that the awareness of God's presence is itself a reliable reference, as our awareness of self is a reliable reference. We take such awareness seriously as part of our cognitive faculties until we have good reason against it, as Swinburne remarked: "It is a principle of rationality that (in the absence of special considerations) if it seems (epistemically) to a subject that *x* is present, then probably *x* is present; what one seems to perceive is probably so."<sup>19</sup>



One may say that there are still some differences between knowledge of God and knowledge of physical objects in ways that make different standards appropriate. Sense experience is universally shared and yields richly detailed results. Immediate knowledge of God, by contrast, is not universally shared: the output of this knowledge is even relative for its devotees. In responding to this objection we may say that undoubtedly there are some important differences between knowledge of God and knowledge of physical objects, but these differences do not require the invalidation of presentational knowledge of God, because there is no reason that “a cognitive access enjoyed only by a part of the population is less likely to be reliable than one that is universally distributed.”<sup>20</sup> Why should we suppose that a source that yields less detailed and less fully understood beliefs is more suspect than a richer source? Moreover, as mentioned, this sort of knowledge is not private, because the minimal level is accessible for all human beings.

## 9. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the internalist model of immediate knowledge of God through knowledge by presence can justify the rationality of belief in God. This immediate knowledge of God is not only basic, because it does not come from other beliefs or sources, but it is also properly basic, because it is acquired in a basic way, and it is accessible to human nature. Thus, if *S* believes *P* based on his innate tendencies and he is aware of these tendencies through knowledge by presence and his natural cognitive system is functioning properly, consequently, his belief is rationally justified. The internalist model of immediacy is capable of being presented to any community and culture; it is not restricted to a certain religious community, because the basis of the model is the epistemic analysis of presentational knowledge of human nature. As we have seen, most of the objections to the immediate knowledge of God are based on the supposition that knowledge is represented; knowledge by presence differs from representation. In spite of the criticisms of the internal model of immediate knowledge, this model is one of the best explanations of the possibility of immediate knowledge of God, and seems more effective epistemically.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> M. Chisholm, *On Metaphysics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Mulla Sadra (Sadr al-Din Muhammad al-Shirazi 1571/2-1640) is perhaps the single most important and influential Iranian philosopher in the Muslim world in the last four hundred years (Sadr al-Din Muhammad al-Shirazi, 1571/2-1640).

- <sup>3</sup> Sadr al-Din Shirazi (Mulla Sadra). *Al-Hikmat al-Muta'aliyyah fi-al-Asfar al-Aqliyyah al-Arbaah* (Beirut: Dar ihya al-Arabi, 1981), vol. 3, p. 297.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid., vol. 3, p. 297.
- <sup>5</sup> See: Avicenna, *Kitab al- Shifa*, ed. G. C. Anawati (Cairo, 1960a), pp. 264–267 (Avicenna, 980–1037).
- <sup>6</sup> (Shihab al-Din Yahya al-Suhrawardi, 1154–1191).
- <sup>7</sup> M. Chisholm, *Theory of knowledge*, 2nd edition (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1977), p. 23.
- <sup>8</sup> Sadr al-Din Shirazi, *Al- Hikmat al-Muta'aliyyah*, Journey 1, vol. 3, Chapter 7, p. 313.
- <sup>9</sup> Avicenna, *Kitab al-Najat*, Logic, Chapter 2 (Cairo, 1938).
- <sup>10</sup> B. Russell, *An Outline of Philosophy*, Chapter 16, (London, 1976), p. 170.
- <sup>11</sup> Sadr al-Din Shirazi, *Al-Hikmat al-Muta'aliyyah . . .*, Journey I, vol. 3, p. 3.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., “The Problem of Knowledge”, Journey I, Part 3.
- <sup>13</sup> B. Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 46–47.
- <sup>14</sup> Suhrawardi, *Kitab al-mashari wal mutarihat*, p. 485.
- <sup>15</sup> W. P. Alston, *Perceiving God* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 21.
- <sup>16</sup> M. Shabestari, *Gulshan-Raz*, quoted in James, W. *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Modern Library, 1902), p. 411.
- <sup>17</sup> “Alston’s reply to Gale,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 1994, vol. LIV, no. 4, p. 892.
- <sup>18</sup> Kant, *Critique of pure Reason*, tr. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965), pp. 645–652.
- <sup>19</sup> R. Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 254.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 659.

ON THE PROSPECTS OF AN ISLAMIC EXTERNALIST  
ACCOUNT OF WARRANT

**Abstract:** Alvin Plantinga's externalist religious epistemology, which incorporates a proper function account of warrant, forms the basis for his standard and extended Aquinas/Calvin models. Respectively, these models show how it could be that Theistic Belief and Christian Belief could be warranted for believers in a properly basic manner. Christianity and Islam share fundamental theses that underlie the plausibility of Plantinga's models: the Dependency Thesis, the Design Thesis, and the Immediacy Thesis. Accordingly, an Islamic worldview can endorse the truth of the standard A/C model but recommend a uniquely Islamic extension. Thus, there are multiple viable extensions of the standard A/C model. *That* there are Multiple Viable Extensions of the standard A/C model grounds the Multiple Viable Extensions Objection (MVE): given the truth of the standard A/C model, it is more likely than not that a given extension of it is probably incorrect, thus those who accept some extension of the standard A/C model have a reason to think that model they affirm is incorrect. After considering the plausibility of second-order knowledge states and responding to objections, I conclude that because a uniquely Islamic extension of the standard A/C model advocates a limited second-order awareness condition on knowledge, it is plausible to think that an Islamic model of warrant (and its corresponding Islamic extension) suggests ways in which a satisfactory response to the MVE objection might be formulated.

**Key words:** Basic Belief: immediate belief, internalism, externalism, Rationality: internal, external, evidentialism, object-level knowledge, object-level awareness, testimony, second-order awareness, Second-Order Knowledge: meta-level knowledge knowing that one knows, true and genuine knowledge, warrant, proper functionalism, (second-order) awareness requirement on knowledge, limited awareness requirement, Aquinas/Calvin model (A/C model): standard and extended, Islamic model of warrant, Theistic Belief, Islamic Belief, Christian Belief, *Sensus Divinitatus*, design plan, The Dependency Thesis, The Design

Thesis, The Immediacy Thesis, doubt, reason, testimonial knowledge,  
multiple viable extensions objection (and defeater)

Alvin Plantinga argues that if God made our cognitive faculties such that they function properly in accordance with a design plan successfully aimed at truth, then belief in theism, and even the core elements of the Christian faith, could have warrant (that property of a belief enough of which, together with truth, is sufficient for knowledge) in an epistemically basic manner – i.e., non-inferentially, immediately, and not on the basis of evidence or argument.<sup>1</sup> As such, Plantinga is an externalist about warrant; he affirms that one need not be aware of *what* makes one's beliefs warranted in order for them to *be* warranted. In contrast, internalists affirm that in order for one's beliefs to be warranted, at least some of them must be internally accessible (at least in principle).<sup>2</sup> Whether to accept internalism or externalism about warrant (or justification or knowledge) is controversial, but it is not my purpose to engage in that debate here.<sup>3</sup> Rather, I contend that Plantinga's externalist epistemology is equally "at home" within the worldview of Islam as it is within the Christian one.<sup>4</sup>

Among other things, according to a uniquely Islamic externalist epistemology, if one's cognitive faculties are functioning properly, then one ought to come to accept the Islamic understanding of God in an epistemically basic way. Yet, historically, Islamic scholars and philosophers apparently advocate (at least implicitly) internalist and evidentialist theories of knowledge. That this is so seems to undermine the notion that it is possible to formulate an Islamic *and* externalist theory of knowledge. However, as I will show, the characteristically internalist aspects of traditional Islamic theories of knowledge can be coherently and plausibly incorporated into the framework of an externalist theory of warrant.

Somewhat ironically, however, to successfully articulate an externalist, Islamic theory of warrant supports a strong objection to the plausibility of Plantinga's religious epistemology in general. In a previously published article, I argued that because Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism antecedently accept its core elements, there are multiple ways of extending Plantinga's standard Aquinas/Calvin model (or A/C model for short).<sup>5</sup> It is worthwhile to briefly summarize my argument before continuing. First, note that Plantinga writes that, "To give a model of a proposition or state of affairs S is to show *how it could be* that S is true or actual. The model itself will be another proposition or state of affairs, one such that it is clear (1) that it is not merely logically true but epistemically possible and (2) that if it is true, then so is the target proposition."<sup>6</sup> According to the standard A/C model, God designed our cognitive faculties such that when they function properly, we naturally and

spontaneously come to believe its target propositions in appropriate circumstances. But God would want us to have access to more detailed and specific revelation of himself and his purposes as well. Accordingly, Plantinga extends the standard A/C model to cover uniquely Christian beliefs about God. But the standard A/C model may be extended to cover non-Christian beliefs about God, too. Given that each extension of the standard A/C model makes exclusive claims about the nature and purposes of God, at most only one extension could be fully correct. Thus, one who affirms some extension of the standard A/C model is more likely than not to affirm an incorrect extension. (Specifically, the probability that a given extension is true is  $1/x$  where  $x$  equals the number of viable extensions of the Standard A/C model.) Consequently, odds are that it is more likely than not that one's specific beliefs about God – the very beliefs that are supposed to be warranted given the extension of the A/C model that one accepts – are not produced in the way that one supposed and thus lack warrant.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, Plantingans who are aware of the fact that there are multiple viable extensions of the standard A/C model must have some reason or evidence for thinking that the extension of the standard A/C model he or she affirms is correct. At the very least, one must have a non-question begging reason for thinking that the other extensions are probably incorrect. But, clearly, if one relies on reasons or evidences at this juncture, although one's beliefs about God might be warranted they, would not be properly basic.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, I concluded, Plantinga's A/C models (at least his formulation of them) do not provide a fully satisfactory account of how belief in God could also be basic and warranted.<sup>9</sup>

In this chapter, I call the above argument the Multiple Viable Extensions Argument (or MVE). I now maintain that awareness of the MVE defeater *defeats* the warrant that one's extension-specific beliefs about God might otherwise have. And so the MVE argument generates what I call the MVE defeater.

Interestingly, the Islamic extension of the standard A/C model I will articulate suggests a promising response to the MVE defeater. Briefly, an Islamic extension of the standard A/C model maintains that God created humans such that they are able to have second-order awareness that their first-order beliefs about God are true. In effect, the suggestion is that to have appropriate second-order awareness of one's first-order mental states is to have (or have access to) sufficient reasons for thinking that the target propositions of the Islamic extension of the standard A/C model are true. Before pressing on, it is crucial to make a few initial clarifying points about this proposal.

First, note that a second-order awareness requirement on knowledge is not necessarily inconsistent with Plantinga's proposed necessary conditions on warrant. That is, to posit an additional necessary condition on warrant does

not rule out the other necessary conditions that Plantinga proposes. Second, according to the Islamic extension of the standard A/C model, God created humans with cognitive faculties the proper function of which is to make it possible for us to know *that* we know God. I will at times refer to this second-order knowledge as “true and genuine” knowledge. Not just any second-order knowledge rightly counts as true and genuine, however. For example, the iteration of conditional knowledge statements doesn’t provide for a deeper knowledge of *p*, but rather amounts to trivial knowledge of hypothetical and logical entailments.<sup>10</sup> Rather, true and genuine second-order knowledge involves a qualitatively rich awareness of the reality of the truth of the proposition that is not possible at the first-order level of knowing. It provides one with better and more epistemically secure reasons or epistemic grounds for thinking that one’s beliefs at the first-order level of knowing really do count as genuine instances of knowledge.

An illustration is in order. The difference between first-order, object-level knowledge and nontrivial, second-order knowledge is analogous to the difference between (a) knowing non-reflectively and without consciously attending to the fact that a distant object in your visual field is probably a Fuji apple and (b) knowing that an object at hand is a Fuji apple because you are an expert Fuji apple inspector who is focusing intently on the fact that you are now eating one for lunch. While proper function is essential in both cases, in the second case, the grounds for believing the object in question to be a Fuji apple are stronger, more secure, and less susceptible to doubt. Other things being equal, it would be better to be in the second epistemic situation than in the first. Essentially, I will argue that Islam maintains that God saw fit to create humans in accord with a design plan that enables us to acquire a deep, reflective mode of knowledge of God.

I can now concisely state the goals of this paper. My first aim is to explain the core elements of Plantinga’s externalist religious epistemology, in particular, his standard and extended A/C models. I then articulate the version of Islamic externalism I have in mind and to show how it qualifies as a viable extension of the standard A/C model. Third, I consider the prospects of this version of Islamic externalism, focusing on how it suggests a successful response to the MVE defeater, and offer my overall conclusions.

# 1. PLANTINGA’S EXTERNALIST ACCOUNT OF WARRANT

According to Plantinga, a belief is warranted if and only if it is internally and externally rational. Internal rationality involves making inferences, deductions, and connections between the many and varied beliefs that one holds,

seeking evidence of truth when appropriate, being open to and responding to the criticism of others, as well as a willingness to be corrected when wrong. In short, we may say that internal rationality involves believing that which is plausible or appropriate to believe given one's epistemic point of view. External rationality consists in forming or holding those beliefs that one ought to form (normatively) in virtue of one's cognitive faculties functioning properly in an epistemic environment sufficiently similar to the one for which they were designed (by evolution and/or God) to operate.<sup>11</sup> More precisely, Plantinga maintains that a belief B is warranted for some epistemic agent S if and only if:

- (1) The cognitive faculties involved in the production of S's belief B are functioning properly,
- (2) S's cognitive environment is sufficiently similar to the one for which S's cognitive faculties were designed,
- (3) The purpose of S's design plan governing the production of B is the production of true beliefs,<sup>12</sup>
- (4) S's design plan is a good one in that there is a high statistical or objective probability that a belief produced in accordance with the relevant segment of the design plan in that sort of environment is true.<sup>13</sup>

I refer to (1)–(4) as “proper functionalism.”<sup>14</sup>

In *Warranted Christian Belief* (WCB), Plantinga builds on proper functionalism by introducing the standard and extended Aquinas/Calvin models.<sup>15</sup> Plantinga contends that the standard A/C model shows how it could be that Theistic Belief (or TB) could be warranted in an epistemically basic manner for theists. The content of TB is that God is an intellectual, affective, and intentional agent, a person who is all-loving, perfectly good, all-knowing, and all-powerful.<sup>16</sup> The extended A/C model shows how it could be that Christian Belief (or CB) could be warranted in an epistemically basic way for Christians. The content of CB includes the central teachings of Christianity as expressed in the intersection of the Christian creeds, including the view that humans are sinners and that God graciously provides forgiveness of sins through Jesus's atoning work on the cross.<sup>17</sup>

According to Plantinga, knowledge of God is “natural” in that humans are able to know God (and know things about God) by means of a sort of cognitive belief forming faculty or process that begins with a sort of perception or experience and culminates in the formation of an appropriate doxastic response rooted or grounded in that perception or experience. On this view belief in God is produced immediately and non-inferentially (similar to the way in which visual or auditory perceptions furnish us with properly basic beliefs about our environment). In these matters, Plantinga follows John Calvin, who writes,

“There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of deity” and “Men of sound judgment will always be sure that a sense of divinity (*sensus divinitatus*) which can never be effaced is engraved upon men’s minds.”<sup>18</sup> Plantinga defines the *sensus divinitatus* (or SD) as, “. . . a disposition or set of dispositions to form theistic beliefs in various circumstances, in response to the sorts of conditions or stimuli that trigger the working of this sense of divinity.”<sup>19</sup>

While Plantinga’s view is naturalized or naturalistic, clearly, it does not require or presuppose metaphysical naturalism. And so Plantinga’s externalism is to be contrasted with versions of externalism offered by the likes of D. M. Armstrong and Alvin Goldman. Consider Armstrong’s characterization of externalism:

According to “Externalist” accounts of non-inferential knowledge, what makes a true non-inferential belief a case of knowledge is some natural relation between the belief-state . . . and the situation which makes the belief true. It is a matter of a certain relation holding between the believer and the world.<sup>20</sup>

While Plantinga thinks there is a “natural relation” here, he does not think that it obtains independently of the existence and activity of God. Rather, he affirms that God created us such that when our cognitive faculties are stimulated by specific perceptual inputs, we naturally form an appropriate belief response. Moreover, God determines the underlying forces and natural laws that make it possible for the relation between our cognitive input processes and their corresponding doxastic outputs to obtain. Consequently, Plantinga’s proper functionalism is consistent with the Islamic view (classically expressed by al-Ghazali in *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, 17th discussion) that God maintains the relation between cognitive inputs and belief outputs. Let us now consider in more detail how humans come to have knowledge of God according to Plantinga’s extended A/C model.<sup>21</sup>

According to the extended A/C model, Christian Belief is produced by means of a three-tiered cognitive process: the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit (or the IIHS), scripture, and faith. The IIHS is a belief forming process the purpose of which is to produce specifically Christian beliefs about the nature of God, salvation, forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and the like.<sup>22</sup> Scripture is verbal or written testimony from God and is identified with the Christian Bible. Plantinga defines faith as, “a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us . . . revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts.”<sup>23</sup> Faith is produced in circumstances or situations that are conducive to its production. Faith may be produced in a wide variety of situations. For example, faith may be produced when one attends such as while attending worship services, while



listening to sermons and religious teachings, though the reading of scripture, or by considering God's handiwork as it is displayed in nature.

It is important to recognize that Plantinga does not think that his models provide an *argument* for the truth of either Theistic Belief or Christian Belief. Rather, Plantinga's conclusion is that (i) if Christians are able to deal adequately with objections to the truth and coherence of CB and have been in general epistemically responsible in both the formation and maintenance of their beliefs about God and (ii) if the standard and extended A/C models (or something very much like them) are true, then CB (and TB) is properly basic and warranted for Christians in a properly basic manner.<sup>24</sup> Now that we have an adequate understanding of Plantinga's A/C models, in the next section I articulate a uniquely Islamic extension of the standard A/C model.

## 2. THE COMPATIBILITY OF PLANTINGA'S EPISTEMOLOGY AND ISLAMIC EPISTEMOLOGY

A major obstacle to the acceptability of Plantinga's epistemology from an Islamic perspective must immediately be addressed. Following the Qur'an, Islamic theology (*kalam*) maintains that one must be aware of the reason-evidence relations that make one's beliefs about God count as genuine knowledge. That is, from an Islamic perspective, while it is unproblematic to accept the necessary conditions on warrant posited by Plantinga's proper functionalism, this cannot be the whole story. As noted above, an adequate Islamic model of warranted belief in God must include a second-order awareness condition on knowledge.<sup>25</sup> However, one might object that if we suitably modify Plantinga's conditions on warrant, while the end result is consistent with Islam, it would be incompatible with externalism. Moreover, externalists such as Plantinga explicitly deny that an awareness requirement of this sort is necessary. For example, Michael Bergmann argues that awareness requirements generate a problematic dilemma: either an infinite justificatory or conceptual regress ensues. If skepticism is to be avoided, we must accept that at least some of our beliefs are justified in a manner that is not cognitively accessible to us. Therefore, awareness requirements on justification are implausible and unmotivated.<sup>26</sup> The same conclusion holds, *mutatis mutandis*, about awareness conditions on warrant and knowledge. So, the objection goes, one cannot formulate an Islamic *and* externalist account of warrant (at least not a consistent or coherent one).

Recall that Islam maintains that in order for one to have true and genuine knowledge of God, one must be aware of reasons or evidences that are sufficient to ground one's claim to know that Islamic belief is true. And so it seems that Islam is inconsistent with externalism. I think this inconsistency is only

apparent. It is possible for God to create us such that we may come to believe in God in a basic way, one that is consistent with externalist requirements on knowledge, and yet also intend that, as we mature in our understanding and after sufficient reflection, we ought to become aware of evidence and reasons that support or confirm the truth of our initial, first-order beliefs about God. Granted, it is in no way necessary that God should create us at all, let alone that He should create us with a capacity for true and genuine knowledge of Himself. However, on the hypothesis that God's design plan for us *does* include this capacity, it is necessary to acknowledge some sort of awareness condition on knowledge of God. Because the applicability of an awareness requirement is not full-stop, and since the capacity for true and genuine knowledge is a contingent feature of the human design plan, I call the kind of awareness at issue here "limited awareness." If God created us with a capacity for true and genuine, second-order knowledge of Him, our knowing that fact would provide us with a sufficiently strong motive to accept a limited awareness requirement on knowledge. Consequently, while externalism is inconsistent with an unqualified awareness requirement, it is consistent with the limited awareness requirement. Islam does not require an unqualified awareness requirement and is consistent with the truth of a limited awareness requirement. Thus, it is possible to formulate an Islamic and externalist theory of knowledge.

Granting that limited awareness is consistent with Islam and with Plantinga's externalist account of warrant, it is important that I do give the impression that one may haphazardly conjoin Islamic belief with Plantingan externalism in an ad hoc fashion. It is only because Islam and Christianity are relevantly similar in many respects that Plantinga's religious epistemology is applicable in an Islamic world-view. Moreover, it is possible to formulate and motivate an externalist religious epistemology even if we consider only the conceptual and philosophical resources of Muslim philosophers and theologians writing from within an Islamic world-view. If I am right, the core insights of Plantinga's religious epistemology ought to be intellectually compelling to contemporary Islamic philosophers and theologians, especially those whose goal is to Islamize the theory of knowledge. Ibrahim Ragab writes that to Islamize the theory of knowledge is, "... to recast knowledge as Islam relates to it, i.e., to redefine and reorder the data, to re-evaluate the conclusions, to reproject the goals – and to do so in such a way so as to make the disciplines enrich the vision and serve the cause of Islam."<sup>27</sup> While various contemporary theories of knowledge and warrant might be "Islamized" in different ways, Plantinga's religious epistemology offers one particularly promising way of doing so.

In the remainder of this section, I articulate three theses that encapsulate the core elements of Plantinga's religious epistemology and show the way in which Islam accepts the truth of each thesis. These theses are:

- (I) *The Dependency Thesis*: Humans are ontologically and epistemologically dependent on and created by God.
- (II) *The Design Thesis*: Humans are created in accord with a design plan that is aimed at the production of true belief.
- (III) *The Immediacy Thesis*: God endows humans with special cognitive faculties or belief forming processes through which God can be known in an epistemically immediate and basic manner.

I maintain that the Dependency Thesis, the Design Thesis, and the Immediacy Thesis are internal to the Islamic world-view. Because Muslims antecedently accept the core elements of Plantinga's externalist epistemology, they may rightly claim both it and the standard A/C model as "their own" but then proceed to accept a uniquely Islamic extension of the standard A/C model instead of Plantinga's Christian extension. Let us look at each thesis in turn.

### 2.1. *The Dependency Thesis*

The Dependency Thesis, that humans are ontologically and epistemically dependent on and created by God, is internal to the Islamic philosophical and religious world-view. In the Qur'an, we read, "Allah is He Who raised the heavens . . . subjected the sun and the moon . . . He doth regulate all affairs. It is He Who spread out the earth, and set thereon mountains standing firm (13:2-3)."<sup>28</sup> And in verses (32:5-7) we read, "He directs the affairs from the heavens to the Earth . . . He is the Knower of all things, hidden and open, the Exalted (in power), the Merciful. He who created all things in the best way." On these themes, M. M. Sharif writes, "The Ultimate Being or Reality is God. God, as described by the Qur'an for the understanding of man, is the sole-subsisting, all-pervading, eternal and Absolute Reality"<sup>29</sup> and "God is omnipotent. To Him is due the primal origin of everything. It is He, the Creator, who began the process of creation and adds to creation as He pleases . . . He created the heavens and the earth."<sup>30</sup>

Islamic philosophers and theologians take into account these and related Qur'anic passages when articulating philosophical accounts of God's creation of the world. Al-Ghazali believes that God created the world "by decree" and "from out of nothing."<sup>31</sup> Al-Kindi maintains that "God is one, God is creator" and as such is "the source of all things."<sup>32</sup> Rather than accept creation ex nihilo, some Islamic philosophers, such as al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd, think that the world is an eternally temporal or everlasting emanation from God. Nevertheless, all Muslims agree that God is the ontological source of all things. God not only creates humans and epistemically God makes it possible for humans to know anything at all. This, we are ontologically dependent on God.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, from the thesis that God is the metaphysical ground of all created things, and given that only God has perfect knowledge, it follows that all created things can only have imperfect or derivative knowledge. On the Islamic world-view, God's creative and sustaining activity sets in place the conditions that make it possible for created beings such as humans to be able to know anything at all. And so we see that Islam affirms the Dependency Thesis.

## 2.2. *The Design Thesis*

The second core thesis of Plantinga's epistemology is the Design Thesis. Recall that the Design Thesis states that humans are created in accord with a design plan that is aimed at the production of true belief. If God is the creator of the world and everything in it, it follows that we have the various cognitive belief-forming faculties we do *because* God designed us in that way.<sup>34</sup>

The Design Thesis is internal to the Islamic world-view, too. In verse (32:9) we read, "He gave you (the faculties of) hearing, and sight, and understanding." Note again that verse (32:7) states that God "created all things in the best way." Here, the Qur'an seems to imply that God creates all things in a way that is in perfect accord with his purposes and plans, as well as the notion that each kind of thing that God creates displays a degree of perfection appropriate to its kind. Clearly, our cognitive faculties are not perfect without qualification because only God is absolutely perfect. But although our cognitive faculties are not perfect, they are sufficiently reliable and provide us with what we need to know a great many things about the world and our place in it.

When articulating Islamic theories of knowledge, Islamic philosophers have acknowledged (at least implicitly) the Design Thesis. This is evident in the fact that Islamic philosophers have a great deal to say about the details of the human cognitive design plan. For example, M. M. Sharif offers a classification of knowledge into three types according to their source: knowledge by inference, knowledge by perception and reported perception or observation (i.e., testimony), and knowledge by personal experience or intuition.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Absar Ahmad writes that Muslims believe that God has equipped man with an inherent light of nature, senses for observation, and reason for deduction and ratiocination.<sup>36</sup> Mohamed Yasien maintains that humans are endowed with three levels of perception. At each level of perception there is a corresponding perceptual process and an appropriate faculty. Consider the following table:<sup>37</sup>

At the level of sensory perception are faculties of cognition such as memory and sensory perception. Through these faculties we have sensory contact with objects in the external world. At the level of rational perception, we are able to comprehend and reason in accord with first principles, including mathematical and logical truths and relations. The operative cognitive faculty at this level

Level of perception	Perceptual process	Faculty
1. Sensory perception	Sight, hearing, smell, etc.	Eyes, ears, nose, etc.
2. Rational perception	(i) Cognition, reasoning, and insight; also (ii) Self-consciousness and conscious meta-level thinking	<i>'aql</i> <sup>1</sup> (mind) <i>'aql</i> <sup>2</sup> (mind)
3. Spiritual perception	Intuition, intellection, and inspiration	<i>qalb</i> (heart)

is *'aql*, or mind. Note that *'aql* is used to refer to the capacities of cognition, reasoning and insight in or of the mind as well as to self-consciousness and conscious or meta-level thinking activity of the mind. As indicated by the chart, I refer to the former function of mind as *'aql*<sup>1</sup> and to the later as *'aql*<sup>2</sup>. The faculty of spiritual perception is the heart, or *qalb*. It involves, Yasien writes, “experience of spiritual realities, e.g., elevation of the self, or attaining the presence of Allah.”<sup>38</sup> Yasien argues that while revelation is necessary for humans to attain the highest knowledge of God, it is by means of spiritual perception that humans can have immediate (i.e., epistemically basic) knowledge of God. Yasien writes, “Through the organ of the heart, its faculty of intellect, and the guidance of Divine Revelation, man is able to attain all levels of perception, even the knowledge of Allah in a *direct and immediate* way.”<sup>39</sup>

Let us now introduce another human cognitive capacity, the capacity for doubt. While *qalb* may inform one about spiritual realities or God, there is always some measure of doubt about this information. The proper function of *'aql*<sup>2</sup> (meta-level consciousness), is to judge the veracity of spiritual perception in the presence of doubts. On the Islamic view of the human design plan, we are not merely to passively receive the deliverances of spiritual perception, nor is it appropriate to accept its deliverances provided that we have no doubts or are aware of no defeaters for them. The idea is that, in accord with God’s design plan for humans, people simply *will* have doubts about the veracity of spiritual perception if they are functioning properly. Doubt has an important function in the human cognitive design plan: it motivates one to seek God and to cultivate a deeper understanding of spiritual realities.

In short, the Islamic model of warrant developed here states that the deliverances of spiritual perception ought to be evaluated by ‘*aql*<sup>2</sup>’ so that one may see for one’s self *that* the deliverances of *qalb* are true. And so we see that positing a faculty the proper function of which is to produce belief in God immediately and in a basic way (a faculty that Plantinga calls the *sensus divinitatis* and Muslims call *qalb*) is not *by itself* sufficient for an adequate Islamic model of warrant. Rather, one must exercise ‘*aql*’ in both of its senses if one is to have knowledge (at least knowledge of spiritual realities such as God). While God intends that we believe in Him, He wants us to have a particular kind of knowledge of Him, one that requires considerable time, growth, commitment, and reflection in order to cultivate and appreciate. While God is merciful and forgiving, true and genuine knowledge of Him is not “easy knowledge,” but requires a certain measure of obedience and faith.

Two further conclusions are to be drawn about the Design Thesis as it appears in Islam. First, note that for our cognitive faculties function properly, both individually and collectively, is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for knowledge. Specifically, while one’s faculties of sensory, rational, and spiritual perception may function perfectly well, only by actively exercising one’s second-order faculty of rational perception (‘*aql*<sup>2</sup>’) can one see for oneself that spiritual perception (or *qalb*) really does furnish one with knowledge of God. This is because doubts about *qalb* cannot be dealt with adequately at the first-order level, the level at which ‘*aql*<sup>1</sup>’ operates. By way of illustration, it is not as if our faculties of doubt and spiritual perception are engaged in a sort of behind the scenes tug of war and whichever force is stronger automatically wins our passive assent and approval. Rather, doubts are *properly* resolved when we self-consciously consider and judge correctly what initially seems true (at the object level) is known as true (at the meta-level).

In his *Deliverance from Error*, al-Ghazali writes that God “casts a light that enlarges ones heart.” Having this light makes it possible for one to “withdraw from the mansion of deception.” He writes,

It was about this light that Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, “God created the creatures in darkness, and then sprinkled upon them some of His light.” From that light must be sought an intuitive understanding of things Divine. That light at certain times gushes from the spring of Divine generosity . . .<sup>40</sup>

Following al-Ghazali, and according to the Islamic model of warrant developed here, one component of God’s design plan for humans is that He uses “the darkness of doubt” as an occasion to bring people to true and genuine knowledge of him. From the Islamic perspective, the human design plan is such that humans are endowed with the capacity to exercise a faculty of second-order rational perception (‘*aql*<sup>2</sup>’) in order to deal with doubts that inevitably

arise. If these conditions are not met, then one's Islamic beliefs about God will lack warrant. It follows that doubt is not bad or to be avoided at all costs, but rather provides an opportunity for one's knowledge of God to be increased and deepened.<sup>41</sup>

Second, Islam affirms that God maintains the reliability of all of our cognitive capacities, including those by which we become aware of the reliability of our cognitive faculties. Thus, an Islamic extension of the standard A/C model must include the view that God makes it possible for us to have the second-order knowledge that He intends us to have. To fully articulate the importance of this point, it is helpful to frame it as a response to Bergmann's objection to the acceptability of awareness requirements. *Contra* Bergmann, it is possible for there to be a motivating reason to accept a limited awareness requirement. According to an Islamic perspective of the matter, because God desires that we should have access to knowledge that goes beyond unreflective, object level knowledge, He enables us to acquire the sort of second-order knowledge I have described.<sup>42</sup> Again, such knowledge cannot be acquired simply in virtue of our cognitive faculties functioning properly.

Not only is the Design Thesis internal to the Islamic world-view, certain details of the Islamic understanding of the human design plan indicate that it offers a promising way of overcoming Bergmann's objections against positing an awareness requirements on knowledge (and it would seem that it is possible to modify the argument so that it holds for warrant or justification as well).<sup>43</sup> I will return to this point in my closing section.

### 2.3. *The Immediacy Thesis*

The third core thesis of Plantinga's religious epistemology is the Immediacy Thesis, that God endows humans with special cognitive faculties or belief forming processes through which God can be known in an epistemically immediate and basic manner. In light of the above discussion of spiritual perception and doubt, we must make important qualifications to the Immediacy Thesis.

In verses (2:192–195), we read that Qur'anic revelation is given in "the Truthful spirit to thy heart."<sup>44</sup> In Yusuf Ali's commentary on this Sura, we read that "the heart" is the "seat of the affections and the seat of the memory and understanding."<sup>45</sup> On this point Maulana Muhammad Ali writes:

There is an inner light within each man telling him that there is a Higher Being, a God, a Creator . . . There is in man's soul something more than mere consciousness of the existence of God; there is in it a yearning after its Maker – the instinct to turn to God for help . . . it cannot find complete contentment without God.<sup>46</sup>

Ahmad's thoughts on this matter are particularly interesting. He writes,

The Holy Qur'an appeals to all thoughtful persons . . . to think and ponder over the outer universe of matter and the inner universe of spirit, as both are replete with unmistakable signs of the Almighty creator. Simultaneously, it invites them to deliberate over its own signs, i.e., its divinely inspired verses. Thus the Qur'an, in addition to its own verses, regards both "self" (*anfus*) and "world" (*afaq*) as sources of knowledge. By pondering over the three categories of signs, a man will be able to perceive a perfect concord between them; and, with the realization of this concord, he will grasp certain fundamental truths which are borne out by the testimony of his nature.<sup>47</sup>

Note that what Ahmad says here is consistent with evidentialism, briefly, the view that "the epistemic justification of a belief is determined by the quality of the believer's evidence for the belief."<sup>48</sup> However, he does not seem to identify signs that indicate the activity or presence of God with evidence for drawing the conclusion that God exists in that his discussion of the perceiving and grasping of signs apparently suggests that some of our knowledge of the existence and activity of God is epistemically basic. But the details are sketchy and need to be filled in.

One way to develop Ahmad's view of signs that allows for basic knowledge of God is as follows. When we read "everyday" signs, such as street signs, addresses in a phone book, or words in a biology text or on the back of a cereal box, we do not normally engage in deductive or inductive reasoning. Unless we are dealing with terms or languages we don't fully comprehend, we don't *deliberate* about these signs say. Rather, we intellectually comprehend their meanings immediately in an epistemically basic way. Analogously, we can intellectually "see" signs of order and design that indicate or testify to the reality and existence of God. Thus, the interpretation of signs presented here need not involve evidences or inferential processes of reasoning.<sup>49</sup> In a similar fashion, Plantinga affirms that it is not necessary for us to come to hold belief in God on the basis of evidence or deliberation. Rather, belief in God is often triggered in a wide variety of circumstances, similar to the way in which we "see" the meanings of certain types of signs. These circumstances include perceiving the beauty of the night sky, the majestic grandeur of the mountains, and the like.<sup>50</sup> In this spirit, Plantinga writes, "there is no spot in the universe wherein you cannot discern at least some sparks of his [i.e., God's] glory."<sup>51</sup>

It seems that Ibn Taimiyyah affirmed a view similar to Plantinga's when he wrote that Prophet Muhammad received a share of the "revelation common to all" (*al-wahy al-mushtarak*), a kind of divine testimony that is made available to anyone who is sensitive to God and his call to obedience.<sup>52</sup> And so it would seem that "revelation common to all" is like unto a sensation of God's revelation, which suggests that Islam posits a cognitive faculty similar to the *sensus divinitatis*. As we've seen, an obvious candidate is *qalb*. This suggests that God



provides signs of his existence that can, in appropriate contexts, cause one to accept the main tenets of Islam in an epistemically basic way.

This line of reasoning seems plausible. However, to speak bluntly, acquiring proper knowledge of God is not relevantly similar to reading the words on the back of a cereal box. Granted, on the Islamic view, first-order level beliefs about God may be immediately known in accord with the theory of signs I suggest above. However, it is sensible to doubt whether or not one has had a legitimate experience of God. Moreover, it is implausible to maintain that all such doubts can be dealt with properly in a basic way. Accordingly, for an Islamic model of warrant, belief in God may be properly basic only until doubts arise. Moreover only by engaging in reasoning that essentially involves second-order awareness can these doubts be adequately addressed. That is, the resolution of serious doubts requires awareness of evidence and/or reasons for thinking that our beliefs about God are true, and therefore cannot be dealt with appropriately in a properly basic manner. At best, our beliefs about God will be partly basic and partly non-basic, in which case they will not be *fully* basic, as Plantinga's proposed conditions on warrant requires them to be. While we must concede that it deviates in important ways from Plantinga's own extension, that this is so does not diminish the legitimacy or negate the viability of an Islamic extension of the standard A/C model.

Before concluding this section, it is worthwhile to note how the version of Islamic externalism I articulate deals with testimonial knowledge claims. Let us focus on a feature of testimony unique to Islam – the view that the *Hadith* (the sayings of the Prophet) and the *Sunna* (the actions of the Prophet) provide standards by which to gauge proper Islamic faith and practice. On this view, the words and actions of the Prophet testify to the truth of Islam. Muhammad Azizullah writes,

[The] Prophet Muhammad . . . occupies a unique position in the chain of prophets. Being the last of a long line of Divine Messengers he was made by God a perfect specimen of humankind and sent as a messenger for the whole universe. His personality, therefore, combined all that was best in morals and manners and he was the very embodiment of all that was preached and enjoined in the Holy Qur'an. His life . . . was a true picture of the teaching of the Holy Qur'an.<sup>53</sup>

Muslims accept that God has providentially ordered events so that genuine testimonial knowledge of matters of faith and practice are passed down to them in the *Sunna* and the *Hadith*. Thus understood, the *Sunna* and the *Hadith* provide basic grounds for specifically Islamic beliefs about God. Note, however, the fact that someone testifies that God did or said something does not make it true that God said or did it. So there will be some measure of doubt about the truthfulness of the *Sunna* and *Hadith*. Inasmuch as the proper function of '*aq<sup>l</sup>*' is to properly deal with doubts about spiritual perception, it seems

that we should acknowledge that another of its functions would be to discern which *Sunna* and *Hadith* are true, which ones are spurious, and which ones are probably true or at least not probably false when doubts about their authenticity arise.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, the Qur'an tells people to check for themselves whether its claims about God are true and even includes arguments for the reality of God that point to clear signs in nature that testify to the existence of God.<sup>55</sup> On an Islamic view, testimony is necessary if we are to know certain things about God. But it is equally crucial that one have some reason for thinking that such testimony is reliable, at least when doubts about its reliability arise. (Note in passing that these points count against the naïve view that an Islamic epistemology must be either uncritical or dogmatic.)

### 3. CONCLUSION

I have shown that Islam endorses the three core theses of Plantinga's religious epistemology that inform his standard and extended A/C models: The Dependency Thesis, the Design Thesis, and the Immediacy Thesis. I've also shown that the conceptual resources for constructing an Islamic variant of Plantinga's A/C religious epistemology are internal to the Islamic world-view. We now clearly see what an Islamized version of Plantinga's religious epistemology looks like and why Muslims might accept it (or something similar to it). In this closing section, I consider in more detail how this Islamic version of Plantinga's religious epistemology suggests a unique way of dealing with the Multiple Viable Extensions Argument. I also consider and respond to a few objections.

In order to adequately deal with the MVE argument, one must have some way of reasonably responding to it. One way of proceeding would be to procure reasons or evidences that support the truth of one's religious beliefs about God. On Plantinga's view of the matter, evidences are inadmissible at this stage because then one's creedal specific beliefs about God would not be epistemically basic, which is an essential component of the A/C models as Plantinga articulates them.<sup>56</sup> Earlier I conceded that an Islamic extension of the standard A/C model will reject this constraint and maintain that, in at least some cases, specifically Islamic beliefs about God are warranted but not in a basic way. But is this conclusion too quick? Is there a way to formulate an Islamic account of warranted Islamic belief in God that need not make this modification? I think that the prospects of doing so are good.

Perhaps an Islamic model of warrant may recognize that belief in God is basic in one sense but not in another. On this view, initially, belief in God is immediate and properly basic in virtue of the fact that one's first-order faculties

of *'aql* (mind) and *qalb* (spiritual perception) are functioning properly as they ought. Doubts about these first-order beliefs are to be resolved as stated in the above model. Of crucial importance is the fact that although one's first-order beliefs about God ought to be confirmed by *'aql* at the second-order level, *qalb* (spiritual perception) continues to operate as designed. Consequently, Islamic Belief is based on multiple supports or grounds, some of which are basic and others that are not. Note, however, that Islamic Belief continues to be formed immediately and in a properly basic manner at the first-order level. While there is a kind of counter-factual dependence relation at work here (by which I mean that were it not for one's non-basic beliefs at the second-order level of knowing, one's first-order beliefs about God would not be warranted), so long as one immediately perceives that one's beliefs about God are true, one's beliefs are warranted in a basic way at the first-order level despite the fact that evidence and/or reasons are required at the second-order level for this to occur. This slightly modified account of warranted Islamic belief preserves the fundamental element of Plantinga's religious epistemology – that belief in God is produced immediately in an epistemically basic manner in accord with proper function.

Let us consider a few objections. Suppose that Islamic beliefs about God are formed immediately in accord with proper function. Let us grant that in order to deal with doubts, one has the requisite second-order awareness that provides evidence or reasons for thinking that one's object-level beliefs about God amount to knowledge. Suppose that this adequately deals with doubts about the first-order reliability of the cognitive faculties responsible for the production of one's initial beliefs about God. Now, what if doubts about the reliability of one's second-order cognitions arise? It seems that one must acquire additional evidence and reasons in favor of the reliability of these second-order beliefs about the first-order reliability of the processes responsible for one's initial belief in God. But then even more doubts may arise, and it is not possible for us to keep going on like this. In order to avoid this problem, one could say that God sees to it that we are endowed with a cognitive faculty that avoids such an infinite regress. Unfortunately, this suggestion is not very illuminating or helpful, and seems like an *ad hoc* suggestion. However inchoate or implausible the initial suggestion is, it does reveal that we need to have a better understanding of the nature of second-order knowledge. While a fully satisfactory articulation of the nature of second-order knowledge is beyond the scope of this paper, I can offer a tentative and approximate characterization.

Consider the difference between one's knowing that *p* at the object-level and one's knowing *that*, that is, knowing that one knows that *p* at the object level (at a higher-order level of knowing). The difference between being in these

two states is relevantly analogous to the obvious but difficult to describe difference between casually eating a Fuji apple and focusing intently on the present experience of eating one.<sup>57</sup> Or, to put it another way, having true and genuine knowledge of God is like eating a Fuji apple, not at all like dreaming that you are eating one. Yet our present experiences are not absolutely indubitable. For instance, we can imagine cases in which things are otherwise than they seem. On the other hand, certain doubts are rather silly, if you think about it. However, some doubts, among them certain of our beliefs about God, aren't silly. According to the Islamic model of warrant discussed here, if we are to have true and genuine knowledge of God, we must carefully consider these doubts and ascertain which one's are legitimate and which one's are spurious. Then we would be in a position to ascertain whether or not it is appropriate to claim that we know what we think we know. At the end of the day, it seems that the best we can do is to consider and respond to serious doubts to our beliefs about God if and when they arise. This is not impossible, but it is not easy either. However, it would seem that on Plantinga's view, serious doubts about Theist and Christian Belief can be resolved in a properly basic manner. I think that this view is implausible. In my estimation, the right conclusion to draw is not that the Islamic account of warrant developed here places requirements on true and genuine knowledge of God that are too difficult to satisfy, but that Plantinga's externalist views makes knowledge of God too easy.

I do not mean to imply that *only* Islamic sources suggest an epistemology of this sort. For example, one can find sources in Christian, Jewish, and Hindu thought that suggest epistemologies of this sort as well.<sup>58</sup> This leaves open the possibility that other religious epistemologies could avail themselves of a second-order limited awareness requirement. Suppose that they can. Does this generate another version of the MVE argument or undermine the plausibility of my proposed limited awareness requirement? I think the answer is, "No." On the assumption that God creates and sustains our knowledge acquisition processes, so long as we continue to reflect on the way that our object-level beliefs about God are formed, presumably, our beliefs about God could acquire an increasingly higher degree of positive epistemic status for us. That is to say, generally, the more that one becomes acquainted with the presence of God, the greater one's knowledge of God will be. Having a greater awareness of the presence of God can only strengthen one's belief in God. Clearly, such knowledge is of greater epistemic value than merely having the undefeated belief that one's beliefs about God are warranted just in case one's preferred extension of the A/C model is correct or the dogmatic assertion that one's undefeated beliefs about God "just seem true." Partly because of the problem of religious diversity, we would expect God to enable us to improve on the epistemic merits of

our beliefs about Him. The Islamic account of warrant developed here shows us one way that might go.

If we are created such that the main purpose of our cognitive capacities is to enable us to seek out God with our hearts and minds, and if God made it possible for us to cognitively grasp Him as our final, appropriate, and “natural” end, then it is fitting that we should be able to have experiences indicative of “knowing that one knows.” The sort of “knowing that one knows” endorsed by the Islamic extension of the A/C model essentially involves second-order awareness. Thus, if one thinks that it is epistemically possible to know that one knows in the way that I have described, then one has reason to think that the limited awareness requirement is true. While it may not be easy to convince those who disagree, it is not difficult to see why one might be motivated to accept a limited awareness requirement on knowledge. At any rate, I think it is easy to see why Muslims have good reasons to accept it.<sup>59</sup>

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Earl Conee describes Internalism thus: “The internalist approach consists in requiring that a person whose belief is justified have cognitive access to a justification for the belief. The justification is ‘internal’ to the person’s mental life. For instance, a Cartesian sort of internalist theory has it that a belief is justified only when the belief provides its own justification or the person apprehends a proof of the belief from self-justifying premises. The justification is wholly accessible to reflective inquiry.” Earl Conee and Richard Feldman, *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> For a good collection of essays on the controversy between Internalism and Externalism, see Hilary Kornblith, *Epistemology: Internalism and Externalism*, ed. by S. M. Cahn, *Blackwell Readings in Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001). Also see Laurence Bonjour and Ernest Sosa, *Epistemic Justification: Internalism vs. Externalism: Foundations vs. Virtues* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003). For a classic defense of Internalism see Laurence Bonjour, *In Defense of Pure Reason, Cambridge Studies in Philosophy*. For a recent defense of Internalism see Richard Swinburne, *Epistemic Justification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). For recent defense of externalism see Michael Bergmann, *Justification without Awareness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, Plantinga concedes that this is possible. See his *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 350.

<sup>5</sup> See Erik Baldwin, “Could the Extended Aquinas/Calvin Model Defeat Basic Christian Belief?” *Philosophia Christi* 2006, 2(8): 383–399. Note that an extension of the standard model must be epistemically possible. It must be, “consistent with what we know, where ‘what we know’ is what all (or most) of the participants in the discussion agree on” (*Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 169). That is, any viable extension of the standard A/C model must not contradict obvious or virtually certain empirical or historical facts. It must not be an explicit work of fiction or be merely logically possible and it must have some degree of empirical adequacy.

<sup>6</sup> *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 168.

<sup>7</sup> “Could the Extended Aquinas/Calvin Model Defeat Basic Christian Belief?” *Philosophia Christi* 2006, pp. 390–393.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 393–396. Also see Erik Baldwin and Michael Thune, “The epistemological limits of experience-based exclusive religious belief”, *Religious Studies* 2008, 44: 445–455.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* (2006), pp. 397–399.

<sup>10</sup> Consider an example of trivial second-order knowledge. Suppose that S knows *p*. On the supposition that S knows *p*, then S knows that S knows that *p*. It follows that if S knows that *p*, then S knows that S knows that S knows *p*. And so on. Obviously, while we could say that S’s knowledge is increased, such knowledge is utterly trivial.

<sup>11</sup> *Warranted Christian Belief*, pp. 111–112.

<sup>12</sup> A design plan includes a description of how a thing will work only under conditions that a designer purposes for them; it is analogous to the blueprints for a car or any other human artifact. See Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>13</sup> For a more complete account of these conditions, see *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 194.

<sup>14</sup> Since I am not arguing for the truth of Plantinga’s account of warrant, but showing how it is consistent with Islam, the controversy about the truth of proper functionalism and the arguments for and against it are not directly relevant at this time. Three critical assessments of Plantinga’s epistemological views stand out. See James Beilby, *Epistemology as Theology* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), Jonathon Kvanvig, *Warrant in Contemporary Epistemology: Essays in Honor of Plantinga’s Epistemology* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), and Deane-Peter Baker, editor, *Alvin Plantinga* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> The models are named after Aquinas and Calvin, two prominent Christian theologians who provided conceptual resources for the formation of the models. Hereafter, I refer to them simply as A/C models.

<sup>16</sup> *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> More completely, Plantinga writes that the content of CB is that “human beings are mired in rebellion and sin, that we constantly require deliverance and salvation, and that God has arranged for that deliverance through the sacrificial suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who was both a man and also the second member of the Trinity, the uniquely divine son of God.” *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I, iii, 1, as quoted in *Warranted Christian Belief*, pp. 171–172. Also see Paul’s *Letter to the Romans*, 1: 18–20.

<sup>19</sup> *Warranted Christian Belief*, pp. 170–173.

<sup>20</sup> David Armstrong, *Belief, Truth, and Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 157.

<sup>21</sup> For Plantinga’s initial statement of the human design plan, see *Warrant and Proper Function* Chapters 1 through 3. For his articulation of the Standard and Extended Aquinas/Calvin models, see Part III of *Warranted Christian Belief*, especially Chapters 6 and 8.

<sup>22</sup> *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 241.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 351.

<sup>25</sup> There is some debate about the exact nature of the failure of such knowledge. The Mu’tazila maintain that such knowledge is necessary if one is to be a true Muslim. Ahl al-Sunna maintains that while one is a true Muslim, to lack such knowledge is a sin. In either case, second-order awareness is necessary for an Islamic theory of knowledge of God.

<sup>26</sup> See *Justification Without Awareness*, Chapter 1.

<sup>27</sup> Ragab (1998:2). Ragab argues that a specifically Islamic view of the social sciences (including but not limited to anthropology, sociology, psychology and philosophy) ought to be coupled with a factually correct and modernized Islamic worldview. He advocates a “sensible integration” of science, reason, and revelation into an over-arching theory that incorporates all valid sources of knowledge and unifies them under Islamic categories of thought. Ragab, Ibrahim A. “On the Methodology of the Islamization of the Social Sciences.” In *International Conference on Islamization of Sociology and Anthropology* (International Islamic University of Malaysia, 1998), 2. Interestingly, Plantinga defends a similar view. He writes, “. . . the Christian community ought to think about the subject matter of the various sciences – again, in particular the human sciences [i.e., economics, psychology, sociology, political science, parts of sociobiology], but also to some degree the so-called natural sciences – from an explicitly theistic or Christian point of view.” Alvin Plantinga, “Science: Augustinian or Duhemian?” *Faith and Philosophy*, 1996, 13(3): 369.

<sup>28</sup> I use the Saudi revision of Yusuf Ali’s translation of the meanings of the Qur’an in this paper unless otherwise noted.

<sup>29</sup> M. M. Sharif, “Philosophical Teachings of the Qur’an.” *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. by M. M. Sharif (Kempten, Germany: Allgauer Heimatverlag GmbH, 1961), p. 137.

<sup>30</sup> “Philosophical Teachings of the Qur’an”, p. 139.

<sup>31</sup> Michael E. Marmura, “Al-Ghazali.” *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. by P. Adamson and R. C. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 141–142.

<sup>32</sup> Peter Adamson, “Al-Kindi and the Reception of Greek Philosophy.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. by P. Adamson and R. C. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 35–36.

<sup>33</sup> On this view, Michael E. Marmura writes, “According to Avicenna, the priority of the essential cause to its effect is ontological, not temporal. The essential cause coexists with its effect. Hence, for Avicenna, the world as the necessitated effect of the eternal essential cause is necessarily eternal.” “Al-Ghazali”, p. 141. Also see David Reisman, “Al-Farabi.” *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. by P. Adamson and R. C. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 56–60, as well as Oliver Leaman, *An Introduction to Classical Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 45–48.

<sup>34</sup> I should point out that the way in which God creates the world need not be the same way he creates humans in accord with a design plan. For example, there are theists who accept Darwin’s theory of evolution. These theists might think that first God created the world *ex nihilo* and then set up the world in such a manner that leads to, by way of natural laws and antecedent conditions, the evolution of human species. On both accounts, although God is rightly called the creator, the sense in which God’s creative activity is affirmed is not the same. This view falls within the pale of orthodox Islamic Belief. I thank Imran Aijaz for bringing this point to my attention.

<sup>35</sup> “Philosophical Teachings of the Qur’an”, pp. 146–147.

<sup>36</sup> Ahmad, Absar. *Exploring Islamic Theory of Knowledge*. [http://www.tanzeem.us/IONA/Files/QH\\_Absar\\_Ahmad.htm](http://www.tanzeem.us/IONA/Files/QH_Absar_Ahmad.htm) (Accessed October 5th, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> I have adapted this table from one provided by Mohamed Yasien. Yasien, Mohamed, 1996, *Fitrah: The Islamic Conception of Human Nature* (London: Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd., 1996), p. 93.

<sup>38</sup> *Fitrah: The Islamic Conception of Human Nature*, p. 95.

<sup>39</sup> Italics are mine. Yasien writes that “fitrah” literally means “creation”, which he explicates as the causing a thing to exist for the first time, the natural constitution with which a child is created in his mother’s womb. *Fitrah: The Islamic Conception of Human Nature*, p. 97.

<sup>40</sup> Al-Ghazali, in W. Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali* (London: George Allen), pp. 25–26.



<sup>41</sup> The light from God comes to one only after struggling with doubts, and one must see how these doubts are resolved by engaging in reasoning about the truthfulness of spiritual perception. But al-Ghazali does not think that “systematic demonstration or marshaled argument” or “strict proofs” are necessary (*The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali*, p. 25). This is consistent with the view that one must have some higher-order reasons or evidences for thinking that one’s spiritual perceptions of God are true.

<sup>42</sup> Of course, God could not intend that we keep on going here. There must be an upper limit to how many levels of knowing even “the smartest person ever” could attain – and it is not “all the way up.” However, it is important to note that second-order knowledge, by God’s design, is sufficient for true and genuine knowledge. This suggests that if one *knows p*, then one is in a position to *know that one knows p*. But it does not entail that if one *knows that one knows p*, then one is in a position to *know that one knows that one knows p* or that one must be able to iterate ever higher orders of knowing. The same point holds, *mutatis mutandis*, with respect to meta-level concepts. We might say that second-order (and above) knowledge states enable one to see that one’s initial, first-order knowledge states were sufficient for knowledge after all.

<sup>43</sup> I would like thank Nazif Muhtaroglu for making these points known to me and for helping me to express them clearly.

<sup>44</sup> Also see the verses 53:10–11.

<sup>45</sup> Qur’an, 10:81.

<sup>46</sup> Mualuna Muhammad Ali, *The Religion of Islam: A Comprehensive Discussion of the Sources, Principles, and Practices of Islam* (Columbus: Amaddiyya Anjuman Isha’at Islam, 1990), pp. 105–106.

<sup>47</sup> Ahmad.

<sup>48</sup> *Evidentialism*, p. 83.

<sup>49</sup> The issues here are as complicated as they are deep, and only so much can be said here. In order to round out this theory of signs, or to develop in more extensive detail a specifically Islamic, externalist account of warrant, it would be useful to consider the “intuitive” epistemological theories found in the works of Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi and Sadr din al-Shirazi also known as Mulla Sadra. Also of interest is Seyyed H. Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from its Origin to the Present: Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

<sup>50</sup> *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 174.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>52</sup> “Philosophical Teachings of the Qur’an”, p. 283.

<sup>53</sup> Muhammad Azizullah, *Glimpses of the Hadith. Vol. One and Two* (Takoma Park: The Crescent Publications, 1972), pp. 2 and 5. Note that in this passage, Azizullah alludes to Sura 33:21, which says, “Ye have indeed in the Messenger of Allah an excellent exemplar.”

<sup>54</sup> There is some disagreement about the authenticity of certain *Hadith* and *Sunna*. Wael Hallaq argues that although one cannot be certain about their truthfulness, Muslims have sufficient reason to think that they probably are true – a view shared by traditionalists and jurists alike. Accordingly, Muslims can accept their testimony in a properly basic manner and, if an Islamic extension of the A/C model is true, such beliefs could have warrant sufficient for knowledge. Moreover, if one has doubts, one can set about discovering reasons in favor of their reliability. Wael B. Hallaq, “The Authenticity of Prophetic Hadith: A Pseudo-Problem,” *Studia Islamica* (89) 1999: 75–90.

<sup>55</sup> For example, see verses 16:10–17 and 67:3–4.

<sup>56</sup> See my “Could the Extended Aquinas/Calvin Model Defeat Basic Christian Belief?”, pp. 393–396.



<sup>57</sup> It is worth pointing out that the model of Islamic Belief I develop in this paper can readily incorporate al-Ghazali's response to skepticism. Al-Ghazali argues that after having had an appropriate awareness of God, one's experience reveals that until then one had been living in a sort of dream state but is now awake to the reality of God. Moreover, the more that one "wakes up", the more one becomes aware of and acquainted with the presence of God, which in turn only further awakens one to the spiritual reality of God. See W. Montgomery Watt's *The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali* (Allen & Unwin LTD: London, 1952), a translation (with introduction and commentary) of al-Ghazali's *Deliverance from Error*.

<sup>58</sup> For example, Augustine defends views similar to this in *De Trinitate* 15.12.12 and 10.7.10, *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* 12.31.59, and *De Magistro* 12.40. See Garth B. Matthews, "Knowledge and illumination", *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. by Elenore Stump and Norman Kretzman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 171–185. Regarding Hinduism, what Bimal Krishna Matilal has to say in "Knowing That One Knows", *Indian Philosophy: A Collection of Readings*, ed. Roy W. Perrett (London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2001), pp. 143–172 may support my claim. Matilal writes that the *Nyaya* philosophy, "... differs from others in its theory of how we grasp the truth-hitting character of a piece of knowledge, i.e., the knowledge-hood of knowledge as knowledge, and not mere awareness. I may inwardly perceive an awareness... but I need something more to grasp its truth-hitting character or its knowledge-hood. *Nyaya* implies that I can have awareness without knowing that this awareness is true" (p. 156). Thus, *Nyaya* affirms externalist conditions on knowledge. Yet doubts may arise. He writes, "because knowledge-hood and falsehood are properties of his (first) awareness and he may remain unaware whether his awareness has such a property or not even when he is aware of his (first) awareness" (p. 170). And second-order judgments can serve to resolve these doubts. Matilal writes, "inference helps to establish the knowledge-hood as well as falsity" and "when an inward perception is grasped by another inward perception... its specific characteristics, inwardness, etc. are also grasped thereby" (p. 170). In my view, the works of Saadya Gaon, Yehuda Halevi, Moses Maimonides, and, more recently, Abraham Heschel, seem to suggest similar strategies. For the articulation of a Jewish externalist account of warrant.

<sup>59</sup> I thank Imran Aijaz for reading and commenting on a draft of this paper and Derrick Abdul-Hakim for bringing to my attention the importance of the notion of *fitrah*. I would also like to thank Daniel H. Frank for encouraging me to do work in Islamic Philosophy and Nazif Muhtaroglu for his many helpful comments and suggestions. Special thanks go to Charles Hughes and Michael Thune for many fruitful discussions and helpful comments on various drafts of this paper.

## SECTION II

## AN OCCASIONALIST DEFENCE OF FREE WILL

**Abstract:** The doctrine of occasionalism ascribes all causal power to God. Occasionalists ranging from the Ash‘arites to Malebranche also ascribed freedom to human beings to account for moral responsibility. However, human freedom within occasionalistic metaphysics seems to be problematic at the first glance. This paper aims to open a door for the plausibility of human will within occasionalistic metaphysics. For this aim, I mainly rely on Sadr us-Sharia’s view, a theologian in the Sunni School of Islamic thought, on free will and compare his account of free will with that of Malebranche and draw similar conclusions from both on the nature of human will. The main elements of Sadr’s analysis, especially the categorical distinction between creation and choice, are similar to some elements in contemporary philosophy. Sadr’s ontological assumptions and his application of them to the free will debate seem to be shared in a certain degree by John Searle and Gilbert Ryle in a different philosophical context. By focusing on Sadr us-Sharia’s solution to the problem free will, I show how some elements of his metaphysics illuminate the free will debate as it is understood across many different traditions.

**Key words:** Category mistake, free will, occasionalism, determinism, creation, choice, divine power, omnipotence, brute facts, nominal facts, the theory of acquisition, Buridan’s ass, consciousness, self, soul, God

Occasionalism is the doctrine which reserves all causal power to God and maintains that no creature has genuine causal power over anything. It seems to follow from this, then, that occasionalism precludes human freedom. However, as I will demonstrate, this inference is a bit hasty and not as strong as it seems, for upon closer examination, it is clear that occasionalism is, in large part, compatible with free will. I say “in large part,” for there is one key component to the problem that is unclear to philosophers and theologians alike, namely, the nature of the self or the soul; and it must be conceded that, without clearer insight into this nature, an element of mystery within the free will debate remains.

Occasionalism was first articulated from within the Ash‘arite tradition of Islamic Theology (*kalam*). It was further developed by scholars who followed in the immediate wake of this tradition; and, on the topic of occasionalism

and free will, Sadr us-Sharia has the most prominent voice. Accordingly, I will examine Sadr's reflections and arguments in detail, for the response that I will outline below is largely framed by his views on the issue.

The intellectual debt owed to Sadr is great, and the significance of his views cannot be overstated. In his work, we find what is deemed a "classical" solution to the problem of free will within the Sunni School of Islamic Theology. It radiates through the centuries as a principal part of the Ottoman education system (*madrassa*) and ultimately becomes dominant within the Sunni-Muslim community-at-large.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, along with its historical importance, Sadr's views remain relevant to current philosophical inquiry, as well. For instance, his thoughts on free will closely parallel those of Malebranche. His categorical distinction between creation and choice speaks to many issues within contemporary philosophy. And the ontological aspects of his solution to the problem of free will map onto the ruminations of Gilbert Ryle and John Searle. Indeed, as I will make plain, Sadr's thoughts on occasionalism and free will withstand the test of time and cut across many different traditions.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sadr us-Sharia<sup>2</sup> is one of the major scholars of the Maturidi School in the Sunni tradition. Even though he analyses the problem of free will in the context of theological doctrines, mainly with respect to the themes of the Qur'an, his methodology is profoundly philosophical. Sadr follows the main points of the Sunni tradition. He adopts al-Ash'ari's theory of acquisition (*kasb*) and al-Maturidi's remarks on the nature of free will. As an original contribution to the Sunni tradition, he puts forward an ingenious argument which purports to solve the apparent clash between the Qur'anic verses and the nature of free will as accepted by the Maturidi School. The key component of this solution is a distinction that he makes between nominal existence and definite external existence.

## 2. WHAT IS THE PROBLEM OF FREE WILL?

The problem of free will is significant since free will has traditionally been accepted as a necessary condition for moral responsibility. If people are judged by what they do, we should suppose that they perform their actions freely. One of the most common theories in opposition to freedom of the will is determinism, which asserts that all events are determined to happen and will inevitably happen. What happens at any future time is the only thing that can then happen,

given what precedes it. Thus, if determinism is true, then there is no place for freedom in humans as well as in the other parts of universe.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, generally in Islamic theology, especially in Sadr us-Sharia's position, free will is examined not in terms of its implications with respect to determinism but with respect to God's omnipotence and control over the universe, for the Qur'an clearly rejects determinism by claiming that God has a free will on which the existence and endurance of the universe depends. The following verses can be given as an examples supporting this claim: "... Allah does what He wills" (2:253). "... There is not a moving creature, but He hath grasped of its fore-lock..." (11:56); "It is Allah who sustains the heavens and the earth, lest they cease (to function): and if they should fail, there is none – not one – can sustain them thereafter" (35:41). The following verse is especially related to human actions: "It is God who creates you and your deeds" (37:96).

Sadr us-Sharia formulates an account of free will which coheres with these verses of the Qur'an. The emphasis on the continued activity of God on the universe in the Qur'an is interpreted as occasionalism by the Ash'arites and this interpretation is accepted by Sadr. However, these verses might be interpreted differently as well. Some may appeal to conservationism which maintains that God sustains the universe constantly via mediate causes or immediately. Some others might embrace concurrentism which maintains that God and created substances concur in the production of effects while God's activity is immediate. However, these alternative metaphysical theories leave the door open for genuine secondary causality in the universe apart from God, which the Ash'arite theology opposes.

According to the Ash'arite cosmology, the universe can be analyzed in terms of two main categories of substance-atom and accident. A substance cannot be found without accidents. Accidents are perishable by nature. No accident can endure or continue to exist if God does not recreate it in its substance. So nothing other than God can have genuine causal power because everything else needs His causal power to remain existent.<sup>4</sup> Actually, there are some verses implicitly supporting this point, such as, "Do they associate as partners with Him those who create nothing and themselves are created" (7:191). At any rate, it is not my aim to decide whether occasionalism is the correct Qur'anic metaphysical view or not. Given my purposes in this paper, it is enough to simply point out that occasionalism is grounded in the Qur'an. Nevertheless, the basic theological question is still vital: if human beings are constantly created and controlled by God and do not have genuine causal power, how can they act freely and where does the freedom of human beings lie?

## 3. SADR US-SHARIA'S ACCOUNT OF FREE WILL

3.1. *The Theory of Acquisition as the Root of Sadr us-Sharia's Account*

Sadr us-Sharia's account of free will is based on al-Ash'ari's<sup>5</sup> theory of acquisition (*kasb*).<sup>6</sup> This theory is mainly shaped by al-Ash'ari's fundamental principle that God is the sole creator of everything, which reflects his occasionalistic metaphysics. As a result, no action or human inclination can occur without the power of God. In brief, God continuously recreates every substance and its accidents.<sup>7</sup> An important consequence of this assumption is that natural laws have no independent existence; they are only names referring to the manner of creation of God. For example, there exists no law of universal gravitation, but God creates objects in a manner that fits the formula of the law of universal gravitation. Think of a pencil. If you drop it from a high point above the ground, it falls to the earth. While it falls to the earth, God creates it in different places at every moment according to a definite order. The orderly sequence of created things seems to us to be a natural law. It should be noted that this theory does not admit determinism either because everything occurs as a result of the free will of God, not as a consequence of determinate causal laws. The relation between any two consecutive events is not inevitable as determinism states; on the contrary, it depends on the free will of God. So an event that occurred under some conditions might not occur under the same conditions at some other time, if God did not want it to occur.<sup>8</sup>

Al-Ash'ari's strong emphasis on the doctrine that God is the sole creator originates as a reaction against the Mu'tazila School's view on human freedom. The Mu'tazila School tries to justify human freedom by classifying the universe into two different realms. One realm is the realm created by God. Everything here is controlled by God. The other is the human realm. The actions of humans are not created by God. They are created by humans themselves. The Mu'tazilites explain freedom of the will by ascribing to humans a creative power in their actions. People have a creative power before their actions in order to perform them. Since this power belongs to humans, they are free in using it.<sup>9</sup> However, al-Ash'ari rejects this aspect of Mu'tazilite doctrine because it ascribes to humans a creative power which can only be ascribed to God.

Nevertheless, al-Ash'ari does not reject human free will. If we examine al-Ash'ari's view of human actions, we see that he divides them into two groups: voluntary and involuntary human actions. Involuntary actions are performed under compulsion which we intuitively feel, such as trembling for instance. These actions are created by God and people have no effect on them.<sup>10</sup> However, regarding voluntary human actions, al-Ash'ari makes a distinction: the creation of them by God and the acquisition of them by humans. Humans freely

acquire their actions which are created by God. The biggest problem related to the theory in question is that al-Ash'ari does not clearly state how freedom of the will is explained by the idea of human acquisition.<sup>11</sup> There is no explanation in al-Ash'ari about how we freely acquire our deeds. Later, an interesting explanation comes from al-Maturidi.<sup>12</sup>

### 3.2. *An Attempt to Elucidate the Unknown Nature of Free Will*

Sadr us-Sharia adopts the theory of acquisition and uses al-Maturidi's<sup>13</sup> remarks on the nature of free will, and employs them in his own thought on the ontological status of free will. Al-Maturidi accepts the ability to choose (*al-ikhtiyar*) as the underlying faculty of acquisition.<sup>14</sup> According to him, human beings are free only in their choices. Free will is the ability to choose. Conversely, all other faculties and capacities of humans, including thinking, desiring, etc., are controlled and created by God.<sup>15</sup> Generally, the Maturidi School maintains that the inclination or the inner power of men, which is created by God, is used in a certain way by human beings. They are used by the "ability to choose" (*juz-i irada* or *al-ikhtiyar*).<sup>16</sup>

Let's try to understand this approach in a simple example: Assume that a man has a thought of drinking water in his mind and has a strong desire to drink it. He takes a glass of water and drinks it. We can explain this case as follows according to the Sadr us-Sharia's interpretation of free will: the thought and desire of drinking water is created by God. Our choice between the occurrence of the act of drinking water and its non-occurrence belongs to us. Every part of the act of drinking water, from buying the water, raising the hand, to swallowing water is also created by God. If this man chooses the alternative of drinking water, he acquires the act of drinking water. If he chooses the alternative of not drinking water, he does not acquire this act. The choice appears somewhere between the inclination and the action to which it leads.

It should also be noted that the Maturidi perspective on this issue is very similar to Leibniz's "inclination without necessitation" approach to the free will.<sup>17</sup> In other words, inclinations do not necessitate actions. We may drink or may not drink water even though we have strong desires to drink water. Nevertheless, these two accounts are not the same. Leibniz maintains that choice always has some reasons even though they do not necessitate, but the Sunni tradition al-Maturidi follows does not admit this requirement. Choice might have reasons as well as might not.

To be more familiar with the Sunni understanding of will, it would be useful to remember al-Ghazali's remarks here. Al-Ghazali presents "will" as an attribute whose character is to distinguish something from its like without the need of a selectively determining factor. He tries to justify this characterization

of will through a thought experiment whereby a hungry man chooses between two indiscernible dates without considering any superior specifying property between them.<sup>18</sup> So our experience of choosing among similar things without any selectively determining reason indicates that the notion of the will is intelligible and we have such a will. We feel that we are free in choosing similar things by an inner experience. Al-Maturidi also points out that freedom of our wills is something we experience in ourselves.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, Ibn Rushd criticizes this understanding of the will. He regards the assumption that the will makes a choice between like alternatives as a false supposition. There are always reasons and selectively determining factors in choosing between similar alternatives. Averroes gives the following interpretation of al-Ghazali's date example. The choice of the hungry man in this case is choice between taking one of the identical dates and not taking the other, while there is no preference for one over the other.<sup>20</sup> So the will chooses in accordance with the *reason* of eating one of them. Thus, there is a selectively determining factor in such a case which is ignored by al-Ghazali. Consequently, a choice between two identical options without a specific property that motivates the choice is impossible and absurd according to Averroes. This point was repeated by Buridan in his famous example of an ass starving to death in front of two stacks of hay of equal size and quality later. The force of this point is that there are implicit reasons according to which we choose a certain option even though we are not aware of them. By relying on unknown, implicit and unconscious reasons, these philosophers argue that a choice between exactly two equal alternatives is impossible.

Nevertheless, this criticism misses the point of al-Ghazali. Al-Ghazali may accept that the man has some reason in his choice. He is hungry and wants to eat one of dates. However, this is not al-Ghazali's focus. His focus is on another aspect of the thought experiment whereby the man prefers one *identical* date over the other. Averroes simply ignores this aspect and does not give a convincing argument for his negligence. We can experience a choice between one thing over the other without any affecting factor of our choice. This is the aspect of our choice that must be explained. In addition, the implicit reasons or motivations which are supposed to affect our choices is a misleading point. Any implicit reason or factor is related to our inclinations rather than our choices. Consider a man who prefers a red notebook to a white one, without being aware of the fact that he is more inclined to red objects by his nature. He is simply more inclined toward red objects. However, the inclination toward the red notebook did not determine his conscious choice in that case. The point here is that consciousness is a precondition for responsibility, so choices without consciousness do not render people responsible. Responsible choice requires consciousness. Since there is no determining factor between the red and white



notebook of which the man is aware, the moral character of his choice is not determined by his inclination in that case. Nevertheless, to illuminate the relations between the notions of choice, consciousness, and inclination completely requires a complete grasp of the nature of the soul, and its relation to body. How much we can know about the soul is a matter of debate and I will return to this point later.

### 3.3. *The Ontological Background of the “Uncreated Nature of Free Will”*

Sadr us-Sharia’s originality within the Maturidi School lies in his observation that choice is not something to be created and does not create anything.<sup>21</sup> In such a way, he maintains the freedom of the will without contradicting the assumption that God is the sole creator. He justifies this thesis by clarifying the ontological status of free will. According to Sadr us-Sharia, free will or choice does not have a definite external existence with respect to God (*wujud-u khariji*). It is only a nominal fact (*amr-i i’tibari*).<sup>22</sup> Having a definite external existence outside of God and being a nominal fact are related to different ontological realms. I will try to clarify the difference between these two ontological areas by means of some examples. Let’s take into account the following words: “right and left,” “above and under.” Their referents have no definite external existence. We cannot mention their existence in the same sense as the existence of concrete entities such as a stone or a tree. They are relational things and depend solely on the objects that have a definite external existence. If these objects did not exist, these relational things would not occur. Natural laws are also examples of this category. Natural laws have no definite external existence according to occasionalism, as mentioned above. They owe their occurrence entirely to the created objects. They can be seen as relations between constantly created objects.

This ontological distinction was pointed out by Pazdawi and Fakhraddin Razi before Sadr us-Sharia.<sup>23</sup> They make a linguistic distinction between the infinitive “to kill” and the word “a dead man” which are morphologically related to each other.<sup>24</sup> The infinitive “to kill” stands for a nominal fact; its referent is not in time and has not a definite external existence. However, “a dead man” refers to an object which is the result of killing and that object has a definite external existence. Then, Sadr us-Sharia applies this linguistic distinction to an ontological problem, namely the nature of the free will and he says that the free will is a nominal fact.<sup>25</sup> This ontological distinction resembles Ibn Sina’s distinction between existence external to mind (existence out of the mind; *wujud fi al-‘ayn*) and mental existence (existence in the mind; *wujud fi al-adhan*)<sup>26</sup> but they are not the same, because, according to Sadr us-Sharia,

mental existence is also a kind of definite external existence from God's point of view. Whatever exists in our minds are outside of God.

A similar consideration to the distinction between these two ontological areas is expressed in a different context by John Searle. The point Sadr us-Sharia emphasizes is very close to but not quite the same as something John Searle mentions in his book *The Construction of Social Reality*. According to Searle, the world is comprised of facts which can be divided into two groups. The first group of facts exists independently of what humans think about them and provides a ground for the other group. The former is the group of "brute facts" and it is divided into mental facts and physical facts. Brute physical facts include such things as rivers, trees, and mountains. Brute mental facts include such things as perceptions, feelings, and judgments. The other group depends for their existence on brute facts and human thoughts. They are constituted by human agreement. They are called "social facts." According to Searle, social facts may be epistemically objective (in that they are not a matter of individual preference or opinion) but may be ontologically subjective (in that they depend for their existence on being agreed upon as facts). Social realities are overlays on brute (mental and physical) realities, requiring those realities for their own reality. Brute facts could exist without social facts but not vice versa.<sup>27</sup> Take a five-dollar bill as an example. On the one hand, it is a piece of paper, which has certain physical properties. This is the brute fact of the five-dollar bill because it is a reality independent of the human mind or human agreement. On the other hand, it is money and has a nominal value to buy something. This is the social fact of the five-dollar bill. Its reality is determined by society, by human agreement.

If we carry Searle's view over to our free will debate, we can say that social facts do not have definite external existence. Searle's distinction between brute and social facts does not entirely reflect the point Sadr us-Sharia tries to make since social realities are determined by arbitrary human agreement. They come into existence through human construction. However, the nominal relational facts which Sadr us-Sharia emphasizes are not arbitrarily determined and they are not products of human construction. For instance, the fact that my house is on the left of my school is independent of human agreement. Human agreement or disagreement about these facts cannot affect them. Thus, nominal relational realities and social realities are similar in the sense that they do not have definite external existence. Nevertheless, they are different in the sense that while social realities are determined by arbitrary human agreement, nominal relational realities are independent of human agreement or disagreement. In this regard, it should be emphasized that human's free will belongs to objective nominal facts, according to Sadr us-Sharia.

After explaining this ontological distinction we should ask whether choosing really belongs to the category of nominal facts. Why is it a nominal fact? Sadr us-Sharia does not clearly answer this question. Justification of the thesis that choosing is a nominal fact is rather problematic. I will examine this issue in the 6th section of my paper. Now, I will compare Sadr's account of free will with that of Malebranche and show that their insights regarding the problem of free will are fundamentally the same with minor differences in expressing it.

#### 4. MALEBRANCHE'S APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF FREE WILL

The doctrine of occasionalism is known mainly through Malebranche in Western philosophy. In fact, it is Malebranche who gave the name "occasionalism" to this doctrine. He reserves all causal power to God as the Ash'arites do and regards the natural causes as the occasions for God's creation of the effects. Natural causes do not have creative power, they are themselves created. However, they are "occasional causes" (a term which he borrowed from Louis de la Forge) in the sense that they are depicting the uniformity of God's operation in the world and providing us with an ordered system of created nature.<sup>28</sup> The term "cause" in this context does not imply any efficient causality. Nevertheless, a "true cause" is a genuine efficient cause which necessitates its effect. According to Malebranche, only God can be considered to be a true cause.<sup>29</sup>

Malebranche is certainly aware of the problem of ascribing free will to human beings in such an occasionalistic framework. He repeats that God is the sole author of all substances and all their modes in his book *Premotion*, but adds that "a mode is that which cannot change without there being some real or physical change in the substance of which it is the mode."<sup>30</sup> The crucial point here is that God is the sole cause of real changes whether in mind or bodies,<sup>31</sup> but he leaves open a door for non-real changes. Malebranche's analysis of freedom of the will is closely related to the idea of non-real changes. However, Malebranche's characterization of the "modes" is too inclusive, for it covers cases which cannot be supposed to be real in the sense Malebranche asserts. For instance, my pencil's being on the left of my book is a mode which is real according to this characterization. The pencil's being to left of the book cannot change without a change in the place of the book or the pencil. Nevertheless, "leftness" is not something real and cannot be regarded as a mode. Malebranche seems to postulate non-real changes just with respect to human will by ignoring the larger scale of its instances. In addition, I think it is a terminological preference of Malebranche to call modes and substances "real" and

all else “non-real.” In my opinion, there is no philosophical problem with calling nominal facts “nominal realities” after indicating the ontological difference between brute and nominal facts.

Malebranche identifies human freedom with the freedom of will.<sup>32</sup> According to him, the freedom of will means that we have freedom of choice to assent or not to assent to a proposition, an idea or some determinate good. He says that the activity of will, namely the act of consenting or suspending consent with regard to a particular good does not produce a real being or physical reality.<sup>33</sup> Even though we have a true power to assent or withhold consent, this power does not produce new modifications in the mind. By relying on these remarks, Elmar J. Kremer thinks that there is one more kind of cause in Malebranche’s system. He suggests that the soul, as the cause of giving or withholding assent, can be considered to be an “agent cause.” It is different from the true cause in the sense that it does not produce anything real. That is to say, it is not an efficient cause. An “agent cause” is also different from an occasional cause because it rather than God is cause of the activity of giving or withholding assent.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, there is a tension between some passages on the nature of this agent cause in different works of Malebranche. On the one hand, in *the Search After Truth*, he regards humans as beings who “can determine the impression God gives them toward Himself toward objects other than Himself,” but he hesitates to call this impression “power.”<sup>35</sup> Conversely, in some later works cited above, he considers this capacity or impression to be a real power but adds the requirement that it cannot produce anything real. So then, what is it that is not real? Is it the activity of choosing between different alternatives or the exact choice of a certain alternative? Should we understand this activity of choosing as something different from the “real activities” we observe every day? If the activity of choosing, namely, giving assent to or withholding assent from a certain alternative, is not real, then does this imply that the power in question which sustains this activity is not real either? Is the soul which is the *agent* cause (not the efficient cause) of this activity something real? These questions are important because it seems that whatever is real is under the scope of divine power, according to Malebranche.

Both Malebranche and Sadr justifies the freedom of the will by considering it to be a member of an ontologically distinct category from the category to which divine power is applicable. In the last analysis, they share the same insight that divine creative power has a certain extension and free will does not fall under it. However, neither of them is quite clear in expressing the exact nature of this freedom. Nevertheless, both of them find a way to reconcile occasionalism with human freedom:-a metaphysical category to which creation or efficient causality is not applicable. Let me clarify the central idea of the scope of divine power which stands behind their analysis of free will.

## 5. FREE WILL AND OMNIPOTENCE

What do creation, infinite power, and so on mean? My aim in this paper is not to analyze these concepts completely but I will indicate the link between them and free will. According to Sadr us-Sharia, creation is the application of infinite power to the things in divine knowledge which would gain a definite external existence after such an application.<sup>36</sup> He admits that God is the sole creator. In addition, he is also aware of the fact that the concept of creation does not apply to everything. As a logical matter, creation applies to the things which could have definite external existence, not the nominal facts. So free will is neither created nor non-created.

Gilbert Ryle's famous notion of category mistake may clarify this point. A category mistake<sup>37</sup> is a confusion in the attribution of properties or the classification of things. It arises from fallacious reasoning about different logical categories. For example, the question "What does blue smell like?" involves a category mistake. Blue is a color that is sensed by the eye while an odor is sensed by the nose. Blue belongs to the category of colors while odors belong to the category of smells. Therefore, blue is not in the category of smell. In the same way, choosing belongs to the category of nominal facts; not to the category of definite things. Therefore, divine power is not applicable to it.

If the ontological status of free will is understood in that way, its ascription to human beings does not contradict the assumption that God is the sole creator. It follows that "God does not create nominal facts," but it cannot be said that "God could not create nominal facts" because the latter sentence presupposes that it is conceptually possible that God creates nominal facts, while the power He has could not perform this activity. But this is incorrect. So the assumption that God's power is infinite does not contradict the idea that free will is uncreated because the infinite power is linked to an ontological category which excludes free will. Divine power is infinite in the sense that it applies to all objects which are infinitely many, in the legitimate ontological category to which it applies.

Even if the categorial difference is accepted, there is one more problem to face. How does divine predetermination, which maintains that everything is predetermined by God, fit to this picture? The difficulty with divine predetermination is whether He can determine the realm to which the concept of creation is not applicable. As a reply to this problem, it can be said that the ontological status of free will belongs to the realm in which nominal relational facts are found, according to Sadr us-Sharia. These nominal relational facts depend on brute physical and mental facts to which the concept of creation is applicable. Therefore, any manipulation of these fundamental facts results in a manipulation in the relational facts. So God also has control over the realm to which the concept of creation is inapplicable. The man drinking water in the

example mentioned in the Section 3.2. does not have the power to determine the kind of action or the variety of alternatives before him. He is free only in choosing one of them. The desires, tendencies, and thoughts that lead to an action are created things. With this account Sadr us-Sharia could also explain what the verse “But you could not will except as Allah wills – the Cherisher of the Worlds” (81:29) means. The human will is constrained by the will of God because it cannot work without alternatives that are put before it by the will of God. If there were not any alternatives, humans could not choose. Any manipulation of alternatives results in different consequences even if humans freely make a choice between them. In short, Sadr us-Sharia’s account implies that people are necessarily free in a very restricted sense. They are bound to make a choice if there are alternatives in front of them. Not making a choice is also a choice about the alternative which is the non-occurrence of the other alternatives. Therefore, people necessarily have free will. However, people are free only in determining the alternative they choose.

Even though human free will is very restricted, we have a role in the determination of our actions by our choices. Although God could hinder us from doing what we have chosen, He generally does not block us in this world even if we choose to perform evil actions, because this world is a place of examination. According to their deeds in this world, human beings are judged in the other world. It can be said that the predetermination of God is generally compatible with people’s determination by their choices. It is always in God’s power to impede people’s choices.

#### 6. FREE WILL AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE AGENT

In order to maintain that people are morally responsible, it should be accepted that they have free will. Sadr us-Sharia does not explain how free will is related to his ontological assumptions. It is not clear how far free will is a nominal fact. The same worry is applicable to Malebranche’s analysis of free will as well. Their insight might be elaborated in the following way. Being on the right side of something is purely determined by the things in question. For instance, if a book is on the right side of a pencil, the book’s being on the right side of the pencil solely depends on the pencil, book and their positions and nothing else. That is to say, the book’s being on the right side of the pencil supervenes on the book and the pencil, which have certain positions at a given time. However, choosing is not the same as being on the right side of something. When we choose something, we have some alternatives from which we choose a certain one. The factor of self enters the picture in choosing as well as the alternatives which provide with the ground for choice. To have some alternatives is a precondition of choice, but it is the self or soul that performs the activity of choice

and bears the responsibility of that choice. So if we want to analyse human freedom in the framework of an occasionalistic metaphysics as depicted by Sadr and Malebranche, we need to examine the relationships among the following factors: self, the activity of choosing, the choice, and the alternatives before the self.

First of all, the activity of choosing must be distinguished from the choice. The former refers to the process of trying to come to a decision on a certain alternative among the ones presented or available to the self. This process takes time and because of that it is regarded as an activity. But if this activity is considered to be real in Malebranche's sense, then it is incorrect to ascribe the responsibility to the person choosing because whatever is real is created by God, according to him. That is to say, it is controlled by God. How can it be regarded as non-real? If we isolate the thinking endeavour from this activity, just relations between the self and alternatives remain. The supervenience of these relations on the self and the alternatives can be taken as nominal facts to which divine power is not applicable. Similarly, the choice which can be depicted as a "discontinuous and essentially inactive event of cognitive crystallisation" as Brian O'Shaughnessy describes decision or deciding-that,<sup>38</sup> is a relation supervening on the self and a certain alternative. In this case, the choice is an instant of time, it does not take time to occur. Divine power is not applicable to the choice either. However, the most unclear factor is the self.

Assuming that humans are free in choosing, who is responsible for choosing? The immediate answer is the human being. But what is it in the human being? Desires, thoughts? Neither of them? In the end, we reach the conclusion that the self is responsible for choosing. Since I assume an occasionalistic metaphysics here, I do not see any obstacle to identifying the self with the soul. So then, is the soul created or not? If it is created, how can we say that the choice occurred freely? In that case, that which chooses is controlled by God. This means that the choice is entirely in the control of God. Said Nursi makes a distinction between created and uncreated aspects of the soul to deal with this problem. In one context, by defining the soul, Nursi says that soul is a conscious and living law which has come from the World of the Divine Command ('*alam al-amr*'), and it has been clothed with definite external existence by divine power.<sup>39</sup> Since it has a definite external existence it is created. In some other contexts, where he analyses Taftazani's<sup>40</sup> and Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi's<sup>41</sup> claim that soul is uncreated, he says that they could concede that soul is uncreated in terms of its quiddity. Nursi makes a distinction when he deals with soul, namely a distinction between existence (*wujud*) and quiddity (*mahiyya*). If soul is examined in terms of its existence, it has a definite external existence which is like a cloth and it is created. If it is examined in terms of its quiddity, it comes from Divine Command and it is not created. So soul in

terms of its quiddity is not under any compulsion. However, what Nursi means by “quiddity” is not so clear in the texts. How it is uncreated is also not clear. Maybe, as the verse “And they ask you about the soul. Say: The soul is one of the commands of my Lord, and you are not given aught of knowledge but a little” (17:85) states, the nature of the soul cannot be captured completely. In the end, then, *how* humans are free in their choices and so responsible for their acts remains mysterious as long as the uncreated nature of the soul remains unknown to us.

Malebranche also points out that our knowledge of the soul is unclear and confused.<sup>42</sup> Because of that, it is impossible for any human being to understand the exact nature of human freedom.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, the inner sense by which we know the soul even in a confused way proves that there is something which we call “soul” even though we do not know exactly what it is.<sup>44</sup> In the last analysis, it seems to be plausible to say, together with Descartes, that “we can touch a mountain with our hands but we cannot put our arms around it.”<sup>45</sup> The consideration that what makes us responsible is a nominal fact to which divine power is not applicable opens a door for the plausibility of human free will within an occasionalistic metaphysics. Nevertheless, the answer to the question of how human will is a nominal fact is not something we can completely grasp given the unclear nature of the soul.

In addition to the difficulty concerning the unclear nature of the uncreatedness of the soul in terms of its quiddity, I would like to consider one more serious criticism directed against Malebranche by Elmar J. Kremer. Kremer criticizes Malebranche’s depiction of the activity of will by focusing on the issue of non-real change. He thinks that there must be a real change in something else even though a change in a thing is not a real change. He gives some examples from Aquinas and Peter Geach. According to the example of Aquinas, if an animal moves around a pillar and the pillar comes to be on its right, then the real change cannot be regarded as it is in the pillar. What is really changed is the animal in this case. As an example from Geach, if a school boy admires Socrates, Socrates’s coming to be admired is not a real change in Socrates but it is a real change in the school boy. Likewise, although, the change involved in the activity of will is not a real change, a real change must take place in something else. In an occasionalistic system, the alternative is God, but it is quite problematic to ascribe real change to God. So Malebranche faces a dilemma here: Do we ascribe real change to humans or to God?<sup>46</sup>

If the principle Elmar assumes, that all non-real changes in something imply real changes in something else is applied to our case, it should be admitted that changes with respect to nominal facts imply changes with respect to the grounds on which nominal facts supervene. If the pillar’s being on the right of the animal changed into its being on the left of the animal while it is standing



still, we must accept that the animal is moving. Being on the left or right side in such a case supervenes on the animal and the pillar. If the position of the pillar does not change, then the animal has been changed under the assumption that the nominal facts in question have changed. If we apply this idea to human freedom, we see that a change from one choice to another and the activity of choosing imply a change in the ground on which choosing supervenes. Either the alternatives change or the soul changes. If the alternatives remain the same, then we must assume that the soul is in a different state. Elmar's principle suggests that the change in soul must be real. However, to account for the human freedom, it must be accepted that the change in the soul cannot be something real to which divine power is applicable. Otherwise it would be created and controlled. Even though we cannot accept any real change with respect to soul, we can never be sure whether such changes are real or not because the soul has a mysterious aspect which makes it difficult to judge whether changes relevant to it are real or not. Because of the unknown nature of the soul, it seems to me dubious to extend the application of Elmar's principle to everything including soul. It is not self-evident that Elmar's principle is valid for states relevant to soul. This is the reason why Elmar's objection is not a forceful objection to the occasionalist account of human freedom. It is admitted that we do not grasp completely how human will is free, but the point of this paper is to open a door to accept occasionalism together with ascribing to humans free will without contradiction.

Another possible criticism concerns the nature of choice and may claim that a choice is real rather than nominal by suggesting that choosing affects how God acts. If a choice directs God's creation on earth, it should be real, according to this criticism. For instance, if I choose to take a drink, God creates in me the act of drinking. If I choose not to, He would not create this act. So isn't my choice a deciding factor? It should be admitted that God usually creates in accordance with the choices of people. However, there might be special cases where human choice is not considered in creation. For instance, a sick person may want to get up from the bed and run but God may not create such actions for him when he is sick. Cases of miracles are another dimension of creation where regularity in creation is suspended for a certain time. There are special reasons behind such cases that are not in accordance with human will but generally human choice is taken into account in creation. Even though the action is performed in accordance with the human choice, this does not make it real or a kind of efficient causal factor. We can remember al-Ghazali's and Hume's worries about deriving causal links from constant conjunctions. We are not justified to consider constant conjunctions to be causally linked neither by observation nor by logical inference. The type of the cause here is efficient causation. According to occasionalism, the human will is not an efficient cause,

but God is the only efficient cause. However, if the term “cause” is interpreted so widely that it may mean “reason” as well, it would be a good topic to deal with the relation between the human free will and God’s action in terms of the reasons God considers in willing something. In what ways and respects does God take into account human will in His creation? This question is valuable to consider but not so relevant to occasionalism. What occasionalism cares about is to establish that there is no efficient cause apart from God. However; it does not reject other types of causes insofar as this is compatible with the idea that God is the only efficient cause. As a result, even though an occasionalist may regard human will as a type of cause (for instance, as an occasional cause in Malebranche’s case), no occasionalist can regard it as an efficient cause. Thus, according to occasionalism, human will does not affect God if affecting is interpreted as efficient causation. So it is not necessary that the human will is an efficient cause and consequently real since God usually takes it into account in His creation.

## 7. CONCLUSION

I have tried to present Sadr us-Sharia’s view on free will systematically. I showed how he made use of al-Ash’ari’s theory of acquisition, al-Maturidi’s identification of choice with free will, and Razi and Pazdawi’s ontological distinction between nominal facts and definite existence external to God in formulating choice as a nominal fact and the free will of a human being. By using these elements, he is firmly part of the Sunni tradition. And by applying this ontological distinction to the problem of free will, he achieves a peculiar status in this tradition. Later, I pointed out the similarity between Sadr’s and Malebranche’s analyses of the freedom of the will. I showed that both of them tried to justify human freedom by regarding human will as something to which divine power is not applicable. Second, I have examined the implications of such an account of free will in terms of God’s omnipotence, and the responsibility of the agent. As my contribution to their ideas, I clarified their contention that free will is uncreated because the power of God does not apply to it by using Gilbert Ryle’s notion of category mistake. This is the crucial point to understand how occasionalism is compatible with ascribing free will to human beings. Finally, I arrived at the point that the nature of freedom and responsibility in human beings has a mysterious aspect as long as the nature of the self or soul remains unknown and unclear either in Sadr us-Sharia’s or Malebranche’s system of thought. Nevertheless, their accounts of human will under my interpretation push us to rethink the common assumption about the incompatibility of human free will with occasionalism. In any case, these accounts should be

considered to be a remarkable attempt in terms of opening a rational door to the consistency between occasionalism and human freedom.<sup>47</sup>

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#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Sadr's view on free will affected Saduddin Taftazani and 'Abd al-Qadir Jurjani later, whose books had been taught in the Ottoman education system (*madrasa*) for several centuries so that this view became dominant in the Sunni-Muslim community.
- <sup>2</sup> He is also known as Sadr us-Sharia as-Sani Ubaydullah bin Mesud. He was died in 1346.
- <sup>3</sup> Galen Strawson, "Free Will" in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward Craig (New York: Routledge Press, 1998), vol. 3, p. 743.
- <sup>4</sup> Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 217.
- <sup>5</sup> The founder of the Sunni school of the Ash'arites (al-Ash'ari, 873–935).
- <sup>6</sup> Omer Aydın, *Kur'an Isiginda Kader ve Ozgurluk* (Istanbul: Beyan Yayinlari, 1998), p. 56.
- <sup>7</sup> Muhammed Abid Jabiri, *Bunyat al-'Aql al-'Arabi*, tr. by Hasan Hacak, Ekrem Demirli and Burhan Koroglu (Istanbul: Kitabevi Yayinlari, 2000), p. 255.
- <sup>8</sup> Montgomery Watt, *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam* (London: Luzac & Company Ltd., 1948), p. 142.
- <sup>9</sup> Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology: An Extended Survey* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), p. 51.
- <sup>10</sup> Montgomery Watt, 1948, p. 162.
- <sup>11</sup> David B. Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), p. 79.
- <sup>12</sup> Because of the lack of clarity in the theory of acquisition, there occurred a common saying among people as follows: When somebody speaks in an unclear way; people say that his topic is more complicated than al-Ash'ari's theory of acquisition. See Emrullah Yuksel, *Sistematik Kelam* (Istanbul: Iz Yayincilik, 2005), p. 84.
- <sup>13</sup> The founder of the Maturidi school which is the other main Sunni school (al-Maturidi, 863–944).
- <sup>14</sup> Al-Maturidi, *Kitab at-Tawhid*, tr. by Bekir Topaloglu (Ankara: Isam Yayinlari, 2005), pp. 239, 256.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid., "All power belongs to God." This sentence repeated many times in the book.
- <sup>16</sup> Emrullah Yuksel, 2005, p. 83.
- <sup>17</sup> G. W. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, in *Philosophical Essays*, tr. and ed. by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), p. 44 (Leibniz, 1646–1716).
- <sup>18</sup> al-Ghazali, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers (Tahafut al-Falasafa)*, A parallel English-Arabic Text, tr. by M. E. Marmura (Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1997), p. 23 (al-Ghazali, 1058–1111).
- <sup>19</sup> al-Maturidi, 2005, p. 396.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibn Rushd, *The Incoherence of the Incoherence (Tahafut at-Tahafut)*, selections in *Classical Arabic Philosophy*, tr. and ed. by Jon McGinnis and David C. Reisman, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2007), p. 304 (Ibn Rushd [Averroes], 1126–1198).

- <sup>21</sup> According to Omer Aydın the first person in the Sunni tradition who argued that free will is uncreated was Sadr us-Sharia. See Omer Aydın, 1998, p. 82.
- <sup>22</sup> Sadr us-Sharia, *at-Tadvih fi Halli Gawamiz at-Tankih* (Beirut, no date), vol. 1, p. 178.
- <sup>23</sup> Omer Aydın, 1998, p. 69.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.
- <sup>25</sup> Sadr us-Sharia, *at-Tadvih fi Halli Gawamiz at-Tankih*, vol. 1, pp. 178–188.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibn Sina, *Kitab al-Shifa* (Cairo, 1961), p. 31 (Ibn Sina [Avicenna], 980–1037).
- <sup>27</sup> John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), Chapters 1, 2, 5.
- <sup>28</sup> Nicholas Malebranche, *The Search after Truth*, in *Philosophical Selections*, ed. by Steven Nadler (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992), p. 94 (Malebranche, 1638–1715).
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.
- <sup>30</sup> Nicholas Malebranche, *Premotion*, in *Oeuvres Completes de Malebranche (OC)*, ed. by A. Robinet (Paris: J. Vrin, 1958–1967), vol. 16, p. 40.
- <sup>31</sup> Nicholas Malebranche, *Elucidations* in *OC*, vol. 1, p. 547 and *Reflexions* in *OC*, vol. 10, pp. 43–44.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, *OC*, vol. 1, p. 46.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, *OC*, vol. 9, p. 1129.
- <sup>34</sup> Elmar J. Kremer, *Malebranche on Human Freedom*, in *Cambridge Companion to Malebranche*, ed. Steven Nadler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 211.
- <sup>35</sup> Nicholas Malebranche, *The Search after Truth*, in *Philosophical Selections*, p. 95.
- <sup>36</sup> Sadr'us-Sharia, *at-Tadvih*, vol. 1, p. 180.
- <sup>37</sup> Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 20.
- <sup>38</sup> Brian O'Shaughnessy, *The Will: A Dual Aspect Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), vol. 2, p. 544. O'Shaughnessy makes a distinction between deciding and choosing. In the former act, "an uncertainty as to what to do finds resolution in the formation of an intention." He adds that not all intendings emerge out of deciding. The act of choosing is an act of selection. This selective act does not need to involve necessarily a decision procedure. These distinctions are useful to understand the mental phenomena better but my worry in this paper is just to deal with the problem of human freedom within an occasionalistic context. So I ignore these distinctions for my purpose in this paper.
- <sup>39</sup> Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Kulliyati* (Istanbul: Nesil Yayinlari, 2001), vol. 1, p. 232 (Said Nursi, 1878–1960).
- <sup>40</sup> Said Nursi, 2001, vol. 2, p. 1515.
- <sup>41</sup> Said Nursi, 2001, vol. 1, p. 598.
- <sup>42</sup> Nicholas Malebranche, *OC*, vol. 7, p. 568.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, *OC*, vol. 16, p. 29.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, *OC*, vol. 6, p. 163.
- <sup>45</sup> Rene Descartes, *A Letter to Mersenne (27 May 1630)*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. III, ed. and tr. by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch, and A. Kenny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 25 (Descartes, 1596–1650).
- <sup>46</sup> Elmar J. Kremer, *Malebranche on Human Freedom*, in *Cambridge Companion to Malebranche*, p. 214.
- <sup>47</sup> I would like to thank Oliver Leaman, David Bradshaw, Tahsin Gorgun, Ilhan Inan, Majid Amini, and Craig Streetman for their valuable comments and suggestions for the earlier drafts of this paper.

REVELATION AND REASON: IBN 'ARABI'S SUFISM  
AND G.W. LEIBNIZ'S IDEALISM

**Abstract:** In this chapter, I analyze the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi using the rational idealism of G. W. Leibniz as a comparative backdrop. After a brief overview of the history of Sufism and Ibn 'Arabi's biography, I expose the tenets of the Ibn 'Arabi's version of Sufism and analyze his method in espousing those precepts. I will illustrate Ibn 'Arabi's articulation of the meta-material reality followed by an explanation of how to approach that reality and how to receive its approach. Leibniz agrees with 'Arabi's claim that, ultimately, reality is unseen and meta-material, while, their approaches differ. However, if rationalists, friendly to Leibniz's method, take heed of the Sufi way, they might create conditions favorable to the experience of revealed truth. This capacity might curtail their dualistic tendencies that separate their philosophic and worldly endeavors. Leibniz's and of Ibn 'Arabi's philosophy both have an ethical purpose, and this marks their convergence in philosophical significance.

**Key words:** Revelation, reason, mysticism, sufism, rationalism, idealism, immanence, imagination, the perfect man, gnostic, manifestation, epiphany, vassal, divine names, monad, recollection, ontology, axiology, theophany, meditation, photism, logos

Revelation and reason: are these methods two sides of the same coin, or are they mutually exclusive? Is mysticism a problem for philosophy and is philosophy a hindrance to religious revelation? Are mystical spiritualism and rational idealism compatible, or are they negatively attracted like two positively charged magnets? These questions approach the problems of religion and philosophy at their cognitive and imaginative limits. The philosophy of Ibn 'Arabi represents an instance of a tradition amenable to revelation, but his method employs all the tools of traditional philosophy in order to present a metaphysics of revelation. Sufism represents a mystical and experiential route to truth. The rationalism of the Cartesian tradition is emblematic of the discursive path to truth. The idealism of G. W. Leibniz represents an instance of this tradition, but its *telos* demarcates it as amenable to the traditions given to revelation. When studied from the isolated perspective of epistemology, rational idealism and mysticism diverge, and appear antithetical. From this perspective, Ibn

'Arabi engages in an emancipatory project: he attempts to free writing from the fetters of ratiocination and to liberate the ineffable Allah from the confining constructs of traditional theology and metaphysics.<sup>1</sup> On the other side of this coin, Leibniz has often been viewed as a representative figure of so-called "bad metaphysics," and one might surmise that Sufism would scorn his systematic endeavor. However, the general tenets of their metaphysics align, as do some more enticing and specific points of connection. Both metaphysical idealism and metaphysical spiritualism reject the ultimate reality of matter as a fundamental substratum or substance. In turn, their convergence or mutual exclusion depends upon the weight each particular philosopher puts on the scale of metaphysics and epistemology. I posit that epistemology relies on metaphysics, and by that generalization I draw the main conclusions of this chapter. While the methods of these schools differ in their acquisition and search for the truth, their final vision of ultimate reality bears a remarkable resemblance. Both maintain the unity and immanence of God in a seemingly pluralistic universe. And for each the fundamental significance of the pursuit of philosophy is the articulation of its ethical significance, grounded in metaphysics.

This analysis will deal primarily with Sufism in general and Ibn 'Arabi's philosophy in particular. Leibniz will provide the comparative backdrop. After a brief summary of the history of Sufism and Ibn 'Arabi's biography, I intend to expose the tenets of the Ibn 'Arabi's version of Sufism and analyze his method in espousing those tenets. This amounts to an illustration of his metaphysics, followed by an explanation of his epistemology. Specifically, I will illustrate Ibn 'Arabi's articulation of the meta-material reality followed by an explanation of how to approach that reality and how to receive its approach. Unseen reality is uncreated and all pervading, and the gnostic on the proper path experiences and realizes this unseen reality in the manifold of symbolic meaning in the cosmos. The mystic approaches it through an understanding of the self, the self's desires, and a subsequent adjustment of one's desires, all of which create conditions favorable to meditative revelation. The idealists agree that, ultimately, reality is unseen and meta-material. Their approach to this reality, however, centers on rational dialectic, not meditation. Where Sufism is experiential, rational idealism is discursive. However, I contend that although these schools of thought differ in method, they ultimately agree on the nature of reality. If rationalists, remain open to the truths of mysticism in general and the Sufi way in particular, they might create conditions favorable to the experience of revealed truth. This capacity might curtail dualistic tendencies that separate philosophic and worldly endeavors. That the soul open to revealed truth bears a better chance at approaching it illustrates the relevance of Ibn 'Arabi's mysticism to contemporary philosophy. The ethical end of Leibniz's and Ibn 'Arabi's philosophy marks their convergence and philosophical significance.

## 1. SUFISM: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Sufism is a form of Islamic mysticism. Sufis travel a spiritual journey, at the heart of which lies the belief that during their life, they may become closer to God. In fact, they believe that the knowledge and understanding of God underlies His very act of creation. Based on a *hadith qudsi*, a sacred sentence uttered by the Prophet Muhammed, but not in the Qur'an, God created the world in order to be known. Consequently, there exists a constant attraction or pull of the believer towards the knowledge of God.

A Sufi believes that through certain spiritual disciplines, one may attain an understanding of God. An important Sufi doctrine presents itself here. These spiritual disciplines concern the believer's self-knowledge. And knowledge of the self leads to knowledge of God. Ibn 'Arabi has more to say on this issue specifically, but Sufis generally adhere to this tenet. Alongside this belief is the idea, held more or less by various Sufis, that there exists no gulf between the Being of the Creator and His creation. While God should not be equated with His creation, the gulf we experience is illusory, a function of our habitual residence in the sensory world.

Here, the balance struck by the Sufis between the transcendence of God, traditional to Islam, and His immanence revealed in our self-knowledge is remarkable. Sufis focus on the unity of being in God. The *tawhid*, the contention that God's unity is the fundamental belief of Islamic thought, is a prevailing theme in Ibn 'Arabi's works.<sup>2</sup> However, in line with the tradition of mysticism, we can come to know God; Ibn 'Arabi exposes the unique features of that type of knowledge. In one way, God is beyond our understanding, but that concealment itself is revealed to us in the modality of our reason. In the modality of our imagination, we can come to know God through His creation, scripture, and through our own self-knowledge, the feature I will most focus on this exposition.<sup>3</sup>

While a summary of Islamic mystical thought presents itself rather consistently in the literature, an etymology of the word, "Sufi," eludes us nearly altogether. Several options present themselves. First, it could be derived from the Arabic word for wool, *suf*. Sufis often clothed themselves in simple wool as a sign of their ascetic vows. Second, it could be derived from the Arabic *sufe*, a word referring to ascetics. Third, it could be derived from *sufateh*, the Arabic word for a specific, thin plant. Sufis were thin, like the plant, because of their rigorously self-controlled diet. Fourth, it could be derived from the Greek word for wisdom, *soph*. However, this option seems less probable as this type of wisdom is the dialectical type, which Sufis most often rejected. And it could be derived from *suffe*, the platform near the mosque where Muhammed prayed. In this case Sufis are "people of the *suffe*."

## 2. IBN 'ARABI: LIFE AND THOUGHT

Ibn 'Arabi was born in 1165 to the Moorish culture of Andalusian Spain, but he traveled throughout the Arabic-speaking world.<sup>4</sup> Spain was a cultural hub for the three dominant western religions, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. This multi-cultural center harbored the great literary, scientific, and philosophic works of Greek antiquity and preserved them through the "Dark Ages" of Western and Northern Europe. Perhaps Ibn 'Arabi owes some of his philosophical acumen to this exceptional environment. At the age of thirty he began to travel through North Africa to Southwest Asia. His first encounters with Sufism in Almeira are reminiscent of Jesus of Nazareth's religious situation. Ibn 'Arabi was at odds with the legalistic Muslims, known as *fuqaha*, the doctors of the law. He scorned their ignorance and depravity, much like Jesus did the Pharisees'. One source claims that he "was enjoined" in a vision to journey to east, so he traveled to Mecca in 1201, although it has been surmised that his journey was pragmatic, an attempt to flee from the threat of punishment from the *fuqaha*.<sup>5</sup> While there he met a Persian Sufi whom he eventually married, and he began his substantial work, *The Meccan Revelations* (*al-Futuhat al-Makkiyah*). This encyclopedic work of spiritual knowledge differentiated among three strands of wisdom – that of tradition, reason, and mystical insight – a body of work that is especially appropriate to the focus of this study. He also wrote *Fusus al-Hikam*, an exposition of the inner meaning of the wisdom of the prophets of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Moreover, Ibn 'Arabi was a renowned poet, writing *Diwan* and *Ashwaf*, two works of poetry in Arabic that reveal his conception of the unity of being.

Like many others in the tradition of Islamic philosophy, Ibn 'Arabi makes use of traditional Aristotelian metaphysics. He claims that God, like other substances has an essence and has attributes. God exists through His essence, yet in His essence, God is unknowable.<sup>6</sup> Ibn 'Arabi emphasizes the inability to know God's essence through logical evidence (*dalil*) or rational demonstration (*burhan 'aqli*).<sup>7</sup> However, God can reveal His attributes to the believer. As mentioned above, traditional Islam placed an influence on God's transcendence, "incomparability." Sufism in forms prior to Ibn 'Arabi, especially in the bold pronouncements of al-Bastimi, crossed the threshold into pantheism and emphasized the immanence and "similarity" of God.<sup>8</sup> Ibn 'Arabi's genius was to call attention to the importance of a suitable equilibrium between the two conceptions of God and their corresponding modes of understanding God, reason and imagination.<sup>9</sup> The gnostic, the believer who has knowledge of God, knows God, but also knows that his knowledge is limited. Furthermore, this God is a uniquely personal Lord for the believer. In the same way, Ibn 'Arabi contends that each religion ponders a limited form of God in a unique way. Ibn



'Arabi problematizes this by reference to the "Perfect Man," who exemplifies the actualization of all God's divine Names in their fullness, thereby becoming the outward form of the inner meaning of Allah Himself.<sup>10</sup> However, the Perfect Man (*insan al-kamil*) is the "first in intention, [and] last in actuality."<sup>11</sup> This means that most do not attain this, but man has been singled out for this purpose, by his unique ability to "disengage" from the "substrata (*al-mawadd*)."<sup>12</sup> This unique ability corresponds to the capacity and preparedness in man to be ignited by the Breath of God.<sup>13</sup>

Henry Corbin simplifies this distinction between the unknowable essence of Allah and the personal knowable referent to Allah's names by describing it as the difference in Al-Lah, the God, a universal, and Al-Rabb, the Lord, a particular attribute of God.<sup>14</sup> This distinction weighs heavily on some of the questions posed above. The gnostic has a one on one relationship with al-Rabb, his personal Lord. This individual relationship relies on the mystical method of the Sufis, not on universal logic.<sup>15</sup> One might assume that universal logic approaches *Allah*, the universal. However, Ibn 'Arabi would not agree with this assumption, and consequently, his mysticism maintains the orthodox position of the complete transcendence of God. In fact, Corbin goes further, in this articulation, to state that "discursive reason rejects [the manifestation of God]."<sup>16</sup>

Before we enter into a full-blown discussion of the mystical path, let us continue to expose Ibn 'Arabi's vision of God. Al-Rabb, the personal Lord, the attribute of God, is one of the divine Names. Each of these divine Names can be thought of as a "bi-unity." This twofold unity consists of an uncreated Lord and a created vassal. The uncreated Lord is the angel of the individual's being, and the created servant is an epiphanized or revealed form of the uncreated Lord. As mentioned above the highest epiphany of the divine is the Perfect Man, the human prototype of Adam. Divinity and humanity, in this regard, correspond to the hidden and inward and the external or outward, respectively, the latter created to serve the former.<sup>17</sup> However, the two roles of angel and vassal merge with each other in the spiritual life of the gnostic. The mystic, in the mode of imagination, can receive the manifestation of the divine Names.

Each divine Name, an attribute of God revealed in the mystical experience of the gnostic, resides in reciprocal union with all other Names. And al-Lah is the Name, which encompasses all divine attributes. Allah is not pluralized by His individuation in each theophanic occasion; God does not fragment Himself in the revelations of his Names. He is entirely present in each instance. From the perspective of the believer, Henry Corbin writes that each "devotee" realizes the immanence of God in every divine Name because the Names are in "sympathetic union."<sup>18</sup>

## 3. IBN 'ARABI AND LEIBNIZ

The relation of the created vassal to the uncreated Lord and the relationship of the divine Names to one another allow me to introduce the comparative backdrop of G. W. Leibniz. This "sympathetic union" of the Divine Names is the first connection between the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi and the idealism of Leibniz. It bears remarkable resemblance to the pre-established harmony of Leibniz's monads.<sup>19</sup> In Leibniz's monadology, each monad is a unique and finite perspective on the totality of its internal relations.<sup>20</sup> External relations are illusory: the apparent chain of causality we witness when two beings, or rational monads, interact, is really the pre-disposition and pre-existing potency of each being to act in pre-established harmony. It must be admitted that the important line to be drawn between these two figures and their respective schools of thought is not only epistemological. While Leibniz grants substantial reality to each monad and Ibn 'Arabi is monistic with regard to substance, the monad is a perspective, which resembles the entire world and is like a mirror of God. Consider this passage in the *Discourse* in light of Ibn 'Arabi's philosophic analogies:

The glory of God is multiplied in the same way by as many wholly different representations of his works. It can be said the every substance bears some sort the character of God's infinite wisdom and omnipotence, and imitates him as much as it is able to; for it expresses, although confusedly, all that happens in the universe . . . deriving thus a certain resemblance to an infinite perception or power of knowing.<sup>21</sup>

Now it must be added that perceptions are not attributes or features of God's one substance; they are themselves substances each with its own principle of activity. However, the essence of each finite perspective expresses the divine essence because of the continual action of God upon them. Leibniz states, "We may say, therefore, that God is for us the only immediate external object, and that we see things through him."<sup>22</sup> The confused nature of each monad reflects and corresponds to confusion that man encounters in the ontological middle realm of possibility between the sheer Being of God and sheer non-existence. The confusion of the monad is due to its finitude. The bewilderment man has in response to Allah's divine name is not only its finite perspective, but the illusion and contradiction the intellect enters into when contemplating Allah.<sup>23</sup> Although substance monism and pluralism are technically at odds, we see the metaphysical similarity consisting in the choice of analogy of the mirror. Just as each monad mirrors the universe, the Perfect Man (*insan al-kamil*) is a miniature of Reality, a microcosm, reflecting all the perfect attributes of the macrocosm.<sup>24</sup> The relation of Allah to each self-limited attribute, to each personal Lord, parallels the relation of God to each monad. Each monad reflects God; the divine Name reflects the Divine Being. Both of these thinkers, who

originate from disparate schools of thought, maintain the unity and revelation of God in a pluralistic universe of finite knowers.

Further inquiry into the mysticism of Ibn 'Arabi will reveal that although he reveals the inadequacies of ratiocinative theology, insofar as self-knowledge is one of the paths to God, he and Leibniz reveal additional similarities. The basic maxim for the Sufi is "He who knows himself, knows his Lord."<sup>25</sup> God reveals himself to us through our own self-understanding. As Chittick remarks, "To the extent that we do come to know ourselves correctly as the divine form, we also come to know the infinite God in both his incomparability and his similarity."<sup>26</sup> And therefore, our Lord, and for that matter, each of the divine Names, are relative to the believer who finds Him because the believer finds his Lord in a unique way. In reality the divine Names have their being in relation to the gnostic. The believer, in this regard, is not an insignificant afterthought; he is a major cosmic player, so to speak. And it appears that we and the divine Names are internally related. Corbin explains further that all individuals actualize as a result of the divine Names yearning to be revealed. God, as mentioned above, created the world to be known; in this sense, each of us is a divine revelation.<sup>27</sup> While the context and terminology of Leibniz's metaphysical system are quite far removed from the world of Sufism, a closer look reveals a higher degree of convergence. Each monad reflects both the entire universe and God. Perceiving the relations internal to each monad is analogous to the gnostic finding God through a process of self-understanding. The self, in both systems, is a microcosmic reflection of the universe and of God.

A further point of comparison concerns the doctrine of remembrance. Of course, Plato represented elements of recollection as both the necessary condition of our discursive access to knowledge and as mystical as well. Both Leibniz and Ibn 'Arabi contain versions of this ancient philosophical doctrine. Leibniz builds on Plato's doctrine by amending the definition of an idea. For Leibniz, an idea is not that which comes into our minds from the outside as wind comes into our homes through a window (as monads are windowless). If this were the case, each idea had would be different than others, and we could not conceive the same idea twice, resulting in nominalism. The idea is always in us, and we have the power to represent to ourselves any form during any occasion for thinking. We are reflecting on our minds because they contain in them at every moment all the forms for all periods of time because the mind expresses, albeit confusedly, all that we can and will think clearly. Leibniz inherits his realism from Plato but asks that the doctrine of recollection be purged of the error that we are remembering the knowledge from a previous embodiment of our soul.<sup>28</sup> Chittick summarizes this analogue in Ibn 'Arabi's Sufism in his discussion of the cosmology of remembrance. The truth

of the unity of God in the *tawhid* is a truth that we forget. Our finitude manifests itself in our “forgetfulness.” The prophets’ role of is to remind us of this eternal truth.<sup>29</sup> God reminds through the prophets, and man must remember. This expresses again the bi-directionality of the gnostic’s relationship to God discussed above.<sup>30</sup> The human condition for both Leibniz and Ibn ‘Arabi is one of a natural desire toward God; in Leibniz this expresses in remembrance as the necessary condition for our knowledge and the reality of ideas; in Ibn ‘Arabi this expresses itself in our keeping God in mind, in responding to the reminder, which are products of the one divine activity which embodies the good, true, and beautiful.<sup>31</sup> Although the emphasis in Leibniz is on the reality of our ideas and the nature of our access to them, while the emphasis in Ibn ‘Arabi is on the metaphysical truth of the *tawhid*, each expresses a similarity in the role of remembrance, and both point to the permanence of God as the fount of knowledge, whether it be acquired or recollected rationally or in revelation.

Returning to the microcosmic reflection of the universe and God, we ask what the relationship of the universe to God consists of. The meta-material reality, emanating from His divine Essence, pervades the world. Corbin wrote, “[God] flows through the things of the world like the waters of a river.”<sup>32</sup> The import of this statement cuts into the distinction between metaphysics and epistemology and enlivens my comparison. Ibn ‘Arabi wrote that the “People of Reflection, those who occupy themselves with speculation (*nazar*) and proofs restricted to the senses and to necessary and self-evident matters,” insist that those receiving God’s commands must be intelligent, but that much of the rest of reality is inanimate.<sup>33</sup> But the path of the mystic, whose imagination intends to know the unveiling of God’s attributes, the entire world is intelligent, living, and speaking.<sup>34</sup> What is interesting in Ibn ‘Arabi’s distinction is that Leibniz certainly represents a person of reflection described here; however, his monadology has given rise to the legacy of pan-psychism in thinkers such as Alfred North Whitehead and others. And while not all perspectives on the universe are intelligent (there are bare monads), each represents a plurality of relations, the infinite multiplicity in each perspective unity.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore the hierarchy of being for Leibniz parallels Ibn ‘Arabi’s insofar as the capacity to receive being (through the breath of God) is proportionate to the hierarchy of its form, from mineral, plant, animal, to man.<sup>36</sup> Corbin goes on to describe the universe: “Everything we call other than God, everything we call the universe, is related to the Divine Being as the shadow to the person. The world is God’s shadow.”<sup>37</sup> Now this analogy drives deep into the heart of creation theory. It reveals the relationship of the Creator to the created quite vividly; the created has an ontological status of dependence upon the Creator. Yet the revealed Lord is ontologically dependent upon the created shadow. However, objects lack the self-sufficiency in themselves to cast shadows. Light, emanating from some other source, is required to create a shadow. What is this light,

and what is its source, according to Ibn 'Arabi? Again Corbin provides insight, "His creation springs, not from nothingness, from something other than Himself, from a not-Him, but from His fundamental being, from the potencies and virtualities latent in His own unrevealed being."<sup>38</sup>

God's longing to be revealed, as this latent potency, appears at first glance to leave my stance unguarded insofar as this potency does not explicitly present itself in Leibniz's formulation. The principle of sufficient reason, that God created the best of all possible worlds, containing the greatest degree of compossible reason and consequent goodness, does not seem to groove with Allah's longing to be revealed. However, just as in Leibniz's system, God's goodness and perfection inheres in his unity, resulting in the creation of the best of all possible world containing infinite monads reflecting his unity, the perfection of the Allah's divine creative attribute becomes manifests itself in his creation. Just as the greatness of an artist manifests itself in her artwork, the greatness of God manifests itself in His creation. Allah is not dependent upon his desire to make himself manifest; rather His desire expresses his attribute perfect creativity. However, one wonders why God sought this manifestation. Could it be that our most worthy pursuit, our journey to understand God's nature through our own self-understanding, demands of us the best life? Could God's yearning be a yearning for moral purpose in our lives, which is fundamentally tied to revelation? Leibniz's normative prescriptions for the good life also entail an understanding of God. In Leibniz's words the good life is the rational life, and the cultivation of reason is the path to divine knowledge, revelation, if you will. Traveling this path, Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason and Allah's desire to be known bear more similarity than upon a passing glance.

At this juncture, however, the methods toward an understanding of God, the world, and the self diverge. An exposition of Ibn 'Arabi's mystical path towards the light of God, when cast on the backdrop of Leibniz's rational route to truth, will reveal the dissimilarities inherent in experiential intuition and cognitive reason. According to Ibn 'Arabi, when the believer approaches God, it is not the impersonal self, the ego, who approaches God; it is the true self. And that believer does not approach "the God of dogmatic definitions."<sup>39</sup> That dogmatically derived God exists without relation to the believer. The personal Lord approached exists wholly in relation to the gnostic. In relation to this Lord, the believer must contemplate his true self and his outer ego, his *nafs*. And God uses the believer as a mirror into which He contemplates his Divine Names. In this way, "We have a reciprocal relationship as between two mirrors facing one another and reflecting the same image back and forth."<sup>40</sup>

This brings us to an important discussion of the normative dimension in Ibn 'Arabi's Sufism. We must struggle with our *nafs* in order to create the possibility of divine revelation in us.<sup>41</sup> This struggle is the path of the mystic. It

originates in the first phrase of the first *shahada*, “There is no deity, except for God.” This first phrase is negative, and one must negate the false sense of self in order to spiritually purchase the affirmative portion of the *shahada*, “except for God.” When our *nafs* dominate our lives, we imagine that God is not present in our lives. This dangerous thought gives way to grosser effects of the *nafs* dominance. We feel the need to gratify our desires: we succumb to anger, lust, addiction, and to our own mental states of anxiety, tedium, and despair, so that we feel as if we were impotent prisoners caged within our own atomized (and tormented) minds. How must the Sufi fight this battle? He must control himself from acting out of anger and gratifying addictions. He must realize the impossibility of achieving fulfillment through these means. He must negate the feeling that he cannot escape his self-conscious captivity, and he must relinquish the thought that God is absent. This generally manifests itself in the attitude of asceticism, the tradition that posed so many of the possible etymological roots to the word, Sufism.

Corbin’s discussion of the ethical dimensions of the path of the Sufi mystic highlights Chittick’s discussion of the ethical importance of discerning the *haqq* of things. The modern tendency to translate the subjective-objective poles of our phenomenological experience into a metaphysical description of reality strips the objects of investigation (the objects, relationships, and concepts) of their “*haqq*s, that is, their characteristic of having real relationships with the Real and of making demands on the subjects who deal with them.”<sup>42</sup> Chittick shows that the Sufi insight is another mode of overturning the tragedy of modernity: that modern science has eviscerated objective knowledge of its value. However, in Ibn ‘Arabi’s account, ethical norms have as much objectivity as scientific knowledge, as construed by the moderns. In fact, insofar as the objectivity of things is taken as axiological and ontological at once, these ethical norms have more, for they are not founded on the mistake of modernity, which put “Reality on one side and things on the other.” And although Leibniz’s path to God is a rational one, the idealism of his monadology attempts to dispel the dichotomies of modernity, as does Sufism. Furthermore, both attempts to do so reveal the objective ethical dimensions of each philosophy.

The Sufi path, however, emphasizes the ascetic norms, and these provide the conditions for the affirmation of God’s immanence. The mystical path takes the ascetic toward God through a private dialogue, a *manajat*. This prayer is a two-way street. Thus, Ibn ‘Arabi interprets the passage from the Qur’an, “Have me present in your heart. I shall have you present to myself” (2:147). We do not pray to God asking for something; we pray in order to express a mode of existing, whereby we experience theophany. Divine Compassion is God’s prayer to be known, to be remembered in *dhikr*. At its peak, the gnostic experiences a meditative vision of God. Ibn ‘Arabi describes three stages of this

meditative process. First, the believer must begin a conversation with God. Next, in an intermediate moment, he must imagine God facing him. And last, he must attain an "intuitive vision" realizing God in the center of his "subtle organ" the heart, and "simultaneously hear the divine voice vibrating in all manifest things, so much so that he hears nothing else."<sup>43</sup> At this point, the faithful achieves, "annihilation or extinction in unity."<sup>44</sup>

Corbin describes this "suprasensory" experience with clarity. He writes, "None of this, [meditation], takes place in the outer sensory world, nor in the 'imaginary world,' but only in the *mundus imaginalis* ('*alam al-mithal*'), the imaginative world to which belong organs of the same nature in the human being, namely the centers of subtle psychology (the *latifa*)."<sup>45</sup> He explains at length the role of the mystical experience of the spectra of light during meditation. The inner visual experience progresses from an apperception of images in the sensory world, to a direct perception of persons and essences, finally towards an experience of colored photisms, of light upon light. These colored photisms signify the "transmutation of the sensory by the transmutation of the senses into suprasensory organs."<sup>46</sup>

Metaphysics of spirit underlies the process of divine revelation through meditation. This metaphysical system of the Sufis gets at the heart of the spiritual nature of ultimate reality. Ibn 'Arabi writes that the prophetic Logos is both the eternal Muhammed through which God reveals Himself, and the creative principle by and through which God created the world. This suggests that at the heart of every seemingly material reality there exists spirit, meaning, and divinity. Matter, as unintelligible, is not the ultimate substratum of reality; spirit, as the lifeblood of divine meaning and intelligibility is. In Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysics, the eternal subsumes the temporal, as the spiritual does the material.<sup>47</sup> This ultimate reality of spirit as divine meaning makes possible the process of meditation, which relies on the suprasensory organs to transform the faithful towards transconsciousness. The Sufi views sensory experience not simply as illusory, but as cryptic and symbolic as al-Rabb speaks only in symbols. The process of encountering the Lord is "a hermeneutics of symbols [...], a method of understanding which transmutes sensory data and rational concepts into symbols, [making the symbols effect this process]."<sup>48</sup> As I mentioned above, epistemology rests on the foundation of metaphysics.

Let us return now to the rational idealism of Leibniz. The question remains: what is the relationship of spirit to reason? Hegel said that Spirit is the synthesis of Idea and its antithesis, Nature. In other words, nature manifests the idea spiritually, that is socially, historically, and culturally. But in the spirit of mysticism might it be that language discounts the worth of ultimate meaning? This was, after all, the problem the Sufis had with philosophy, and it is, of course, the problem philosophy has with mysticism. Mysticism is experiential.



It is intuitive and immediate, a genuinely first order discipline. William James abstracted from a variety of mystical experiences that they were “ineffable.” Sufi philosophers, adept at putting their experiences into words, might disagree, and I think Ibn ‘Arabi’s words, (and Chittick’s and Corbin’s words about Ibn ‘Arabi’s thought), are quite illustrative. However, philosophy will always be a second order discipline. Its use of language implies a gap between the sign and the signified, between words and meaning. Leibniz’s method and route to truth employs reason and its handmaiden, language. It partakes in rational discourse and logical scrutiny. On Leibniz’s journey to his formulation of the monad as the universal, individuated substance, he applied the “complete concept theory” to Aristotelian predicate logic. The implications of logical analysis led him to his metaphysical system.

However, our question still demands clarification. Do reason and revelation need to be dichotomized like so many notions, imprisoned by the dualism of the Western canon? I think not. Both spiritualism and idealism reject materialism. Both schools resemble each other in their depiction of God. The Sufis envision that God limits Himself by making one of his attributes revealed to the gnostic in the form of his personal Lord. This Lord, this divine Name maintains both a sympathetic union with all other divine Names and a unity with the divine Essence. Leibniz’s monads maintain a pre-established harmony. The Sufis teach that the path to God is internal, that to know God is to search within oneself. Leibniz’s rational monads must perceive the totality of relations internal to the monad in order to understand God, since, in both schools, God is reflected in the soul of man and man is God’s reflection. The finite perspective of the Sufi insures that he will experience his Lord, a divine attribute, which participates in the being of the believer, in his true self. The finite perspective of the monad is what defines its very being. The Allah of Sufism encompasses all divine attributes. Similarly, Leibniz’s God perceives the totality of its internal relations with the perspectival character of the finite monad held in check.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

However, they do differ in terms of method. The former relies on meditation, the latter reason. But this method tends toward the same goal: an understanding of the divine. While the Sufi battles his *nafs* in order to create conditions receptive toward Divine Compassion and *dhikr*, the rational monad must use sufficient reason to contemplate the best and most rational course of action. While many philosophers follow a rational and discursive path to truth, it would be narrow-minded and dogmatic to fail to realize that our approach is limited. When confronted with theological questions, we often preface and disclaim our



responses by adding, "I am not a mystic." However, this would be as fruitless as the patient refusing his physician's promptings to exercise by announcing that she is not an athlete. Perhaps attempting to create more favorable conditions with which to receive Divine Compassion in meditation would help our philosophical endeavors. By battling false senses of ego and the prison of self-consciousness, so many philosophers, who fail to heed their own call, would curb their dualistic tendencies. In other words, taking the advice of mystics in general and the Sufis in particular may help bridge the gap between the philosophic and worldly endeavors of the rationalist. Leibniz, the rationalist, and Ibn 'Arabi, the Islamic mystic, travel divergent paths to the same truth – the unity and immanence of God in a pluralistic universe.

We began by asking whether revelation and reason were two sides of the same coin or mutually exclusive? The truth of the matter is that couching the terms in an excluded middle is an effective rhetorical device, but not all that helpful if we are to disclose continuities between them. With our comparative analysis completed, we do not find them to be two sides of the same coin or mutually exclusive. Mysticism has been a problem for philosophical analysis historically because of philosophy places such gold standard on discursive thought and language and mysticism reveals truths often "described" as ineffable. Philosophy can be seen as a hindrance to religious revelation if we allow our rational capacities and structures to harden into rigid ontologies. But both of these historical and potential problems, to my mind, reveal only that bad philosophy and mysticism are mutually exclusive. (1) Allowing mysticism into one's philosophy serves two purposes: it stretches the limits of one's imagination, thereby recruiting our non-linguistic capacities to our service. (2) Mysticism reminds us that our philosophy should be a moral enterprise from the start. Its truths orient the *telos* of philosophical inquiries. I hope my inquiry has revealed this *telos* and helped us stretch our imaginations by comparing these two important philosophers who would otherwise be treated as rigidly distinct if we allowed our excluded middles to legislate the bounds of philosophy.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ian Almond, "The Shackles of Reason Sufi/Deconstructive Opposition to Rational Thought", *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 53, no. 1 (Jan., 2003), pp. 22–38.

<sup>2</sup> William C. Chittick, *Makers of the Muslim World Ibn 'Arabi Heir to the Prophets* (Oxford: One World, 2005), p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

- <sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 4.
- <sup>5</sup> Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 251.
- <sup>6</sup> Michael Chodkiewicz, William C. Chittick, and James Winston Morris, *Ibn al 'Arabi: The Meccan Revelations* (NY: Pir Press, 2002), p. 32 (§ 118. 33).
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 32 (§ 118. 35).
- <sup>8</sup> *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, p. 243. The reference to "similarity" is to Chittick's use of the term as analogous to immanent. If God can be similar and comparable, as Sufi poetry would suggest, then it emphasizes his immanence as opposed to the traditional formulation of transcendence.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibn 'Arabi Heir to the Prophets*, p. 19.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 42.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 43 (§ 104.29).
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 44 (§ 104.29).
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 52 (§ 426. 32).
- <sup>14</sup> Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, Trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 122.
- <sup>15</sup> *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, p. 94.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 188–189.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibn al 'Arabi: The Meccan Revelations*, pp. 42 and 36 (§ 120. 2). Also see *A History of the Islamic Philosophy*, p. 253.
- <sup>18</sup> *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, p. 134.
- <sup>19</sup> G.W. Leibniz, *Discourse on Method Correspondence with Arnauld Monadology*, Trans. George Montgomery (Las Salle: Open Court Publishing, 1995), p. 269 (*Monadology* § 78). Here Leibniz is referring to the conformity between the soul and the organic body. However, this also refers to the harmony among monads. As each cannot be effected by external relations (the monads are windowless), the evident effect of each on the rest is also governed by pre-established harmony.
- <sup>20</sup> *Discourse on Metaphysics* (§ IX).
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid. (§ IX).
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid. (§ XXVIII).
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibn al 'Arabi: The Meccan Revelations*, p. 63 (§ 197. 25).
- <sup>24</sup> Roland Stahl, "The Philosophy of Kabir," *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 4, no. 2 (Jul., 1954), 149. Stahl makes the connection I am emphasizing here between Leibniz and Ibn 'Arabi. He cites A.J. Arberry, *Sufism*, trans. Edward Fitzgerald (NY: The Macmillan Co., 1950), p. 109, in order to illustrate the Perfect Man as a microcosm reflecting the divine attributes.
- <sup>25</sup> *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, p. 95.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibn 'Arabi Heir to the Prophets*, p. 20.
- <sup>27</sup> *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, pp. 114–115.
- <sup>28</sup> *Discourse on Metaphysics* (§ XXVI).
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibn 'Arabi Heir to the Prophets*, pp. 54–55.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 55.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 55.
- <sup>32</sup> *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, p. 95.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibn al 'Arabi: The Meccan Revelations*, p. 36 (§ 120. 6).
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 36 (§ 120. 6).
- <sup>35</sup> *Monadology* (§ 13 and 14).
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibn al 'Arabi: The Meccan Revelations*, p. 52 (§ 426. 32).

<sup>37</sup> *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, p. 185.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

<sup>41</sup> Ibn 'Arabi uses the term *nafs* in seemingly several ways. In one sense it is the soul, as the essential unity of the faculties of activity and intellect. See *MR*, p. 53 (§ 427. 10). Here I am using it more in the Greek sense of psyche, representing the more worldly hang-ups that the saint strives to overcome.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibn 'Arabi Heir to the Prophets*, p. 99.

<sup>43</sup> Henry Corbin, *The Man Of Light in Iranian Sufism* (New Lebanon, New York: Omega Publications, 1994), p. 78.

<sup>44</sup> *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, p. 254.

<sup>45</sup> *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, p. 76.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>47</sup> *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, p. 254.

<sup>48</sup> *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, pp. 188–189.

IQBAL ON SELF AND PRIVACY: A CRITICAL  
ANALYSIS IN THE LIGHT OF WITTGENSTEIN'S  
*PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS*

**Abstract:** The conception of self enjoys a pivotal position in the philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal. He rejects the picture of self construed on the analogy of a thing. Self, for him, is an act not a thing. The appropriate method of knowing the self, according to him, is through the interpretation of conscious experience, which reveals that it is a unity in which states of consciousness melt into one another and form an organic whole. With this notion, the problem of freedom, the relation between mind and body, and the issue of immortality are explained in ways that are different from the dominant philosophical tradition. Like other philosophers, however, Iqbal seems to cling to the notion of "privacy" as the essence of self/mind which leads to some fundamental problems in philosophy and has been the focus of attention of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. The present paper will attempt to examine Iqbal's conception of self as he developed it in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* and will also examine the issue of privacy in the light of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*.

**Key words:** Muhammed Iqbal, L. Wittgenstein God, self, ego, privacy, consciousness

Muhammad Iqbal's philosophical system revolves around the notion of self or ego. For him, God<sup>1</sup> is a self or ego, who is absolutely perfect, and whatever God creates has selfhood. The realization of self is different at different levels. God is an absolutely perfect ego. Man is a relatively perfect self as he is a self-conscious being and is capable of having direct contact with ultimate reality through religious/mystical experience.

Human ego, for Iqbal, is the finite center of all experience.<sup>2</sup> Mental states or experiences form an organic whole by being internally related to each other, which is called mind.<sup>3</sup> The internal relation, which is characteristic of the mental realm, makes it different from the external world. The difference between them is fully captured in the two conceptions of time that seem to be synonymous with Iqbal's system. Like Bergson, Iqbal distinguishes between serial time and duration. The former belongs to the external world, while the latter to the world of consciousness.<sup>4</sup> This makes it impossible to study the nature of

self with the help of scientific methodology, i.e., modern psychology, as scientific methodology operates on the external world of serial time where one deals with kinds of things and not with their uniqueness. Uniqueness also belongs to the essence of self. According to Iqbal, "Mental unity is absolutely unique."<sup>5</sup>

Not only science but philosophy has also failed to understand the nature of self because philosophical attempts are conceptual investigations and the notion of self is so subtle and unique that it cannot be intellectualized.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, when intellectualized, the self, like other concepts, becomes something static and loses both its uniqueness and individuality. What one gets after this effort is the notion of soul-substance which can also be found in al-Ghazali and other classical philosophers. According to Iqbal, al-Ghazali's "ego is a simple, indivisible, and immutable soul-substance, entirely different from the group of our mental states and unaffected by the passage of time. Our conscious experience is a unity, because our mental states are related as so many qualities to this simple substance which persists unchanged during the flux of its qualities."<sup>7</sup>

Iqbal disagrees with the view of soul substance. The following may be noted in this connection:

- i) Like Kant, Iqbal maintains that it is not possible to argue for the ontological status of soul substances on the basis of any formal condition of thought. He says that "[t]he 'I think' which accompanies every thought is, according to Kant, a purely formal condition of thought, and the transition from a purely formal condition of thought to ontological substance is logically illegitimate."<sup>8</sup>
- ii) The soul substance does not reveal itself in experience<sup>9</sup>, and is of no psychological interest.<sup>10</sup>
- iii) The phenomenon of alternating personality cannot be explained with the help of soul substance.<sup>11</sup>

Iqbal is also dissatisfied with the views of interactionism or parallelism of mind and body, which are characteristic of Cartesian dualism and Spinoza's pantheism. He holds that the true nature of self cannot be revealed through any of these positions. Such a task can only be accomplished through the interpretation of conscious experience. Experience, therefore, is the correct way of knowing the nature of self. Iqbal finds this approach in William James. Iqbal of contents:

William James conceives consciousness as "a stream of thought" – a conscious flow of changes with a felt continuity.<sup>12</sup> He finds a kind of gregarious principle working in our experiences which have, as it were, 'hooks' on them, and thereby catch up one another in the flow of mental life.<sup>13</sup> The ego consists of the feelings of personal life, and is, as such, part of the system of thought. Every pulse of thought, present or perishing, is an indivisible unity which knows and recollects. The appropriation of the passing pulse by the present pulse of thought, and that of the present by its successor, is the ego.<sup>14</sup>

Iqbal is, however, not satisfied with James's conclusion. The reason for Iqbal's dissatisfaction lies in the fact that it "ignores the relatively permanent element in experience."<sup>15</sup> Iqbal is convinced that, "We appreciate the ego itself in the act of perceiving, judging, and willing."<sup>16</sup> Thus ego, for him, is not the finer matter of the Islamic theologians (*mutakallimun*), nor is there a Cartesian dualistic picture of soul. It is also different from James's picture of the self. For Iqbal, self is an act rather than a thing. This conception of self stems from his interpretation of the Qur'anic verses.

And they ask thee of the soul. Say: the soul proceedeth from my Lord's *Amr* [Command]: but of knowledge, only a little to you is given.<sup>17</sup>

To Him belong creation and direction.<sup>18</sup>

According to Iqbal's interpretation, God's creation means the external world, while His direction means the self. He says:

Thus my real personality is not a thing; it is an act. My experience is only a series of acts, mutually referring to one another, and held together by the unity of a directive purpose. My whole reality lies in my directive attitude. You cannot perceive me like a thing in space, or a set of experiences in temporal order; you must interpret, understand, and appreciate me in my judgments, in my will-attitudes, aims, and aspirations.<sup>19</sup>

The human being is not a duality of mind and body but a unity. The soul is a system of acts and body is a system of events. Both come from God, the former as directed while the latter as created. According to Iqbal "[t]he characteristic of the ego is spontaneity; the acts composing the body repeat themselves. The body is accumulated action or habit of the soul; and as such undetachable from it." This analysis not only explains mind-body relation but also helps in explaining the notion of freedom. The system of events, the world external to consciousness, is governed by causal laws, hence is mechanistically determined in serial time. The world of consciousness, being a system of acts, endures in non-mathematical time where the causal laws do not operate, which makes it free. Freedom is an essential property of self.

Iqbal identifies two sides of the self, namely the efficient self and the appreciative self, which accord with his distinction between serial time and duration. The efficient self is the "subject of associationist psychology" as it "enters into a relation with what we call the world of space." He explains it as follows:

The self here lives outside itself as it were, and, while retaining its unity as a totality, discloses itself as nothing more than a series of specific and consequently numerable states. The time in which the efficient self lives is, therefore, the time of which we predicate long and short. It is hardly distinguishable from space. We can conceive it only as a straight line composed of spatial points which are external to one another like so many stages in a journey.<sup>20</sup>

Appreciative self, on the contrary, endures in pure time or duration. It is the appreciative self that reveals the true nature of ego. Iqbal argues:

A deeper analysis of conscious experience reveals to us what I have called the appreciative side of the self . . . It is only in the moments of profound meditation, when the efficient self is in abeyance, that we sink into our deeper self and reach the inner centre of experience. In the life-process of this deeper ego the states of consciousness melt into each other. The unity of the appreciative ego is like the unity of the germ in which the experiences of its individual ancestors exist, not as a plurality, but as a unity in which every experience permeates the whole.<sup>21</sup>

Iqbal holds that the creative act of God is not arbitrary. It has both direction and meaning. God is a perfect ego or self and whatever He creates contains selfhood. For Iqbal, nature by being organically related to its creator enjoys selfhood and displays the habits of the Almighty in its laws and patterns. If we look around in this universe/nature, we find an inorganic world and an organic world. The latter involves both the plant kingdom and the animal kingdom. Selfhood is present in both the inorganic and the organic world. Its realization, however, is different at different levels. Since God is the Creator of all and his Creativity is with a direction and purpose, the realization of selfhood has evolved according to the direction set by the Almighty. The evolution of selfhood reached its summit in man. Man is capable of coming in intimate contact with the Absolutely Perfect Being [God] through prayer, knowledge or religious experience, and in this way he can achieve perfection in a relative sense.

Although Iqbal is highly critical of Darwin, he supports a view of evolution in the manner of Ibn Maskawayh and Jalaluddin Rumi. As to the question of how did man first emerge, Iqbal quotes with approval the following lines from Jalaluddin Rumi.

First man appeared in the class of inorganic things,  
     Then he passed therefrom into that of plants.  
 For years he lived as one of the plants,  
     Remembering naught of his inorganic state so different;  
 And when he passed from the vegetative to the animal state  
     He had no remembrance of his state as a plant,  
 Except the inclination he felt to the world of plants,  
     Especially at the time of spring and sweet flowers.  
 Like the inclination of infants towards their mothers,  
     Which know not the cause of their inclination to the breast . . .  
 Again the great Creator, as you know,  
     Drew man out of the animal into the human state.  
 Thus man passed from one order of nature to another,  
     Till he became wise and knowing and strong as he is now.  
 Of his first souls he has no remembrance.  
     And he will be again changed from his present soul.<sup>22</sup>

The self, being directed from God, has the capacity to reach ultimate reality through religious experience or prayer. For Iqbal, prayer is a way to turn away from the worldly affairs towards the depth of one's being and to return to the being from whom the soul is directed. In this experience, the self doesn't cease to exist but, rather, it achieves its potential which is perfection in a relative sense. Here Iqbal seems to reject Pantheism. Human self is real and it does not lose its reality in coming in contact with the ultimate reality. Far from that, it realizes its potential. The Man-God relationship is captured in the following lines in *Message From the East*.

You created the night (*Man is talking to God*)  
 —I lit the lamp;  
 You created clay—I moulded the cup;  
 You made the wilderness; I cultivated flower-beds.  
 I made a mirror from a rock,  
 and from poison I extracted a sweet beverage (*Piyam-i Mashriq*)

An important feature of self that has been held by the classical and modern philosophers is its immortality. Iqbal, however, differs from them on this issue. Immortality of self, according to him, is not given as a gift but has to be achieved through living a life directed towards God who is the absolutely perfect Self. The following may be concluded about the nature of the human ego from the above discussion:

1. Human self is an act not a thing.
2. It is the center of all experience, so the real nature of self can be understood only by a conscious interpretation of experience. [It is a unity in which states of consciousness melt into each other and form an organic whole.]
3. Human ego is relatively perfect and is free.
4. Human beings have evolved according to the direction set forth by God.
5. Immortality of the soul is not given. It has to be achieved. When self achieves its true potential, it cannot cease to exist.

We see here that Iqbal disagrees with traditional thinkers as well as with the moderns on important points. He, however, agrees with other philosophers in maintaining that *privacy* is the essence of ego.<sup>23</sup> This seems to be a mistaken view and in what follows I shall attempt to examine it critically. The criticism of this view owes a lot to my reading of the later Wittgenstein.

Iqbal says that an "important characteristic of the unity of the ego is its essential privacy which reveals the uniqueness of every ego." According to this view of privacy, it is logically impossible to know, share and have access to what goes on in another person's mental realm. This view leads us to the problem of other minds. The following may be concluded regarding the privacy of ego:



- a) Human ego, which as mentioned above, is a single and unique center of experience, possesses an organic unity of mental states.
- b) Privacy of experience is the central feature of human ego.
- c) The only way to know the true nature of human ego is to have direct experience of the same.
- d) Direct experience of ego is essentially private.
- e) The essential privacy of experience does not leave room for any inter-subjective category.

In an effort to prove privacy of ego, Iqbal writes:

In order to reach a certain conclusion all the premises of a syllogism must be believed in by one and the same mind. If I believe in the proposition 'all men are mortal', and another mind believes in the proposition 'Socrates is a man', no inference is possible. It is possible only if both the propositions are believed in by me.<sup>24</sup>

This line of reasoning is erroneous. It assumes inference to be essentially psychological rather than logical. Inference, it is often said, is an objective relation that holds between propositions and not between states of consciousness. There is no place for psychologism – a view that reduces logic to psychology – in modern logic.

Iqbal also brings the following argument in order to prove his notion of privacy of mental states:

Again, my desire for a certain thing is essentially mine. Its satisfaction means my private enjoyment . . . My pleasures, pains, and desires are exclusively mine, forming a part and parcel of my private ego alone . . . My feelings, hates and loves, judgments and resolutions, are exclusively mine.<sup>25</sup>

Iqbal's reasoning seems to assume two senses of privacy, namely inalienable privacy of states of consciousness by the first person alone, and epistemic privacy.<sup>26</sup> States of consciousness are believed to be exclusively owned by the first person. Again, only the first person can experience them, which is the only way to know what belongs to one's mental realm. Since another person cannot have access to my private realm, he cannot feel or experience what belongs exclusively to me. And this leads us to conclude that another person cannot know what I know.

As is evident from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, both these senses of privacy are mistaken.<sup>27</sup> In the first case, mental states are construed on the pattern of physical objects—a consequence of taking name-object relationship as *the* foundation of language. It may be noted here that states of mind are akin to colors and habits rather than the physical objects. These are identified by their characteristic expressions and not by their locality. There is no sample or thing exclusively belonging to one's private realm on the basis of which

'mental conduct vocabulary' functions, since, in that case the word cannot be used in our language.

Wittgenstein identifies the problem in the following section of *Philosophical Investigations*:

If I say of myself that it is only from my own case that I know what the word "pain" means—must I not say the same of other people too? And how can I generalize the *one* case so irresponsibly?

Now someone tells me that *he* knows what pain is from his own case!—Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a "beetle." No one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle.—Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing.—But suppose the word "beetle" had a use in these people's language?—If so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as *something*: for the box might even be empty.—No one can "divide through" by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is.

That is to say: if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of "object and the name" the object drops out of consideration as something irrelevant.<sup>28</sup>

The second view of privacy is also mistaken. Here "knowing" is taken to be logically equivalent to "feeling" or "having an experience." It is not difficult to see from here the difference between a first person and a third person claim about mental states. I know the sensation that I am having by feeling or experiencing it. Since I cannot *have* the sensation of others, therefore, I cannot know what the other person (third person) is experiencing.<sup>29</sup> A careful reading of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* will show that the logic or grammar of knowing is very different from the logic or grammar of feeling. They belong to different families of ideas. Whenever there is a knowing claim it is possible to doubt it. Doubt, however, has no place in the case of felt experiences [like pains and other mental states]; as it makes no sense to say that "I doubt whether I am in pain." Again, in the case of knowledge there is a possibility of learning. As far as mental states are concerned, there is no teaching and learning them. In the case of learning there is, in principle, ignorance before learning something, whereas the so called *epistemic privacy* leaves no place for us to be ignorant of my mental states. Since I cannot be said to be ignorant of my mental states, it follows, I cannot be said to learn them either.

It is true that one may keep something secret to oneself. This sense of privacy is different from the one that Iqbal assumes. In this sense, it can be safely said that nothing can be private unless it is, in principle, publicly accessible. It is also true that my recognition of something refers to my past experience, but it does not follow from here that I privately own something in my mind which could not be shared by anyone else.

Iqbal takes experience, which includes both sensory experience and mystical experience, to be a source of knowledge. In his system, reason is also a

source of knowledge. Like the British Empiricists and Continental Rationalists of early modern philosophy, he takes knowledge to be a relation between a knower and the known. This leads to a subject centered position. Knowledge, for both British Empiricists and Continental Rationalists, is ultimately explained by referring to the contents of mind. Iqbal is right in holding that there is more than one source of knowledge. He, however, ends up in the same subjectivist position because of a misconceived notion of knowledge. The privacy of experience and the privacy of knowledge are both mistaken. There is no denying the fact that one learns by experience, but it should be taken into consideration that experience presupposes a background, which is shared. The privacy of experience model seems to overlook this consideration. In the same way, the rationalists' view of indubitable knowledge is subjective. It needs to be noted that knowledge involves truth, criticism and objectivity, which seems to be missing in the conception of knowledge adopted by Iqbal.

We have seen here that Iqbal's conception of self is, in many ways, different from that of medieval Muslim thinkers and philosophers from the modern period. But he shares with them the notion of "privacy" as the essence of self, which leads to problems in philosophy. The methodology that Iqbal pursues for knowing the self through the interpretation of conscious experience leads to a subjectivist account of knowledge as it equates "knowledge" with "subjective experience." Knowledge involves truth and objectivity, which is missing here. As shown by the later Wittgenstein, the reason for this lies in the conception of language for which the name-object relationship is considered to be the foundation, and as a consequence meaning lies in the contents of mind. It may be said that although Iqbal rejects the notion of self which is akin to a thing, his view of "privacy" is deeply embedded in the conception of language that locates "meaning" in the "nature of things." Wittgenstein's criticism of the privacy picture suggests that experience presupposes a background that is shared, and his rejection of object-oriented theory of meaning provide a framework for avoiding the problems relating to privacy picture. Experience shows that there is a concrete network of relations that links oneself with others, and it seems to be the case that self should be understood within this context.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> God, according to Iqbal, is an absolutely Perfect Individual, closed off as an ego, peerless and unique. Creativeness, Knowledge, Omnipotence, and Eternity are other important elements in the Qur'anic conception of God. The universe according to Iqbal is organically related to God who is ceaselessly involved in the act of Creation. In Him thought and deed are one. God does

not only create but also knows His creation. Divine knowledge must be conceived of as a living creative activity to which the objects that appear to exist in their own right are organically related. God is immediately aware of the entire sweep of history in a single indivisible act. There is no before and after for Him (which means that God is Eternal). The future certainly pre-exists in the organic whole of God's creative life as an open possibility, not as a fixed order of events with definite outlines. See Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934).

<sup>2</sup> He disagrees with F. H. Bradley's view according to which ego is a mere illusion which is based on the system of logic within which Bradley operates. Iqbal, however, notes that Bradley reluctantly admits the reality of ego. He writes, "Yet, in spite of the fact that his [Bradley's] ruthless logic has shown the ego to be a mass of confusion, Bradley has to admit that the self must be 'in some sense real', 'in some sense an indubitable fact'." See *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 78. References that are in parentheses in these end notes are provided by M. Saeed Sheikh.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>4</sup> Iqbal says, "Again, mental and physical events are both in time, but the time-span of the ego is fundamentally different to the time-span of the physical event. The duration of the physical event is stretched out in space as a present fact; the ego's duration is concentrated within it and linked with its present and future in a unique manner. The formation of a physical event discloses certain present marks which show that it has passed through a time-duration; but these marks are merely emblematic of its time duration; not time-duration itself. True time-duration belongs to the ego alone," *ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 80 [*Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 329–330].

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>11</sup> Iqbal clarifies it as follows: "And it may further be pointed out that in view of the improbability of different soul-substances controlling the same body at different times, the theory can offer no adequate explanation of phenomena such as alternating personality, formerly explained by the temporary possession of the body by evil spirits," *ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1, Chapter ix, p. 340. [provided by M. Saeed Sheikh]

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1, Chapter ix; cf. *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 342, note (a) where Kant gives an illustration of a series of elastic balls in connection with the third paralogism to establish the numerical identity of the ego. Kemp Smith in his *Commentary*, p. 461, has rightly observed that William James's psychological description of self-consciousness is simply an extension of this illustration. [provided by M. Saeed Sheikh]

<sup>14</sup> *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 96 [Cf. *Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1, Chapter ix, p. 339].

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 82 [Qur'an, 17:85].

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. [Qur'an, 7:54].

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 82–83.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 97 [*Masnawi*, pp. 216–217].

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 94–95.

<sup>26</sup> Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein* (London: Allen Lane, 1973).

<sup>27</sup> For detail, see my paper “Inalienable Private Ownership of Sensation and Sensation Vocabulary in Public Language” in *Al-Hikmat*, vol. 23 (2003), pp. 25–33.

<sup>28</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963). This work has been cited here as PI. References are to section in part-i. Section 293 (PI, 293).

<sup>29</sup> It is not difficult to see from here the difference between a first person and a third person claims about mental states. I know the sensation that I am having by feeling it/experiencing it. Since, I cannot have the sensation of others; therefore, I cannot know what the other person (third person) is experiencing.

### SECTION III

WHO IS THE GOD OF THE QUR'AN? A MEDIEVAL  
ISLAMIC DEBATE AND CONTEMPORARY  
PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

**Abstract:** This chapter revisits al-Ghazali's classic polemic against the Islamic *falasifa* on the one hand, as well as Ibn Rushd's attempt to refute al-Ghazali's position, on the other. The chapter does not examine the specifics of this well-known discussion, but focuses on the significance of al-Ghazali's charge that the philosophers offer a mere philosophical construction of God, very different from the God of Islam. It then addresses the question of whether there is a "God of religion" as opposed to a "God of the philosophers," by drawing also on Ibn Rushd's position concerning the relation between Scripture and philosophy in his *Decisive Treatise*.

Ultimately the chapter offers an examination and evaluation of both al-Ghazali's and Ibn Rushd's concerns in the light of Ludwig Wittgenstein's invocation of ordinary language by exploring how concepts (and thus religious concepts as well) are used. To this effect the work of philosophers influenced by Wittgenstein is presented and commented upon.

**Key words:** Islamic Aristotelians, Neoplatonism, contemporary philosophy of religion, relation between philosophy and religion, literal interpretation of the Qur'an

This chapter revisits the classic debate between al-Ghazali and Ibn Rushd manifest in their treatises entitled the *Incoherence of the Philosophers* and the *Incoherence of the Incoherence*, respectively. Rather than re-examining the specific arguments and counter-arguments for the eternity of the world, God's knowledge of particulars and the nature of resurrection, it introduces a new focus: the significance of al-Ghazali's charge that the philosophers offer a mere philosophical construction of God and of Ibn Rushd's radical claim that theology is a dialectical science and so severely limited even in interpreting the Scripture. So it argues that al-Ghazali's accusations raise questions such as: who is the God of religion? How are we to think of Him? What is the ultimate authority in such matters?

The emerging distinction between “the God of religion” and the “God of philosophy” is then discussed by reference to Ludwig Wittgenstein’s idea that philosophy should not attempt to substitute philosophical theories for religious language but to detangle conceptual misunderstandings springing from the latter’s confused application. The chapter attempts an examination and evaluation of both al-Ghazali’s and Ibn Rushd’s concerns in the light of this contemporary perspective.

#### 1. AL-GHAZALI’S CRITIQUE OF THE PHILOSOPHERS: IS THE WORLD ETERNAL?

In his famous *Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Tahafut al-falasifa*), al-Ghazali<sup>1</sup> turns against the people he calls “the philosophers” (*falasifa*) on a number of grounds. He charges them with heresy on seventeen grounds and with being unbelievers (*kafir*) on another three. In his view, they have gone too far astray in denying the resurrection of bodies and in presenting a God who is given none of the characteristics He has in the Qur’an; a God who is given no real agency, no knowledge of particulars, and no ability to perform miracles.

Coming a century later, Ibn Rushd<sup>2</sup> would most probably have appeared even more objectionable to al-Ghazali than these Neoplatonizing Islamic Aristotelian philosophers (from now on the “philosophers” or the “*falasifa*”) of the 9th and 10th century. In his turn, he denounces the *Incoherence of the Philosophers* in defence of philosophical thinking. In his own work, called the *Incoherence of the Incoherence* (*Tahafut al-Tahafut*), Ibn Rushd not only defends the right of philosophers to talk about God and religion, but goes further than this in granting them a special position among the interpreters of the Qur’an. In an effort to alleviate pressures against philosophy springing from al-Ghazali’s challenge as well as from juridical circles, he maintains that the theologian’s claim to be the ultimate authority on religious matters, especially in the interpretation of Scripture, is invalid. He denies, that is to say, that the theologian can be the final arbiter as to what constitutes “the authentic Islamic view according to the Qur’an.” For Ibn Rushd there cannot be a distinction between a God of religion and a God of the philosophers, as al-Ghazali would have it.

In the 20th century, Ludwig Wittgenstein put forward a revolutionary view of language according to which words do not have meaning through referring to a fixed essence. Their meaning is shaped by the way they are used in specific contexts intertwined with various human activities. Each one of these activities has its own characteristics and constitutes a system with its own criteria of sense. Wittgenstein calls them “language-games.”



Philosophers following in Wittgenstein's steps (R. Rhess, P. Winch, N. Malcolm, D. Z. Phillips, to mention but a few) have attempted to investigate the relation between religious and secular language by placing the concept of language-game at the centre of their analysis. They have argued that religion constitutes a distinct language-game and that religious claims are not to be evaluated by standards appropriate in other domains, such as science. Furthermore, they have claimed that the notions of verification and falsification are quite different with respect to the field of religion. Consequently, that philosophy cannot offer a foundation for either religious belief or atheism. In Stephen Mulhall's words,

... [Wittgenstein] engages in a *grammatical investigation* of these topics: he attempts to clarify the nature of religious belief by clarifying the use of expressions of religious beliefs-the place of religious concepts and religious uses of concepts in the lives of believers *and unbelievers*.<sup>3</sup> (my italics)

According to Wittgensteinians, such a clarification may reveal that the root of a philosophical problem lies in a misconception or misunderstanding of ordinary language, an attempt to express something which cannot be expressed in that particular way. The philosopher has to point this out, but should not try to replace it with a philosophical construction of his own. Wittgensteinians see the task of philosophy as not prescriptive but descriptive. This is their avowed approach in philosophy of religion as well. It is a perspective which has attracted criticism by people who feel that it "waters down" religious terms. In this sense, it can be seen as the resurfacing of certain questions present in the al-Ghazali – Ibn Rushd debate.

Al-Ghazali's *Incoherence of the Philosophers* is a critique of the Neoplatonic Aristotelians of Islam, and most clearly of Ibn Sina.<sup>4</sup> First he contests their belief in the eternity of the world. The philosophers argue that a temporal world presupposes origination of a temporal will to create from an eternal God. According to them, this raises the question as to why God willed to create now rather than at an earlier time:

If it is said to have been due to the absence of will, then one act of will will stand in need of another, and so on *ad infinitum*.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, the origination of the temporal will from an eternal God is impossible, for this would imply a change in the eternal "in respect of power, or means, or time, or nature." Since the eternal is not susceptible to any change, it is concluded that "the world has been proved (always) to have existed." For al-Ghazali this is the most clever argument of the philosophers and the one which marks their most substantial discussions.<sup>6</sup> Generally speaking, this type of argument relies on the idea that the nature of the divine being undergoes

alteration through reference to the temporal. It is characteristic of the *falasifa*'s Neoplatonic picture of things which is based on eternal emanation out of the First Being.

Another aspect of the discussion concerning the world's eternity is the question whether the world is created out of pre-existing matter, as Aristotle and his Neoplatonizing Arab speaking followers would have it, or whether it was created *ex nihilo*. Implicitly referring to al-Farabi's and Ibn Sina's distinction between a necessary being and a possible being, al-Ghazali focuses on their claim that an originated being's possibility of existence "is a relative attribute which cannot exist in itself" but needs to be related to a substratum.<sup>7</sup> There cannot be any other substratum than matter. Now, if matter had been originated, its origination would have required another matter to serve as the substratum to which the possibility of matter was to be related; since this would lead to an infinite regress, the *falasifa* conclude that matter is not originated.

Unlike the *falasifa*, al-Ghazali believes that when the supposition that something exists does not contradict reason we call that thing possible without needing an existent to which our "intellectual judgements" would be related as attributes. One of his three arguments for this claim runs as follows:

... in the case of blackness and whiteness, the intellectual judgment of possibility is made before their existence. If this possibility were to be related to a body to which they occur (so that one might say: *What the possibility of blackness or whiteness means is that it is possible for this body to become white or black*), then neither white nor black would in itself be possible, and the predicate of possibility would not be applicable to either of the two, *for the possible thing would be the body to which blackness or whiteness was to be related*. Now, we must ask: What about blackness or whiteness in itself? Is it possible, or necessary, or impossible? The only answer to this question is that it is possible.<sup>8</sup> (my italics)

The paragraph above is a characteristic example of the main charge that al-Ghazali hurls against the philosophers: that they do not believe in a radical origin of things, a radical notion of causation which can vindicate God as a truly omnipotent agent. In the case of whiteness and blackness, al-Ghazali wants to see what can make them possible, independently of their being embedded in matter and manifested through material objects. He writes against the philosophers:

As regards the plea that blackness or whiteness has no self or individual essence, it is true if it means that this is so in Being. But it is not true if it means that this is so for the Intellect as well. For the Intellect does apprehend universal blackness, judging that it is possible in itself.<sup>9</sup>

In the lines above al-Ghazali is claiming that whiteness and blackness can exist as universals in the intellect of God, without them being associated with a material substratum. The distance between this and the idea that God can bring

whiteness and blackness themselves into existence, through His creative fiat, does not seem to be very long.

Similarly, the existence of the world does not require the pre-existence of matter: it is an actuality which by far transcends the Aristotelian notion of actuality: it cannot be accounted for on the basis of the Aristotelian metaphysical pair of potential matter rendered actual by form.

Further exploring the thorny issue of divine agency, al-Ghazali makes clear that he considers the philosophers' position not simply to be theoretically erroneous, but also to be intellectually corrupt. In a telling way, he declares that he shall be talking:

Of their [the philosophers'] *dishonesty* in saying that God's the Agent and the Maker of the world which is His action or product: and the explanation of the fact that these words have *only a metaphorical, not real significance* to them.<sup>10</sup> (my italics)

In specific reference to the falasifa's thesis of eternal creation he claims:

... we cannot concede the possibility of an eternal action. For that which has not arisen out of non-existence cannot be called an action- except in a *metaphorical sense*, having no basis in reality.<sup>11</sup> (my italics)

The latter he develops into a more severe charge against their integrity, by the following verdict:

The only purpose of this problem is to show that you *pretend to believe* in these names *for the sake of the merit* acquired by one who believes in them. But you do not think that in reality anything corresponds to them. To you, God is not an *agent in the real sense of the word*; nor is the world His action *in reality*. The use of the word 'action' in your theories *is only a piece of metaphorical language, having no basis in reality*. So our purpose has been achieved inasmuch as this subterfuge has been exposed.<sup>12</sup> (my italics)

He epitomizes this critique by observing in the final part of Section III:

... the philosophers cannot find their way to affirming the First Principle; and that, therefore, *their conception of Him is bound to be an arbitrary notion*.<sup>13</sup> (my italics)

## 2. GOD'S KNOWLEDGE OF PARTICULARS

The second thesis of the philosophers considered unacceptable by al-Ghazali is that God has universal, not particular, knowledge of all the beings that emanate from Him. Al-Ghazali complains that the philosophers have diluted God's agency beyond recognition:

... they have destroyed all that Glory signifies. They have made His condition *comparable to that of a dead man who has no awareness of what goes on in the world*.<sup>14</sup> (my italics)

At this juncture, al-Ghazali's effort to disqualify the legitimacy of the philosophers by measuring up their Neoplatonizing claims against his conception of the Qur'anic God is worth noticing. This is a theme which runs through the totality of the *Incoherence* but which (as it will be seen in a while) gets more of a sharp edge in connection to God's knowledge of particulars.

Under "Problem XIII," Ghazali introduces the philosophers' doctrine concerning God's knowledge of particulars. He is particularly hostile to their idea that God, as he puts it,

does not know the particulars which are divisible in accordance with the division of time into "will be," "was," and "is."<sup>15</sup>

Referring to Ibn Sina by name he ascribes to him the idea that God's knowledge is of a universal mode, not subject to temporal qualifications. With good reasons, he traces the ultimate source of this assumption to the philosophers' fear that ascribing knowledge of particulars to God entails temporal and spatial differentiation for Him and so severely compromises His impassibility.<sup>16</sup> What feeds such a fear is their assumption that both knower and knowledge follow the object of knowledge in its fundamental determinations. In this way, knowledge of particular objects which are specific in space and time imparts not only upon God's mode of knowledge, but also upon God Himself, a socio-temporal character.

In response to this, al-Ghazali points out that the philosophers' own theory also entails differentiations in the object of divine knowledge which are by no means negligible. God's knowledge of universals involves knowledge of the difference between the diverse genera and species. According to this, it is again a kind of knowledge which includes plurality and transition from one object to the other. So it is always in danger of imparting its changeability and plurality on to the knower as well. Again, nothing seems to be gained by the substitution of universal species and genera in the place of temporal divisions of material objects. To this effect, al-Ghazali concludes rhetorically:

If *that* difference does not necessitate multiplicity and difference, how can *this* do so either?<sup>17</sup>

As al-Ghazali sees it, the philosophers' position above is based on *shaky philosophical grounds*. He talks in the same vein concerning the issue of divine simplicity. With respect to that, the philosophers exhibit the same attitude: in their fear of imparting plurality and change to God, they deny that He has an essence to which properties can be attributed. So they claim that His very essence is necessary existence. Al-Ghazali's response is that

we cannot understand unqualified existence which is not related to a definite essence.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, the problem of associating plurality with God is not going to go away because the concept of necessity itself seems to be an addition to the concept of existence. As al-Ghazali puts it:

Besides, if necessity is additional to existence, plurality comes in. If it is not additional, how can it be the quiddity? Existence is not quiddity.<sup>19</sup>

These been said, there is an extra dimension in al-Ghazali's discussion concerning God's knowledge of particulars. He offers arguments which purport to show that something very important in the Islamic system of beliefs and ways of looking at the world will be lost if we deny God knowledge of particulars. God will not have anything like a decent knowledge of the empirical world for He will not be in a position to know that a solar eclipse takes place now, or will be, or has ended. So no knowledge of natural events and processes will be attributed to Him. Furthermore, He will not know anything beyond a generic idea of humanity. He will not know particular individuals like Zaid, 'Amr or Khalid. The attributes of individual human beings will always be beyond the scope of his knowledge.<sup>20</sup>

It is not to be doubted that this has fundamental consequences for Islamic belief (and for religious faith more generally). It entails direct and tangible questions for ordinary believers' life. For, if God does not even know the condition and the way things are within the nature He created, He cannot intervene in the world, or guide the flow of events in any way. Can such a God listen to a prayer? Can He intervene to save the sailor from the tempestuous sea, or people from an earthquake? Can He bless the crops and the farmer with abundance? Can He heal the sick? And, more importantly, as al-Ghazali himself underlines here, can He know whether, not generic humanity, but this particular man, Zaid, or Khalid, is a good and pious man or an infidel? Can He then reward or punish them on the Day of Judgment? Divine providence and petitionary prayer, to say nothing of the thorny issue of miracles, are very central to Islam and to the Muslim faith. Al-Ghazali rightly stresses that Ibn Sina's perspective seems to leave precious little room for them. If it is followed through, God cannot even know the actions of Muhammad himself, and so, not even be aware of his prophetic mission!<sup>21</sup>

### 3. RESURRECTION OF BODIES

The last major disagreement between al-Ghazali and the philosophers concerns the latter's rejection of the resurrection of bodies. Al-Ghazali takes issue with this thesis in the final chapter of the *Incoherence* entitled "Refutation of their denial of the resurrection of bodies." Again, he traces the root of error in what

he sees as divergence from the Qur'anic understanding of life after death and the treatment of Qur'anic language as merely allegorical.

... they maintain that these things are symbols mentioned to common men in order to facilitate their understanding of spiritual reward and punishment which are superior to those of a physical character. This being opposed to the belief of all the Muslims... all those elements which are opposed to Islam.<sup>22</sup>

The philosophers construe life after death as everlasting existence of the soul and the soul as a self-subsisting incorporeal substance. On his part, Al-Ghazali asserts the "existence of a physical Paradise and Hell"<sup>23</sup> and he explicitly declares that the philosophers' theory presents us with elements which do come into conflict with religion.

Such are the denial of the revivification of bodies: the denial of physical pains and pleasures in hell and paradise, and the denial of the existence of paradise and hell as described in the Qur'an.<sup>24</sup>

His disinclination to accept non-sensible, intellectual pleasures and pains as the sole reality in the Hereafter, may appear puzzling: one may have expected a man of his spiritual status to be very happy with an emphasis on intellectual and spiritual rewards. However, in the philosophers' exclusion of bodies and sensible pleasures al-Ghazali sees a perilous drive towards a non-distinctively religious understanding of life after death.

The philosophers claim that after the demise of the body, the soul continues to exist for ever. Its eternal happiness can be achieved by means of perfection and purity. Perfection is derived from knowledge, and purity from virtuous action.<sup>25</sup> This is certainly reminiscent of the Aristotelian distinction between intellectual and moral excellence, to which al-Ghazali refers by name.<sup>26</sup> What is the force of the expression "pure and perfect," though? For the philosophers' epistemology, knowledge consists in grasping the universal intelligibles through the rational faculty. Their theory of the Active Intellect (*al-'aql al-fa'al*), and of the way it illuminates the human reason and enables it to grasp the universals, is well known. As al-Ghazali rightly sees, this epistemology shapes the philosophers' understanding of eschatology as well. Perfect bliss in the Hereafter is said to depend on the clarity of one's intellectual vision of the universals. Moreover, it seems that the philosophers give priority to intellectual as opposed to moral excellence.<sup>27</sup> In their view, intellectual perfection can save one from the effects of moral corruption, but moral purity will leave one short of attaining perfect bliss. For al-Ghazali this picture is far away from Qur'anic notions of reward and punishment by an omnipotent and just God.

Al-Ghazali then protests that, in treating a text of the Scripture (e.g. the Qur'anic belief in bodily resurrection) as if it were a mere anthropomorphic allegory in order to facilitate popular understanding, the philosophers remove

it from the context where it occurs, and from which it derives its significance.<sup>28</sup> He does not reject allegorical interpretation in toto, as, for example, a Hanbali scholar would have done. What he insists upon is that our mode of thinking about the afterlife have its foundations in the Qur'an, and remain an essentially religious, rather than an intellectualist discourse. The following lines recapitulate his point succinctly:

Most of these things are not opposed to religion. We do not deny that the pleasures in the Hereafter are superior to sensible pleasures. . . . Nor do we deny the immortality of the soul separated from the body. But we know these things on the authority of religion, as expressed in the Doctrine of Resurrection. . . . we take objection, as we did before, to [the philosophers'] assertion that mere reason gives them final knowledge of these things.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4. AL-GHAZALI, IBN RUSHD AND CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Al-Ghazali's criticism of Arab Neo-Platonism in its turn came under attack by Ibn Rushd, almost a century later. In his own *Incoherence of the Incoherence* (*Tahafut al Tahafut*), Ibn Rushd offers a detailed response to al-Ghazali's criticisms of the *falasifa*. As will be seen in the remainder, a very interesting symmetry seems to characterize al-Ghazali's and Ibn Rushd's respective views. The former accuses the philosophers not only of straying from the path of the Scripture, but of being *philosophically* incoherent as well. The latter takes himself to be offering not only a philosophically sound, but also a *Qur'anically sponsored* perspective. According to Ibn Rushd, for example, the question of eternal creation out of pre-existing matter is tightly connected with the question of literal versus allegorical interpretation of the Qur'an.

The Muslim Neoplatonizing Aristotelian *philosophers* were accused of presenting not a religious picture but a secular analogue of God. In a similar way, there are people wondering nowadays as to whether philosophers allow for a "really existing," omnipotent God who responds to human prayer, acts providentially and even performs miracles. D. Z. Phillips and other Wittgensteinian philosophers of religion are often suspected of attitudes similar to those that al-Ghazali had charged the *falasifa* with. Ibn Rushd, on the other hand, is in stark opposition to al-Ghazali. Given this, an issue worth exploring is Ibn Rushd's relation to contemporary philosophy of religion.

#### 5. D. Z. PHILLIPS'S UNDERSTANDING OF DIVINE CAUSALITY, PRAYER, AND IMMORTALITY

D. Z. Phillips is the most prominent representative of Wittgenstein's approach to philosophy of religion in the 20th century. Despite his view that religion does

not have to measure itself up to alien standards (those of science, for example), he has often been criticized for failing to do justice to what religious people “really believe.”

*The Concept of Prayer* (1965) and *Death and Immortality* (1970) are two of Phillips’s most famous and influential works. In them he attempts an analysis of the *grammar*, that is to say, the logical structure and ways of using the concepts of prayer and immortality respectively. In Chapter 6 of the *Concept of Prayer*, Phillips discusses petitionary prayer in the context of people who pray to God to “help them” or “save them.” These may be people who, let us say, pray to God to save their child from a lethal illness when medical treatment has failed. In Phillips’s own words, unless such prayers have a consistent place in a person’s life

they are not characteristic of the *religious* role of prayer in the life of the believer. These prayers are far nearer superstition: kissing a rabbit’s foot or touching wood.<sup>30</sup>

Phillips’s analysis of petitionary prayer points into the following direction: in isolation from any substantial religious surroundings, words of supplication are not recognizably *religious*. People uttering them are being superstitious because their prayer does not tie up with anything of spiritual significance in their lives. This seems to be reasonable and well put. However, it is not the end of the matter, for Phillips’s discussion in the remainder of Chapter 6 seems to have a more specific target. The parents’ petition for the recovery of their child is said to be superstitious not because they forget about God once their hopes for healing are thwarted; but, rather, because such a hope for the child’s recovery and its expression in prayer *are of a clear causal character*.

Phillips claims emphatically that prayer is not a piece of theoretical metaphysics and it does not spring from a philosophical conviction that God exists.<sup>31</sup> This is a view that al-Ghazali certainly shares. It does not involve a prediction about which way things in the world – in our case the child’s recovery – will develop. Consequently, prayer is not to be associated with causal expectations concerning God’s intervention in the world in order to bring about healing or whatever else may be asked from Him. According to Phillips, when such expectations take the place of total trust in God, whichever way things in the world may go, prayer cannot be distinguished from superstition.

Again, handing oneself over to God, in total trust, makes perfect sense as a religious idea. Nevertheless, a problem arises when Phillips takes trust in God to mean that one cannot and should not entertain any “concrete” causal expectations from God, such as healing or salvation from a shipwreck, or survival in a battle. Phillips is not willing to examine any such petitionary prayers on an one by one basis – for him all of them are generally and irrevocably *superstitious*.



One may then wonder to what extent Phillips remains loyal to his own Wittgensteinian convictions. It is well known that in Wittgenstein's view the task of philosophy is not to construct a superior philosophical language but to describe and elucidate concepts as these appear in ordinary language. Still, though, what is to be stressed for our purposes here, is that such a view of prayer is hardly recognisable by religious believers, the great majority of whom would not deny that they do have causal expectations from God.

D. Z. Phillips analyzes the concept of immortality in his 1970 book, entitled *Death and Immortality*. It has become a classic, but, at the same time, it constitutes a typical example of a philosophical approach which makes many believers feel uncomfortable.

At the same time it is a very typical example of exactly those elements which make many people feel uncomfortable.

Phillips calls the first of the four subdivisions into which the book is divided "Does Belief in Immortality Rest on a Mistake?" The title is certainly challenging, for in these pages Phillips claims that belief in immortality is not part of a theory concerning the nature of reality.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, he puts forward an emphatic distinction between survival after death on the one hand, and immortality, on the other.

Most philosophers, I think, would say that belief in the possibility of survival after death is a necessary precondition of any kind of belief in immortality.<sup>33</sup>

There seems to be little doubt that "immortality" and "survival after death" are used interchangeably in ordinary language. Phillips's strategy, however, is to associate the more plain phrase "survival after death" to a quest for a theoretical, quasi-scientific framework of answers. With good reasons, he argues that such efforts are misconceived and that they can never succeed; he then concludes that the concept of immortality must be separated from that of "survival after death" and be analyzed within a very different framework of assumptions.

Phillips enumerates and examines three different ways in which various thinkers have tried to argue for the possibility of survival after death. These are as follows:

1) To say that after we die we get some kind of non-material body and, more generally, to deny that the dissolution of our physical bodies is as crucial a factor as the denial of immortality supposes it to be.<sup>34</sup>

Interestingly, this seems to be very close to the position that al-Ghazali ascribes to the philosophers and attacks them for.

2) To deny the importance of the body altogether, and to identify the self with the soul. This is the dualist point of view, put forward by Descartes, according to which, our bodily existence forms

no part of our identity whatsoever. This raises the notorious problems of Cartesian dualism. For Phillips the idea of a disembodied self is not simply problematic, but incoherent. He argues against the conception of introspective pure consciousness and stresses that the notion of the self is not the notion of a private mental substance but necessarily involves a physical and social aspect as well.<sup>35</sup>

The third point to which Phillips proceeds is not a new suggestion but an effort to highlight and come to terms with a remaining, intractable difficulty. If we grant that a person may survive bodily death in a disembodied existence, we still need to account for personal identity. We cannot say that disembodied thoughts are thoughts or memories of X because they once belonged to body X.<sup>36</sup> Not even reincarnation can solve the problem of personal identity because this would require establishing

that there is a one-one relation between the material bodies involved in the two spans of existence.<sup>37</sup>

Phillips is in agreement with Peter Geach that unless a man comes back to life by resurrection he does not live again after death. Both Phillips and Geach find resurrection very hard to believe. The same goes for the idea that a disembodied soul survives and preserves the identity of the embodied person, without ever being reunited with the body it used to “inhabit.” However, they both accept that, in Geach’s words,

apart from the *possibility* of resurrection, it seems to me a mere illusion to have any hope for life after death.<sup>38</sup>

By “resurrection” Geach here means the recommencement of embodied existence after one’s death. Geach is not after defending religious faith. He sees, though, on the basis of complex considerations in philosophy of mind, that it is impossible to account for human identity and individuality without any reference to the human body. It is very interesting to observe that al-Ghazali expresses similar considerations as well. In the last part of the *Tahafut* he writes:

it may be said [by the philosophers] that the Matter of the body would remain as dust, and that resurrection means that this dust will be collected and composed into the figure of a man, wherein life will be created for the first time. So this is one alternative.

.....  
[The position above] is evidently false, because when life as well as the body has disappeared, the recreation of it would be the production of something similar to, but not identical with, what had been. But return, as we understand it, implies the supposition of the continuity of one thing as well as the emergence of another.

.....  
If there is nothing which continues, and if, on the contrary, there are two similar but numerically different things between which time intervenes, the conditions prerequisite for the application of the word ‘return’ will not be complete.<sup>39</sup>

Here al-Ghazali seems to be saying that the preservation of the soul as an immaterial entity cannot in itself furnish a criterion of identity for the person who will be resurrected. For unless some level of preservation of the person's initial body is presupposed, it is very hard to see what will make the attachment of the soul to a material body a *return* to the person's previous body and, consequently, a re-emergence of the *same person* as before death.

Al-Ghazali certainly has a religious agenda and, in accordance with it, he rejects this model which the philosophers of his times had endorsed. He rejects it though, *both* as an erroneous philosophical view *and* for clouding the perspective of the Qur'anic eschatology, with all the rewards and penalties reserved for a unique individual.

To return to Phillips: after rejecting the idea that immortality can be explained either as survival in the form of non material body, or a soul, or through reincarnation or resurrection, Phillips attempts a totally different approach. He returns to the question whether "belief in immortality rests on a mistake" and claims that in the light of the difficulties mentioned above, belief in immortality collapses. Having said this, however, he hastens to add that this happens only because we assume that incorporeality, reincarnation or resurrection are necessary presuppositions of a belief in the immortality of the soul. An account of immortality calls for a new approach. Questions as to whether people can live after death or whether they are the same person before and after death, are to be seen not simply as puzzles in philosophy of mind, but as permeated by a moral dimension. We have to pay attention to "the *moral* relations which do or ought to hold between the life a man lives here and now, and his existence after death."<sup>40</sup>

Phillips develops this insight into a novel conception of immortality, whereby belief in an immortal soul does not entail survival after death. This seems to be very far away from what a standard monotheistic believer would say. Phillips, however, joins Stewart Sutherland in calling for an end to "literalising" the religious idioms connected to immortality:

The philosopher of religion who centres his discussion of immortality and resurrection upon a literalising of the idioms of "life after death," of "this world and the next," must ask himself whether or not he is trying to state what should be otherwise communicated.<sup>41</sup>

The end to "literalising" advocated by Sutherland becomes apparent when Phillips attempts a clarification of our linguistic idioms concerning the soul. He argues that the term "soul" is about a person's moral integrity and that dimension in his or her life where moral concerns and practices may manifest themselves or may fail to do so. And so, one may cease to think of the soul as a thing, as a kind of incorporeal substance, one can be brought to see that in certain contexts talk about the soul *is* a way of talking about human beings.<sup>42</sup>

Phillips attempts to explore such contexts in human life and thus he first focuses on the “reality of goodness.” This is a direct influence from Kierkegaard to whom he explicitly refers.<sup>43</sup> According to this, “Eternal life is the reality of goodness, that in terms of which human life is to be assessed.” Just like in determining the state of one’s soul, so in the case of one’s regard for the eternal, “what needs to be examined is the kind of life he is living.”<sup>44</sup> Realising though, that such an account of eternal life and immortality of the soul, is not religiously distinctive.<sup>45</sup> Phillips introduces the conception of overcoming death through dying to the self.<sup>46</sup> For him overcoming death is a dynamic aspect of one’s current life on earth and has nothing to do with what he sees as a “prolongation of existence.” As he puts it, “Eternal life would mean living and dying in a way which could not be rendered pointless by death.”<sup>47</sup> By such a life, he means the Kierkegaardian life whose measure is goodness, “life in God.”

#### 6. IBN RUSHD’S HARMONIZATION OF PHILOSOPHY AND SCRIPTURE

On his part, Ibn Rushd takes issue with what lies at the heart of his disagreement with al-Ghazali in his *Decisive Treatise* (*Faṣl al-Maqāl*). This concerns the legitimacy of philosophy to offer its own interpretation of scriptural and, more generally, religious matters. What permeates Ibn Rushd’s attempt to bring the Qur’an and philosophy closer together, is the fact that the Qur’an contains both literal and allegorical meanings.

In paragraphs 8–10 of the *Decisive Treatise*’s second chapter, Ibn Rushd claims that there are both external (obvious) and internal meanings in the text of the Scripture. This is because believers differ in their natural abilities and their means to receive the truth of Islamic revelation. In paragraph 8 he quotes the Qur’an itself (sura Imran, 7.) verse:

It is He who has revealed to you the Koran. Some of its verses are precise in meaning – they are the foundation of the Book – and others ambiguous. Those whose hearts are infected with disbelief follow the ambiguous part, so as to create dissension by seeking to explain it. But no one knows its meaning except Allah. Those who are well-grounded in knowledge say: ‘we believe in it: it is all from our Lord. But only the wise take heed.’<sup>48</sup>

This Qur’anic passage introduces the idea that, along the verses whose meaning is obvious, there are others which are ambiguous. Now the latter pose a serious problem: can they and should they be interpreted? If yes, by whom? This is a crucial question, for any attempt at interpretation by people who have doubts may not simply fail to grasp the sense of the ambiguous

verses: it may have severe social repercussions, such as dissension and strife among the Muslims.

Ibn Rushd opts for a radical interpretation of the Qur'anic passage above. He puts forward a novel reading of the Arabic text by placing the full stop just after the phrase "those who are well-grounded in knowledge." In this way, the Arabic text is to be read as "No one knows its meaning except Allah *and those who are well-grounded in knowledge*."<sup>49</sup> Such an alternative punctuation then makes room for the introduction of a class of people who are in a position to grasp the meaning of the ambiguous verses, and so, even the meaning of the term "knowledge" included in Al-Imran 7. That is to say, the knowledge they have constitutes *knowledge of knowledge itself*. This is an excellent way of putting it, given Ibn Rushd's ultimate purpose: to show that the "knowledge" to which the Qur'an refers in III, 7, is identical with philosophy.

For a great Aristotelian like Ibn Rushd, philosophers are people involved in demonstrative science. As the *people of demonstration* (*burhan*) they can understand and interpret the ambiguous verses of the Qur'an correctly. Only by means of Aristotelian logic, which is focused on apodeictical syllogism, can one solve questions concerning interpretation of the Scripture. Demonstrative syllogisms can lead to conclusions which are binding, and not just subjective opinions. For this reason, according to Ibn Rushd, the final authority to decide, also on matters of religion, lies with the philosophers, not with the theologians! In this way, he gives philosophy a place in the very heart of Islamic thinking and practice. Theology needs the demonstrative reason of philosophy in order to properly articulate the breadth and depth of its meanings.<sup>50</sup>

This being said, it is of paramount importance to stress that according to Ibn Rushd, the philosopher is not to eliminate the other two kinds of arguments, the dialectical arguments of the theologians and the rhetorical arguments of the masses. The latter are "common" to all people.<sup>51</sup> As an example of a "common" argument of the Qur'an, Hourani mentions the bodily representation of the future life.

In *Fasl al-Maqal*,<sup>52</sup> Ibn Rushd maintains that the parts of the Scripture which refer to the future life are undecided: demonstrative scholars disagree as to whether the Qur'anic teaching about the future life is to be taken literally or allegorically. They are neither verses that must be taken in their literal meaning by everybody, nor like those verses which must be understood literally by the masses and allegorically by the scholars of the "demonstrative class." Let us note that in his short piece of work called *The Future Life* (*Manahij al-adilla*) Ibn Rushd claims that the superiority of Islam over other religions lies in the use of corporeal symbolism of the future life. According to this, the revelation of the Qur'an has a chance to be understood by all people, independently of

their intellectual level, if different expressive means are used for its presentation. With regard to resurrection, the depiction of the hereafter in physical terms greatly impresses the masses for whom religion – unlike philosophy – has to care. This kind of depiction, however, is a stylistic device generated by pedagogical concerns. It does *not*, in Ibn Rushd's view, form an inalienable part of the Qur'anic teaching about resurrection.

Consequently, life after death does not have to be portrayed in corporeal terms and resurrection does not have to be thought of as bodily. To deny the bodily character of resurrection is not illegitimate. What is illegitimate is the rejection of a truth that all recipients of revelation understand: that an after life exists. If one were to reject not simply a bodily after life, but the very idea of an after life itself, this would mean no less than rejection of faith, *kuf'r*. Ibn Rushd's own personal view, however, which he is very careful not to disclose explicitly, is this: there is no personal immortality, but a unified cosmic intellect into which the higher intellectual powers of the individual human souls are assimilated.

#### 7. WHAT DOES THIS LEAVE US WITH?

Despite the radically different intellectual paradigms dominant in their respective eras, there are both similarities and differences between the two medieval thinkers of Islam and contemporary philosophers of religion like D. Z. Phillips and other Wittgensteinians.

As we saw, Ibn Rushd defends the legitimacy of philosophical discourse in matters of Scripture and religion. Practising philosophy the way he understands it, often entails metaphorical or allegorical reading of the Qur'an's ambiguous verses. Such examples are Ibn Rushd's metaphorical interpretation of the Houd Sura (11:6) as well as of the Fussilat Sura (41:10). He interprets these verses in a way which takes smoke and water to be indications of pre-existing matter. He uses this as an argument for his thesis of the eternity of the world and of pre-existing matter.<sup>53</sup> Worth noting here is that Ibn Rushd takes his interpretation of the verses above to be a demonstration which only philosophers can offer. The allegorical interpretation of the theologians clashes with the interpretation of "a school of philosophers" who accept the apparent meaning of the verses. The theologians cannot then be met with unanimous agreement; in Ibn Rushd's view their disagreement with the philosophers robs their interpretation of its validity.

On his part, al-Ghazali argues against the philosophers and accuses them of reducing clear cut Qur'anic concepts and claims to little more than layers of metaphor and stylistic devices. Even if he may not see a problem in metaphor

per se, he finds it difficult to see how the framework and the limits of interpretation can be so broadened as to involve arguments with non explicitly Qur'anic premises. If we are to look for *the God of the Qur'an*, such framework and limits cannot be open-ended.

In the 20th century, D. Z. Phillips also came under attack for allegedly presenting religious concepts and scriptural language in a way that makes them unrecognisable to orthodox believers. The charges against him are very reminiscent of al-Ghazali's allegations against the *falasifa*.<sup>54</sup> What is more, he is also said to have done so in a way that betrays philosophical arrogance, since he tries to impose upon believers an "authentic," "non-superstitious" view of what their faith is about. Let us see the following question addressed to Phillips:

Wittgensteinians always claim to tell us what we really mean. Why not ask Christians what they do mean? If the majority says they mean such-and-such, that settles the matter. You can do this kind of philosophy by Gallup Poll.<sup>55</sup>

Phillips insists that one cannot do philosophy by "Gallup Poll" and that this kind of procedure is not advocated in any other philosophical field. He defends his approach as follows:

A Wittgensteinian is committed, not to the defence of common sense, but to the clarification of the grammar of the words in which common sense and any other intelligible utterances are given expression. What provides that clarification in the case of religious belief is not whatever religious believers are at first inclined to say about themselves – that is philosophical raw material, not its end-product – but rather how they in fact employ religious concepts in the practices which go to make up their lives.<sup>56</sup>

This still leaves believers with the feeling that the philosopher knows better than them what they themselves believe. This discomfort is potentially exacerbated by the fact that Phillips rejects the distinction between literal and metaphorical in religious discourse. So if one is to protest that his notion of, say, immortality is a piece of metaphor, Phillips will retort

But what is literal truth in this context? When we say that something is not literally true, we can compare it with the context where it *could* be literally true. But we are agreed that this is what cannot be done in the cases I am considering. . . . So we have no original context of literal truth which the religious pictures can distort or deviate from.<sup>57</sup>

In this respect, Phillips is quite unlike Ibn Rushd: the latter considers both metaphorical interpretation and the distinction between the literal and the metaphorical itself as legitimate. So he can clearly accept much of the simple believers' crude literalism. For Phillips, however, these cannot be more than products of conceptual confusion. He cannot see them as an easier to digest literal understanding of something that philosophy formulates in a more sophisticated way. Ibn Rushd, on his part, is a fine case of a medieval Aristotelian realist. He thus has a notion of ontological truth and takes himself to be

supported by an essentialist picture of the world which is available in Qur'anic revelation. For Ibn Rushd, there is a clear understanding of what "literal" and "allegorical" consist in. It is an understanding which takes the Qur'an and the traditions of Muhammad as the ultimate point of reference and which emerges within the shared body of Islamic practice and interpretation.

Our contemporaries do not have such an ultimate resource since they themselves renounce it. Their understanding of truth is by no means ontological and so, when their claim to represent ordinary language seems to falter, there is not much else to turn to. For thinkers like Phillips or Rush Rhes and Peter Winch, the accusation of putting forward a philosophical construction cut off from the ordinary believers is particularly bitter: for it is them who set themselves the task of bringing religious language back to the stream of ordinary life, as opposed to that of theoretical metaphysics.

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#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Al-Ghazali (1058–1084).
- <sup>2</sup> Ibn Rushd (1126–1198).
- <sup>3</sup> Dewi Zephaniah Phillips and Timothy Tessin (editors), *Philosophy of Religion in the 21st Century* (Palgrave: The Claremont Graduate School, 2001), p. 97.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibn Sina (980–1037 AD).
- <sup>5</sup> Al-Ghazali's *Tahafut Al-Falasifah (Incoherence of the Philosophers)*, translated into English by Sabih Ahmad Kamali (Lahore: Pakistan Philosophical Congress Publication No. 3, 1963), p. 15.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 71–72.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 93–94.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 155–156.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.



- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 229.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 234.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 236.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 234–235.
- <sup>30</sup> D. Z. Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 144.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 120.
- <sup>32</sup> D. Z. Phillips and T. Tessin (editors), *Philosophy of Religion in the 21st Century* (Palgrave: The Claremont Graduate School, 2001), pp. 1–19.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 1.
- <sup>34</sup> D. Z. Phillips, *Death and Immortality* (NY: Macmillan St Martins Press, 1970), pp. 2–3.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 5–10.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 11.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 12.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>39</sup> Al-Ghazali, op. cit., p. 137.
- <sup>40</sup> Phillips, *Death and Immortality*, p. 18.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 42. See S. Sutherland, “Immortality and Resurrection” (Religious Studies, iii, 1967–1968), quoted by Phillips.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 44–45.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 48.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 49.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 54.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 50.
- <sup>48</sup> N. J. Dawood translation, Penguin Classics, p. 408.
- <sup>49</sup> See George F. Hourani, *Averroes on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, A translation, with introduction and notes, of Ibn Rushd’s *Kitab fasl al-maqal*, with its appendix (Damima) and an extract from *Kitab al-kashf ‘an manahij al-adilla*, Trustees of the E. J. W. Gibb Memorial (London: Luzac & Co., 1961), p. 53, p. 54, II, 10, 5–10 and footnote 87, pp. 97–98.
- <sup>50</sup> Oliver Leaman, *A brief Introduction to Islamic Philosophy* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1999), pp. 159–160.
- <sup>51</sup> G. F. Hourani, *Averroes on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, II, 15, 5–20, pp. 58–59.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid., II, 14.10, p. 58.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid., II, 13, pp. 56–57.
- <sup>54</sup> See, for example, Richard Swinburn’s criticism in his “Philosophical Theism” included in D. Z. Phillips and T. Tessin (ed.), *Philosophy of Religion in the 21st Century* (Palgrave: The Claremont Graduate School, 2001), pp. 3–20.
- <sup>55</sup> D. Z. Phillips and T. Tessin (eds.), *Philosophy of Religion in the 21st Century* (Palgrave: The Claremont Graduate School, 2001), p. 150.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 108.
- <sup>57</sup> D. Z. Phillips, *Death and Immortality* (NY: Macmillan St Martins Press, 1970), pp. 65–66.

NURSI ON THEODICY: A NEW THEOLOGICAL  
PERSPECTIVE

**Abstract:** In this chapter, I argue that Said Nursi, a contemporary Turkish theologian, offers a new theological perspective on theodicy centered on *Divine Names Theology*. In order to show the novelty of his perspective, I discuss his ideas on the justification of evils and sufferings as God's wise plan with respect to certain critical questions: notably God's definition, the nature of evil and its origin, the ontological relation between evil and non-existence, the nature of free will and its role in evil, the theological difference between the creation of evil and acquisition of evil, the meaning of life, the origin of such a world of duality, and the relationship of worship with evil and sufferings.

**Key words:** God, evil, good, theodicy, divine names theology, divine names ontology, free will, non-existence, existence, creation, acquisition, sufi, satan, devil, jinn, afterlife, death, free will theodicy, best possible world theodicy, examination, struggle, trial, reward, punishment, meaning of life, wisdom, omnipotence, afterlife theodicy, existential theodicy, positive worship, negative worship

Throughout the history of philosophy, philosophers have been challenged by the problem of reconciling the existence of evil with the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, all-good God. We simply call this problem *the problem of evil*. Many different perspectives have been offered to reconcile these two apparently conflicting ideas as well as conclusions rejecting the existence of God. In this chapter, I aim to analyze a contemporary Turkish theologian Said Nursi's view on the justification of evil as God's wise plan. It is possible to situate his theological view on theodicy within the tradition that appeals to the Divine Names as an explanatory principle in metaphysical speculation. However, as I will show, his approach introduces new perspectives and approaches on the problem of evil.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

With regard to the problem of evil, there are some philosophers who have claimed the incompatibility of the existence of evil in the world with the existence of God, paving the way for atheism. For instance, Epicurus (d. 270 BC), Ibn al-Rawandi (d. 911), Abu 'Ala al-Ma'arri (d. 1057), and David Hume (d. 1776) can be regarded within this camp. On the other side, philosophers such as Augustine (d. 430), Ibn Sina (d. 1037), al-Ghazali (d. 1111), Maimonides (d. 1204), and Leibniz (d. 1716) have asserted that the existence of evil is compatible with the existence of God. In other words, a person who accepts the reality of evil can still believe in God at the same time.

Most critics who claim the inconsistency of the existence of evil in the world with the premise that an omnipotent and good God exists put forward arguments from evil<sup>1</sup> so as to prove their belief that God does not exist. In the last century, they have formalized these arguments in logical forms with a structure, some logical propositions, and a conclusion. The most basic logical form of the argument from evil is as follows<sup>2</sup>:

- (1) "God exists";
- (2) "God is all-powerful";
- (3) "God is all-good";
- (4) "God is all-knowing";
- (5) "Evil exists".

In their opinion, a theist must accept propositions 1–4 as a result of the position that he holds as a theologian or theist, and additionally, he must accept 5 as a concrete reality observed everywhere in the world. On the assumption that all five statements are essential propositions of most theological positions, it seems that a theist can propose all five, albeit *inconsistently*,<sup>3</sup> or that, at least, it is improbable that these propositions are all true.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, there are two main responses to these arguments from evil, namely *defense* and *theodicy*. The defense aims to explain why arguments of evil proposed by critics are not successful on their own terms, whereas theodicy seeks to give persuasive reasons for the existence of evil in the world.<sup>5</sup> Manichaeists attempted to solve the problem with a dualistic religious system based on the separation of matter and spirit and of the separation of good and evil. Some, like Plotinus (d. 270), explain the reason for the existence of evil by describing matter as evil in and of itself. Similar to Augustine, others have asserted that evil is a privation and absence of good (*The Privative Theory of Evil*). The advocates of process philosophy, like Charles Hartshorne (d. 2000), have generated *the concept of a limited God* as a solution to the problem of evil such that, in their opinion, God has neither enough power nor knowledge to prevent evil.

This problem has been discussed in the history of Islamic thought as well. The students and followers of al-Farabi (d. 950) did not describe matter as the source of evil, but, inspired by Aristotle's (d. 322 BC) metaphysical distinction between *matter* and *form*, as well as between *actuality* and *potentiality*, they stated that matter is limited and restricted in the matter of its potential. In this view, a small amount of evil comes from the nature of matter. To put it differently, matter has no power or capacity to fully reflect the order of the World's Planner (*Munazzim al-ard*). Therefore, ontologically a certain amount of evil is unavoidable. Consequently, there is no contradiction between Divine Justice and evil.<sup>6</sup>

The followers of Islamic Sufism, stating "Whatever God does, it is good," have denied the ontological status of evil in compliance with their religious-mystical experiences. In respect of this philosophical problem, al-Ghazali, one of the most influential thinkers in the history of Islamic thought, formalized his idea in the following words: "Laysa fi al-imkan abda'u min ma kana," which means, "There is not in possibility anything more wonderful than what it is." After him, the famous German philosopher Leibniz introduced a similar formula to the Western philosophy of religion. For Leibniz, despite all the different sorts of evil, divine justice is manifested in the world, and this is the meaning of theodicy.<sup>7</sup> Now, I will move on to Said Nursi's ideas on theodicy. Before I analyze his ideas in detail, I will introduce his epistemology in a most general way, and the fundamentals of his theodicy.

## 2. NURSI'S EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE FUNDAMENTALS OF HIS THEODICY

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1878–1960) was one of the most important thinkers of the twentieth century and the initiator of a new movement of ideas in the Islamic world. Today, his ideas arouse great interest not only among Muslim scholars, but also among Western ones. But, there are certain difficulties that scholars with interest in the study of Nursi's ideas meet. First of all, he wrote a six-thousand page commentary on the Qur'an called *The Risale-i Nur Collection*, which is related to almost all subjects of Islamic disciplines, ranging from Qur'anic exegesis, *hadith* methodology, theology, philosophy, to Sufism. In addition, he did not interpret the Qur'an systematically as have interpreters more familiar to us done, so we may easily understand his exegeses upon the relevant Qur'anic verses relating to any issue. Also, his ideas concerning a certain issue are scattered throughout every part of the *Risale-i Nur Collection*. Furthermore, since Nursi's language is literary Ottoman Turkish, which has been imbued with Arabic and Persian words and phrases, it is not immediately

understandable to a speaker of modern Turkish. In this sense, this research can be considered as the production of a long-term reflection and of deeply analytical readings of the whole collection.

It may be useful to shortly mention Nursi's epistemology in order to better understand the key points in his ideas of theodicy. In his epistemology, the Qur'an and the authentic narrations of the Prophet Muhammad (*Hadith*) occupy a central role. When we think carefully over his ideas on theodicy, we will see with certainty that he was deeply inspired by the Qur'an and the Sayings of the Prophet (*Hadith*). That is to say, his ideas are actually an interpretation of the relevant Qur'anic verses and the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad. The basic question that he seeks to answer in the whole Risale-i Nur Collection is, in my opinion, how Muslims should understand the Qur'an and Hadith in modern times. I think, his answer to this crucial question in accordance with his epistemology can be characterized not only as criticism of Modernism that departed significantly from traditional values, but also a reconstruction of Islamic thought in accordance with Qur'anic teaching. In his work *Muhakemat*, he gives us a number of hermeneutical principles as to how to solve this methodological issue. He insists that the Qur'an mainly needs to be interpreted by itself. A person must search for the meaning of the Qur'an in the Qur'an, in its own content, its sentences, its expressions, and its wording.<sup>8</sup> In other words, its meanings are hidden under itself. On the other hand, the Qur'an includes expressions and statements which are general ('amm), particular (khass), limited (muqayyad), comparative (mutashabih), absolute (mutlaq), synoptic (mujmal), clear (mu'awwil), allegorical, and metaphorical (majazi), so they all need to be expounded in every century depending upon conditions of that century in which Muslims live in order to fit their own needs. As a result, time is, Nursi states, a great interpreter.<sup>9</sup> In this way, he attaches attention to time as one of the most significant hermeneutical factors in understanding the Qur'anic verses.

I regard Nursi's responses to the arguments from evil as both a defense and theodicy. However, his main concern is to propose rational reasons for why evil exists in such a relatively imperfect, transient world against the unbelievers who criticize the existence of evil in terms of God's goodness. He clearly asserts that the existence of evil is consistent with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent God. He discusses this theological issue in the light of his responses to the following questions: What is God? What is the nature of evil? Whence does it come? Is there an ontological connection between non-existence and evil? Who creates evil? Why does God permit evils to exist? Is the creation of evil, or the inclination to do evil, evil? Who is ethically responsible for evil: human beings or God? What is the nature of free will? What is the origin of such a world of duality? Why did God create such a

relatively imperfect transient world rather than the more perfect one? What is the metaphysical meaning of life?, and “What is the relationship of evil with worship which is expressed as the purpose of life in the Qur’an?”. In this chapter, I will analyze Nursi’s responses to these critical questions in order to reconstruct his theological approach to theodicy.

In explaining his theodicy, Nursi appeals to the following metaphysical principles which, I think, constitute the essence of his idea of theodicy:

- Evils are the manifestations of divine glory, and come from God.
- Divine beauty manifests all good things, so they originate from God.
- Existence requires an existent cause. This means it is based upon a cause which has an actual reality. Whereas, non-existence is dependent upon non-existential things
- The non-existence of a thing may take place through the non-existence of only one of all its conditions and causes.
- To abandon a good thing for a minor evil becomes a greater evil.
- Evil has an external reality.
- Free will has no actual existence.
- Evil is non-existential, and arises from non-existence.
- The creation of evil is not evil; rather the desire for evil is evil.
- Non-existence is pure evil, whereas existence is pure good.
- There is no such thing as absolute evil in the universe.
- There is no absolute non-existence in the universe.
- Destruction is easy.
- Evils are like good with regard to their results.
- Satanic spirits are the representatives of evils of the universe.
- Angels represent and supervise the laws of the good matters in the universe.

As it is clear from the main title, I claim the originality of his theological perspective on theodicy from many aspects. Primarily, Nursi explains the absolute origin of evil in the light of Divine Names, which will be seen later. Even though it seems possible to trace the fundamentals of *Divine Names Theology*<sup>10</sup> to which Nursi turns for building his ideas back to the famous Muslim theologian al-Ghazali (d. 1111), who for the first time introduced it in general in his book *Al-Maqṣad al-Asnā fi Sharḥ Asmā’ Allāh al-Husnā* (The Noblest Aims in the explication of Beautiful Divine Names), Nursi’s approach has much broader dimensions. In his work al-Ghazali simply seeks to explain the ninety-nine Divine names in accordance with the basic theological principles of Islam. However, as he himself clearly points out, and which is indirectly implied by the book’s title, the absolute goal of his explications of Divine

Names is to illustrate how a person can be characterized by the characteristics of God Most High.<sup>11</sup> In this way, the pure theological perspective with which we have been familiar in the pre-Ghazalian theological tradition gives way to a religious-mystical interest in his view. As for Nursi, he systematically explains almost every theological issue, including the absolute origin of evil, in the light of Divine Names which I term this methodological approach as *Divine Names Theology*. In addition to the saying of the Prophet designating *Ninety-Nine Names of God*, Nursi attaches much importance to the unparalleled prayer book consisting of one hundred parts, each part containing ten of God's attributes and names, *al-Jawshan al-Kabir* (The Big Shield) despite the fact that it has been narrated by Shi'ite lines of the *Hadith* transmission.

Secondly, Nursi follows the Ghazalian view of *Best of All Possible Worlds*, however, theodicy, by seeking to find solutions to relevant theological issues such as the meaning of life, God's purpose in creation, the wisdom in Adam's being removed from Paradise, the absolute origin of the variety in creatures, and the theological meaning of such a transient and relatively imperfect world in comparison to paradise. Although he accepts the existence of some elements of imperfectness in the world, Nursi eventually claims the perfection of the universe in principle in terms of creation. Further, Nursi believes that this world is not the exact place where absolute perfection will be manifested. In order to show the difference in value between the world and afterlife, he creates new theological terms such as *place of wisdom*, *field of omnipotence*, *field of trial and examination*, *place of obligation and struggle*, and *place of reward and punishment* in accordance with the Qur'anic understanding.

Upon his reflection on the wisdom in the creation and combining of opposites, pain within pleasure, darkness within light, ugliness in beauty, and evil in good, Nursi develops a new ontology in the light of the Divine Names, which I call *Divine Names Ontology*. Especially, the close relation between evil and non-existence, and good and existence has a special place in Nursi's ontology. He holds the claim that the ultimate source of evil is God himself, however, what causes the creation of evil is man and jinn's incapacibilities and actions such as destruction, the failure to perform duties, and lack of ability, which are all non-existential.

Nursi's philosophical explanation of free will is consistent with Islam's pure monotheistic belief that God creates everything in the whole universe, including human acts. Also, it is in harmony with his metaphysical premise that evil originates from non-existence. Nursi describes free will as a single theoretical matter<sup>12</sup> (*amr-i i'tibari*), an instance of non-existence, and an acquisition (*kasb*), which possesses no ability to create. Neither human beings nor Jinn<sup>13</sup> have freedom of action, but ability to choose. As a result, in his eyes, evil results from a non-existential matter like free will.

Nursi can be regarded as the founder of a new theodicy, which has been termed *Existential Theodicy* in the last decades. This theodicy suggests practical solutions to evil and suffering rather than searching for abstract justifications for all evils as a part of a divine plan.<sup>14</sup> Unlike existential theodicies, Nursi does not reject rational reflection on God and evils. Rather, he validates the theoretical justification of evils and sufferings based on Islamic scriptures. Additionally, he offers practical solutions to sufferings and evil for every layer of society in the shape of Qur'anic verses and the sayings of the Prophet. Moreover, he tries to demonstrate the certainty of afterlife in the light of Divine Names theology with the purpose of showing the eschatological aspect of the problem.

Nursi approaches the issue from a different aspect that seems inventive in philosophical discussions of the problem of evil. He analyzes the problem in relation to worship. In order to show this relationship, he creates a new theological concept: *negative worship*. First, Nursi discusses the relationship in the light of Divine Names. Then, he touches on the anthropologic aspect of the problem and draws attention to man's impotent and poor nature. In other words, since, according to him, the existence of evil reinforces the spiritual relation between God and man, God permits sufferings and evil.

Beyond all these, Nursi's *wisdom-centric approach* to evil striking as compared to previous Islamic theologians. Nursi strives to find reasonable solutions to evil that comply with God's wisdom. Simultaneously, he emphasizes divine power and will as well. Whereas, the tradition rather gave priority to *omnipotence-centric explanations*. If he had been asked why God created such a world of duality, that is, relatively imperfect rather than a more perfect one, I think Nursi simply would answer that it is the divine wisdom who required the world to be created in this way rather than in another way, but there should be many reasons for it, with only some of which we are familiar. In contrast to the emphasis of the Ash'arites on divine omnipotence and will and their explication of the talisman in God's creation without enough emphasis on God's wisdom, Nursi seeks to explain why evil exists in this world of duality in accordance with the Qur'anic wisdom. For example, whereas some verses are used as textual evidence by the Ash'arites to explain why God sends suffering by emphasizing punishment for the servants' faults, Nursi, in detail, explains the wisdom for such suffering. It is as though he has stated that God is not unjust, and that, he does not find pleasure in the creation of evil, on the contrary he has a wise plan for the creation of such an imperfect world, and additionally, many reasons for the creation of evil, some of which are still unknown to us. Now, let me analyze Nursi's approach to evil in detail.



## 3. THE CONCEPT OF GOD

One of the ultimately significant questions that every philosopher who takes interest in the problem of evil needs to answer is: What is God? because, as described in the basic form of the argument from evil, the concept of God has great bearing on the problem, especially when speaking on a theistic ground. Speaking from the very beginning, the existence of God is not a problematic issue to Nursi, so much so that he sees the existence of God as more definite than that of the universe. However, he puts forward hundreds of arguments for the necessary existence of God's divine attributes in order to show that his belief has been founded upon an epistemological base.

As the initiator of a new Sufi path, Nursi, at every occasion, mentions the knowledge of God (*ma'rifatullah*). Though, on the one side, he clearly asserts the unknowability of God's essence (*Mawjud-i Majhul*) as inspired by a statement of the Prophet Muhammad: "Do not seek to investigate the Essence of God, but think about Allah's blessings." Whereas, on the other side he claims that God is, in fact, knowable. To put it differently, we can know Him through the following four universal proofs as well as their particular instances (*juz'i mu'arrif*). According to Nursi, the four great and universal instructors (*kulli mu'arrif*) which make known to us the Sustainer of all things are as follows:

- 1) The mighty book of the universe, which is macro-cosmos or macro-human
- 2) The Prophet Muhammad, which is the greatest of God's signs in the book of the universe
- 3) The Qur'an of Mighty Stature, which is the interpreter of the book of the universe<sup>15</sup>
- 4) The conscience as man's conscious nature, which is one of the most important senses as it has the capacity to recognize God.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to textual evidence such as the Qur'an and the authentic sayings of the Prophet, Nursi frequently cites simple observations on the whole universe and human nature in order to show a truth indisputable in his eyes, which is God's existence. Even though his reading of the universe is thought to have been derived from his simple observations, in his opinion, the truths taken from these observations as well as logical reasoning are ultimately derived from the Qur'an.<sup>17</sup> In other words, his observations make sense only when they are consistent with the relevant Qur'anic verses. In this way, he has theologically legitimized the validity of such a reading of the book of the universe.

Following the Islamic theological tradition, especially the Ash'ari scholarship, and his reading of the universe based upon simple observations, Nursi describes God as the necessarily existent One with seven attributes.<sup>18</sup> Three of them, divine omnipotence, knowledge, and will, have been considered important in expressing God's creativeness among theologians and philosophers. As a theologian, he also feels the need to emphasize them in addition to God's justice in relation to the problem of theodicy.

The hundreds of a priori and a posteriori arguments<sup>19</sup> Nursi has proposed, concerning divine knowledge, divine power, divine will, and divine justice, can be seen as though they are put forward as responses to those who find the inconsistency of the reality of evil in the world with the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good God. Provided that they are philosophically accepted as valid and sound,<sup>20</sup> it can be inferred from all these arguments that the first four propositions listed above<sup>21</sup> are certain and definite that such an inconsistency between “God exists” and “evil exists” cannot be claimed. Even the existence of God and his attributes, whose acts are seen in every part of the universe, is more definite and certain than the existence of the universe.<sup>22</sup> Inasmuch as there is no doubt about the existence of God and his eternal attributes, what Nursi eventually needed to accomplish is to give reasons for the existence of evil.

#### 4. DIVINE NAMES THEOLOGY AND EVIL

As mentioned above, in the light of Divine Names Nursi seeks to provide a reasonable solution for the problem of evil as well as some other theological questions such as the existence of God, the necessity of Prophethood, and the coming of the resurrection. Nursi argues the problem as it relates to the following questions: Where do dualities in the universe stem from? and Whence does evil come?

I think not only the study of the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet, but also his simple observation led him to claim that God has two kinds of attributes and names: names and attributes of beauty (*Jamal*) and of glory (*Jalal*).<sup>23</sup> He is The Beneficent (*al-Rahman*), The Merciful (*al-Rahim*), The Loving (*al-Wadud*), The Beautiful (*al-Jamil*), The All Forgiving (*al-Ghafur*) and The Compassionate (*al-Ra'uf*). On the other side, He is The Compeller (*al-Jabbar*), The Sublime One (*al-Jalil*), The Great One (*al-Azim*), and The All-Compelling (*al-Qahhar*). As textual evidence for such a division of divine names and attributes into two, we can show the following Qur'anic verse: “Know that God is severe in punishment, but that He also is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” (5:98)

Furthermore, according to Nursi, when a person carefully observes the natural events in the universe, he can see the same ontological distinction between the names of glory and those of beauty. At the end of his simple observations, it will be realized with certainty that there are two elements that have spread into every part of the universe and which have become rooted like good and evil, beauty and ugliness, benefit and harm, perfection and defect, light and darkness, guidance and misguidance, light and fire, love and fear, and summer and

winter. Nursi enthusiastically puts his ideas into words, as seen in the excerpt below, in order to explain how these two opposite elements observed in the universe will separate from each other at the end, and which will be manifested in the form of paradise and hell:

... They are constantly manifested through change and transformation. Their wheels turn like the workshop of the crops of some other world. Of a certainty, the branches and results, which are opposites, of these two elements will continue into eternity; they will become concentrated and separate from one another. Then they will be manifested in the form of Paradise and hell. Since it is out of this transient world that the permanent world will be made, its fundamental elements will certainly go to eternity and permanence.<sup>24</sup>

As a result, Nursi claims that evil is the manifestation of God's glory, just as His beauty manifests good. This claim includes two metaphysical premises Nursi points out: the first one is that evil is an undeniable fact observed over the world, the second one is that evil comes from God, for Divine Names, in his opinion, require that their manifestations have a reality. In other words, the denial of reality of evil comes to the meaning that God's manifestations of glory do not exist. Additionally, he is very clear in asserting that God is the only cause and creator in the universe. In order to prove it, he wrote a treatise on nature all by itself. To summarize it, there are, according to Nursi, only two options it can be offered about the creation: God creates everything in the whole nature or it is created by nature, or chance, or its own self. However, the whole universe reflects the seal of unity as each part shows the seal of oneness. There remains only one option which is that one God creates everything, including both good and evil.<sup>25</sup> In this way, Nursi rejects not only the privative theory of evil, but also the Manichaeism dualism of God and Satan.

##### 5. THE SOURCE OF EVIL AND CERTAIN METAPHYSICAL PRINCIPLES

When elucidating his theological perspective on evil, Nursi uses several metaphysical principles. Through these principles, he explains the non-existential sources of evil, the close relationship between non-existence and evil, which is also described as pertaining to non-existence, the perfection of existence and imperfection of non-existence, the non-creative role of Satan and free will in the creation of evil, and the theological distinction between the creation of evil (*khalq-i sharr*) and the acquisition of evil (*kasb-i sharr*).

Primarily, Nursi accepts the reality of evil. For him, all things, including evil, come from God. This is clearly stated in the Qur'an in the following verses as well:

Yet if a happy thing befalls them they say: This is from Allah; and if an evil thing befalls them they say: this is from thee (O prophet). Say (unto them): All is from Allah. What is amiss with these people that they come not nigh to understand a happening? (4:78)

Allah is the Creator of all things. (39:62)

When Allah hath created you and what you do? (37:96)

Who creates death and life that He may try you, which of you is the best in conduct. (67:2)

Even if we analyze the lexical meaning of the term create (*kha-la-qa*), which is quoted in the preceding verses, we can come to the conclusion that evil exists in the world. As a result of such a semantic analysis, we can define anything created (*makhluq*) as something that passes from the sphere of divine knowledge (*dairah al-'ilm*) and descends into the visible world (*dairah al-khalq*/*'alam al-shahadah*). He alludes to this meaning in different places of the *Risale-i Nur Collection*. Furthermore, he clearly states this reality when interpreting verse 67:2 by pointing out that death, which is a kind of evil, like life, comes from God, and additionally that it is made implicitly understood as a bounty.<sup>26</sup>

However, Nursi sometimes describes evil as pertaining to non-existence (*'adami*)<sup>27</sup> as he defines good as existential (*wujudi*). The basis of all evils, like misguidance, calamities, and sin, is non-existence; in other words, all evils arise from non-existence,<sup>28</sup> whereas, all perfections and good virtues are based on existence, and related to it. He elucidates the fundamental sources of non-existence, and how evil exists in the world, saying:

... For all faults arise from non-existence, or lack of ability, or destruction, or the failure to perform duties, which are all non-existence and acts which are not existent and pertain to non-existence.<sup>29</sup>

Only through the existence of all its conditions and causes the existence of a thing is possible, but its non-existence may take place through the non-existence of only one condition. For example, if one employee of a ship neglects a small duty, he can be the cause of all the efforts of the other employees counting for nothing.<sup>30</sup> As a result, evil has resulted from his negative and non-existent act. Another source of evil is destruction. In Nursi's opinion, evil easily occurs in this world by means of destruction. Just by simply lighting a match, one person can suddenly destroy a building that took twenty men a long time to complete.<sup>31</sup> In addition, lack of ability results in evil as well. For example, the non-ability of the nature of such a transient world to accept absolute goodness causes evil. Finally, failure to perform one's duties and an attitude of laziness may cause evil to happen.

When asked why Satan's party often triumphs over the people of truth, Nursi explains the wisdom in it. He -again- emphasizes the easiness and power of destruction in social life against its construction and repairing.<sup>32</sup> Due to the principle that destruction is easy, Satans from among the jinn and men easily

deviate people from the right path. It is for this reason that the Qur'an, as Nursi points out, repeatedly and insistently prevents believers from sin and encourages them to do good. And they should seek forgiveness from God throughout our life and take refuge in God's mercy.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, by exchanging the places of the idea expressed in the predicate of the proposition "Evil is non-existential," with that of the subject, along with their derivations and qualities, Nursi identifies non-existence with pure evil and existence with pure good, in order to draw attention to certain metaphysical ideas, namely the perfection of existence, which is an established truth in his philosophy. It is the two former propositions which state that evil is non-existential (*'adami*), and conversely, that good is existential (*wujudi*). The two latter propositions claim that non-existence is pure evil,<sup>34</sup> and that existence is pure good.<sup>35</sup> It can be inferred from the above four propositions that since the whole universe has been composed of all things that exist, everything within it, directly or indirectly, has the quality of goodness. As mentioned before, although the source of all evils is non-existence, evil is a reality,<sup>36</sup> and therefore, evil certifies universal goodness manifested in the universe in many regards. Additionally, evils can be regarded as good in respect to their results as I will discuss later. Therefore, there is no such thing as absolute evil, but maybe relative evil which eventually results in goodness. Furthermore, Nursi considers evil as a dominant principle for human perfection as will be seen under the title *Worship and Evil*. Moreover, evils are the manifestations of divine glory. Lastly, according to Nursi, as all the worlds of existence give all praise to God, all the worlds of non-existence ascribe all glory to him.<sup>37</sup> In this respect, the reality of evil has an exceptional importance for his Divine Names theology.<sup>38</sup> Since Divine Names have a reality, their places of manifestations have an external reality as well.<sup>39</sup>

Nursi often mentions the non-creative role of free will<sup>40</sup> in the creation of evil, stating that evil, disbelief, and rebellion, each considered innumerable instances of non-existence, may result from a single theoretical matter (*amr-i i'tibari*) and from a single instance of non-existence.<sup>41</sup> He describes free will as a single theoretical matter, which is non-existent. Thus evil comes from such a non-existent matter which has no actual reality.

Additionally, as a follower of the Ash'ari tradition, Nursi draws a clear distinction between the creation of evil and the acquisition of evil. They are two completely different matters. Whereas he describes God as the creator of evil, he calls human beings, Jinn, and even Satan as the acquirers of evil. In his opinion, the creation of evil is not evil; it is rather the acquisition (*kasb, iktisab*) of evil. To state the matter differently, the tendency<sup>42</sup> for one to do evil is evil, because God's creation absolutely looks to the universal results of evils. Since

the existence of one instance of evil is an commencement to achieve numerous good results, the creation of that evil becomes good in terms of these good results, and is like good. For example, fire has a hundred good results, but certain people, through using it for its destructive results, make fire evil for themselves by abusing their free will. These people have no right to say, the creation of evil is evil, because, they were the ones who did evil to themselves due to their own inclination.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, I want to briefly talk about the role of Satan in terms of evil. Nursi considers evil and satanic spirits as the representatives (*mumaththil*) and ushers (*mubashir*) of evil matters and as the means of the laws of such matters. Nursi arrives at this conclusion as a result of analogical reasoning, based on Qur'anic verses. For him, all religions, even though they are expressed in different ways, agree that angels represent and supervise the laws of the good matters in the universe. Likewise, wisdom requires that the existence of satanic spirits act as the representatives of the evils of the universe and as a screen to God's wise acts. In addition, the inner faculty which exists in a corner of the human heart and which is the means through which the diabolical suggestions are communicated to humans, called *al-lumma al-shaytaniyyah* by Muslim Sufis, also requires the existence of an external evil individual called Satan (*shaytan*).<sup>44</sup>

Using all the previous principles which he put forward for the non-creative role of free will in the creation of evil, he explicates the awesome destruction in the universe being made by the devils from among the jinn and men as well. According to Nursi, Satan cannot take a hand in the creation of evils. In order to prove it, Nursi uses two philosophical arguments. First, for a thing to exist, it demands an existent cause which has an actual reality, whereas non-existence of that thing is dependent upon non-existential things. Second, the non-existence of something may, in Nursi's philosophy, take place through the non-existence of only one of its conditions. In that case, Satans cannot create evils through their own free will which is a hint of non-existence, but they do evils through forbidding good to be done and acquiring the ears of people. As a result, they have no power to interfere a bit in Divine creation. Further, Nursi claims that the imaginary god of evil which the Zoroastrians called Ahriman was Satan.<sup>45</sup>

## 6. FREE WILL, DIVINE DETERMINING, AND EVIL

Even though I draw attention to his answer to What does it mean to be free? above, it may be useful to give further explanations. In his book *The Words*, Nursi defines the essence of power of choice as a kind of inclination (*mayalan*) or a disposal (*tasarruf*) within inclination. In both cases, it is a theoretical (*amr-i i'tibari*) and relative (*amr-i nisbi*) matter lacking a definite external existence

(*wujud-i khariji*) and may be attributed to God's servant.<sup>46</sup> In Nursi's opinion, the power of choice has no actual existence. It is like hypothetical lines in geometry.<sup>47</sup> It appears only when a person is inclined to do something. In order to clarify this idea, he makes a linguistic analysis. According to Arabic grammar, the active participle (*fa'il*) is derived from the basic form of a verb, the infinitive (*masdar*), which is a relative matter, not from the verbal noun (*al-hasil bil-masdar*), which is an actual matter. An infinitive like murder is a person's acquisition. It is for this reason that he is called murderer. Whereas, a verbal noun, like death, is God's creature.<sup>48</sup>

Nursi's interpretation of free will is consistent with the Qur'anic world view. The Qur'an, on the one side, states that everything is created only by God.<sup>49</sup> On the other side, it gives responsibility to man.<sup>50</sup> In order to reconcile these two Qur'anic propositions with one another, Nursi has excluded free will from *everything* mentioned in the verse, however. To Nursi, since free will has no actual being, it does not need to be included in the semantic scope of everything.<sup>51</sup> This is because Nursi ascribes free will to God's servant. In short, man wishes to do evil or good and God creates what he desires to do. In other words, he has not freedom of action, but freedom of will which has not been determined by God.

It might be useful to discuss briefly Nursi's view of the consistency between divine determining and free will. In his opinion, divine determining is a kind of knowledge of God. Furthermore, to a famous principle that previous theologians also used to answer this question of consistency, divine knowledge is dependent on the thing known (*ma'lum*). That means divine determining confirms our decisions and choices.<sup>52</sup>

In conclusion, freedom of choice appears only when a rational person tends to do something. In other words, it gains kind of a mental entity with the condition that his choices have been put in motion, however, it has no actual being other times. On the other hand, Nursi, describing evil as non-existential, relates free will with evil. He concludes from these two premises that evils arise from free will of a non-existential nature.

## 7. THE MEANING OF LIFE AND BEST POSSIBLE WORLD THEODICY

Nursi discusses Best Possible World Theodicy with regard to the question of the meaning of life. His starting point is, again, Divine Names. In relation to this question, there are certain issues that he feels the need to explain such as the wisdom in the expelling of Adam from Paradise, the origin of the variety in creatures, and the theological meaning of this world of duality, and so on. As

a result of his responses to these crucial issues, Nursi holds the idea that this world is the best of all possible worlds, despite the reality of the existence of a small amount of evil.

According to Nursi, divine names of beauty and glory require to be seen and be seen. That is, they want to behold themselves in two ways: eternally contemplating themselves in different mirrors and contemplating themselves by means of the astounded admirers and spectators' transient contemplation.<sup>53</sup> In his interpretation of God's purpose in creating the universe, Nursi seems inspired by the following sacred tradition (*al-Hadith al-Qudsi*): "I was a hidden treasure, and I desired to be known; therefore I created the creation in order that I might be known." In this sense, Nursi's interpretation can be characterized as mystical.

Unlike Christian theologians, Nursi considers Adam and Eve's being cast out of Paradise as a result of neither their sin nor God's punishment. So, what was the main reason underlying the occurrence of this abstruse event? In Nursi's opinion, the main reason is the charging of duties (*taklif*). Adam was charged with such a duty that caused divine purposes to take place, for example, the unfolding of all mankind's spiritual progress, the manifestations of the divine names, the revealing of all mankind's potentialities, and man's essential nature being a comprehensive mirror of all Divine Names. If Adam had remained in Paradise, man's rank would have been fixed like that of the angels and his potentialities would not have unfolded. In any case, the angels, whose ranks are unchanging, are numerous. Then, there would be no need for man to perform such worship that angels had already sought to accomplish.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, God has many reasons why the creation of the world is subject to a small amount of evil, only some of which Nursi has makes reference to above.

Nursi argues that God has placed opposites together in the universe. In his opinion, there is a great wisdom in combining opposites in creation; ugliness in beauty, pain within pleasure, evil in good, and darkness within light. As a result of the variety of the manifestations of beauty and glory, the variety in creatures arises. In other words, these names show their decrees through different manifestations. Further, by bringing opposites face to face, God has given them aggressive and defensive positions in a wise contest. He brought conflict, striving, competition, and change into being,<sup>55</sup> and eventually, has made the universe bound by the law of change and transformation, and the principles of advancement and progress. As a result of the creation of the relative matters like evil and good, the infinite degrees of progress and decline in the world of humanity arised, starting from Nimrod's spiritual degree to that of the prophets. If evil had not been created, the spirit of Abu Bakr<sup>56</sup> as the highest of the high would be equal to that of Abu Jahl<sup>57</sup> at the lowest of the low. To put



it differently, evil and good together have caused the door of competition and examination to be opened in the world for humanity and Jinns.<sup>58</sup>

Above all, like the great Muslim philosopher al-Ghazali, Nursi also maintains the idea of “*Laysa fi al-imkan abda‘u min ma kana*,” which means “*There is not in possibility anything more wonderful than what it is*,” though their perspectives are different. Nursi, as a child of the Modern age, seeks to draw attention to the perfection of the world from the perspectives of different sciences, which is implied in different ways in the Qur’an. He describes the world as “an exceedingly perfect vast pharmacy, a perfectly ordered chemist’s shop, a totally faultless factory, an infinitely productive and well-ordered garden, an extremely well-set-out exhibition, an exceedingly well ordered warehouse, a dominical kitchen and cauldron of the Most Merciful.”<sup>59</sup>

In spite of his claim of the perfection of the universe in principle, Nursi notes the existence of a small amount of evil in such a world of examination and competition. But, this is not contrary to the idea of the world’s perfection because, these minor evils are necessary as a result of the universal laws in order that universal benefits may be gained. He describes natural evils and calamities as the occasional results of the universal laws which are called ‘*adat al-Allah*.’<sup>60</sup> However, he considers this small amount of evil as an indirect instance of goodness in respect to its results, for beneath the veil of natural evils the immaterial beauties are hidden. He states this with great enthusiasm:

Beneath the veil of stormy rains and muddy soil in the season of spring are hidden the smiles of innumerable beautiful flowers and well-ordered plants. And behind the veils of the harsh destruction and mournful separations of autumn is the discharge from the duties of their lives of the amiable small animals, the friends of the coy flowers, so as to preserve them from the blows and torments of the events of winter, which are manifestations of Divine Might and Glory, and under the veil of which the way is prepared for the new and beautiful spring. Beneath the veil of events like storms, earthquakes, and plague, is the unfolding of numerous hidden immaterial flowers. The seeds of many potentialities which have not developed sprout and grow beautiful on account of events which are apparently ugly. As though general upheavals and universal change are all immaterial rain.<sup>61</sup>

As seen from the above excerpt, Nursi often emphasizes the aesthetic dimension of the world influenced by the Qur’an’s enthusiastic language. It is likely to see the same language in the classical Sufi literature, and, especially, al-Ghazali’s works.<sup>62</sup>

In order to further certify the idea of the necessity of evil, Nursi employs the following principle: “to abandon an instance of good for a minor evil becomes a greater evil, or the lesser evil is acceptable for the greater good.” According to him, a minor evil becomes like good based on the conditions. For example, a lazy person received damage from rain, which actually includes numerous good results. He has no right to question the Divine acts observed in the world,

saying: "Why did God make it rain?" and "Rain is not mercy," for, if God had stopped the rain, he would do a greater evil, because rain comprises lots of instances of good, such as nurturing crops and delivering the essence of all life to earth.<sup>63</sup>

Nursi occasionally describes the world as a field of trial and examination and as a place of obligation and struggle in conformity with his Divine Names-embedded ontology. As is seen above, the concepts of examination, struggle, competition, and obligation require that opposites, including good and evil, exist within this world. It is due to the necessary existence of both sides of any pair of opposites in the world that God has created evil. Without the existence of one pole of a pair of opposites, the other pole cannot be known. Likewise, without evil, good cannot be known or understood. In addition, Nursi believes that it is because of the principles of examination and struggle that worldly calamities afflict not only the oppressors, but also the oppressed. However, in respect to their heavenly results, they are good, even though they are considered to be bad when it is looked at them superficially, because, the property of the innocent person becomes like alms and gains permanence in the hereafter, and additionally, he exchanges his transience for a permanent life as a result of his death.<sup>64</sup>

Additionally, Nursi defines this world as a place of wisdom (*dar al-hikmah*) and the afterlife as a field of omnipotence (*dar al-qudrah*). In this world God's wisdom, for the most part, reveals itself more than divine omnipotence does; divine omnipotence manifests itself in this world mostly beneath the veil of wisdom. In afterlife, the reverse will be the case. His power will be manifested more than His wisdom. In his book *The Rays Collection*, Nursi expresses this idea:

... Since this world is the realm of wisdom and the hereafter the realm of power, numerous Divine Names like All-Wise, Arranger, Disposer, and Nurturer, as well as dominical wisdom, require that the creation of things in this world is gradual and in the course of time. In the hereafter, however, power and mercy will be manifested more than wisdom, and there being no need for matter, time, and waiting, things will be made instantaneously. Alluding to the fact that things which are made here in a day or in a year will be made in the hereafter in an instant or a flash, the Qur'an of Miraculous Exposition states: The command of the Hour will be like the glance of the eye, or briefer. (16:77)<sup>65</sup>

It is because of this principle that God allows evil to occur in this world, which is not perfect in the desired form, but transient and relatively imperfect for many reasons.

Nursi touches on the subject's anthropologic aspect in terms of Best Possible theodicy. He establishes the close relation between the existence of evil in the earth and human choices. In reality, disasters and calamities, Nursi states according to the Qur'anic instructions,<sup>66</sup> result from man's wrongdoing. In

other words, God sends suffering as a punishment for their sins. This may be either the sin of the individual or of his society.<sup>67</sup>

Finally, Nursi analyzes the problem psychologically, and seeks to answer why some people become unbelievers by being influenced with the idea of the inconsistency between evil and the existence of God. Nursi explains their pessimistic psychology and negative attitudes in the face of the aesthetic picture of the universe:

But because man is both enamored of the apparent and is self-centered, he considers only the externals and pronounces them ugly. Since he is self-centered, he reasons according to the result which looks to himself and judges it to be ugly.<sup>68</sup>

Therefore, things and events have not merely one, but more than one aspect. Something, which appears to be evil from one aspect, may be very good from another.<sup>69</sup> In a sense, Nursi emphasizes the relativity of evil.

#### 8. BELIEF IN AFTERLIFE AND EVIL

In addition to rational arguments for the justification of evils and sufferings as part of a divine plan, Nursi also advocates practical solutions. Unlike many of existential theodicies which reject theocentric rational theodicies and replace them with anthropocentric practical solutions, he suggests both theoretical responses, albeit having a practical value, and anthropocentric theodicy. In this context, he, on the one hand, underlines the significance of the belief of afterlife in human life based on the religious texts and considers it as an essential principle for believers to cope with the world's evils and suffering. On the other hand, by seeking to certify the certainty of afterlife in the light of Divine Names, he often invites suffering men and individuals in fear of death to struggle and be hopeful in hard times.

Primarily, Nursi argues the certainty of the hereafter in view of Divine Names in order to comfort those who feel hopeless in life due to their powerlessness in the face of sufferings and evil. In his opinion, eternal divine beauty and glory require that astounded admirers and spectators will be made immortal. Likewise, in addition to all other divine attributes and names divine justice demands that their rights be preserved and the oppressors be punished.<sup>70</sup> As a result of his extensive analyses of Divine Names, he claims that even Divine Names give good tidings to all suffering men and oppressed people.

According to Nursi, in overcoming suffering and evils, belief in the hereafter has a remarkable influence. It is only through the thought of paradise that children can endure all the instances of death around them:

My little brother or friend has died and become a bird in Paradise. He is flying around Paradise and living more happily than us.<sup>71</sup>

In addition, it is only with the belief in the hereafter that elderly people can put up with their proximity to death. Only after their spirits are equipped with the implications of this belief they can calm themselves before the fact that their lives will be extinguished and their fine worlds will come to an end. They can bear grievous despair only by means of this thought. Moreover, it is only through the belief of punishment that one can restrain youth from aggression, oppression, and destruction. Further, it is only the thought of an everlasting world and eternal life that the members of a family will have an abiding companionship and friendship.<sup>72</sup>

Finally, when asked why God sends natural evils such as Tsunami and earthquakes to Muslims and causes them to suffer, he touches on the eschatological dimension of the problem in comply with two of the sayings of the compliance:<sup>73</sup>

Just as the requital for big mistakes and crimes is postponed and made in big centers, and the requital for small crimes is made quickly in small centers, as a consequence of an important instance of wisdom, the recompense of the greater part of the unbelievers' crimes is postponed to the Last Judgment, while the punishment for the believers' faults is in part given in this world.<sup>74</sup>

Lastly, Nursi explains his metaphysical perspective on the nature of death in order to comfort not only suffering individuals, but also those in fear of death. Based upon his deep reflection on the following verse: "Who creates death and life that He may try you, which of you is the best in conduct." (67:2) he maintains that death, like life, is created, and is additionally made a bounty, even though it appears to be dissolution, non-existence, decay, the extinction of life, and the annihilator of pleasures, if a superficial analysis of the nature of death is made. Accordingly, he describes death as a discharge from the duties of life, a kind of rest, a change of residence, a change of existence, an invitation to an eternal life, and the introduction to an immortal life. In remembering the perfection of creation, he holds the idea that just as life comes into the world through a creation and determining, so too departure from the world is through a creation and determining, and through a wise and purposeful direction. As the death of the seed is the start of life of the shoot, it is like life itself.<sup>75</sup>

## 9. WORSHIP AND EVIL

According to the Qur'an, God created humans only that they may know and worship him.<sup>76</sup> The verse (51:56) is like the basis of the Supreme Sign (*Ayah al-Kubra*), one of the most striking parts of *The Risale-i Nur Collection*. His introduction to this work starts with this verse:<sup>77</sup>

According to the meaning of this mighty verse, the purpose for the sending of man to this world and the wisdom implicit in it, consists of recognizing the creator of all beings and believing in

Him and worshipping Him. The primordial duty of man and the obligation incumbent upon him are to know God and believe in Him, to assent to His being and unity in submission and perfect certainty.<sup>78</sup>

In his opinion, worship is a servant's realization of divine dominicality, divine mercy, and eternal power, seeing his weakness, poverty and all his faults.<sup>79</sup> It can be inferred from this definition that the main purpose of worship is to turn minds toward God.<sup>80</sup> In order to support his definition, he uses the argument that man is sent to this world in a most weak and impotent way,<sup>81</sup> so that he may perfect himself through learning and proclaim his worship of God and servitude to him through supplication.<sup>82</sup>

Nursi often establishes a close relation between evil and worship. According to him, there are two forms of worshipping God. The servant is able to realize God's divine dominicality either in a positive or negative way. The first one is the well-known worship called positive worship (*muthbat 'ibadah*) such as the five daily prayers and one's supplication to God. The second one manifests itself through the negative form called negative worship (*manfi 'ibadah*) like illness and disasters. By means of illness and disasters, those afflicted realize their inherent impotence and weakness. They beseech their All-Compassionate Creator and take refuge in Him. They manifest worship in a sincere way without hypocrisy.<sup>83</sup>

This time, Nursi analyzes the relationship of evil to worship in regard to Divine Names. According to him, beneficial matters, manifestations of Names of Beauty, like good health and all kinds of pleasure cause a person to give thanks in the forms of the five daily prayers and supplication, so that the human machine becomes like a factory producing thanks. On the other hand, through evil matters, manifestations of Names of Glory, like illness, pain, and disasters, are put in motion. As a result, a person in such a difficult situation seeks refuge in him not only with a single tongue, but with the tongue of each of his members.<sup>84</sup>

Nursi again argues for the connection between evil and worship by placing human nature at the center of the issue. To him, in order to show his infinite power and endless mercy, God has placed infinite impotence and endless want inside human nature.<sup>85</sup> Human being in infinite impotence and weakness is always in search for a point of support in the face of his innumerable enemies. Immediately, his conscious resorts to an omnipotent One. In the face of his numberless aims he perpetually searches for a point of assistance through the language of his unlimited poverty and need. This time, his conscience turns to an All-Compassionate One. At the end, he opens his hands in supplication to him.<sup>86</sup>

In this way, Nursi claims that not only the essence of worship, but also the creation of man in infinite weakness and poverty necessitates the existence of

evil. As a matter of fact, almost all religions, directly or indirectly, hold the same ideas. They see prayer in the sense of supplication (*du'a'*) as the essence of worship. Prayer is meaningless without suffering. Specifically, why would people pray to God if they did not suffer? So, what does it mean to pray? In my opinion, it means that a person suffers, and therefore, he prays, in other words, that he needs something considered necessary for his living or wants to be protected from all his enemies, and he opens his hands in supplication to God for these reasons enthusiastically. As a result, both the essence of prayer and the elements of impotence and poverty in human nature require the existence of evil.

Furthermore, inspired by a weakly transmitted saying of the Prophet Muhammad, Nursi might hold the idea that the best of matters are the most difficult (al-'Ajluni, *Kashf al-Khafa*, 1:55).<sup>87</sup> The Qur'anic verses (94:6–8) also support this idea.<sup>88</sup> In general, easiness is hidden behind difficult matters. That means difficulties prepare people for the future; they also mature them. Likewise, disasters and evils gain spiritual perfection in those who reacted to them patiently. It is remarkable that Nursi could still offer thanks in patience, and also, see these difficulties as a Divine bounty through which he might gain greater merit, despite the fact that he suffered unimaginable torments in prison.<sup>89</sup> Such a religious attitude in the face of distressful sufferings echoes the principle of difficulty which Muslim Sufis followed in their own spiritual lives. They suffered intentionally, in order that they could reach the terminus of the spiritual station, the Annihilation in God (*Fana Fillah*). In their opinion, those who suffer most in the way of God are the best of people.<sup>90</sup>

## 10. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I hold the claim that Nursi proposes a new theological perspective on theodicy in response to the main question whether there is consistency between the existence of evil in the world and the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good God.

With this chapter, in terms of Nursi's ideas I intended to contribute to theological and philosophical discussions of the problem of evil. As far as I see, Nursi theologically offers new insights on the problem. Initially, the analysis of the problem in the view of Divine Names seems to be a new approach in theology. Even though a similar approach in general terms has been also encountered in al-Ghazali's ideas, his main interest is mainly religious-mystical. Whereas, Nursi applies Divine Names Theology to almost every theological issue in order to explain them inasmuch that he systematically puts this theology at the center of his philosophy. Additionally, Nursi developed

a number of metaphysical principles in order to propose his ideas systematically. Starting from these principles, it seems possible to draw a map of his philosophical thoughts. Further, intellectually, his ideas on Free Will Theodicy, Best Possible World Theodicy, Afterlife Theodicy and Existential Theodicy has potentiality to inject fresh blood into theological discussions. Moreover, it is striking that Nursi sets up a close relation between Divine Names and human impotent and poor nature in terms of evils and sufferings as mentioned in the last part of the chapter. From this aspect, the followers of all other religions can also take advantage of Nursi's practical responses to evils.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Here, it seems useful to remember an important point related to these arguments. They have been discussed under the Christian theological terms in Western intellectual circles. For example, in Christian theology God is described as love of God; the creation of evil cannot be ascribed to such a God. In short, even though both Christianity and Islam have agreed on many theological issues, there is disagreement on some subjects, such as the nature of Satan and his role in the creation of evil, the source of evil, God's divine names and attributes, the nature of free will and divine determining, and the metaphysical value of the world

<sup>2</sup> Michael L. Peterson, *God and Evil: An Introduction to the Issues* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1998), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>6</sup> Mehmet Aydın, "The Problem of Evil in the Risale-i Nur," *Third International Symposium on Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*, Trans. Şükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözlük Ofset A.Ş., 1997), p. 244.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>8</sup> Said Nursi, *The Reasonings: A Key to Understanding the Qur'an's Eloquence*, trans. Hüseyin Akarsu (Izmir: Çağlayan A.Ş., 2008), p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> Said Nursi, *Münazarat*, <http://www.risaleinurenstitusu.org/index.asp?Section=Kulliyat&Book=Munazarat&Page=70>

<sup>10</sup> I use the term Divine Names Theology in the sense that it is the intellectual effort to explain almost every theological issue in a systematical way in accordance with the meanings of Divine Names set not only by the Sunni tradition but also by the Shi'ite lines of transmission on the successive authority of Ja'far al-Sadiq, Muhammad al-Baqir, Zayn al-'Abidin, Husayn and the forth caliph 'Ali in the famous prayer book *al-Jawshan al-Kabir* (The Big Shield). As much as I see, I used the term Divine Names Theology in this sense the first time.

<sup>11</sup> Al-Ghazali, *Al-Maqsad al-Asna fi Sharh Asma' Allah al-Husna*, ed. Mahmud Bejou (Damas-cus: Matba'at al-Sabah, 1999), p. 126.

<sup>12</sup> He has made reference to the power of choice in the expression Single Theoretical Matter. Single Theoretical Matter (amr-i i'tibari) is a thing which has no actual existence except in the mind of a person who conceives it as long as he conceives it. So, freedom of choice has a kind of a mental entity. It becomes apparent only when a rational being tends to do something.

<sup>13</sup> According to the Qur'an, jinn are made from smokeless fire. They have free will like human beings. They too will receive punishment for their sins, and will be rewarded for their virtuousness.

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed information about existential theodicy, please see *Beyond Theodicy: Jewish and Christian Continental Thinkers respond to the Holocaust* by Sarah K. Pinnock.

<sup>15</sup> Nursi often establishes correlations between the Qur'an, the universe, and man. In his opinion, the universe is like a book, which is an enlarged form of the Qur'an, and also, of man. On the other hand, the Qur'an is an interpretation of that enlarged book. That is why the Qur'an often depicts the universe as evidence for Divine Unity as in the following verses: (3:191); (30:20); (30:21); (30:22); (30:23); (30:24); (30:25); (30:46). All beings in the universe are signs testifying to God's perfect names, attributes, and qualities. Please, see Said Nursi, *Letters*, Trans. Şükran Vahide (İstanbul: Sözler Neşriyat A.Ş., 2001), pp. 275–280.

<sup>16</sup> Said Nursi, *Mathnawi al-Nuri: Seedbed of the Light*, Trans. Huseyin Akarsu (İzmir: The Light, 2007), p. 19; Said Nursi *The Words*, Trans. Şükran Vahide (İstanbul: Sözler Neşriyat A.Ş., 2004), p. 243.

<sup>17</sup> Said Nursi, *The Rays Collection*, Trans. Şükran Vahide (İstanbul: Sözler Neşriyat A.Ş., 2002), p. 616.

<sup>18</sup> Said Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, Trans. Şükran Vahide (İstanbul: Sözler Neşriyat A.Ş., 2004), p. 22. Seven attributes are as follows: Life (*Hayah*), Omniscience (*'Ilm*), Hearing (*Sam'*), Seeing (*Basar*), Omnipotence (*Qudrah*), Speech (*Kalam*), and Will (*Iradah*).

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed information about these arguments, please see *The Rays Collection*, pp. 608–634; *Letters*, pp. 291–299.

<sup>20</sup> It needs to be examined how much these arguments are philosophically valid, so that we can come to the conclusion that there is no inconsistency between the existence of God and the existence of evil in this world.

- <sup>21</sup>
- (1) God exists;
- (2) God is all-powerful;
- (3) God is all-good;
- (4) God is all-knowing;

<sup>22</sup> Nursi explains this word in his book "*The Words*" as follows:

"All the letters of a book describe themselves to the extent of a letter and point their own existence in one way, while they describe their writer with ten words and show him in many ways. For example: 'The one who wrote me has fine hand-writing. His pen is red, and so on.' In just the same way, all the letters of the mighty book of the universe point to themselves to the extent of their own size and physical beings, but describe the Names of the Pre-Eternal Inscraper like odes, and testify to the One they signify and point to His Names with fingers to the number of their attributes. That means that even if one denies both oneself and the universe like the foolish Sophists, one still should not deny the All-Glorious Maker." *The Words*, p. 307.

<sup>23</sup> S. Nursi, *The Flashes Collection*, Trans. Şükran Vahide (İstanbul: Sözler Neşriyat A.Ş., 2004), p. 115; *The Words*, pp. 194–195.

<sup>24</sup> *The Words*, p. 552.

<sup>25</sup> For a detailed explanation about it, please look at his treatise *On Nature* within the book *The Flashes Collection*, pp. 232–254.

<sup>26</sup> *Letters*, p. 24.

<sup>27</sup> *The Flashes Collection*, pp. 103–104.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>29</sup> *The Rays Collection*, p. 282.



<sup>30</sup> *The Flashes Collection*, p. 105.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104, 107, 108, 111.

<sup>34</sup> In Nursi's opinion, even merely to think of the possibility of non-existence is a kind of horrible evil. It is because he often emphasizes how difficult it is for unbelievers who claim non-existence after death to live in this world. Please, see *The Words*, p. 155; *The Flashes Collection*, pp. 30–31.

<sup>35</sup> *The Flashes Collection*, p. 106.

<sup>36</sup> Nursi describes evil as non-existential ('adami), not as non-existence ('adam). In this way, he alludes to the fact that evil comes from non-existent things, not to the claim that evil is non-existence.

<sup>37</sup> *The Rays Collection*, p. 282.

<sup>38</sup> *The Flashes Collection*, p. 61; *Letters*, pp. 81–82.

<sup>39</sup> Further, in accordance with his Names theology and the established principle of Ahl al-Sunnah "The reality of things is constant," Nursi accused Ibn Arabi's doctrines of Unity of Being (*Wahdat al-Wujud*) and Ibn Rabbani's idea of Unity of Witness (*Wahdat al-Shuhud*) of being contrary to many clear statements of the Qur'an and Hadith. In his opinion, the places of manifestations of God's glory and beauty cannot be illusions and imaginings. Inasmuch as Divine Names have a reality, their places of manifestations should have an external reality separate from God's existence. For a detailed explanation on his criticism, see *The Flashes Collection*, pp. 58–61.

<sup>40</sup> Nursi attributes the concept of free will to all human beings, Jinn and Satanic spirits.

<sup>41</sup> *The Words*, p. 479.

<sup>42</sup> The tendency to do evil (*kasb*) is nearly the same as a single theoretical matter and the power of choice.

<sup>43</sup> *Letters*, p. 62; *The Words*, p. 478.

<sup>44</sup> *The Flashes Collection*, pp. 117–118.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106–107.

<sup>46</sup> *The Words*, p. 482.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 558.

<sup>48</sup> The word *al-Hasil bil-Masdar* is derived from the infinitive (*al-Masdar*), which means the source or essence of the verb. The former denotes the thing which comes into existence as a result of man's desire to do something. For this reason, according to Nursi, this existent thing, like death, should be attributed to the creator of all things God. Whereas, since the latter is a relative matter, which has no actual existence, it, like murder, can be ascribed to another relative matter like free will. *Ibid.*, p. 482–483

<sup>49</sup> "Allah is the Creator of all things" The Qur'an (39:62).

<sup>50</sup> Please, see The Qur'an (2:256) and (2:195).

<sup>51</sup> *The Words*, p. 482.

<sup>52</sup> *The Words*, p. 483.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>54</sup> *Letters*, pp. 61–62.

<sup>55</sup> Please, see the Qur'an (67:2) and (2:155).

<sup>56</sup> Abu Bakr (AD 573–634) was the first male convert to Islam. He became the first caliph after the Prophet Muhammad's death in 632. He died in 634.

<sup>57</sup> Abu Jahl not only rejected Islam, but also persecuted early enslaved Muslims. Even though he had been called Abu al-Hakam, *the Father of Wisdom*, Muslims called him Abu Jahl meaning, *the Father of Ignorance*. He was killed at the battle of Badr.

<sup>58</sup> *The Words*, p. 753; *Letters*, p. 63; *The Flashes Collection*, p. 115.

- <sup>59</sup> *The Flashes Collection*, pp. 407–408.
- <sup>60</sup> *The Rays Collection*, p. 40.
- <sup>61</sup> *The Words*, p. 240.
- <sup>62</sup> Mehmet Aydın, “The Problem of Evil in the Risale-i Nur”, p. 245.
- <sup>63</sup> *The Words*, p. 478; *Letters*, p. 62.
- <sup>64</sup> *The Words*, p. 186.
- <sup>65</sup> *The Rays Collection*, p. 46.
- <sup>66</sup> “Corruption and disorder have appeared on land and sea because of [the evil] which men’s hands have earned. Thus He causes them to taste a part of what they have done, so that they may turn back [from evil].” The Qur’an (30:41).
- <sup>67</sup> *The Words*, p. 186.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.
- <sup>69</sup> Mehmet Aydın, “The Problem of Evil in the Risale-i Nur”, p. 248.
- <sup>70</sup> *The Words*, p. 61.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- <sup>73</sup> “When God wants to favor His servant, He hastens His punishment for him/her in this world. And when He wants to do His servant evil, He keeps Himself from harming him/her who sins, so that He may punish him/her in the Day of Judgment.” (an-Nawawi’s *Riyadus Salihin*) and “Disasters, illness, and even a thorn prick to the finger are as atonement for believers’ sins.”
- <sup>74</sup> *The Words*, p. 186.
- <sup>75</sup> *Letters*, p. 24.
- <sup>76</sup> The Qur’an (51:56).
- <sup>77</sup> Ali Mermer, “The Ways to Knowledge of God in the Risale-i Nur”, *Third International Symposium on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, Trans. Şükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözler Neşriyat A.Ş., 1997), p. 54.
- <sup>78</sup> *The Rays Collection*, p. 125.
- <sup>79</sup> *The Words*, p. 52.
- <sup>80</sup> *Signs of Miraculousness*, p. 161.
- <sup>81</sup> The Qur’an (4:28).
- <sup>82</sup> *The Words*, p. 324.
- <sup>83</sup> *The Flashes Collection*, p. 23, 267.
- <sup>84</sup> *The Flashes Collection*, p. 28.
- <sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.
- <sup>86</sup> *The Words*, p. 719.
- <sup>87</sup> *The Rays Collection*, p. 338.
- <sup>88</sup> “So, verily, with every difficulty, there is relief: Verily, with every difficulty there is relief. Therefore, when thou art free (from thine immediate task), still labour hard, And to thy Lord turn (all) thy attention.” The Qur’an (94:6–8).
- <sup>89</sup> *The Rays Collection*, p. 336.
- <sup>90</sup> There is a saying of the Prophet supporting this Sufi principle: “Among men the prophets suffer most, then other men according to their respective ranks.”

## SECTION IV

POETRY AND THE EMOTIONS  
IN ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

**Abstract:** A question in aesthetics that has been discussed for a long time is how far can our aesthetic reactions be taken to be cognitive. That is, we feel certain emotions perhaps when we confront examples of art, and then wonder whether those are just subjective and personal reactions, or do they fall into some rule-governed pattern based upon the nature of the objects themselves and our nature? Sufism tends to regard aesthetic responses as objective, as insights into a deeper level of reality where only one sort of reaction is appropriate, while the Peripatetic philosophers rather argue that although poetry in particular has a logical structure, it does not result in a conclusion that has to be generally accepted. The latter are often criticized for making poetry fit into a logical straitjacket which is inappropriately rigid, but there are good reasons for thinking that the Peripatetic thinkers in the Islamic world are far better at analyzing the role of emotions in poetry than are the Sufis.

**Key words:** Emotions, aesthetics, poetry, syllogism, demonstration, illuminationist thought, sufi(sm), peripatetic

According to Nelson Goodman, “In aesthetic experience the emotions function cognitively.”<sup>1</sup> This certainly seems to be the case, in the sense that we use our emotions to understand what we read or hear, and the text itself often makes reference to the emotions also. This was a point that was well-understood in classical Islamic philosophy, and is often regarded as an aspect of the rather rigid attitude that the *falasifa* had towards Aristotle and the principle of syllogism.<sup>2</sup> That is, they took seriously the idea of an organon in the Aristotelian sense, of a structure of knowledge which can be characterized in terms of different kinds of syllogism. So at the apex of the system there exists the very best sort of knowledge which is organized in terms of demonstrative argument, the strongest form of argument possible, where the premises are universal and the conclusions that are derived from them are similarly entirely general and follow necessarily from what precedes them. Then there is a hierarchy of different kinds of syllogism, not in the sense that the structure of the syllogism varies, since it invariably follows the same Aristotelian pattern, but

the premises differ in their strength, and so the conclusions also vary in what they can be taken to show.

### 1. POETRY AND THE SYLLOGISM

In poetry this works in a specific way. An idea is produced as a premise, and then we work out the implications of that premise. Finally we arrive at some proposition, or an emotion (the *falasifa* differed on this issue) that represents a reasonable conclusion. What is it a conclusion to? It is a conclusion to the ideas that were set in motion, as it were, by the poem, and it can represent our sense that we now grasp the various links between those ideas and have pulled them altogether. It could also be an emotion, something that has been inspired in us by the poem. Even if the conclusion is not an emotion but rather a statement, emotion still comes into it, since it would be argued that in order to understand the poem and how it works one would need a grasp of what the appropriate emotions are along the way.

This gives us an idea of how the emotions operate cognitively, they are here either conclusions of a reasoning, or they illustrate how the reasoning itself is taken to work. It is certainly true that the attempt to push a poem into the straitjacket of a syllogism often looks artificial, and we are today rightly sceptical of the precise project that the *falasifa* set themselves, to use the syllogism as a way of classifying and understanding every kind of writing. On the other hand, the principle behind that project is far from implausible, that there is a reasoning process involved in poetry, and indeed in art in general, since words are not being tossed out at random. Words have meanings, and meanings are what we often react to emotionally, and one might even go so far as to claim that unless one had knowledge of what the right emotions are that go with particular words, poetry would be a mystery.

### 2. WORDS AND CONCEPTS

It is worth here mentioning a longstanding debate in the Islamic world on the nature of language. Is understanding language more a matter of grasping the meanings (*ma'na*) behind the linguistic expressions, or is it rather knowing what the linguistic expressions (*lafz*) themselves mean? This debate came to the fore when Islamic philosophy first got going seriously and its enemies charged it with importing a level of analysis of meanings that sought to bypass ordinary language in an objectionable way. After all, it was argued, to understand the sentence "The cat is on the mat" all one needs to know is the language in which the sentence is written, including of course its grammar. Nothing deeper

is required, and so there is no room for logic to be given the job of analyzing such propositions. Logic, based as it was on the Greek language, would in fact not do a good job, since it has a different language and culture in mind. The philosophers argued by contrast that there is a level of meaning which lies behind language and which deals with the structure of the statement in any language, and so explains how it operates in a deeper way than does mere linguistic grammar.<sup>3</sup>

We could use this debate to construct a similar dichotomy about the role of the emotions in poetry. Are they part of the language, or are they deeper? If emotions are part of language, then all we need to understand a poem are the words themselves. That is how poetry works, after all, with language and we know what sorts of emotions normally go with what linguistic expressions. It is not as though we need to have a cacophony of emotions going through our minds while reading or listening to a poem. On the other hand, if we do not feel the right emotions, surely the poem will be mysterious to us. This comes out nicely in Borges's short essay on Averroes and art, where he describes as tragic the attempt by Averroes to understand Aristotle's writings on aesthetics when Averroes had himself no knowledge of Greek art.<sup>4</sup> So much of what Averroes (Ibn Rushd) was reading must have been a mystery to him. Or must it? Could he not from understanding the principles of reasoning that lie behind art have grasped what he needed to know? To a writer like Borges no doubt wedded to the idea that a specific language is very important in understanding literature such an orientation towards the meanings that the text presupposes is objectionable, but not to Ibn Rushd. As an Islamic philosopher, he was committed to the idea that behind ordinary language there is a level of reasoning and indeed even emotions that can only be properly grasped logically.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. THE QUR'AN A POEM?

There is another aspect of the debate in Islam which needs to be mentioned, and that is the status of the Qur'an as literature. The Qur'an is often very beautiful, yet denies that it is poetry.<sup>6</sup> This is for at least two reasons. One is that poetry was very much the enthusiastic leisure activity of the Arabs in the region of Mecca, who we are told used to compete poetically with each other when the different tribes met up on special occasions. The Qur'an does not want to represent itself as just one of those sorts of activities. Also, poetry is very much identified at the time of the Qur'an with a rather frivolous activity that produces material which has no particular connection with the truth. So to say that the Qur'an was poetry would be to claim that it was not necessarily true, but quite the reverse. On the other hand, the Qur'an often boasts about what fine

literature it is, indeed, so good that anyone reading it or listening to it would have to conclude that it could only have divine origins. The Qur'an sets out this challenge (*tahaddi*) to its detractors, to produce anything as good as it, or even a few verses that are as good. The same debate about meaning that we outlined earlier was applied to this idea in Islamic culture, whether the miraculous nature of the Qur'an reposes in its language, the meanings behind that language, or in some combination of the two.<sup>7</sup> It is worth mentioning the issue of the miraculous nature of the Qur'an because it brings out how significant in Islamic culture the interpretation of literature was, and indeed remains still today, and also the rather questionable nature of poetry. The Qur'an addressed the Arabs using fine language since it knew that the Arabs appreciated fine language and so this was the appropriate way to address them. On the other hand, fine language can mislead and language can be very fine and point us in false directions at the same time. This is why Goodman's claim about the emotions may seem strange, in that we often think of emotions as comprising attitudes and feelings that we just have, while thoughts are what we work up to after a process of consideration. How can they be linked with each other, even in aesthetics? When the Qur'an denies that it is poetry, surely it is saying that it consists of thoughts primarily, as compared with emotions.

#### 4. THREE APPROACHES TO POETRY IN ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

Poetry is clearly a rational process. Language is organized in a variety of ways in poetry, and plays on our emotions, but not in an arbitrary manner. It is only if the word order, the words themselves and the rest of the structure is appropriate that the necessary link with our emotions will be established, and of course the ways in which this is done is complex. But our emotions do not have to be elicited by a poem, it is up to us to decide if we are going to be affected by it and how. So poetry then looks like a subjective process, since any sort of response is feasible to a poem. The *falasifa* may have it wrong, then, when they insist that poetry follows a syllogistic form, for surely if it did and the syllogism was valid, we would have to accept the conclusion, here perhaps equivalent to having the appropriate emotion, if we are rational. Yet they are not wrong, since they correctly point out the link between the organization of language in a poem and our emotions, and the entire point of communication does have to be linked to the audience and its needs and interests. People do vary in their reactions to things, though, however well framed, and they would not be making a mistake in reasoning if a poem fails to evoke in them the emotion the poet intended, or the emotion that most people feel.

That is the position in what we tend to call *mashsha'i* or Peripatetic Islamic philosophy, and it would be useful to contrast this with the views of the other

two major varieties, Sufi and ishraqi thought. For the Sufis aesthetics is objective. This is because the structure of the world, its origins in God and our reactions to it all fit into a tight and interconnected pattern. There are many kinds of Sufism, of course, but let me just outline what I take to be the most general principles shared by them all. The notion of beauty is a reflection of something real, and of divine origin, so that the sorts of things we rightly find beautiful fit into some schema that is invariable and fixed. What this is precisely there can be argument about, but the idea is that there is such a principle and it grounds our ideas of beauty in something solid, a real connection with how things are, and how they ought to be. For the Sufis God's influence on the world did not just start when he created it, but is constantly entering the world by sustaining its continuing existence, and it is the role of art to replicate that, to a degree. So in the visual arts we get in Islamic painting and decoration these recurring and repeating patterns, a sense of the unity of everything, the unending nature of God's presence and a tendency to develop ideas in abstraction. As far as poetry is concerned, we would expect a successful poem to do much the same sort of thing, and not only in poetry which is directly dealing with Sufi or religious themes. Even a poem about an entirely secular topic would, if it were successful, relate in some way to issues like divine unity (*tawhid*) by perhaps bringing together a particular experience with something much larger, so that the reader is drawn to put the topic of the poem within a broader metaphysical context. That does not mean that they have to understand what that context is precisely, but they need to appreciate that what they are reading is not just the description of something of no significance, but links up with far wider issues and so is worthy of attention and indeed appreciation. It is not difficult to argue that, of course, since we do expect a poem that describes something very banal to yield much more significant material when it is put within a wider context, and that is the reason for classifying it as a poem rather than as a piece of ordinary writing.

The Sufi approach to poetry has the advantage of using determinate criteria in its approach to poetry. We are not left in the sort of vague doubt about what precisely to say about a poem as can happen in the Peripatetic case. Some poetry could easily be condemned for not managing to make that leap from the particular to the general in the sort of elevating way that the Sufis insist on. For example, a poem might well be regarded as not taking us anywhere we ought to go, if it only mentioned ordinary things. On the other hand, if it mentions them in such a way as to link them with wider issues, even just by implication via the style of the language, this would fit in nicely with Sufi aesthetics. This actually results in Sufism not being especially objective about aesthetics at all, since the judgement about whether a poem raises these broader issues is itself very much a personal one. For example, a poem may include violent language



and deal with an unsavoury topic, and may disgust one reader, while another may find the attention paid to such unpleasant phenomena can be revealing of the role of the sordid in our lives and its relationship to what is higher.

The third major school of Islamic philosophy is *ishraqi* or illuminationist thought, and this is based on the view that the basic criterion of reality is light and its effect on the world. The more we know something, the more lit up the object of knowledge is, as it were, and the way we know we know is the feeling of radiance that accompanies our thought of it. Some knowledge is immediate and incontrovertible, and other knowledge is acquired in more painstaking ways and involves concepts that do raise issues of truth and falsity. It is not clear what kind of knowledge aesthetics falls into in *ishraqi* thought. It does not escape subjectivity if it is conceptual, since we can then disagree about precisely what concepts to apply to it. On the other hand, if it is immediate then we cannot question it at all. There certainly are flashes of recognition, as it were, in aesthetic experience, but it is difficult to know how to translate this into the language of aesthetic judgement, with its arguing and balancing of different approaches to the same object. The thing about the *ishraqi* idea of the sudden grasp of the truth of something is its capturing nicely of the experience of seeing something from a particular point of view, which does occur rather like a flash of light. Suddenly one sees things differently, perhaps connections are established for the first time and once we can see an aspect it is difficult to understand how we could not earlier. It just appears to be so obvious. Yet working up to that point often involves the use of concepts and even argument, so it is difficult to see it as immediate knowledge until the very last moment, as it were, which in *ishraqi* thought is to serve as the foundation of further knowledge claims. Here again we have a problem in *ishraqi* thought in that it is far from clear what sort of basis an aesthetic judgement is to anything further, it seems rather to stand by itself as a reflection of what is in front of us. Yet there is something very valuable in this idea of an aspect being rather like someone putting the light on, after which nothing is quite the same again. With an aspect once the light is turned on it can never be turned off again, since it becomes difficult to drop that aspect once it has impinged on one's consciousness.

##### 5. POETRY AND REASON

There is a very important feature of seeing as, something that interested Wittgenstein.<sup>8</sup> When you see an aspect, you employ a set of concepts, but when you see it from a different aspect, you employ a different set of concepts, and you cannot use both sets at the same time, since that would vitiate the aspect entirely. On the other hand, you can appreciate when you see it from one point of view that there is another point of view available to you, just not right now.

The thing worth noting about seeing an aspect is that one can use reason to get to that position, but reason is often not enough. An argument can help you see the aspect, and once one has grasped it, the aspect is readily available after that, but it may take a long time to apply the concept that is involved in seeing the aspect, and it may never happen. This is where the Sufi and the *ishraqi* views are helpful, in that they describe nicely the sensation of “getting it,” seeing the aspect as a sort of flash, and one where you feel that you are seeing something that is true, not just another way of seeing a thing. The idea that one is seeing one thing in a variety of different ways, as different aspects, is interpreted otherwise by the Sufis and the *ishraqis*, as seeing more of what is true, since the fact that one thing may be variously identified strikes them as a remarkable metaphysical fact, more about the world than about us. The idea that it is voluntary to see it in all these ways strikes them as problematic, in that it is not a matter of chance that one thing can be seen in different ways, but a matter of how the world is. To say it is voluntary suggests that one might or might not grasp the aspect and wish to hold onto it, which for them is a bit like understanding a mathematical proof and then refusing to accept it.

Yet the voluntary aspect of aesthetic interpretation is very important if we are to regard issues of beauty as matters of debate. We are familiar with the disagreement of apparently sensible people over the appropriate interpretation of a poem, and it is not clear that someone is making a mistake. In the end someone just cannot see it in a particular way, while someone else finds it difficult not to see it in that way, and seeing as is clearly crucial in the interpretation of art of any kind. Argument cannot always resolve the issue, but as the *falasifa* suggested, that does not mean that argument is irrelevant. What we always have to bear in mind when art is at issue is the huge role played by our emotions, which is one reason that poetry was placed way down the scale of powerful argument forms. Art itself is a representation of the truth for those who are incapable of coming face to face with it through reason, and that is why religions often use imagery and subtle artistic devices. A religion wants to appeal to the greatest number of people and represent the same truth as does philosophy, but in a way that resonates with the widest possible audience. This is a thesis that is shared by most of the *falasifa*, since at least the time of al-Farabi. It argues that there is nothing wrong with poetry apart from the fact that it is a bit more indirect in its approach to the truth as compared with other forms of reasoning, but situating it in its appropriate religious context will bring the ordinary person into contact with what he really needs to know, in an evocative and imaginative manner.

This brings us to a closer understanding of what it means for seeing an aspect to be voluntary, since surely the thesis cannot be that one may accept the religious truth behind the impressive language or that one may not. We are not talking about liking a movie here, but understanding the form of reality and

our role in it, including most importantly our duties. Can we really regard not stealing and believing in the afterlife as voluntary? It is not these beliefs that are voluntary but how we arrive at them. We may arrive at them by working them out ourselves, or listening to other people, or putting our moral system on some sort of rational basis, but on the other hand we could be impressed by the fine language of the Qur'an and act in order with what it says, or what we think it says. What is voluntary is the way we get to the truth, not the truth itself, or our acceptance of it. The imaginative language of religion gets us to the truth eventually, in a more indirect manner than the language of logic, for instance, but it gets us to the same place in the end.

## 6. EMOTIONS AND AESTHETICS

We can quite easily see the link between emotions and aesthetic judgement in that for some people their emotions get in the way of such judgements, or help them along. For example, someone who has a close relationship with agriculture may find examples and imagery that relate to nature resonates with her more readily as compared with someone who has no knowledge or liking for the natural world. The successful religion is one that manages to express itself in a wide variety of ways so that everyone is given a formulation that can move them in the right direction, and some theologians refer to the Qur'an expressing itself in 35, 40 or even 200 different ways with this aim in mind.<sup>9</sup> God after all knows well the thinking processes of the creatures he created, and can easily design a representation of the message that should work for each type of sensibility.

This makes the voluntary nature of aesthetic interpretation a bit dubious, since if God expects us to accept a certain interpretation, it seems rather impolite to deny it. The Qur'an keeps on urging its audience to think, consider and reason about what they are told, and much of the language is beautiful and evocative, calling on our rational faculties but also our emotions, as al-Farabi often argued, summoning everyone regardless of his or her own abilities to find a route to the truth. Someone who was not persuaded either intellectually or aesthetically, though, a particular stubborn individual, looks on this account as though he is being perverse. It is like someone who is hungry, someone offers him food, and he rejects it (incidentally, one of the suras of the Qur'an is called *al-ma'ida* – the replete table). It looks very much like we should go back to the analysis offered by the Sufis or the ishraqis, an analysis that makes the aesthetic assent inevitable, once one understands all aspects of the text one is considering and its links with what is higher than it. One can perhaps make too much of the significance of the voluntary in religion, and the Qur'an does

make quite a few references to faith not as something we choose but something that God may, if He wishes, instil in us.

#### 7. THE *FALASIFA* VINDICATED

One might have expected the *falasifa* to take an Aristotelian line on aesthetic appreciation which goes rather like this. Being the sort of creature we are, and having the sorts of ends we naturally do, it is in our interests to see the world in a particular sort of way, and to find beauty in certain sorts of pattern and unity. Someone who did not accept this normal view of beauty would offend against who he is and what is necessary for who he is to flourish. One could not rule this out entirely, but it should be clear from following this sort of approach what is wrong with that person's choice. Then someone who does not choose the right judgement on the poem would be rightly regarded as perverse and lacking in a kind of rationality, although not a logical rationality.

Yet the *falasifa* do not follow such an approach, and it is important to work out why. It could well be because they were convinced of the significance of the wide gap between poetry and other forms of argument. Poetry is certainly logically organized, they suggested, in that it has a rational structure and we can work out what it means by following that structure and the sorts of ideas and emotions that it evinces in us. But who is this "us"? It is surely the average person, and if it is reasonable to think that the average person would react to a poem in a particular way, why cannot we say that he ought to react in that way, or even more strongly, that unless he reacts in that way there is something awry with him? Going this far would be to go too far, since it would fail to acknowledge a very important feature of imagination in the *falsafa* tradition, its link with us as physical creatures and hence its embeddedness in our particularity. This is what is wrong with imagination from a philosophical point of view, it does not give us scope to generalize. The trouble with linking ideas closely to bodies is that those ideas are then contaminated, as it were, by the individual features and experiences of a particular physical being, and so essentially limited in scope. This is very clear in poetry, where the words point us in the direction of what is universal and general, while the experiences that go along with the words have a unique resonance for each particular reader.

This is not just an issue about aesthetics, but is central to the understanding of Islam by the *falasifa*. The message that the Prophet received was a message to a particular person, and he was often accused of inventing it, or having an overactive imagination. Yet Islam presents itself not as just the views of an individual but as a divine guide to how to live and how the world is, i.e. in entirely general terms. It is important to get this distinction between the views

of the individual and the impersonal and universal truth straight. Even if one does not accept a religion, it is not difficult to tell that the religion is trying to do something different from reporting on just one person's experience, even though the religion may spend a lot of time talking about such experiences. The Qur'an is no exception, it tells us a lot about the prophets and their stories, and one of the guides that Muslims have to how to live is the *hadith*, the Traditions that report on the sayings of the Prophet and those close to him, and also the *sunna* or practice of the Prophet. These are all reports on individuals, but they are taken to have much wider implications. If the Prophet was the perfect man (*insan al-kamil*) as the Sufis say, then clearly his life has useful information for us also.

Learning from a story about the life of the Prophet and learning from a poem are different. The life of the Prophet presents an exemplar and we can follow that, or at least consider it as a candidate for imitation. A poem could inspire us and even change our lives, but there is no reason why it should in the sense that we make a mistake by not taking it in that way. To give an example, some people are very moved by accounts of the natural world, and poetry using natural imagery is effective for them. It is less effective for people who are uninterested in that world, they might still be impressed with the structure of the poem but unmoved by its basic content. The commentators on the Qur'an commented on how many different ways the Book presents and represents its message in order to attract the maximum conceivable audience, reflecting precisely this point that the way a message is presented is only effective if it latches onto the individual interests and experiences of as many people as possible in the audience. The aim is to get people to understand some entirely general information. But with poetry such general information is often lacking, the poet is using her imagination to present a view of the world which may be entirely personal and make very little reference to the reader's life, yet because it is beautifully written it could find a warm response from the reader. Or it could not. This distinction between poetry and prophecy is very important in Islam, even where the latter is illustrated by the former, and even where the former takes on the appearance of the latter.

The distinction between poetry and prophecy is important in Islam, but this does not mean that poetry is without cognitive value, and here we return to the way that poetry is effective in helping us learn about ourselves and the world. It is not just a way of expressing our feelings and emotions, or about motivating us to action. A poem develops an idea, and that idea does as the *falasifa* suggest have a connection with an emotion. We may use poetry to explore our emotions, to see how far we can push them in a certain direction, how far we may extend them. This is the strength of using the form of the syllogism to analyze poetry, we get to use the idea of a structure and argument form within which

an emotion is interrogated, as it were, and here we get away from the subjective/objective issue that bedevils aesthetics. It does not really matter whether a reader of a poem thinks that the poem is accurate in its portrayal of something, what matters is that the poem provides a treatment that is considered and then perhaps rejected, but it is part of a rational process of assessment, and if the poem is felt to be successful it takes us further along in our understanding of something. Perhaps what we can understand is something that previously was difficult to understand, something connected to the emotions. But even if we are not convinced by the poem we still learn from it, in the sense that it takes us along a line of argument that we eventually do not accept, but even following that process in itself is helpful in showing us what forms of approach to the emotion do not work, or at least do not work for us. That is useful information since the thing about the emotions that does make an essential demand on the subjective/objective dichotomy is the fact that we have an individual attitude to things via our emotions. We like different things, are frightened and impressed in distinct ways, and all this comes into our understanding of emotions in general. That is not to say that we cannot, or should not, make the effort to understand what it is about something that other people have a particular attitude towards, but it is an effort, and for most people perhaps there is no effort at all to be made in this direction, since they just naturally share a common emotion.

The *ishraqi* account of the emotions also makes sense on the account I am providing here, since the idea of a flash or sudden knowledge about what something means is a common aspect of reading poetry, and also grasping what we come to feel about something. An emotion is then explored through a process whereby it is acquired and elucidated, and then experienced in a direct way. This is something that Mulla Sadra discusses in great detail in his *Afshar*, the different processes at work in improving our understanding of particular issues, and the way in which our knowledge may be elevated through art is expressed in a way that stresses the role of art as not a representative of reality, but as real itself.<sup>10</sup> The art object is itself a part of reality, as is what it discusses, and we can learn from it. A problem with the *ishraqi* approach is that a lot of experience is regarded as incorrigible which we do not normally understand in this way, and the idea that something can be so vivid to us that we cannot doubt it is difficult to accept at face value, with respect to the emotions as well as to anything else.

The Sufi approach really fails to make much of the issue, which is surprising given its close link with the mechanics of the creation of art itself. The problem with Sufism is its dogmatism, its insistence that poetry represents something real and incontrovertible about the essence of things, and this means that the

emotions can only be understood in one way. The neat ways in which the different parts of a poem are seen as representing specific aspects of reality just does not do justice to our experience of poetry, although it could were we to be irretrievably committed to a spiritual way of looking at the world. Perhaps we should, but it is a weakness in an account of aesthetics if it is dependent on a view of the world that is circular in the sense of presupposing that the world is spiritual and then insisting that we observe spiritual aspects in it via aesthetic experience.

Commentators tend to be rather scathing about the Peripatetic approach to aesthetics. It is too rigid, it does not make sense of the varieties of aesthetic experience and output, we are told, and it was constructed by thinkers who did not have any experience of the sort of art that it was originally designed to describe. Despite these problems, and they are problems, it has been argued here that the *mashsha'i* approach does provide us with some decent conceptual tools to understand many of the aesthetic issues that arise in poetry, and are an advance on the alternative approaches in Islamic philosophy.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> N. Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 248.

<sup>2</sup> D. Black, *Logic and Aristotle's "Rhetoric" and "Poetics"* in medieval Arabic philosophy (Leiden: Brill, 1990); V. Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age* (Leiden: Brill, 1975); S. Kemal, "Aesthetics" in S. Nasr and O. Leaman (eds.) *History of Islamic Philosophy (HIP)* (London: Routledge, 1996), Chapter 56, pp. 969–978; S. Kemal, *The Poetics of Alfarabi and Avicenna* (Leiden: Brill, 1991); O. Leaman, *Islamic Aesthetics: An Introduction* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> S. Abed, "Language", *HIP* op. cit., pp. 898–925.

<sup>4</sup> J. Borges, "Averroes' search" trans. J. Irby, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. D. Yates and J. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964) pp. 148–155.

<sup>5</sup> This is discussed in O. Leaman, *Averroes and his Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997); *A Brief Introduction to Islamic Philosophy* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1999); O. Leaman, *An Introduction to Classical Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> A. Fatani, "Language and the Qur'an", in *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia*, ed. O. Leaman (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 356–372.

<sup>7</sup> S. Wild, "Inimitability" in *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia*, op. cit., pp. 295–296.

<sup>8</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *The Philosophical Investigations*, II, xi, trans. E. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953).

<sup>9</sup> Said Nursi, *Letters*, trans. Shukran Vahide (Istanbul: Sozler Publication, 2001), p. 474.

<sup>10</sup> S. H. Nasr, "Mulla Sadra: his teachings", *HIP*, op. cit., pp. 643–662; S. H. Nasr, "The Qur'an and hadith as source and inspiration of Islamic philosophy", *HIP*, op. cit., pp. 27–39.

A DISCUSSION OF THE AESTHETIC VIEWS  
OF IBN SINA AND ARISTOTLE ON THE BASIS  
OF AESTHETIC VALUE

**Abstract:** This chapter intends to be a contemporary interpretation of the aesthetic views of Ibn Sina and Aristotle on the basis of aesthetic value. In the first half of the chapter, I compared and discussed mainly the aesthetic views of Ibn Sina and those of Aristotle. In the second half of the chapter, I focused on the problem of catharsis in Aristotle. The aesthetic views of Ibn Sina and Aristotle move on the central of the theory of mimesis. Additionally, Ibn Sina emphasizes that artistic creativity is an imaginative creativity. I argued for that catharsis in both Aristotle and Ibn Sina is neither an experience which makes art an ethical activity nor an intellectual clarification or therapeutic experience. On the contrary, catharsis is an aesthetic experience that is founded by moral value and its realistic effect. Catharsis is the *existential* meaning of the art.

**Key words:** Catharsis, aesthetic value, tragic value, Hellenistic, logic, poetic, rhetoric value, moral or ethical value, tragedy, assent, imagination, mimesis, imitation, aesthetic experience, aesthetic taste, imaginative speech, aesthetic subject, aesthetic object

Ibn Sina deals with poetry in the corpus of logic in *Kitab al-Shifa'*, an encyclopedia of philosophy in the peripatetic tradition. I think we should understand the poetics of both Ibn Sina and Aristotle as a philosophy of art in general rather than poetry alone. The ideas they put forward are generally about art, while some of their points are directly related to poetry in particular. Although *aesthetics* is a very new term, it had been established with all of its fundamental problems by Plato. While the aesthetics of Plato can be considered to be both a metaphysics of beauty and a philosophy of art, the poetics of Aristotle and Ibn Sina should be regarded as a philosophy of art rather than a metaphysics of beauty. Some scholars such as Salim Kemal and Ismail Dahiya made comprehensive studies on the poetics of Ibn Sina. In this chapter, I will attempt to discuss the aesthetic views of Ibn Sina and Aristotle on the basis of aesthetic value. In other words, this chapter is a contemporary interpretation of the aesthetic views of Ibn Sina and Aristotle – it intends to discover what they tried to say in their poetics. Therefore, some of the views I will put forward may not



have been explicitly stated by the mentioned philosophers. In the first half of the chapter, I will analyze mainly the aesthetic views of Ibn Sina and those of Aristotle by means of Ibn Sina. *Al-Fann al-Shi'r (The Poetics)* of Ibn Sina is not only a commentary and explanation of the *Poetics* of Aristotle; it also contains his own original theory and comments; especially Chapter 1, where he presents his original theory of poetry. Ibn Sina underlines the subjective side of art and the importance of the aesthetic subject in the formation of the work of art. Therefore, aesthetic values play an important role in his philosophy of art. Moreover, the origin of art, the relation between logic and poetics, poetic imitation, and aesthetic experience are essential subject matters on which Ibn Sina contributed. Nevertheless, we shall indicate the relation of Ibn Sina's poetics to Aristotle's poetic when necessary. In the second half of the chapter, the problem of catharsis in Aristotle shall be our main topic. Cathartic experience was interpreted historically in different ways. Interestingly enough, the prominent interpretations have argued that Aristotle did not consider catharsis to be an aesthetic experience. Contrary to these interpretations, I shall claim that catharsis is an aesthetic experience in both Aristotle and Ibn Sina. In this context, the relation between aesthetic and ethical values is very crucial in understanding the experience of catharsis.

#### 1. WHAT IS ART?

According to Ibn Sina art is imitative (*mimesis/muhakat*), just as it is in Aristotle's poetics. It is well known that Plato introduced the theory of mimesis, but he did not describe it as a creative activity, although it appears as a fundamental cultural activity in some of his dialogues. It seems that Plato made many aesthetic problems more problematic without resolving them. Imitation obtained its current meaning as an aesthetic activity in the poetics of Aristotle. As a matter of fact, Aristotle and Ibn Sina state that the essence of art is imitation. Imitation in Aristotelian aesthetics is different from Plato's understanding of mimesis. In the works of Aristotle and Ibn Sina, imitation is a creative activity of human beings, not mere copying. In the beginning of the *Poetics*, Aristotle says that the arts can be distinguished from each other by way of their respective mimetic mediums, objects and manners. Some arts imitate through the medium of color and form, some through the medium of rhythm, harmony and language.<sup>1</sup>

In the poetics of Ibn Sina, the essence of art is made clearer than it is in Aristotle's. Ibn Sina emphasizes that artistic creativity is an imaginative creativity. He stresses that the imaginative nature in artistic creativity excludes all other kinds of creative activity from artistic creativity. He first underlines that

a human being is an imitating or mimetic animal. So humans are distinguished from other animals by their supreme talent for imitation. Imitation is, for the human being, the medium of cultural activity and cultural work. Mimesis as enactment is not simple simile or copy; since while something is represented as a poem, story, or any variety of art, it is not given in its mode of facticity. Rather, it is given as an object to be creatively altered through the imaginative faculty (in metaphor, composition etc.). Art is the product of this process.<sup>2</sup>

Ibn Sina says that the essence of imitation consists of simile, metaphor and composition; and with imitation one aims at beautification, uglification (aesthetic denigration) or correspondence.<sup>3</sup> The difference that is made with respect to the essence of imitation shows that art is a creative and imaginative activity. An object in a portrait is depicted either more beautifully or more ugly than that object itself. Ibn Sina emphasized the contribution of the artist to the art object. Art as an activity of the subject, whether it involves beautification, or uglification, or correspondence, reflects in all of its products the sight and the comprehension of the subject and reveals the values of the subject. All of these subjective contributions of the artist take shape in the manner in which the percipient of art comprehends them. The source of the relativity of the aesthetic judgment lies here as well. Ibn Sina points to this subjective side in the aesthetic object by paying attention to the imaginative or imaginary side of the imitation.<sup>4</sup> According to Ibn Sina, the artist elevates the aesthetic object over crude reality by adding her or his own values and thereby promotes it to a different and higher ontological level.

Ibn Sina's comments on poetry can be applied to aesthetics in general. Ibn Sina defines poetry as an imaginative speech (*kalam mutakhayyal*) that consists of equal metrical speeches.<sup>5</sup> The vital point in this definition is his characterization of poetry as an imaginative speech. Although modern poetry generally abandons the formulaic demand for meter and rhyme, imaginative speech continues to be the nature of poetry. Ibn Sina also defines tales and stories as types of imaginative speech. In this case, the unique difference between tale and poem is that poems are metric.<sup>6</sup> While this claim may be regarded as unacceptable today, as we also distinguish poems that lack meter from tales, it does conform to ancient poetry. As a matter of fact when many great works of antiquity are rendered as prose, they lose almost all of their uniquely poetic qualities and turn into mere stories. Literary species like the tale, story, tragedies, etc. are types of imaginative speech, but the intensity of the imagination is different in them. The poetic imagination is more intense and obscure than the imagination in the tale, the story, and the novel; the manner of their poetic imagination is different. This case can be seen very clearly in the so-called epic poems of unsuccessful poets. For epic poems have a story in nature and unsuccessful poets write stories that lack the poetic imagination of genuine epic poems. As

a matter of fact, Ibn Sina's awareness of this difference demonstrates that the genuine distinctive quality of poetry is imagination. Metrical speeches that do not have imagination are not poetry, although they look like poetry. Ibn Sina exemplifies this with an example taken from Aristotle: what Empedocles wrote is not poetry, although he wrote metrical verses. Therefore, Empedocles is not a poet, but a physicist. Yet Homer wrote poems. Thus we properly call Homer a poet. Homer and Empedocles have nothing in common, but the verse (meter).<sup>7</sup> The reason for this is very obvious: while poetry is an imaginative or imaginary art, philosophy or science is not.

*Al-Shifa'* is one of the most important encyclopedias in the history of philosophy. *The Poetics (al-Fann al-Shi'r)* takes place in this encyclopedia as a sub-discipline of logic following the Hellenistic tradition (it is well known that the *Poetics* was added to the logic by the Hellenistic commentators after Aristotle). Ibn Sina says that the logician studies poetry only insofar as it is an imaginative speech. If, however, we consider this work in terms of the aesthetic problems Ibn Sina discusses, we can easily see that Ibn Sina is cognizant that logic and poetics (aesthetics) are different disciplines from each other. Some imaginative (poetic) utterances may declare a judgment, namely, poetic utterances may be a type of syllogism and, only in this respect, logic could be related to poetics.<sup>8</sup> According to Ibn Sina,

poetical syllogisms are composed of imagined propositions, inasmuch as their imagined aspect is considered, be they true or false. In short, they are composed of premises, inasmuch as these premises have a certain disposition and composition, which the soul receives by virtue of their resemblance or by virtue of their truth. (That is, as long as) there is nothing to prevent this (reception).<sup>9</sup>

Yet, the relation Ibn Sina sees between logic and aesthetics is not essential because some poetic speeches may declare a judgment.

Alexander Baumgarten, who is regarded as the philosopher that gave us our modern understanding of aesthetics, regards aesthetics as the logic of sensual knowledge. Accordingly, logic gives clear and evident knowledge, yet aesthetics yields unclear and imprecise knowledge. Therefore, knowledge of aesthetics is inferior and lower than that of logic. I think the relation Baumgarten sees between logic and aesthetics is an essential relation, despite the fact that he indicates aesthetic pleasure, for it seems that logic and aesthetics are considered by Baumgarten to be a means of gaining knowledge. But for Ibn Sina, poetics is not a kind of logic or not a device to gain clear or unclear knowledge. The reason why Ibn Sina gives a place to poetics in the corpus of logic is that he wanted to follow the Hellenistic classification of the sciences. Therefore, I think, it would not be true to say that Ibn Sina regards aesthetics or poetics as a branch or kind of logic, despite the fact that it appears in the corpus

of logic. In addition, although some poetical utterances can bear logical structure or exemplify the structure of a syllogism, this is not sufficient to disregard them as poetical expressions, nor does it imply that poetics is a sub-discipline of logic.

Art is a phenomenological act in itself because the artistic activity is intentional and the artist objectifies what appears in her consciousness or perception. In other words, the accomplishment of the artist is to make the artistic object appear in itself. The intentional relation of the subject exists within the origin of art. As far as we know, Aristotle is the first philosopher that indicates the intentional property of art and the work of art. He said that poetry in general (i.e., poetry understood as art) has sprung from two instinctive causes in our nature: Imitation and the pleasure arising from imitation.<sup>10</sup> Ibn Sina stated this intentional relation in a similar fashion. According to him, poetry (or art) arises from two powers in the human subject: the pleasure from the imitation and the natural love of harmonic works and melodies. He believed that there were appropriate meters for various melodies and that, afterwards, human beings invented them by intending these melodies.<sup>11</sup> In this way, Ibn Sina explains the origin of art or the formation of the work of art as an intentional relation with the artist.

Ibn Sina emphasizes that the unique aim of art is the pleasure of the subject, and that is why we create objects of art – this is related to the essence and the existence of art. Additionally, Ibn Sina indicates that art has some social functions that have not arisen from the essence of the art. He terms these functions as civil purposes. For instance, the art can be a tool of friendship or hatred. Rhetoric plays a special role in poetry at this point. Yet, Ibn Sina states that rhetoric uses assent (*tasdiq*), poetry uses the imagination (*takhyil*).<sup>12</sup> When rhetoric as a declamation joins with the imaginative power of the poetry, it is a more effective means to direct the masses and demoralize the enemy. Moreover, for Ibn Sina, art is not disinterested in social problems.<sup>13</sup> Although art is not a tool for social communication and information, it can reflect social sensibility and utter the social issues in an aesthetic form. In fact, Ibn Sina emphasizes that poetry is classified with certain social purposes, and meter is often chosen with respect to their social purposes.<sup>14</sup>

For example, tragedy is determined by its subject matter. It has a tasteful meter in which human virtue and goodness are treated. Afterwards all these features were ascribed to the main character and the poem was recited before the king. In the case of the death of the king the tunes were added. Dithyramb is like tragedy; the difference between them is that the praise in dithyramb was not made only for one human or one nation, but for a certain good. Comedy treats wickedness, scandals and the objects for satire. The tunes were added in this kind of the poetry too in order to cite the evil deeds of animals and humans.

Ibn Sina cites different kinds of Greek poetry by indicating their place in the social life.<sup>15</sup>

## 2. AESTHETIC OBJECT AND AESTHETIC VALUE

We have already said that the poetics of Ibn Sina indicate his views on aesthetics, because he speaks generally about the essence of art and painting, sculpture etc. alongside poetry. We can easily understand from *The Poetics* that Ibn Sina would have artistic works in mind when he refers to the aesthetic object. Then aesthetic object is the individual artistic product. According to the metaphysics of Ibn Sina, every being is a composite of form and matter through the act of active intellect. Accordingly, aesthetic objectification is an act of giving a higher form to the matter that has a form through the imagination of the artist. Artistic beauty has a difference from the natural beauty. Artistic beauty differs from natural beauty in that the former aims to create a pleasurable taste; that is, the aesthetic object is directed to the pleasure of the aesthetic subject. Thus it appears that for Ibn Sina the aesthetic object is an intentional object.<sup>16</sup>

What attracts our attention to the aesthetic object is the aesthetic value which is also the source of the aesthetic pleasure. The most comprehensive concept of the aesthetic value is the concept of beauty. How does Ibn Sina define beauty as a value concept? Unlike Plato, Ibn Sina does not have a metaphysics of beauty in the poetics; rather, he adapts the definition of beauty given by Aristotle. Accordingly, a beautiful object, whether it is a living organism or inorganic object, whether it is a work of art or natural object, must have an orderly arrangement of the parts and a certain magnitude; that is, beauty depends on magnitude and order. Since we cannot perceive very small organisms, they cannot be beautiful; an object which has vast size cannot be beautiful because our eyes cannot take it all in immediately; the unity and sense of the whole is lost for us.<sup>17</sup>

According to Ibn Sina, mimesis is an ontological category of art because art is a mimetic act of human being. But this kind of mimesis is an imaginative one.<sup>18</sup> It appears that imagination is the ontological difference between art and other kinds of mimesis. In addition, aesthetic values appear in the creation of imaginations; these values differentiate true works of art from the kitsch ones.

Ibn Sina states that there are three elements of the imagination and imitation in poetry: melody (*lahn*), meter and speech. These are the structural elements of poetry; in other words, they are the fundamental forms of poetry. The artist uses these forms in the manner befitting the intended object or quality: dignified, dolorous etc.<sup>19</sup>; and what makes a speech imaginative is meter (*wazn*), the sound of the speech, its meaning (ma'na), and what is related to the sound, the meaning and whatever is between them.<sup>20</sup> What Ibn Sina means by this sentence is that poetry is essentially an imaginative speech. Yet this does not imply

that imagination is only a mental or an imaginary and fictive thing, but it also has a harmonic or melodious voice. In brief, poetry has music for our ears and meaning which can affect and convince us for something. For instance, poetry could convince us that death is beautiful, which is actually direful and fear-some. However, this would be possible when the elements mentioned above get together. This is what Ibn Sina calls "imagination in general." Poetry takes its power sometimes from its meaning and its being concise (*wajiz*), sometimes from its music. So the hesitation between focusing on the music and the meaning in poetry is one of the properties of imagination, according to Ibn Sina. This shows that Ibn Sina regards imagination as a very comprehensive and extensive concept. The meaning and the sound (what is understood and heard) of the poetic speech can give pleasure to us in two ways. First, we can get pleasure through the properties of the words such as lucidity, correctness, and clarity (*fasih*), and being without artifice (*hile*) or through the properties of meaning such as strangeness, and being exotic (*gharib*). But this strangeness (*gharabet*) is different from the *gharabet* of the imitation and imagination (*takhyil*). Second, we can get pleasure through an artifice (*hile*), which has sprung from the word, meaning, simplicity, or from the composition (*tarkib*) of the word. A composite *hile* in the word can be obtained through the rhyme, the similarity of meter, embellishment or the turning of a letter into another letter (*qalb*).<sup>21</sup>

For Ibn Sina *hile* is one of the categories of aesthetic value in poetry, which occurs on the word and its meaning. Every *hile* appears with respect to the relation between the parts. This relation involves either similarity or diversity. The similarity and dissimilarity are either complete or incomplete. All of these consist either in word or in their meaning. The similarity and diversity with respect to the word are in the words that have incomplete denotation or in the words that have no denotation such as letter, preposition or in simple words that have a denotation and in composite words. Concerning the similarity and diversity in relation to meaning, these are either simple or composite meanings.<sup>22</sup> Flower is an example of simple meaning, whereas human being as a rational animal is an example of composite meaning. Ibn Sina treats these in *al-Fann al-Shi'r* in detail. *Hile* is actually not an individual aesthetic value, it is rather an artistic activity which makes various aesthetic values appear so that they give pleasure to us in this way.

We have already indicated that according to Ibn Sina mimesis is not an act of crude copying. On the contrary, as being an enactment, it has various creative functions. Metaphor and *istiare* are also mimetic aesthetic values because metaphor, *istiare* and the composition of them are components of imitation.<sup>23</sup> Ibn Sina also points out that imitation and simile are intentional activities because one can intend through these not only concrete objects, but also feelings and experiences. He says that the painters paint the angels in a beautiful

manner and the devil in an ugly manner. As a matter of fact, Manicheans painted the situation of anger as ugly and that of mercy beautifully.<sup>24</sup>

Another value Ibn Sina found in poetry is its rhetorical value. Poetry has gradually moved away from rhetoric through the contingent processes of historical transformation. In modern poetry, rhetoric or rhetorical values are seen as unpleasant elements. Above all else, poetry is not eloquence. However, we have to take an important point into consideration here. The fact that rhetorical elements dominate a poem is different from the fact that rhetorical values are used in a poem.

Indeed, rhetorical values are vital values in poetry. In other words, they are values and effects that give vitality to the aesthetic object and rescue it from being boring. Vital values are the source of superficial effects in the aesthetic subject. Doubtlessly, rhetorical value and effect or vital value and effect would be an aesthetic element or value if it appears with deep value and effect together.<sup>25</sup> Otherwise, a work in which rhetorical values are dominated would be exploited for the superficial and un-aesthetic experiences. That is, it would not be regarded as aesthetically valuable.<sup>26</sup>

As Ibn Sina treats tragedy, he gives special attention to tragic value. Tragic value is one which appears in tragedy through the demise and downfall of ethical values. It has the strongest effect on the aesthetic subject as to produce a cathartic experience. Ibn Sina points out that for the appearance of the tragic value and the production of the tragic effect, the story (*mythos/ khurafa*) in tragedy must turn not from happiness to happiness, but from the happiness to calamity, and the characters must experience calamities.<sup>27</sup>

Tragic value has a special relationship with ethical value because the downfall of the ethical value is the precondition of the appearance of the tragic value. Unless the characters underwent an undeserved calamity, tragic value would not appear and the tragic effect would not be sensed. Of course, we must have a sense of ethical value in order to feel this effect. In short, a tragic value is not some ethical value but an aesthetic value that has a special relationship with an ethical value. Ibn Sina pays special attention to this side of tragic value. I will discuss tragic value further as I deal with the problem of catharsis.

### 3. AESTHETIC SUBJECT AND AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

The aesthetic subject is that for which an aesthetic object is created. In other words, he is the intending being. He attends to the aesthetic object with a certain attitude and has some expectations from the aesthetic object. He cannot approach to the aesthetic object similarly as he approached to the normal objects of perception. When a natural object with which he is disgusted

becomes a work of art, it is not disgusting any more for the aesthetic subject. For, the aesthetic effect is not an effect of perceptual reality. The aesthetic subject enjoys the imitation, but alongside this, in the source of his aesthetic experience is the imagination of the work of art. For example, imaginative speech in poetry is the source of the aesthetic experience or the aesthetic taste. Imaginative speech relieves and embarrasses, pleases and saddens the aesthetic subject without choice or reflective pondering. Thus, with respect to Ibn Sina there is no intellectuality in the essence of aesthetic experience. This is because imaginative speech (imaginative figures, colors, melodies etc., namely any imagination in all the arts) creates an internal, non-intellectual, impression on the aesthetic subject.<sup>28</sup>

This idea is essentially true, but when we want to understand and judge a work of art, it is impossible to exclude intellectuality in our experience. A genuine aesthetic attitude must also be intellectual. But this attitude is rather the attitude of an expert or critic because the intellectuality has a disturbing effect for the aesthetic experience of the masses.

In addition, Ibn Sina states that one cannot evaluate the imaginative speech at the source of the aesthetic experience in poetry as it is in the case of logic. Imaginative speech or imagination (*takhyil*) creates an effect on the subject which is different from the one that is created by assents (*tasdiqat*). This impact is internal, intimate and essentially different from the effect that is made by the assented speech (*al-qawl al-musaddaq*). Because, the effect of assented speech is an effect of perceptual reality. Imagination (*takhyil*) can still produce an effect when one does not assent to it. For instance, when we say "the rose is sucking the blood of nightingale" we would feel pain, although we did not assent to it. Therefore, it does not matter whether imaginative speech is assented (*musaddaq*) or not. As a matter of fact, most of the speeches or things that create an aesthetic effect are not assented; even falsity (*kidhb*) exists in the essence of the imagination itself. What makes the aesthetic subject obey internally is the imagination rather than assent (*tasdiq*). For the aesthetic subject dislikes assents (*tasdiqat*) and escapes from them. This is because imitation has attraction or pleasure (*ta'cib*) whereas truth does not. The known truth is empty, and the unknown truth does not arouse an interest, whereas there is something in imitation, which catches on the human being and which is not in the assent. This is the lineament or the characteristic of aesthetic reality.<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, Ibn Sina says that if the true speech departs from tradition and if something with which the subject could be acquainted (breaking in) is added to the true speech, it can express assent (*tasdiq*) and imagination (*takhyil*); but the imagination can prevent somebody from accessing to the assent or from becoming conscious of it. According to him, both imagination (*takhyil*) and assent (*tasdiq*) are a compliance or an obedience (*idh'an*). Assent is obedience



in the sense of accepting something as it is said; but the imagination is obedience in the sense that the aesthetic subject would feel pleasure and would be pleased by that pleasure. The source of the pleasure is the speech (*qawl*) itself. This is because imagination is made by the speech itself, whereas the assent is made by something about which it is spoken. In other words, in assent one takes the situation of the thing in which it is spoken into consideration, in imagination one considers merely the speech (*qawl*) itself. The assent is to obey the acceptance of something as it is said.<sup>30</sup>

The difference between aesthetic and unaesthetic pleasure is that the latter does not arise from aesthetic values, but from the topic, special interests etc. in the work of art. This would be clearer, if each one of the mimetic objects had been made into an aesthetic object. For instance, when each one of the unpleasant and disgusting animal carcasses becomes a picture or takes place in the verses of a poet, it gives pleasure to us. Since the effect of an aesthetic object is not an effect of a normal object of perception. If the aesthetic effect were an effect of reality, the objects we dislike in reality would make the same effect when they become a work of art but this is not the case. As a matter of fact, Ibn Sina says clearly that what creates pleasure in us is not what is pictured itself (the real object), but the mimetic object, namely the picture itself.<sup>31</sup>

There are comments of some scholars on the *Poetics* of Aristotle according to which pleasure analyzed in that work is not aesthetic pleasure but pleasure felt from learning. By the same reason, one can have doubts about the nature of pleasure in Ibn Sina's work. What we have demonstrated up to this point is that the pleasure from the aesthetic object is definitely an aesthetic pleasure; aesthetic and non-aesthetic pleasures are not confused with each other in Ibn Sina. What we said above is enough to prove this. But the experience and pleasure of the aesthetic object, especially the problem of catharsis, are very controversial in Aristotle. Let us now examine the views of both Aristotle and Ibn Sina relative to this problem.

#### 4. TRAGEDY AND CATHARSIS AS AN AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE IN ARISTOTLE AND IBN SINA

The type of poetry that holds the largest place in the *Poetics* of Aristotle is tragedy. Ibn Sina allocates most of the sections for tragedy in *al-Fann al-Shi'r* following Aristotle. He defines tragedy as the imitation of every kind of action that exemplifies high virtue and wholeness through proper speech. This imitation is not the imitation of ability, but of action.<sup>32</sup> For, the aesthetic value which would appear in tragedy is possible with the imitation of the action, not of the ability. What is aimed at in tragedy is not the imitation of human beings or high

virtues, or characters, but the actions of the humans, the life that passed from happiness to calamity, for when one imitates the actions, virtue and character are introduced. Action and mythos are necessary because they are the backbones of the tragedy. One cannot create a tragedy by describing a character or virtue. In this regard, tragedy is the imitation of actions in which high virtues are exemplified.<sup>33</sup>

Ibn Sina, just as Aristotle, puts tragedy before all other kinds of poetry. For the tragedy is an art in which the ability of imitation is realized perfectly. The mythos or plot, characters, language, thoughts, decoration and music are the elements that form the tragedy. From this point of view, tragedy is an art that is formed by multiple arts together. Nevertheless, both Aristotle and Ibn Sina stress that decoration and music are not essential to tragedy, since the tragic effect can be felt without them.<sup>34</sup> It is obvious that an art that is superior aesthetically to other varieties of poetry would be superior to the other kinds of poetry on the side of its aesthetic effect.

Aristotle calls the experience of tragedy "catharsis." Ibn Sina clarifies this experience in detail. Well, what does catharsis express in Aristotelian aesthetics? What is the essence of catharsis?<sup>35</sup> Up to now three explanations of the meaning of catharsis have been suggested. According to the first, catharsis is a form of moral purification that is achieved by inciting the emotion of fear and pity in the audience. Alongside this, catharsis is understood as the purging of pity and fear, and the purging of the mind of distress, affliction, disease etc. This purgation theory of catharsis appears in the sixteenth century; we find the first statements related to this theory in *De Poeta* of A. S. Minturno in 1559. In this work, Minturno maintains that the principles of the homeopathic theory of medicine are applicable to mental afflictions, and in *Arte Poetica* in 1563 he connects the purgation reached by tragedy to medical treatment of disease in the body.<sup>36</sup>

We see that Tyrwhitt defends the theory of purgation in the nineteenth century; in an edition of *Poetics* he published in 1806, he claims that the main task of tragedy is to purge the feelings of pity and fear from the audience. In 1847, H. Weil asserted a connection between the process of tragic catharsis and that of medical purgation using Aristotle's discussion of music in *Politics* as evidence. But this approach became prevalent through *Zwei Abhandlungen über die Aristotelische Theorie des Dramas* (1857) of J. Bernays.<sup>37</sup>

In brief, with respect to the notion that catharsis is a moral purgation and therapeutic discharge, fear and pity are disturbing feelings in many respects. Therefore, they have to be eliminated. When one beholds tragedy, these tendencies (feelings) would turn into higher forms of the feelings. When these tendencies are becalmed, one would be rescued from the diseased elements. In other words, as the tragic action goes forward, if the excitement and chaos of

the mind are fueled, and then becalmed, the lower forms of the emotion turn into the higher and the more purified forms.<sup>38</sup>

Many writings that mention catharsis maintain that it is an experience which gives a moral purification from the passions to the audience, for the aim of the art is the catharsis. Art is determined not for aesthetic pleasure, but for ethical pleasure. This ethical pleasure is produced through the discharge and purification of our soul. Therefore, Aristotle is unable to differentiate artistic activity from ethical activity and aesthetic experience from ethical experience. The prominent indication of this is that catharsis is put forward as having an ethical purpose.<sup>39</sup>

The second explanation is that "catharsis is a form of structural purification in which the development of the plot purifies the tragic deed of its moral pollution and thus allows the audience to experience the emotions of pity and fear."<sup>40</sup> This explanation is not so different from the former, since what appears finally is the ethical value and the experience is ethical experience.

According to the third approach, "catharsis is a form of intellectual clarification in which the concepts of the pity and fear are clarified by the artistic representation of them."<sup>41</sup> These three explanations have been independently defended by S. O. Haupt,<sup>42</sup> Leon Golden<sup>43</sup> and H. D. F. Kitto.<sup>44</sup> With respect to Golden, only the etymological argument among other arguments of Haupt is rigorous and persuasive enough to defend an intellectual interpretation of catharsis. Haupt establishes an etymological relationship between "katharsis" and "katharos." This etymological relationship justifies the translation of catharsis as *Aufklaerung*.<sup>45</sup>

Golden's own argument is grounded mainly on an analysis of the internal structure of Aristotle's own argument in the *Poetics*. He pays attention to the fact that Aristotle addressed all components of the definition of tragedy outside of catharsis in the five chapters of the *Poetics*. For Aristotle holds the position that catharsis represents the climax of the definition and the final cause of tragedy. Therefore, Golden wants us to attempt to see if Aristotle gave any indication about what the goal or final cause of tragedy is in the *Poetics* except the definition of tragedy itself. As we have known, for Aristotle all of kinds of poetry are forms of mimesis; but Golden calls attention especially to the fact that Aristotle points out the importance of mimesis for human beings because it also involves an experience of learning. Golden claims that according to Aristotle the main pleasure which one derives from mimesis is the pleasure of learning; and learning involves a movement from particular to universal and reaches its climax through insight or by inference.<sup>46</sup>

In attempting to defend the view that poetry is an experience of learning, Golden cites the following from Chapter 9 of Aristotle's *Poetics*: "the poetry narrates the universal and the history narrates the particular." Aristotle says

in the Chapter 14 of *Poetics* that “one must not expect every pleasure from tragedy, but just that which is proper to it.” However, for Golden, the pleasure of poetry in general consists in learning (moving from particular to universal). Thus, the pleasure of tragedy must also consist in learning. Aristotle says in Chapters 6 and 14 that tragedy is related to pleasure derived from fear and pity.<sup>47</sup> He writes:

Since tragedy as a species of poetry and thus of mimesis must involve learning; and since tragedy is specifically associated with pity and fear, it is clear that tragedy must involve learning about fear and pity. Thus tragedy must involve a learning process consisting of a movement from the particular to universal in regard to pitiful and fearful situations and leading to the clarifying insight or inference which we associate with the learning process. This, then, is the goal or end of tragedy as it is defined by Aristotle in the argument of *Poetics* outside of the formal definition of tragedy.<sup>48</sup>

This is so because “under the traditional interpretations of catharsis there is no relationship between the goal set for tragedy in the formal definition of tragedy and the goal set for it in the general argument of *Poetics*.”<sup>49</sup> In brief, Golden makes his argumentation over the concept of mimesis and claims that catharsis is an intellectual clarification, an experience of learning.

The argumentation of Kitto, which is known by Golden, is also etymological. He begins with the etymological closeness between “katharsis” and “katharos” just as Haupt does. According to him, the adverb katharos that stems from the same root with katharsis carries an intellectual sense. Epicurus and Philodemus used catharsis in the meaning of clarification.<sup>50</sup> He wrote, “If we interpret catharsis to mean ‘intellectual clarification,’ we see that it conforms exactly to the goal of learning and inferring what each thing is which Aristotle set in Chapter 4 of the *Poetics*. Moreover, this interpretation of catharsis brings the concept into close articulation with the emphasis on the universality of poetry in Chapter 9 and the discussion of the particular pleasure of tragedy in Chapter 14 of *Poetics*.”<sup>51</sup>

Then according to the argument of Golden, catharsis can legitimately carry the nuance of intellectual clarification and when it is interpreted in this way, it does not articulate purgation or purification. Briefly, the interpretation of the intellectual clarification of catharsis is based on two points: first, there is an etymological justification to interpret catharsis in an intellectual sense. Second, Aristotle’s view of mimesis as a process of learning is connected to a correct understanding of the nature of catharsis.<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, O. B. Hardison understands catharsis as a clarification and associates a word of Aristotle with the pleasure we derived from the learning. According to him, this enlightenment in tragedy is relevant both to our clarification and to our discovery of the relationship between incidents and universals and to our ascertainment of how things happen.<sup>53</sup> “J. Gassner thinks catharsis

is an emotional purgation and the characters in a drama act as our proxies, but he also believes that it is the moral and intellectual clarification we experience while watching a tragedy which separates this form from melodrama and enables the catharsis to take place."<sup>54</sup>

Another view, put forth by Noreen Kruse, regards catharsis as the integration of clarification, cleansing and the restoration of emotional equilibrium.<sup>55</sup> She writes, "Catharsis, then, is a combination of scripted proofs which clarify situations and enlighten the audience so that the plotted actions first evoke and then modify the spectator's emotional responses."<sup>56</sup> Kruse's explanation is an accommodation and modification of several of the views we dealt with above; therefore, it is an eclectic explanation, which consequently does not constitute a novel contribution to our understanding of catharsis.

Aristotle's treatment of *poetike* (his term for the science of artistic creation) is not similar to his treatment of *theorike* and *praktike*. He gives a philosophy of art in the *Poetics* and makes use of the concept of imitation rather than the concept of creation. We should consider why Aristotle deals with the concept of imitation, instead of the concept of creation, and why he did not develop a theory of creation later. The answer will give us a possible response to those who interpret catharsis as an intellectual clarification and clear-cut learning which emanates out of mimesis. The scholars mentioned above approached the concept of imitation just from one aspect and incompletely. Imitation in Aristotle is not just the activity of learning, but also a basic concept that expresses all cultural activities of the human subject, of which learning is but one. Imitation in the context of art, as I have already said, is a creative activity and a theory of creation in Aristotle. That is why Aristotle did not need to develop a theory of creation or *poetike* beside mimesis.

In addition, catharsis cannot be intellectual clarification because imitation or mimesis is specifically the most important ability with which human beings create works of art as well as the medium in which we can be cultured in general by speaking, learning, and developing new behavior patterns etc. The fact that human beings are mimetic subjects allows them to create artistically. Thus, one cannot restrict the concept of mimesis to learning and it should not be interpreted by taking learning as its central feature. The etymological analysis does not always bring us to the correct result. For example, while "mimesis" means a simple or naïve imitation etymologically, as a concept it expresses a creative activity. I think the best way to understand this concept is, again, to be found in Aristotle's own work, the *Poetics*.

Pleasure was a fundamental instinct Aristotle found in us. He takes up pleasure in the sense of aesthetic pleasure and liking. The explanations of Ibn Sina show this. The views above mentioned suggest that Aristotle could not have found aesthetic pleasure correctly. In addition, the following words of Aristotle

about the cause of our pleasure derived from the artistic object were criticized and shown as a proof of that Aristotle could not found aesthetic pleasure correctly<sup>57</sup>:

When an object becomes an artistic work, while contemplating, we derive pleasure from it because of learning something. For example, while looking at a picture we learn what it tells us and whose picture it is, and because of that, we contemplate it deriving pleasure. But if the object to which the picture is related happened not to be seen beforehand, the pleasure that is derived from the mimetic object will be due not to the imitation as such, but to technical perfection, color or some such other cause.<sup>58</sup>

If we evaluate the words of Aristotle as a whole, we see that Aristotle refers to the first kind of pleasure in the context of ordinary life and he does not consider it to be the cause of aesthetic pleasure. His view that the work evokes in us pleasure because of technical perfection, color or some such other cause must be understood as an emphasis on aesthetic pleasure. Aristotle claims that if the objects we contemplate with great admiration in nature did not conform to the principles of the art, we would not find them as beautiful. Aristotle defines the border: the cause of our pleasure derived from an artistic work is not our seeing, knowing it beforehand, but in that it was created in accordance with the principles and techniques of art. The pleasure is because of seeing, knowing the object before is un-aesthetic pleasure and not related to the principles and techniques of art; it is only because of interest and curiosity. These are not confused with each other in Aristotle. Ibn Sina also interprets the mentioned pleasure in the aesthetic sense and says that it is produced by the quality of the picture.<sup>59</sup>

I think the catharsis in Aristotle can be interpreted differently than the interpretations of the above commentators. By "catharsis" Aristotle meant a deep experience that shakes the aesthetic subject existentially. In Aristotle, aesthetics was not dominated by ethics through the experience of catharsis. Rather, Aristotle conceptualized the climax of aesthetic experience and became probably the first philosopher that expressed the existential meaning of art in the history of philosophy:

Any feeling which comes strongly to some souls exists in all others to a greater or less degree – pity and fear, for example, but also excitement. This is a kind of agitation by which some people are liable to be possessed; it may be arise out of religious melodies, and in this case it is observable that when they have been listening to melodies that have an orgiastic effect on the soul they are restored as if they had undergone a curative and purifying treatment. Those who are given to feeling pity or fear or another emotion must be affected in precisely this way and so must other people too, to the extent that some such emotion comes upon each. To them all inevitably comes a sort of pleasant purgation and relief. In the same way active melodies bring men an elation which is not at all harmful.<sup>60</sup>

In this passage, Aristotle refers to the structural change in the aesthetic subject, which was made by a work of art. In this experience, the self of the human being is appalled and undergoes an amendment or a structural change. By opening all his doors, he ascends to a noble sphere. This state of pure pleasure is the existential effect of the art and catharsis. Such an experience is the existential meaning of the art. The experience here produces a purification or purgation (catharsis) in the aesthetic subject. But this purification means purging of the aesthetic subject from un-aesthetics experiences. As a result of this experience, the subject can experience a deep discharge, relief or an aesthetic passion.<sup>61</sup> Here Aristotle gives the first aspect of catharsis; Ibn Sina indicates both of them.<sup>62</sup>

Another point is that ethical value and ethical effect fulfill a function of foundation or establishment (*Grundlagung*) for the aesthetic value and aesthetic experience because aesthetic value or aesthetic experience sometimes arises through a proper and true sensing of ethical value. For example, genuine dramatic expression in drama could not be sensed without a sense of ethical value. In this context, ethical value is a precondition for the appearance of the aesthetic value. But when the aesthetic values appear, the ethical values do not necessarily appear with them again. They need not be a part of aesthetic values. What appears is only aesthetic value.<sup>63</sup>

Aristotle says that the melodies, or verses, which yield purification (catharsis), give a pure pleasure to us. It is obvious that this pleasure is not ethical pleasure, but aesthetic, existential pleasure and experience. Aristotle's attitude must not be confused with that of Plato's. Since, Plato does not speak about the existential meaning of art; he reaches an entirely ethical purpose moving from an entirely ethical ground. But Aristotle reaches an aesthetic experience and the existential meaning of the art moving from an aesthetic experience that is founded by an ethical value.

Thus, catharsis in Aristotle is the existential meaning of the art. It is neither an ethical, therapeutic, experience nor an intellectual clarification. Catharsis is a genuine aesthetic experience that is founded by the sense of ethical value. That the basis of the experience is ethical sense but it does not make it an ethical experience; instead, it transforms this experience to a higher and more elevated aesthetic experience. Cathartic experience elevates the self of a human to a higher stratum. Aristotle means by this experience the existential meaning of art for humans.

It may be asked whether Ibn Sina understood catharsis in this sense; namely, did Ibn Sina understand catharsis as an ethical experience or aesthetic experience? I definitely hold that it was an "aesthetic experience" that Ibn Sina understood. As I have indicated above, Ibn Sina truly comprehended ethical and aesthetic values as well as the experience of them by the subject. We clearly

see that he stresses some ethical virtues in tragedy in order to supply or to realize a deeper aesthetic experience. He shows this experience as the cause of making use of high virtues and more artistic language and meter in tragedy. As a result of this experience, Ibn Sina says that the aesthetic subject experiences a deep fear and pity, turns from one state into another state and gains a tenderness, compassion and subtlety in his soul. It is impossible to have such experience for one who is not open to the values that mentioned in tragedy. He says also that music would sharpen this experience, although it is not an essential part of tragedy.<sup>64</sup> That Ibn Sina indicates an artistic meter, language and music beside this subject shows clearly that he understands catharsis as an aesthetic experience.

Another justification that Ibn Sina did not regard tragedy as an art that has an ethical purpose involves what he said about the essence of tragic value and its tragic effect. Ibn Sina says that in order to produce a tragic effect, the story (*mythos/khurafa*) in tragedy must turn not from happiness to happiness, but from happiness to calamity and the characters must experience calamities. What appears in tragedy is the tragic value. But tragic value appears through the defeat and downfall of ethical value. If both Aristotle and Ibn Sina have expected a moral value (to have a noble virtue) or task (to be purified from moral pollution, unwanted feelings, thoughts etc.) from tragedy, they would have said that the good must not be defeated, the characters must not be afflicted with the calamities they do not deserve. On the contrary, both of them state that for the appearance of tragic value and the tragic effect, the good must be defeated and the characters must undergo calamities.

Consequently, catharsis in both Aristotle and Ibn Sina is neither an experience which makes art an ethical activity nor intellectual clarification and therapeutic experience. Catharsis is an aesthetic experience that is founded by moral value and effect. This experience, that is, to be appalled by the deep aesthetic effect and then to be spiritually purified is the existential meaning of the art according to both of them. The tragic value which is the source of such experience is an aesthetic value.<sup>65</sup>

*Turkey*

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Poetika*, trans. İsmail Tunalı (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1976), 1447a, b.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Sina, *Al-Shifa' al-Shi'r*, ed. Abd al-Rahman Badawī (Qairo: al-Hay'a al-Âmme li Shuû'n al-Matâbi' al-Amīriyya, 1966), pp. 32, 37.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Sina, *Al-Shifa' al-Shi'r*, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.



<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> Ibn Sina, *Remarks and Admonitions – Part One: Logic*, trans. by Shams Constantine Inati (Belgium: Universa Press, 1984), p. 460. See for this discussion the end note 12 and Salim Kemal, *The Poetics of Alfarabi and Avicenna* (Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1991), p.169 et seq.

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, *Poetika*, 1448b.

<sup>11</sup> Ibn Sina, *Al-Shifa' al-Shi'r*, pp. 37, 38.

<sup>12</sup> With respect to Ibn Sina, *tasdiq* is to judge on the relation between two concepts (*tasawwur*). In other words, it means “it is” or “it is not”. Imagination (*takhyil*) is the corresponding (*mutakabil*) of *tasdiq*. According to Ibn Sina, the knowledge achieved by means of intellectual effort is divided into *tasdiq* (assent) and *tasawwur* (concept). While *tasdiq* that is achieved by means of intellectual effort takes place in us with a syllogism, *tasawwur* achieved by intellectual effort takes place in us with a definition. *Tasdiq* has some degrees: (a) some *tasdiqs* are certain (*yaqini*) (b) some *tasdiqs* are similar to certain (c) some *tasdiqs* are persuasive (*zanni*). Syllogisms have degrees as is the case with *tasdiq* as well: (a) some syllogisms yield certain conclusion, these are apodeictic (*burhani*) syllogisms (b) some syllogisms yield conclusion similar to certain, these are either dialectic (*jadali*) or sophistic and fallacious (*mughalata*) syllogism (c) some syllogisms form of a strong supposition (*zann-i galip*) in us. These are rhetoric syllogism. Ibn Sina states that poetical syllogism does not form of any *tasdiq*, but an imagination, moving the soul to closing of itself and opening of itself making it imitate beautiful and ugly things.

As for *tasawwur*, it can be regarded as a principle of *tasdiq* because every thing assented (*musaddaq*) is conceived. But every thing conceived is not being assented. For, all of meanings of individual words and the composite words whose composition is not a complete speech (*al-Qawl al-Djazim*) is being conceived, but not assented. Unlikely, the complete speeches are both conceived and assented. This would be in two ways: The conceiving of complete speeches is that their meanings exist in the mind. For instance, “human being is alive.” As for the reason of that they are assented, the meanings of complete speeches are ascribed to the state in reality of something. It is as is conceived; therefore to assent something from an aspect is like that conceiving is complete. *Muhayyalat* (imaginaries) just as the effect of what assented close and open the soul to somethings. So, these take the place of the premises assented, although they are denied. For example, when one says “honey is bitter and emetic, the soul is disgusted with the honey as if the soul assented to it. It is the principle of poetical syllogism to proce effect as if it is assented, although it is not assented. Ibn Sina, *Şifa – İkinci Analitikler – Burhan*, çev. Ömer Türker (İstanbul: Litera Yayıncılık, 2006), pp. 7–14.

<sup>13</sup> Ibn Sina, *Al-Shifa' al-Shi'r*, p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 29–30.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle, *Poetika*, 1450b.

<sup>18</sup> Ibn Sina, *Al-Shifa' al-Shi'r*, p. 25.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 25–26.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>25</sup> For the vital value and effect, see Moritz Geiger, *Zugang zur Aesthetik* (Leipzig: Der Neue Geist Verlag, 1928).

<sup>26</sup> Rhetoric is used especially in epic and politic poems. Some poems of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nazım Hikmet who are one of the most important poets of the twentieth century Turkish literature can help us to understand this problem. The poem "Sakarya" of Kısakürek is typical example for the unsuccessful poem in which rhetorical values are dominated. As many rightist Turks like this coarse poem, they do not show interest so much in his other poems which make Kısakürek a worldwide poet. The one exception of this is the poem *Kaldırımlar* (Pavements). The poem "The Epic of Şeyh Bedrettin" of Nazım Hikmet is very successful epic poem in which rhetorical elements were used. But we should say that every one that likes this poem has not an aesthetics experience.

<sup>27</sup> Ibn Sina, *Al-Shifa' al-Shi'r*, p. 59.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 24–25.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 44, 52.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 46–47.

<sup>34</sup> Aristotle, *Poetika*, 1450a.

<sup>35</sup> We have already written an article in Turkish language, which treats the concept of the Pleasure and Catharsis in Aristotle. We will, here, defend the ideas we have already said in this article. See the related article, Habip Türker, "Aristoteles'te Hoşlanma ve Katharsis Kavramını Ruhsbilimsel-Varlıkbilimsel olarak Yeniden Okuma", *Kutadgubilig*, pp. 77–86.

<sup>36</sup> Leon Golden, "The Purgation Theory of Catharsis", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 31, no. 4 (Summer, 1973), p. 473.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 473–474.

<sup>38</sup> Noreen W. Kruse, "The process of Aristotelian Catharsis: A Reidentification", *Theatre Journal*, vol. 31, no. 2 (May, 1979), p. 164.

<sup>39</sup> For example, see İsmail Tunalı, *Grek Estetiki* (İstanbul: İstanbul Ün. Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1963), p. 96 et seq. Here we do not discuss whether ethics be entirely dominated to his aesthetics. But we should say that Aristotle divided definitely ethics (praktike) and aesthetics (poetike) from each other determining their matters. His words about the criticizing of works of art for the ethical reasons might have been said because of the social pressure. In other words, he might have intended to breast the critiques directed to works of art for the moral reasons. It would be enough to remember Sokrates; the words of him in *Poetics*, Chapter 25/9 (1461a) direct us to think in this way.

<sup>40</sup> Leon Golden, "The Purgation Theory of Catharsis", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 31, no. 4 (Summer, 1973), p. 473.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 473.

<sup>42</sup> See S. O. Haupt, "Wirkt die Tragödie auf das Gemüt oder den Verstand oder die Moralitaet der Zuschauer?" (Berlin, 1915).

<sup>43</sup> See Leon Golden, "Mimesis and Katharsis", *Classical Philology*, vol. 64, no. 3 (July, 1969), pp. 145–153.

<sup>44</sup> See H. D. F. Kitto, "Catharsis", in *The Classical Tradition*, ed. L. Wallach (Ithaca, NY, 1966), pp. 133–147.

<sup>45</sup> Golden, "Mimesis and Katharsis", p. 146.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

- <sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 146.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 147.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 147.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 147.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 147.
- <sup>53</sup> Noreen W. Kruse, p. 164.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 164.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 169.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 169.
- <sup>57</sup> See İsmail Tunalı, *Grek Estetiki*, p. 96 et seq.
- <sup>58</sup> Aristotle, *Poetika*, 1448b.
- <sup>59</sup> See Ibn Sina, *Al-Shifa' al-Shi'r*, p. 38.
- <sup>60</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. by S. A. Sinclair (England: Penguin Books, 1992), pp. 73–74.
- <sup>61</sup> Phenomenologist philosopher Moritz Geiger gives analyses on the aesthetic experience and speaks on the existential meaning of the art in *Zugang zur Aesthetik*; yet he does not mention catharsis related to this matter. For Geiger existential effect of art gives only happiness; but it is an insufficient explanation. Existential effect of art gives both an aesthetic passion and happiness.
- <sup>62</sup> See Ibn Sina, *Al-Shifa' al-Shi'r*, pp. 56–59.
- <sup>63</sup> Nicolai Hartmann, *Aesthetik* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., Verlag, 1966), p. 349.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibn Sina, *Al-Shifa' al-Shi'r*, p. 44.
- <sup>65</sup> I would like to thank Seth Vannatta and Adam Labecki for their valuable comments and suggestions for this paper.

TRANSLATING MALE-ORIENTED PHILOSOPHICAL  
WORKS FOR A MULTI-GENDER SOCIETY

**Abstract:** This chapter takes the position that the point of translating texts is to open up works from the past and make them accessible to people today. In considering the accessibility of texts, we should also consider the gender of the pronouns we use, without neutering them from their original meaning. In his essay on the Afterlife (*al-Adhawiyya fi al-ma'ad*), Ibn Sina considers where a person (*insan*) believes her essence resides. This chapter uses *huwa*, the masculine singular pronoun to indicate humans in general. Grammatically speaking the indefinite pronoun *huwa* which Ibn Sina uses is masculine singular. Arabic grammar requires him to use marked speech in all verbs and pronouns. If Ibn Sina's purpose is to investigate the reality of being human – why a human is human – then his project in contemporary translation should reflect the inclusion of female persons as well as male persons. We may take a cue from the Qur'an itself which specifically addresses both believing male Muslims and believing female Muslims (S. 33.35) after women objected to being lumped with men grammatically. It is a common and unexamined assumption among practitioners of philosophy that there is only one possible correct translation into English of classical Arabic philosophy. Rather, I argue translation from classical Arabic into English is not a one-to-one proposition and the translator is justified in alternating the gender of the indefinite pronouns as part of her interpretive work.

**Key words:** Afterlife, Arabic language, human being, Latin language, feminine pronouns, masculine pronouns

Does the translator have to continue historically relentless sexism in rendering a classical text to produce a legitimate translation? Or, to put it another way, is the male orientation of Ibn Sina and his predecessors an essential part of his philosophy?

These are the questions that will drive my discussion of gender and the translation of pronouns in the fourth chapter of Ibn Sina's *al-Adhawiyya fi al-ma'ad*.<sup>1</sup> These questions were not the starting point in my thought process, but in translating the chapter, "The lasting essence of the human being," it struck me as inequitable to render the Arabic third person masculine singular pronoun *huwa* as he when Ibn Sina was discussing the essence of persons, not of male

persons. While the use of a masculine pronoun might be the sole alternative in 11th century Central Asian court society – it is not in ours. Because I recognize the debilitating effect of masculine-only pronouns, I am unwilling to translate them literally and to exile the discussion of this question to a footnote. In classical Arabic grammar, the masculine singular pronoun is used for the indefinite pronoun. However, a contemporary English translation that used only *he* would sound deliberately sexist.

Sebastian Brock,<sup>2</sup> among others, discusses not just the difference between word-for-word translation and sense-for-sense translation. He connects word-for-word translation with Biblical translation where the order of words is included in aspects of the text which are important to reproduce, owing to the divine nature of the text.<sup>3</sup> Such reverence for the text spilled over from Scriptures to all translations. Brock begins his argument explaining that initially the literary translator (by sense) was considered to operate at a higher level than a “*fidus interpres*, the hack translator”<sup>4</sup> who translated legal documents word-for-word. In observing most literal translations from Arabic to English we see that style and form are ignored in the eagerness to provide an accurate word-for-word account; this leads to many unfortunately stilted translations of Arabic-language philosophy.

The question of gender issues in translation is submerged, a hidden field usually not dealt with. Therefore the purpose of this chapter is to investigate the proper translation of *huwa*, the masculine singular pronoun in an Arabic text that considers the final disposition of human souls based on understanding their composition and behavior. The above-mentioned text is *al-Adhawiyya fi al-ma'ad*, the *Adha* treatise on the Afterlife, a text discussing these questions, written by Ibn Sina. The *Adhawiyya* is a text where Ibn Sina investigates various aspects of the Afterlife in an organized manner: he discusses how different religions treat the question of life after death, the question of reincarnation, and the punishment or reward for humans. He also analyzes where the essence of a human resides. As you might imagine, he is considering humans in the most non-specific terms. Ibn Sina was an 11th century Islamic philosopher and is known as Avicenna in the West. Among issues for consideration is that our 21st century view of humans is specifically inclusive, in contrast to the generalized vagueness and exclusiveness of the 11th century. If this text is to have any authentic resonance for us, part of the translation process will be to change the philosophical *he*, inherited from Hellenic philosophy as a vague unmarked referent to a gender inclusive usage. *Huwa*, for he, may sound general in Arabic, but *he* in English now calls attention to itself as a male-dominating pronoun. It makes us focus on the unexpressed feminine.

What is the purpose of translation? To give an audience access to a writer they cannot read, because it is written in a language they do not read, and to

make the writer accessible to a large number of people. If the source language is Arabic, it has to be translated into comprehensible terms. In translating Arabic we already make transitions based on culture, not grammar: we typically replace the stop sign/conjunction *wa* with periods or commas; in addition to *and* – the base meaning of *wa* – it may be translated as *but*. Sometimes a translator (Gutas, Marmura) will recast a very long sentence into two sentences, or even reverse the order of two clauses in the translation. Since an Arabic treatise begins and keeps going with neither sentence nor paragraph breaks, people generally split it up, including the editors of modern printed editions.

It is a common unexamined assumption among practitioners of philosophy that there is one correct translation into English of classical Arabic philosophy. This translation appears to them to exist on the celestial plane, along with Plato's Forms. Rather, I would argue translation from classical Arabic into contemporary English is not a simple one-to-one proposition; therefore the translator is justified in simultaneously adjusting the gender of the indefinite pronouns, as part of her interpretive work. In deciding how to translate *huwa*, we may ask again: What is the purpose of translation? Is it to render a one-to-one meaning of one text into a second (target) language?<sup>5</sup> By this, I do not mean to domesticate the texts, neutering them from their original meaning. While I agree with resistant translation in keeping as much cultural meaning as possible, the question remains: how will some particular factors affect the target community? We can see a related case below in the translator's choice of pronouns for God in translation from the Latin.

I argue that Ibn Sina's use of the masculine was reflexive and unmediated and that in our times we are free to translate the significant passages alternating the masculine and feminine pronouns. These issues appear with the most clarity in Chapter 4 "On the essence of the human being" in his treatise on the Afterlife. Here is Ibn Sina on why a person (*insan*) considers herself a human: "When for the human being it becomes obvious to her that she is contemplating the thing for which they call her 'she' and she calls herself 'I', she imagines that this [is] her physical body."<sup>6</sup>

The idea Ibn Sina is expressing here is of an unmarked human, which we know as he uses *insan*, the vaguest of terms to indicate a human being, including masculine and feminine, singular and plural.<sup>7</sup> However, Arabic requires him to use marked gendered speech in both verbs and pronouns. Change of pronouns is another change on a similar level to changing *wa* to commas or paragraphs. Other languages also elicit changes in pronoun gender, as we will see below. Words for God which are feminine in Latin are changed to all masculine in English. To convey meaning in English, the ubiquitous use of "he" as the unmarked descriptor is fading. It is becoming a marker for a male being. To translate Ibn Sina's chapter on humanity is to risk specifically positing that only

men are the humans under consideration. Perhaps only men read the treatise in the 11th century, but this is not the case today. In parallel cases, in philosophical texts specifically, there are other non-gendered uses of formally masculine terms including *ma huwa*, *huwiyyah* (the nisbah), and *huwa* as a copulative verb. *Ma huwa* commonly used to refer to the quiddity, the what-it-isness in philosophy, is not appropriately translated as what he is, as the *huwa* in this phrase is philosophically vague. The strategy of using both gendered pronouns in English is part of making the feminine visible as part of the world, refusing to see females as subsumed in the concept of males.

While grammatically speaking the indefinite pronoun *huwa* Ibn Sina uses throughout this chapter is masculine singular, Ibn Sina is investigating the reality of being human, not of being a male human or a gendered human. Therefore, to show the inclusion of both female and male persons, I translate alternate paragraphs using *she* and *he*. As evidence for the belief that women are intended for inclusion, we may refer to the Qur'an which, like the Bible, addresses its message to female believers and male believers. Verse 33:35 begins, "Verily men and women who have come to submission . . ."<sup>8</sup> In agreement with von Flotow and others, I can no longer accept the notion that the masculine pronoun in academic English is inclusive.<sup>9</sup> If one considers Ibn Sina to be speaking only of male human beings, this is a different problem. If one translates this sentence with only the masculine singular pronoun, then it makes Ibn Sina speak only to males.

In a related case, Jennifer Hockenberry discusses the problem of translating St. Augustine's masculine and feminine Latin words for God into English. Since Augustine used grammatically feminine as well as masculine words for God, such as Wisdom and Truth, the accurate translation could read "... because She made me . . .; whoever knows the truth, knows Her . . ." among other examples. But Hockenberry says to translate the Latin feminine with *she* "sounds shocking in English" as English readers are used to a masculine pronoun for God.<sup>10</sup> She adds that it might throw too much emphasis on the gender of the pronoun. However, many translators switch to He since the masculine singular pronoun is expected by English-speakers. Hockenberry observes that the advantage of Augustine's multi-gendered language is it indicates Augustine does not consider God "physically masculine."<sup>11</sup> She says that a literal translation of pronouns would demonstrate Augustine's inclusiveness in his description of God's attributes. After all, this is only the shock of resistant translation, seeking to preserve qualities of the source language.<sup>12</sup> Hockenberry asserts the issue of Augustine's metaphorical language is philosophical, rather than philological. The same can be said of Ibn Sina's discussion of the human being. The frame is philological but the issue is philosophical. Likewise Hockenberry's discussion makes clear she and other interpreters of Augustine think

he still has something to say to us. I think we have to decide if Ibn Sina's treatise is a quaint *risala* only of interest historically or a still-interesting speculation on the destiny of humans and inform our translation based on our response.

Similarly, there appears to be a movement toward using the feminine singular she for the indefinite pronoun in English these days, rather than the masculine singular. This usage can be observed in the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker* among others. In a recent article the reporter says, "Why, after all, should someone who knows that she is going to move after just a few years have no choice but to take out a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage?"<sup>13</sup> Pico Iyer writes in a recent review of *The Religious Case against Belief* of James Carse's use of italics "while they [italicized emphases] effectively convey a tone of voice, they also sometimes seem to push a reader to a conclusion that she's not yet in a position to accept."<sup>14</sup> Iyer uses the feminine pronoun for the indefinite reader throughout this review.

In the same way, I would translate the indefinite Arabic pronoun *huwa* (he) as *she* in addition to *he*. This pronoun usage has the additional benefit of reminding the readers they are reading a translation, of jarring them a bit out of domesticated translation. Lawrence Venuti argues for making translation obvious by alienating the domestic language; he wants to subvert total fluency.<sup>15</sup> In general terms, I would agree with him: too many translators of classical Arabic look for what they consider accuracy in the words of translation, at which point they often lose the elegance and simplicity of the original. In English he or she may cover the same territory, as a reference to common humanity. Either pronoun could cover the whole non-specific group, considering an (unspecified) individual as a universal exemplar. She, as much as he, refers to an unnamed individual. Using the feminine pronoun has the advantage of making the readers aware they are reading a translation.

It has been popular for some time now to translate Arabic philosophy as if it were the bastard child of ancient Greek and contemporary analytic philosophy. In the (Arabic) original the language is generally simple and uncluttered. Usually the translator is required to fill in words or phrases to give an intelligible reading of the treatise. However, any translation is one person's reading, and reviewers should cease behaving like they have the only direct line to the philosopher's meaning. There is no legitimate reason to translate clear Arabic words – perhaps with obscure meaning – with polysyllabic, hoity-toity words. If one subscribes at all to the idea of resistant translation, simple elegance would be far superior. Even the philosophers' Arabic neologisms tend to be self-evident participles in the 5th or 6th form, like Ibn Sina's *mutakammama*, which means quantified.<sup>16</sup> In the chapter under consideration, Ibn Sina's discussion investigating what feature the essence of a human being resides in is quite specific.



In considering that the meanings of a text are indeterminate and translation necessarily must force a determinate meaning, we might reconsider the appropriateness of translating *huwa* as he in English. By using “he,” we indicate the intent to refer to male human beings. However, the evidence is that Ibn Sina was referring to all human beings, as we will discuss below. If we think Ibn Sina is talking about all human beings, then we are justified in including females, by some grammatical device. As Dorit Bar-On mentions there is “more than one best available translation.”<sup>17</sup> She also objects to unrealistically strict standards.<sup>18</sup> One of the prisms I would like the reader to consider this through is the idea that “implicit canons” are used to rank the accuracy of translations and these lack objective status, as discussed in Dorit Bar-On’s article.<sup>19</sup> The academic group mostly associated with translating Islamic philosophy has a set of implicit or unexamined assumptions including: a perfect translation exists, Arabic philosophy follows Greek philosophy, general ignoring of the Islamic matrix and a one-to-one word for word translation of technical terms and important words is both possible and desirable. In my reading the Islamic philosophers are often elegant and terse in their style, but cramming them into a translated straight jacket is not necessarily felicitous. And since this is a very small field, there has been little examination of the parameters of translation except in highly critical review essays, which may also be idiosyncratic relying on an authoritarian rather than an authoritative voice.

If we consider the text has a plurality of meanings in the source language, while its original meaning is necessarily limited in the target language, we can see the indeterminacy of translation. Mostafa Ouajjani is among those making the case that while translation obviously makes texts available “translation reduces the plurality of the literary text to a singularity.”<sup>20</sup> In many aspects philosophy texts resemble literary narratives, the particular subject of Ouajjani’s article. Furthermore, Ouajjani objects to translators’ “determining the indeterminate,” which is similar to Jonathan Rée’s calls for maintaining obscurity, for not clarifying beyond the author’s horizons.<sup>21</sup> Bar-On also chimes in on the question of ambiguity. She calls a translation which does not preserve ambiguity “deficient.”<sup>22</sup> Does this also mean one should preserve the incomprehensibility of corrupt ms. texts? In her discussion of idiosyncratic features which render exact translation difficult, Bar-On mentions a “linguistic mismatch”<sup>23</sup> where although all the elements of an idea are present in both linguistic communities, they are compressed in one name in one, but not the other. *Ma‘ad*, from the title of Ibn Sina’s treatise exemplifies this mismatch. The Arabic words means a place one returns to, from the root ‘*aud*, to return. Authors use *ma‘ad* to include, the resurrection of the body for the Last Judgment of souls at the end of time and the punishment or reward of the person. Thus although “Afterlife” is not the exact translation, it appears to be the most

accurate for English speakers; the term incorporates many of the ideas. The Arabic concept is very thick however, where Afterlife is a result of the return. The return also includes and echoes the Qur'anic idea of the soul returning to God.<sup>24</sup> In recognizing this problem, the Latin translator Alpagó transliterated *ma'ad* phonetically as *mahad*, since Latin has no 'ayn. And he dropped all reference to *Adhawiyya* from the title. Although we do not have one word as rich as *ma'ad*, the concepts can be communicated in the notes, since we are familiar with the relevant concepts.

The word Ibn Sina uses here translated as human being is *insan*, a word meaning human being or person at the most non-specific level. It includes both male and female genders in the term according to Lane.<sup>25</sup> The pronoun *huwa* (he, masculine singular), follows the rule of classic Arabic grammar that in a group of entities with mixed genders, the feminine is subsumed to the masculine. Thus the default indefinite pronoun is the masculine. This does not imply that all members of the group are masculine. However, in English, we no longer consider the masculine singular *he* to be the default position. In this particular case, Ibn Sina visualizes the individual speculating in the mind and the common dodge of using a plural – they – will not do. The use of the plural is further refuted in this passage because the person holds an interior monologue, and meanwhile, the readers are introduced to the outside audience – “they say” – reinforcing the fact that the person holding the monologue is, above all, singular. (We could hardly say, “. . . it becomes obvious to one that one is contemplating the things for which they call them ‘they’ and they call themselves ‘I’, they imagine . . .” etc.) In English, one is too distant for an inner dialogue, and at least in American English, one is too formal; the Arabic is on the level of letting the readers eavesdrop on an unselfconscious human being’s internal thought processes. Although we are unobserved, we are full witnesses. She or he at least puts us on the same plane as the observed human. (In Ibn Sina’s day the court he addressed was composed of males, but this is not the case today.)

What was the intention of Ibn Sina’s reference in the *Adhawiyya*, especially in chapter 4?<sup>26</sup> Perhaps if we follow his exploration of the essence of a human, we can better understand what his methodology is. His first answer to the question what makes a person human? is the body, that is the physical body. So let us look at the aspects of the body as he defines it in his speculation: hand, foot, the ribs and other visible organs. Or, if not the external body, he says, perhaps it is the brain, the heart, and the liver, described as the main organs. These options are all rejected. None of these initially-suggested answers indicates a search for any gender-related characteristics. In fact, the limbs and organs of the body mentioned are notable for being present in both sexes. Ibn Sina has already dispatched the idea of reincarnation as unworthy of consideration. So

unless we want to think gender resides in the mind or the soul for Ibn Sina, it does not appear to have any bearing on the question at hand. While Ibn Sina is working beyond the physical, his methodology of rejection is to review body parts found in all humans, not sexual characteristics. The essence here for Ibn Sina is not the observable body, but he assumes it to be something deeper, inner, unseeable. Therefore the quality that makes a person a human cannot be a gendered quality, since we may observe the physical manifestations of gender.

Next, let us look at the word he uses for human. *Insan* is a vague descriptor according to *Lisan al-arab*, the famous dictionary of Ibn Manzur (d. 1311-2). He says, “*insan* [the word] is also said [in reference] to women, and *insana* is not said.”<sup>27</sup> To translate the meaning: the *ta marbuta* feminine ending is not used to make *insan* feminine, because the same word in the singular may be used for either gender. *Lisan* is usually considered the ultimate authority for classical Arabic. Ibn Sina did not use *rajul*, the gendered word for man (a male human being), which is unequivocally masculine. He chose *insan*, implying that he is *not* considering gender. Once he chose to use the term *insan*, a masculine noun by form, he was led to use *huwa* for its pronoun as the formal solution.

While it appears likely that Ibn Sina was writing for the men in his day that would not necessarily bear on his analysis. Today our audience we presume to be evenly distributed between male and female, and no doubt both groups would like to see themselves represented in the translation. Thus we see the value of an inclusive translation, with an alternation of the feminine singular and the masculine singular pronoun. By using the feminine to give a marked gender in English, as well as the masculine I hope to include the full spectrum of human beings understood by *insan*.

What kind of translation we embrace depends on whether we are translating this text as an artifact, or like a text of contemporary interest, as an open text, in which case an inclusive pronoun is preferred.

Just because the Greeks were purveyors of male supremacy do we have to follow them in this to be real philosophers? While our philosophical tradition comes through the Scholastics, such as Thomas Aquinas, and the Islamic philosophers from the Greeks, surely there is no need to continue Aristotle’s masculine-centric language. In Muhammad’s day, the women’s strong objections to grammatical addresses which placed them in an undifferentiated set with men can be seen in the Qur’an. Verses 24:30–31 is generally thought to be revealed after the early women Muslims complained about being left out of revelation. The verses read in part: “Tell the believing men to lower their eyes . . . Tell the believing women to lower their eyes . . .” Here the feminine form of believers – *muminat* is used in contrast with the masculine form in the

preceding verse. One commentator (Maulana Muhammad ‘Ali), referring to the verse cited above states “this verse repeats ten times that women” achieve the same spiritual qualities as men and therefore both sexes are on the same spiritual level.<sup>28</sup> We may recall here that Ibn Sina was a hafiz – he had memorized the Qur’an. The notable point is that women, either as *muminat* or as *muslimat* were addressed with specifically feminine plural nouns after they complained about their lack of recognition in the new community. This was so even though all the rules of grammar maintain that women are included in the masculine plural. The early Muslim women were not told to be quiet, nor were they informed they were grammatically included in *muslimuna* – the masculine plural. They were addressed with a gender-specific noun.

Arabic, like Latin, has different words for humans and men. *Insan* refers to all humans in a non-gendered way; *rajul* refers to men as male human beings. Likewise, Latin uses *homo* in a non-gendered way and *vir* for males.<sup>29</sup> In English we have less choice for vagueness. In the 11th c. *huwa* may have been more inclusive than the 21st c. *he*.

I would also like to draw the audience’s attention to Jonathan Rée’s article, “The Translation of Philosophy.” He makes two points applicable here. First, he objects to the rigid form of translation currently in vogue, forcing translators to treat every text as Holy Scripture.<sup>30</sup> This has led to the unfortunate result of texts that may be rigidly accurate on a textbook level, but have had all the life sucked out of them as actual living, breathing works.

Second, he argued for preserving the ambiguity of the original.<sup>31</sup> Although his example is the translation of Kant’s obscure German the point applies equally well to the telegraphic Arabic of the 11th century. The texts of philosophers such as Ibn Sina were transmitted in a manuscript tradition. Such a chain of transmission allows numerous mistakes known as corruption of the text to slip in. Generally the translator searches for references in Aristotle or the commentaries (as appropriate) and smooths out the jagged edges as much as possible. The assumption is that one is recreating the missing text, but there is no way to know. So the idea of keeping the obscurity is an interesting new form of honesty. This is also a concept to consider in view of the other general attitudes to the text. And, although Rée discusses the translation from French to English as being a very hazardous one, the same can also be said of the journey from Arabic to English.

If you say, why we should care about how masculine singular pronouns are translated in texts written hundreds of years ago, my claim is that it is essential to welcome all prospective readers of Ibn Sina, especially those who might not have been welcomed in Ibn Sina’s own day. Islamic philosophy is a tiny field. Given most people are likely to meet Ibn Sina in translation initially; it

is ridiculous to insist on translations likely to alienate half the possible readers on an immediate basis.

If the meaning of *huwa* must include all human beings as the referent of *insan* (human) there is no point in insisting that the expression must follow the Arabic form. One might say that while the accidents of readers change, the essence of humanity they explore in the *Adhawiyya* remains constant. This focus should be considered in the translation.

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#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Ibn Sina, *al-Adhawiyya fi al-ma'ad*, ed. by Hasan 'Asi (Beirut: al-Mu'assasah al-jami'iyyah lil-dirasat wa al-nashr wa al-tawzi', 1984). Literally "The *Adha* treatise on the return," hereafter, *Adhawiyya*.
- <sup>2</sup> S. Brock, "Aspects of Translation Technique in Antiquity", in *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 20 (1979), pp. 69–87.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- <sup>5</sup> Dorit Bar-On, "Indeterminacy of Translation – Theory and Practice", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 53, no. 4 (December, 1993), pp. 781–810.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibn Sina, *Adhawiyya*. The Arabic reads: *al-insan idha bada lahu an yata malu fi al-shay al-dhi li-ajalihi yaqal lahu huwa wa-yaqul li-nafsihi ana yakhayl lahu an dhalika badanahu wa-jisadahi*. (p.127:1–2) 'Asi ed. my translation.
- <sup>7</sup> E. W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1980), (reprint) Bk. I, p. 114: Lane calls it a generic noun.
- <sup>8</sup> Here using *al-muslimina* and *al-muslimat*.
- <sup>9</sup> See also Luise von Flotow, *Translation and Gender* (Manchester, UK: 1997), pp. 52–57 for considerations in rewriting translations of the Bible.
- <sup>10</sup> Jennifer Hockenberry, "The He, She and It of God" in *Augustinian Studies*, 36:2 (2005), p. 436.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 437.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 440.
- <sup>13</sup> David Leonhard, *New York Times*, March 19, 2008, p. A13.
- <sup>14</sup> Pico Iyer, *New York Review of Books*, 06/26/08, p. 37, reviewing James Carse's *The Religious Case*.
- <sup>15</sup> Lawrence Venuti, *Scandals of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 11.
- <sup>16</sup> *Adhawiyya*, 122:16.
- <sup>17</sup> Bar-On, "Indeterminacy," p. 795.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 785.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 781.
- <sup>20</sup> Mostafa Ouajjani, "Narratives and aspects of untranslatability" in *Turjuman*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1998), here p. 13.
- <sup>21</sup> Ouajjani, p. 18.
- <sup>22</sup> Bar-On, p. 782.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 787.

<sup>24</sup> S. 89.30. "O Soul at peace, return unto thy Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing." Online text at: <http://arthursclassicnovels.com/arthurs/koran/koran-arberry10.html>

<sup>25</sup> Lane, *Arabic Lexicon*, Bk. I, p. 114.

<sup>26</sup> *Adhawiyya*, p. 127.

<sup>27</sup> *Lisan al-arab*, Beirut, 1956, vol. 6, no. 1, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> *Qur'an*, printed by Ahmadiyyah Anjuman Isha'at Islam (Lahore, Pakistan), 1959, 14th ed., p. 809, n. 1989b (S. 33:35).

<sup>29</sup> See homo in *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus*, J. E. Niermeyer and C. Van de Kieft (Leiden: Brill, 2002), vol. 1, p. 644, "man, human nature."

<sup>30</sup> J. Réé, "Translation" in *New Literary History*, 32.2 (2001), [accessed online], p. 224.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

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