God and Logic in Islam

The Caliphate of Reason

John Walbridge

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GOD AND LOGIC IN ISLAM

This book investigates the central role of reason in Islamic intellectual life. Despite widespread characterization of Islam as a system of belief based only on revelation, John Walbridge argues that rational methods, not fundamentalism, have characterized Islamic law, philosophy, theology, and education since the medieval period. His research demonstrates that this medieval Islamic rational tradition was opposed by both modernists and fundamentalists, resulting in a general collapse of traditional Islamic intellectual life and its replacement by more modern but far shallower forms of thought. The resources of this Islamic scholarly current, however, remain an integral part of the Islamic intellectual tradition and will prove vital to its revival. The future of Islam, Walbridge argues, will be marked by a return to rationalism.

John Walbridge is Professor of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures at Indiana University. He is the author of nine books on Islam and Arabic culture, including four books on Islamic philosophy, two of which are *The Wisdom of the Mystic East: Suhrawardi and Platonic Orientalism* (2001) and *Suhrawardi, the Philosophy of Illumination* (with Hossein Ziai, 1999).

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To Frances, with love,
and to the memory of Elaine Wright.

The first thing God created was mind.

a hadith

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Preface and Acknowledgements

I have written this book with three readers in mind: the educated Western reader whose knowledge of Islam may be no more than impressions formed from television and newspapers; the Muslim reader troubled by the misfortunes of his community in the modern world; and the scholar of Islamic studies. They have, unfortunately, quite different needs, and I hope that each will be tolerant of the needs of the others.

I have tried to write this book in a way that will be understandable to an educated Western reader without specialized knowledge of Islam. I have therefore avoided assuming much knowledge about Islam and in particular extensive use of Arabic words and names. I have usually defined technical Islamic terms and identified names when they first occur. I also give brief definitions and identifications in the index. However, there are inevitably places where I have to deal in technicalities, for which I ask the patience of the nonspecialist. For my Muslim readers, this is essentially a theological work, a plea to reexamine the riches of the Islamic rationalist tradition in light of the needs of the modern Islamic community. For my scholarly reader, this book is a reminder of what I hope he already knows – the central importance of rationalism, and particularly scholastic rationalism, in the Islamic intellectual synthesis.

This book represents ideas that have developed over the course of my career, going back to my first undergraduate Islamic studies paper. It took this specific shape as a byproduct of work that I conducted first in Pakistan on the role of logic in Islamic education and later in Turkey on the relation of Islamic science and medicine to philosophy. These projects were generously funded by several organizations, including the Fulbright program, which allowed me to spend a year each in Pakistan

and Turkey; the American Institute of Pakistan Studies; the American Research Institute in Turkey; the American Philosophical Society; the Guggenheim Foundation; and Indiana University. Some sections were first published in the journal *Islamic Studies*, and I gratefully acknowledge their permission to reprint material from these articles and even more their support of my work on the role of logic in Islamic education, particularly the encouragement of Dr. Zafar Ishaq Ansari. Considerable parts of the book were first presented as lectures at Punjab University in Lahore and the İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi in Üsküdar, Turkey. The latter also provided me with a fellowship that allowed me access to their excellent research library, as well as office space, research support, and – not least – sociable, intellectually stimulating, and delicious lunches. In particular, I would like to thank my chief hosts there, Drs. Nüri Tınaz and Aydın Topoloğlu. I would also like to thank the librarians at Punjab University, the Ganj-Bakhsh Library in Islamabad, the wonderful Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul, the İSAM library, and the Indiana University Libraries.

Though I have discussed these ideas with various people over the years, I would like to particularly thank my friend, Emeritus Distinguished Professor of the History and Philosophy of Science Edward Grant, who somewhat inadvertently started me thinking about the relation of science and reason in Islamic civilization and whose books on the role of reason and science in medieval Europe have been a model for my decidedly more modest contribution.

As always, I owe thanks to my family for their support and forbearance – my sons, John and Nathaniel, who put up with my scholarly research and long trips abroad, and my late wife, Linda Strickland Walbridge, who accompanied and supported me for most of my career. Finally, I owe special thanks to my wife, Frances Trix, who entered and brightened my life at the end of a very difficult period, interpreted for me in Turkish libraries, sat through the lectures that were the penultimate form of this work, and has encouraged me in all that I have done these last seven years.

Spelling, Names, and Sources

Arabic terms are spelled with slight modifications according to the system commonly used by scholars of the Middle East. It will be familiar to specialists. In the occasional cases where I am citing names or terms from other Islamic languages, I treat them as Arabic for simplicity unless they have established equivalents in English. I also frequently omit the "al-" from Arabic names, again for simplicity.

In a work such as this, Arabic terminology and names are unavoidable, but I have tried to keep it accessible to a general reader, at least a patient one. Whenever possible, I use English equivalents rather than Arabic terms. Almost any translation of an Islamic religious term can be objected to as imprecise, but on the whole I think it is better to use a term that the reader starts out understanding, explaining how it differs from its usual sense, rather than start with a term the reader does not know and try to explain the meaning to him or her from scratch. I include brief definitions of terms and names in the index, which the reader can use as a glossary. I also explain terms and identify people at first mention. Dates are given only according to the Common Era except in the case of books whose publication dates are given according to the Islamic calendar.

One term deserves special comment: "fundamentalist." It is widely used but is subject to objections. It is, after all, a term for a specific trend in modern American Protestantism. It is now used in Arabic – *uṣūlīya* – a calque from English, but it is not a term accepted by the people to whom it is applied. I use it in a very specific sense: those modern adherents of a religion who wish to return to the original textual roots, bypassing in the process the medieval high religious syntheses. I thus use it for the Islamic groups who tend to refer to themselves as Salafī, followers of the *salaf,*

the pious forefathers, as well as for analogous modern Christian groups – and for my Puritan ancestors who came to America fleeing the wrath of the Stuart kings.

A book such as this takes place through the accretion of knowledge over many years. The notes mainly document specific points and quotations and do not necessarily include all of the sources I have consulted, particularly for facts that will be generally known by specialists. For more general sources, the reader should consult the bibliography, where I give a summary of the sources I have used and books that the interested reader might wish to consult.

Introduction

The visitor to an Islamic bookstore is struck by the orderly rows of Arabic sets, usually handsomely bound in rich colors with calligraphic titles framed in arabesque and stamped in gold or silver. Nowadays, the title commonly runs boldly across the spines of all the volumes. A well-run bookstore will have these works sorted by discipline: commentaries on the Qur'ān; collections of the reported words and deeds of the Prophet and his Companions, with their commentaries; Islamic law, both rulings and studies of the principles to be followed in deducing law; theology; large biographical dictionaries of individuals of various classes, most commonly scholars; histories and geographies; and Arabic grammars and dictionaries.

The casual visitor may be excused the suspicion that sometimes these sets serve a decorative purpose. He may have visited a mosque and noticed that the imam's office walls were lined with such sets and that they showed few signs of use. Watching visitors he may also observe that it is the decorative Qur'āns and popular tracts that sell most briskly.

Nevertheless, he would be unwise to dismiss the imposing sets as mere pretentious ornament. Scholars wrote these books for a purpose. They are, moreover, mostly old books, written between five and twelve centuries ago. The age of printing did not start in Islamic countries until the nineteenth century, so that even the younger works survived fifteen or more generations being copied and recopied by hand, defying the threats of damp, fire, neglect, and white ants. Even this understates the effort that went into their preservation, for a work written in the fifteenth century most likely represents the synthesis of a succession of earlier works written during the previous seven or eight hundred years.

A knowledgeable visitor would also understand that the sustained effort of copying books that might take many weeks to read – let alone write out by hand – was done with great care, with copied manuscripts checked against oral transmission accompanied by oral commentary. The precision with which this had to be done varied by discipline, but for the core religious subjects, a student could not simply buy a copy of a book; he had to copy it out under the supervision of a scholar who himself had learned the work from a teacher. When a scholar copied a collection of hadith, the recorded sayings of the Prophet and his Companions, under the supervision of his teacher, he became the latest link in a chain of teachers and students, generation from generation, back to the days of the scholars who first collected these sayings soon after the deaths of the last Companions of the Prophet. A scholar's most precious possessions were the books he had copied under the supervision of his teachers and the licenses that his teachers had given him to teach these books.

If our casual visitor saw fit to leaf through the books, he would notice that many include commentary in the margins or at the foot of the page. Often the books themselves are commentaries, with the original texts interspersed through the page. If he is lucky, he will stumble on a reprint of one of the old lithographic editions, in which commentary, supercommentary, and glosses by various authors snake around the page and between the words of the text in elegant confusion, so that text ultimately being commented on may be represented by only a few words on each page. If his interest were piqued and he visited an Islamic manuscript library, he could see this process at work in the dusty books: a humble student's manuscript in which the carefully written text is surrounded by notes taken in class or a scholar's manuscript with a carefully crafted commentary and glosses and corrections and variant readings in the margin. He would quickly realize that thousands of such commentaries and supercommentaries exist explaining the works commonly studied, and that few of them have been printed.

This is not, our visitor might reflect, the Islam that he sees in newspapers or on television, a fanatical devotion to the arbitrary interpretation of a single text, the Qur'ān, preached shrilly and politically to excited throngs at prayer. It is something else, a cooler, a thoughtful and earnest intellectual world, a scholastic world much like the traditional study of the Torah and Talmud in Jewish yeshivas or the study of Aristotle and

theology in medieval European universities. It is not modern – in the sense that it is not secular and does not address the post-Enlightenment intellectual world of the modern West – but it also is not modern in that it is not the absolutist fundamentalism of much modern religion, Islamic or otherwise.

And, he might think to himself, the popular tracts addressing current issues are cheaply printed and carelessly bound, stacked in racks to be sold to those without the training to understand the old, long, difficult Arabic books. It is the dry works of Islamic scholasticism that are treated with respect. Everything about them – the color of their bindings, the care of their editing and printing, the increasingly high quality of the paper, the elegance of their design, their respectful placement – indicates that these books, second only to the lavishly printed copies of the Qur'ān, are important.

Why, we might ask, is this so?

THIS BOOK IS AN ARGUMENT FOR A SINGLE PROPOSITION, THAT *ISLAMIC intellectual life has been characterized by reason in the service of a non-rational revealed code of conduct.*

The "non-rational revealed code of conduct" is the Sharīʿa, the Law of God, which occupies the same position of primacy in Islamic intellectual life that theology does in Christianity. I do not wish to say that the Sharīʿa is irrational or contrary to reason or beyond reason, these being issues on which Muslims themselves disagreed – only that the Sharīʿa is given and that Muslims by and large did not think that the reasons for any particular command of God need be accessible to the human mind.[1]

Whereas the foundation of Islam was the revelation given to Muḥammad, which thus is fundamentally beyond reason, reason was

[1] For a slightly different account of the role of reason in Islamic civilization with a stress on political philosophy, see Muḥsin Mahdi, "The Rational Tradition in Islam," in Farhad Daftary, ed. *Intellectual Traditions in Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris and the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2000), pp. 43–65. In a book that arrived too late for me to use systematically, Jeffry R. Halverson, *Theology and Creed in Sunni Islam: The Muslim Brotherhood, Ashʿarism, and Political Sunnism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), makes a similar argument. He argues that by the end of the middle ages *atharī* thought, the term he uses where I would use "literalism" or "fundamentalism," had succeeded in replacing rational theology with uncritical literalist creeds, with unfortunate effects for Islamic religious thought.

the tool normally chosen by Muslims for the explication of this revelation – from the time when Companions of the Prophet still lived down to the dawning of our day. This legacy of rational methodology is to various degrees ignored by Muslims, both modernist and fundamentalist (though they are not as different as we might believe) and by outsiders seeking to understand Islam. This book is thus a reminder to my Muslim friends and readers that the core intellectual tradition of Islam is deeply rational, though based on revelation. This tradition has been largely rejected by modern Muslims, or at least ignored by them. Non-Muslims are usually unaware of it and thus misunderstand Islam.

I chose the word "caliphate" in my subtitle for the relationship of reason to the content of revelation to indicate that reason served revelation and thus was secondary to it. *Khalīfa*, "caliph," comes from a root meaning "to follow," in the sense of coming afterwards. It has two major uses in Islamic religious thought. First, the Qur'ān says that man is God's caliph on earth. Second, it is the title used by the first rulers of the Islamic world after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad and by occasional later rulers, such as the Ottoman sultans, who were able to claim universal authority or legitimate succession from earlier caliphs. Abū Bakr, Muḥammad's first successor, chose the title *khalīfat Rasūl Allāh*, "successor of the Messenger of God," in an act of political modesty. Later rulers sometimes styled themselves *khalīfat Allāh*, "Caliph of God," to some disapproval from the pious.[2] The title "caliph" was also used by Sufi leaders who had been granted a considerable degree of authority of the heads of their orders. In all of these cases, "caliph" implies authority under sovereignty granted by another and higher authority. This, it seemed to me, was a fair term to characterize the role of reason in Islam.

There have been many who have either denied that reason plays a central role in Islamic intellectual life or objected to its doing so. In our troubled times, many non-Muslims see Islam as an inherently antirational force, pointing to a supposed failure to adapt to the modern world ("What went wrong?"), a cult of martyrdom, well-publicized examples of bizarre applications of Islamic law, and a general modern secular suspicion of religion as an organizing principle of human life, particularly of social and political life. Within Islam, there have always been

[2] *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 2nd ed., *s.v.* "Khalīfa."

critics of the role of reason in the religious sciences. The hadith literature, as we will see, arose in part as a reaction to the incipient rationalism of early Islamic legal scholarship. The great fourteenth-century fundamentalist reformer Ibn Taymīya hated reason wherever it expressed itself in Islamic intellectual life. In modern Islam, the traditional legal scholars, with their intricate systems of scholastic reasoning, have been condemned by both modernists, who with some justice considered their legal systems to be medieval and obsolete, and the exponents of Islamic revival, heavily influenced by the hadith and the criticisms of Ibn Taymīya.

My contention in this book is that the logic of the central ideas of Islamic life as they were launched by the Prophet and the earliest generation of Muslims drove relentlessly toward a situation in which religious knowledge was placed in a rational context, with reason providing the organizing principles for bodies of knowledge whose origin was nonrational. This book is my argument for this proposition.

MANY MODERN "FUNDAMENTALIST" ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS ARE ACTIVELY hostile to this tradition of rationalism. The thoughtful observer of Islam will notice the damage done to the integrity of Islamic intellectual life by this disregard of the careful analysis of the heritage of Muḥammad's revelation performed by fifty or more generations of Islamic scholars. The result is a plethora of arbitrary personal interpretations of the Qur'ān, the hadith, and Islamic law. The damage done is plain for all to see.

I am a Protestant and, in particular, an Anglican. My ancestors came to America three and a half centuries ago escaping religious war and persecution, fundamentalists fleeing persecution by other fundamentalists and sometimes persecuting yet other sectarians in the New World with whom they disagreed. The Reformation had broken the religious unity of the Western Christian world, opening the gates for floods of personal interpretations of Christian doctrine and the Bible. The wounds are not yet healed in Christendom. The Anglicans attempt to walk a tightrope, open to the reforms and new ideas of the Reformation yet remaining loyal to the ancient tradition of the Church Universal and never admitting the finality of Christian division or condemning those who follow other ways. It is a path I commend to my Muslim friends. I do not wish on them the two centuries of war that drove my ancestors across the sea

into the American wilderness or the five centuries of unhealed divisions that Western Christians have endured in conflict over the tradition of the ancient and medieval Church. Moreover, the poverty of much modern Islamic thought compared with the subtlety and richness of the medieval Islamic intellectual tradition leads me to think that the solution to the problems facing contemporary Islam lies, at least in part, in reclaiming an older and more intellectually rigorous tradition of Islamic thought.

For my non-Muslim readers, my task is historical: to show the richness of pre-modern Islamic scholastic rationalism. Many modern expressions of Islam do not deserve much respect, but fortunately they are also not the best – or even, historically speaking, up to the average – that Islam can produce. Islam is another path from Christianity, a path in which the spiritual experiences of a single man, Muḥammad, the son of ʿAbd Allāh, a merchant of the town of Mecca in the seventh century, are taken as normative. During the fourteen centuries since then, serious Muslims have undertaken to preserve that experience, using all the scholarly tools at their disposal and devoting every resource of reason to explicating that experience and its ethical, legal, and spiritual implications. By doing so, they hoped that as individuals and as a community they might know how to live a life pleasing to God and righteous among men. It is, from a Christian point of view, an act of terrifying bravery, and it deserves our respect.

PART ONE

THE FORMATION OF THE ISLAMIC TRADITION OF REASON

1

The Problem of Reason in Islam: Is Islam a Non-Rational Religion and Civilization?

In a widely circulated article on the state of the Islamic world in the aftermath of the World Trade Center attacks of 2001, the Pakistani physicist Pervez Hoodbhoy argued that a thousand years ago, there was an Islamic golden age of reason and science under the ʿAbbāsids, a period in which theology was dominated by the rationalist Muʿtazilites and science and philosophy by translations of Greek works. This age of tolerance and creativity, Hoodbhoy claimed, came to an abrupt end when Ghazālī attacked logic and science in the name of an antirationalist Ashʿarite theology. Thereafter, the Islamic world settled into a dogmatic slumber that has not yet ended, as evidenced by the miserable state of science in the Islamic world.[1] A variation of this view stresses Ghazālī's defense of Sufism as the source of his antirationalistic position. Of course, the picture could be reversed, with the early centuries of Islam being seen as a time when advocates of pagan rationalism challenged the young Islamic revelation, only to be defeated by defenders of orthodoxy like Ghazālī, leaving the stage open for a purer Islam based on the practice of the Prophet, not the fallible speculations of human philosophers and scientists. This is the view of Ibn Taymīya and his modern followers.

Outside perceptions of Islam are more negative. The Western view of Islam is dominated by media coverage that stresses terrorism, a supposed innate Islamic hostility to the modern Western world in general and to America and the Jews in particular, headscarves as a tool for

[1] The article is Pervez Amir Ali Hoodbhoy, "How Islam Lost Its Way: Yesterday's Achievements Were Golden: Today, Reason Has Been Eclipsed," *Washington Post,* December 30, 2001. The argument is presented in more detail in Hoodbhoy's *Islam and Science: Religious Orthodoxy and the Battle for Rationality* (London: Zed Books, 1990).

the oppression of women, and violent responses to trivial offenses like tasteless cartoons. However shallow this view of Islam might be, there are serious intellectual arguments against the compatibility of Islam and reason, some of them made by Muslims themselves.

There is first the phenomenon of "Islamic fundamentalism" itself. This term can be used in several ways or rejected entirely. In chapter ten, I will use it to refer to a specific religious response to the medieval Islamic heritage, one very similar to that of my Puritan ancestors. However, I will use it here, as the Western press tends to use it, to refer to all the problems of Islamic civilization in the modern world, and especially to its maladaptations: the terrorism, suicide bombings, bizarre fatwas, obsessions about women's dress, and so on. The cult of martyrdom, with its willingness to kill innocents for a religious ideal that seems unconvincing to non-Muslims, would seem to indicate a failure to engage rationally with the larger modern world. These acts – monstrous, pitiable, or simply embarrassing – are done in the name of Islam. Their irrationality seems obvious to outsiders, and so it would seem to follow that Islam itself is irrational or antirational.

We could, and probably should, dismiss such phenomena as suicide bombers as more a product of the stresses of the modern world than of Islam as a religion, but a form of antirationalism has explicit defenders within Islam. The twentieth century saw the rise of a new kind of Islamic fundamentalism that is often referred to as Salafī – that is, following the example of the *salaf,* the pious forefathers of the first generations of Islam. The Salafīs, diverse though they most certainly are, seek to go back to the pure truth of early Islam before it was corrupted by the scholastic speculations of medieval Islamic scholars. They are doing something very similar to what my Protestant ancestors did when they sought to rid Christianity of the encrustations of medieval theological speculation and post-Apostolic religious doctrine and custom in order to return to the pure spirituality of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the practice of the primitive church. Despite their claim to go back to the roots of Islam, they are, like their Christian fundamentalist counterparts, a modern phenomenon, the product of the mass education that allows a technician or engineer to have direct access to the Qur'ān and the other foundational texts of Islam.

The influence of Salafī Islam has grown steadily, in good part because the Salafīs have a point: the foundations of Islam are the Qur'ān and the life and practice of the Prophet, everything after them being human speculation grounded in the intellectual and social conditions of the times when Islamic scholars wrote. Nonetheless, most non-Muslims, however sympathetic they might be to Islam, would see the Qur'ān and *sunna*, the practice of the Prophet, as being in some sense the product of the social and religious context of seventh-century Arabia. Certainly, the amount of religious information and text preserved from the time of the Prophet is finite. The Qur'ān is a single, not especially large book, and the hadith that have any claim to be considered authentic number no more than a few tens of thousands. Restricting the foundations of religion and society to these few books seems to non-Muslims a rejection of independent reason.

We also note the overwhelming presence of mysticism in Islamic life from about the year 1000 C.E. up through the nineteenth century. Mysticism, too, is anti- or non-rational. Sufism, the usual term for Islamic mysticism, produced sophisticated intellectuals like Rūmī and Ibn ʿArabī but also innumerable enthusiasts, charlatans, and wandering dervishes. In the second half of the nineteenth century, both colonial administrators and modernizing Islamic reformers saw Sufism as a prime example of the superstition that needed to be extirpated before Islam could be reformed. Salafīs, by and large, still think so.

On the other hand, there is a case to be made for the compatibility of Islam and reason. Most Muslims are perfectly able to conduct their lives in a constructive way in the modern world. Even a country like Iran, despite its revolutionary break with certain aspects of modernity in the name of Islam, has continued to modernize in most senses. Apart from Tehran's new metro system, the consolidation of the revolution has led, for example, to an efflorescence of Islamic software in Iran. Also, if we look back, we can see that certain rationalistic endeavors did flourish in medieval Islam. There was a tradition of philosophy, originating with the Greeks but continuing to our own day, particularly in Iran. Until about 1500, Islamic science was the most advanced in the world, and it seems beyond question that Islamic science, as transmitted to medieval Europe, played a critical role in preparing the ground for the Scientific

Revolution. We now know, for example, that Copernicus borrowed much of the mathematics of his heliocentric system (though not the idea of heliocentrism as such) from Islamic astronomers.[2]

Most important, the Islamic religious sciences in their mature form represent a kind of scholasticism, the mode of study in which reason is employed to explicate religious texts. This kind of scholasticism is the basis of postclassical Islamic religious education, wherein students are rigorously trained in Aristotelian logic, the tool used in more advanced subjects like jurisprudence.

It is my belief that such rationalism was basic to Islamic intellectual culture in its classical and postclassical forms. Chapters three through eight of this book are devoted to showing precisely what I mean by this: what was the nature of Islamic rationalism, particularly scholastic rationalism, how it developed, and what were its strengths and limitations. The final chapter of this book deals with the enemies of this kind of reason, its decline and fall, and the role it might play in the development of Islamic thought in the modern world.

There is an ontological issue here that I wish to clarify. I do not believe in a "Muslim mind" or in "Islam" as an autonomous and eternal entity. The human world consists of individual human beings and their individual thoughts and actions. Nevertheless, ideas have power and their own logic, though historical circumstances shape and constrain the expression of those ideas. The Islamic religion came into being from the religious experience of a single man, the Prophet Muḥammad. What shaped that spiritual experience is a question for a different historical inquiry, but that experience had a particular quality expressed in a set of ideas passed on and given more specific form by the personalities and experiences of the men and women around him. Those ideas have shaped and limited the possibilities available to Muslim intellectuals down to our own day. Much happened later, but the unfolding of Islamic intellectual life grew in large part, although not exclusively, from the potentialities inherent in the complex of ideas inherited by the earliest generations of

[2] George Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance* (Transformations: Studies in the History of Science and Technology; Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), pp. 193–232; F. Jamil Ragep, "Copernicus and his Islamic Predecessors: Some Historical Remarks," *History of Science* 14 (2007), pp. 65–81.

Muslims, and in turn, the intellectual life of later centuries was shaped by the choices made by earlier generations.[3]

I do not wish to assert that there was some essential intellectual determinism at work in Islamic intellectual life, but rather that the nature of Muḥammad's experience opened some options and tended to foreclose others. The characteristic legalism of Islam was present from the time of the Prophet, so it is no accident that Muslim legal scholars in every age enjoyed a prestige that was never shared by Christian canon lawyers. The form that this legalism took was shaped by decisions made by the earliest generations of Muslims about how to respond to the withdrawal of the direct divine guidance that the Prophet had formerly provided. Some intellectual approaches, like scholastic legalism and mysticism, prospered; others, like Fārābī's attempt to make rationalistic political philosophy the central organizing principle of Islam, failed. Still others, like Greek logic and metaphysics, faltered but eventually found their place. Greek philosophy was never accepted as the mistress of the sciences but eventually found respectability as the handmaid of legal dialectic and mystical speculation.

The ideas that shaped Islamic life had an inner logic that defined the options open to Muslim intellectuals and thus channeled Islamic intellectual life in particular directions. The issue was not a lack of freedom for individual creativity or other alternatives, but rather that those whose efforts cut across the grain of the formative ideas of Islamic society, like Fārābī and the early philosophers, did not shape the central core of Islamic thought. Those who could make their intellectual creativity flow into channels that the founding ideas of Islam had opened won enduring influence. Such thinkers included Ghazālī, who saw that the place for logic was in the legal curriculum, and Suhrawardī,

[3] This point is elegantly made by Marshall Hodgson in *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization,* vol. 1: *The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 34–39, where he incisively criticizes various essentializing interpretations of Islamic history (p. 37): "Accordingly, it is wise to posit as a basic principle, and any deviation from which must bear the burden of proof, that *every generation makes its own decisions.* . . . A generation is not bound by the attitudes of its ancestors, as such, though it must reckon with their consequences and may indeed find itself severely limited by those consequences in the range of choices among which it can decide."

who saw that the natural role of philosophy was as the interpreter of mysticism.

The interrelationships among the disciplines of thought were different than in Latin Christendom but, as in medieval Europe, reason in due course came to serve faith.

But what, we may ask, do we mean by reason?

2

The Diversity of Reason

Reason and rationality are difficult conceptions to pin down. Encyclopedias of philosophy tend not to have specific articles devoted to them.[1] When we look at what specific philosophers mean by reason and rationality, it quickly becomes obvious that they mean many different things. Most of the time philosophers claim to follow reason and rational methods, but it often seems that "rational" is no more than a philosopher's assertion that his methods and conclusions are obviously correct.

Consider that in the Enlightenment, "reason" meant a substitution of individual thought for inherited religious authority; for the medieval European philosophers it was a supplement to revelation; and for the Utilitarians it was the practical ideal of the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Modern relativism denies that reason can reach ultimate truth, and Romanticism rejects it in favor of a prerational experience of

[1] Systematic investigations of the concepts of reason and rationality in a global sense are rare, with philosophical investigations tending to focus on reasoning, epistemology, or practical reason as it relates to ethics. Thus, for example, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is an epistemological critique of rationalist metaphysics, with the rationalism he is critiquing being a method of conducting metaphysics. An exception is Robert Audi, *The Architecture of Reason: The Structure and Substance of Rationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), although he is building a theory of rationality, rather than surveying its history, as I am. There is a series of related articles in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1998), s.v. "Rational Beliefs" by Christopher Cherniak; "Rationalism" by Peter J. Markie on the European rationalists; "Rationality and Cultural Relativism" by Lawrence H. Simon; "Rationality of Belief" by Jonathan E. Adler; and "Rationality, Practical" by Jean Hampton, but these do not develop a coherent theory of rationality and reason as a whole.

the world. It is not difficult to identify comparable competing notions of rationality in Islamic civilization. Clearly we are not dealing with a single, unambiguous concept. Therefore, if we are going to talk about reason in Islamic civilization, we need to make clear exactly which form – or, more likely, forms – of reason we are talking about.

Western ideas about reason are not the standard against which Islamic reason should be judged – there is, in any case, no single Western conception of reason to use as a touchstone – but Western intellectual history is diverse and thus unequalled as a point of comparison. The relationship of the West with reason has been complex and troubled and has generated a number of different conceptions of reason and the rational, as well as several antirationalist schools of thought. An outside point of reference will allow us to look at Islamic conceptions of reason with fresh eyes. We can ask of the hadith not whether they are authentic or what their authority is in relation to other pillars of Islamic law and doctrine, but what do the choice of hadith and the way they were structured and classified tell us about how early Muslims understood the search for religious truth and legal authority. Likewise, we can ask of Islamic law what are the assumptions of its methods, of mysticism what is the significance of the intricate treatises of mystical theology, and so on.

THE DEFINITION OF REASON AND RATIONALITY

But first we need a meta-definition of reason and rationality, one by which we can consider the various conceptions of reason we will encounter. For the moment, I will take the two as more or less synonymous, with the distinction being that reason is abstract and rationality is the exercise of reason in thought or action. I will take the following as a working definition:

Reason or rationality is the systematic and controlling use of beliefs, arguments, or actions based on well-grounded premises and valid arguments such that another person who has access to the same information and can understand the argument correctly ought to agree that the premises are well-grounded, that the logic is sound, and that the resultant beliefs, arguments, or actions are correct.

The critical ingredients are:

1) *well-grounded premises:* that the factual bases and principles the rational person uses are known to be correct or can be accepted as correct for good reasons;
2) *sound logic:* that these principles are used in accordance with the laws of logic; and
3) *systematic and controlling resort to reason:* that such use of well-grounded principles and sound logic is the basic method by which the person determines his beliefs, makes his arguments, or decides on his actions.

To clarify, let me give some corresponding examples of what would qualify as unreason or irrationality by this definition:

1) The premises and principles used might be in themselves irrational or non-rational, as in a metaphysical system developed by a madman or, much more commonly, as in actions based on authority, unexamined beliefs, or emotions.
2) The logic used might be fallacious, sophistical, or rhetorical, either because the individual did not care to think clearly, was unable to do so, or sought to deceive others or himself.
3) Such rational methods might be used occasionally but not systematically within the larger context of the individual's intellectual or practical life.

The problem with reason and rationality is that reason is, to a great extent, in the eye of the beholder, particularly with respect to starting points. A well-grounded premise can be very different in different times and places and even among individuals in the same time, place, and social setting. Nevertheless, the overall notion seems sound: One can imagine Aquinas, Descartes, Voltaire, and Bentham agreeing that our beliefs and actions ought to be systematically based on well-grounded premises and sound and valid arguments, but they would disagree completely on what constitutes a reasonable starting point for such arguments and for lives of reason in general. It is these differences that I intend to explore as a way of clarifying the nature of the commitment or hostility to reason and rationality in the intellectual life of Islamic civilization.

WESTERN CONCEPTIONS OF REASON

In this chapter, I consider six conceptions of reason that seem to me to have operated in Western civilization – the *logos* doctrine of the Greeks,[2] medieval scholasticism, scientific reason, Enlightenment reason, Utilitarian reason, and relativism – and two antirationalist reactions, Protestant textualism and Romanticism. I then discuss some of the conflicts between these conceptions of reason in Western intellectual history. I close with some suggestions about how these varying conceptions of reason and the tensions and conflicts among them might relate to the Islamic experience. This history could have been analyzed differently, and I have not dealt with all the subtleties, either of Western or Islamic intellectual history. Nevertheless, a simple set of categories is needed to make sense of the Islamic experience of reason. I think this one is more or less satisfactory.

Logos *and Rationality among the Greeks*

The Western ideal of reason derives from ancient Greece. No other ancient civilization in the greater Mediterranean region developed anything like it.[3] The practical and spiritual accomplishments of the Mesopotamians, the Egyptians, the Jews, and the Iranians were enormous, but they were certainly not based on reason in as we understand it. They were all religious and authoritarian cultures. The Jews followed their jealous God because of the mighty deeds He did when He led them out of Egypt and because He was vengeful when spurned or offended. The Mesopotamians and Egyptians treated their kings like gods and their gods like kings. A deeply mythological religious life permeated the ancient Middle East.

[2] The reader will excuse me for counting the ancient Greeks as part of Western civilization, because they are equally intellectual forebears of Islamic civilization as well as of the semi-Western Orthodox cultures of Byzantium and Russia. In fact, the Greeks seem more Middle Eastern to me than European. Nevertheless, whatever other intellectual descendents they may have, they were unquestionably intellectual ancestors to the modern West, and it is in that sense that I have appropriated them here to the history of Western intellectual life. Their role in the intellectual ancestry of Islamic civilization is discussed in chapters 4 through 7.

[3] I leave aside China and India, which were too far away to affect the intellectual foundations of either Western European or Islamic civilization, but they are worthy of a separate investigation, which I am utterly unqualified to do.

Strange and beautiful and sometimes truly spiritual as it may have been, it was not reason. The Persians and Egyptians developed successful and orderly administrative systems, but an orderly bureaucracy devoted to the service of a monarchy is not a sufficient basis for saying that a civilization follows an ideal of reason. Only the Greeks conceived the project of explaining the universe and its contents from rational first principles and then organizing their lives accordingly.

The Greeks associated this rationalistic project with the word *logos,* a term of protean ambiguity derived from the verb *legein,* "to speak." It famously occupies several pages in the largest Greek-English dictionary and bears meanings such as word, argument, speech, principle, logic, inner nature, and theory, among others. The English word "logic" is derived from it; the Arabic *manṭiq,* logic, is a literal translation. In philosophical contexts, *logos* tends to be used in three senses: first, for the inner nature of something; second, for the theory explaining it; and third, for the verbal exposition of its theory. The Stoics developed the concept of *logos* most elaborately, but the notion was at the foundation of Greek philosophy from the beginning: There is a rational structure to the universe and its operation, this inner rationality can be understood by theory, and this theory can be expressed in speech.

The most remarkable aspect of this enterprise was that it operated under very few constraints. From the beginning, Greek philosophers did not feel constrained by conventional religious views, so their systems ranged from sophisticated intellectual mysticism to unabashed materialism. There were occasional prosecutions, such as when Anaxagoras was run out of Athens for encouraging atheism by teaching that the sun was a hot rock. Satirists also found them a delightful target, but mostly they were respectfully left to elaborate their quite contradictory theories, following reason where it led them. (Socrates was executed not because of his philosophical views but because of the number of his students who betrayed Athenian democracy.) They may have disagreed about conclusions, but they agreed that they were engaged in an attempt to understand the *logos* of the universe and express the *logos* of thought through *logoi* of speech. Thus, from the very beginning, philosophy operated under the assumption that its overarching methodological principle was the supremacy of reason, however reason might be understood. It is difficult to know why this was the case. One factor was certainly the

degree to which the violent and adulterous gods of Olympus had lost their hold on the individual conscience, leaving both a spiritual hunger for something loftier and an absence of compelling religious orthodoxy. It is likely that the political fragmentation of classical Greece also played a role.

Scholasticism: Reason as the Tool of Theology

Revealed religion eventually overthrew the intellectual and educational supremacy of Greek philosophy. The philosophers of the Greek and Hellenistic periods could not, by the very nature of their enterprise, meet the spiritual needs of the masses of people. By the time of the Roman Empire, those spiritual needs were increasingly met by a variety of international cults, mostly of Oriental origin, of which only Christianity need concern us. Christianity was a religion of doctrine, its early history rent with disputes about the nature of Christ and the Godhead. The doctrinal assertiveness of Christianity put it into collision with the philosophers, their chief rivals in the business of explaining the universe. Christians quickly learned to cast their theology in philosophical terms – indeed, they learned to do so from the pagan philosophers who so often were their teachers. By about the tenth century, a new rational model had emerged: scholasticism.[4]

Scholasticism thus is a product of the maturity of Christian theology. The scholastic philosopher-theologians knew what they believed; they knew philosophy – usually Aristotelianism – and were interested in pressing reason as far as it would go in the justification and explication of Christian doctrine. But revelation was supreme: If there was a religious doctrine that clashed with philosophy, the scholastic theologian had to work out some sort of reconciliation. To take a famous example, in the Eucharist, the bread and wine change into the body and blood of Christ – but of course they still appear to be bread and wine. It was the business

[4] Two instructive works on the emergence of Christian thought in the context of Late Antique philosophy are Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition: Studies in Justin, Clement, and Origen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), and Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

of the scholastic to explain how this could be made compatible with the Aristotelian theory of material substances.[5]

Enlightenment Reason

Under this heading I will include both the rationalism of seventeenth-century European philosophy and eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought properly speaking. The common feature of both is a rejection of inherited authority and a confidence in the autonomous power of human reason. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European philosophy is largely a reaction against scholasticism. Reason came first, and although many Enlightenment thinkers wished to preserve Christianity, this had to be done through reason alone. Others, like Voltaire and Jefferson, were quite content to reject Christianity in whole or in part. Moreover, there was an optimism about the capacities of reason. Descartes believed that by considering the nature of thought alone, he could rationally reconstruct human knowledge on an unassailable basis. The Enlightenment political philosophers believed that by careful and rational consideration of human nature, they could provide the ideological bases for a new and improved, just, humane, and stable society. Thus, Enlightenment thought is characterized by a rejection of inherited authority, whether religious or political, and by a boundless faith in the capacities of human reason when freed from the inherited fetters of religious and political authority.

Scientific Reason

I might have included the rise of scientific rationality with Enlightenment reason, for they occurred at the same time and were often advocated by

[5] On scholasticism in a comparative context, see José Ignacio Cabezón, ed., *Scholasticism: Cross-Cultural and Comparative Perspectives* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998). The chapter on Islamic scholasticism, Daniel A. Madigan, "The Search for Islam's True Scholasticism," deals mainly with early theology, though it does discuss Islamic law as a scholastic genre. It does not deal with later theology and legal education, where the comparisons with European scholasticism are most marked. For a survey of scholasticism and the problem of reason in Europe, see Edward Grant, *God and Reason in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Grant is a leading advocate of the view that modern science is grounded in the medieval traditions of scholastic rationalism; see p. 97, n. 13 below.

the same people. In this respect, we might take into account such figures as Benjamin Franklin, a great scientist and a hero of Enlightenment political thought. Nevertheless, they are different enough to consider separately.

There is still debate about the nature of science and what exactly it was that changed during the Scientific Revolution, which took place between the time of Copernicus, whose theory of heliocentrism was published in 1543, and the publication of Newton's *Principia Mathematica* in 1687. It is now clear that a number of elements contributed to the drastic change in scientific thought during this period: a general shift from Aristotelian science, the increased use and prestige of experiment and empirical methods, and the use of mathematics in scientific theory.[6] Perhaps most fundamental was the shift of emphasis that made the natural world the most basic problem of philosophy. Increasingly, whatever could not be explained by the methods of empirical and mathematical natural philosophy came to be seen as unknowable, unimportant, or nonsensical, especially once the practical successes of the new science had won enormous prestige for physical science and its methods. Philosophically, science has retained its influence, spawning regular attempts to reform philosophy and sometimes other areas of life along scientific lines.[7] Much of twentieth-century intellectual life was dominated by attempts to apply scientific methods to other areas of life. Although the attempt to reduce philosophy to mathematical logic and science was ultimately a failure, science remains the most prestigious claimant to the crown of reason.

Utilitarian Reason and Practical Rationality

In the late eighteenth century, Jeremy Bentham and his followers attempted to apply scientific methods to the problems of ethics, society,

[6] The exceedingly complicated historiography of the Scientific Revolution and the competing theories of its nature are summarized, at least through 1990, in H. Floris Cohen, *The Scientific Revolution: A Historiographical Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). His own theory will be found in his *How Modern Science Came Into the World* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, forthcoming 2010). On the relation of these theories to Islamic science, see chapter 5, pp. 96–102, below.

[7] For one example, see Hans Reichenbach, *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963). He claimed to have found and applied a scientific approach to philosophy that eliminates the speculation and guesswork characteristic of earlier philosophy.

and politics. Their basic assumption was that the goal of all ethical, social, and political activity is the increase in the sum total of human happiness, "the greatest good for the greatest number," a philosophy they called "Utilitarianism." Bentham's philosophy had a certain inhumanity, some serious philosophical problems, and an insensitivity to cultural diversity. The influence of Utilitarianism has ebbed and flowed in the two centuries since, but it can be taken as representative of a post-Enlightenment Western tendency, particularly in the social sciences, to define rationality as the practical organization of society: economic and productive efficiency, a well-organized bureaucracy, and the like. This view of rationality as the practical now has an influence on the day-to-day world greater than any other – greater, on the whole, even than science.

Relativism

At about the time that Bentham was crafting his chilly humanitarianism, the Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant was preparing the ground for the most philosophically influential modern view of reason: relativism. Kant was dealing with the purely philosophical questions of why so little real progress had been made in metaphysics and how to answer the skeptical objections to the validity of all rational knowledge made by the British empiricists John Locke and David Hume. His "Copernican Revolution," as he called it, reversed the priority of knowledge and truth. He asserted that such principles as the law of causality and the permanence of substance were universally valid not because they were truths that we discover in the world but because they were the concepts that our mind uses to organize experience. They were thus subjectively but not objectively valid. Kant's system foundered on technical philosophical shoals, but other philosophers took up his insight that the world we experience is shaped by the contents of our own minds. Philosophers, especially in Germany, turned from seeking eternal rational truth to studying the nature of human subjectivity. Hegel, who was a young man when Kant died, worked out an intricate system in which history was the unfolding of various aspects of the human spirit. In the work of Marx, human subjectivity was the product of the individual's class in the economic structure. Hegelian ideas of the relativity of truth then shaped the social sciences that emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well

as the new discipline of comparative religion. If truth was simply a function of where and when one lived and how one was educated, then no culture or religion was inherently superior to another; each was equally true and had to be understood in its own terms.

The rise of relativism put enormous pressure on religion, forcing religious communities to choose between acknowledging the truth of all other religions or rejecting modern thought and its scholarly understanding of religion.

The West also produced two great antirationalist movements, both still major influences on Western thought and culture, one a reaction to medieval scholasticism and the other a reaction to the Enlightenment and scientific reason.

Protestant Textualism

The medieval Catholic Church relied on three sources of knowledge: scripture, tradition, and reason. Of these, scripture was perhaps the least important in practice. The church knew that the bread and wine of the Eucharist became the body and blood of Christ, not because scripture clearly said so or because reason could prove it, but because the church believed it and had born witness to it in the liturgy for more than a thousand years. The enormous structure of church doctrine, ritual, practice, government, and law rested on very tenuous scriptural foundations. When the church hierarchy fell into disrepute because of its blatant corruption, reformers challenged the bases of its authority. In the sixteenth century, this blossomed into a schism that would later be known as the Protestant Reformation. The Protestants disagreed among themselves about many things, but in general they privileged scripture over all other sources of knowledge, whether religious or secular. They tended to reject the tradition of the church when it could not be justified by the clear text of the Bible, invoking the principle "Scripture alone." The result was various forms of scriptural literalism that are influential to the present day. Originally, the focus of Protestantism was anti-Catholicism, but Protestant ideas about scripture could justify the rejection of other religions, other sects of Protestantism, certain aspects

of science – notably biology and geology – secular scholarship, and the secularization of culture.

Although Protestants are exceedingly diverse, the original guiding impetus and the reality of much of Protestantism is antirationalist, denying reason an independent role in finding religious truth and making reason's legitimacy in other areas of thought contingent on harmony with scripture. Nevertheless, Protestantism has often claimed the mantle of reason, whether in the somewhat scholastic sense of providing the most reasonable explanation of scripture or in the sense of presenting a fundamentally reasonable account of God and the world.[8] Certainly, Protestants developed the art of religious polemics to a very high order and have put the products of modern technology and technical rationality to very effective use, starting with the printing press.

Romanticism

Romanticism, the second great Western antirationalistic movement and a reaction to the sunny reasonableness of the Enlightenment, is a movement with artistic roots. The Romantics saw modern society as having lost touch with the emotional and irrational, or subrational, aspects of life. Romanticism was characterized by an interest in untamed nature as opposed to the rational study of nature characteristic of such Enlightenment figures as Dr. Franklin. Its founders exalted the primitive, the emotional, the ecstatic, the Dionysian. They were fascinated by heroes and outlaws. They produced good art and murky philosophy. As a clear movement, Romanticism rose and fell quickly, but its legitimization of the irrational survived, regularly reappearing in art, having a major influence in psychology, and spawning such phenomena as the counterculture of the 1960s and modern environmentalism.

THE CIVIL WAR OF REASON IN THE WEST

Even excluding Greek ideas about *logos,* at least five distinct notions of reason and two ideals of nonreason are at work in the modern West – and

[8] See, for example, John Wesley's "appeals to men of reason and religion" or the folksy commonsense arguments of C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity.*

none of the seven is monolithic. It is not surprising then that Western intellectual life has been in more or less continual civil war for almost five hundred years. I will list a sampling of four of the most important intellectual conflicts between rival conceptions of reason and nonreason, but conflicts could be identified between any pair of these conceptions.

Scholasticism versus Protestant textualism. This conflict literally resulted in civil war for about two hundred years. The issue, simply stated, is what the source of religious knowledge is. Is it the pure revelation as expressed in Bible, literally understood in its every verse, as the more extreme Protestants would have it, or is it the whole tradition of the Roman Catholic Church: the Bible, the church's tradition of belief and worship, and the accumulation of two thousand years of pious reflection and intellectual examination of scripture and tradition? The Protestant answer is clear and simple; the Catholic answer richer and more subtle.

Science versus religion. This is not simply a matter of whether the account of creation in Genesis is to be taken as infallible history, symbol, or primitive myth; it also concerns what credit is to be given to the fruits of secular academic study of the Bible and the history of religion. This conflict began at least as early as Copernicus and continues to this day, especially in the United States.

Relativism versus Utilitarianism and Protestant textualism. In the first half of the nineteenth century, India was the scene of an intellectual conflict between the so-called "Anglicists" and "Orientalists." The Anglicists were those who wished to modernize India by introducing modern higher education in English, the better thereby to eliminate the undesirable aspects of Indian culture and religion, including Islam. This was a project dear to the heart of the Utilitarian Jeremy Bentham, who had himself undertaken to produce a new secular legal code for India. The Orientalists were those who wished to cultivate Indian culture and held that any modernization must move forward within the limits imposed by that culture. The evangelical Protestants of Britain had made common cause with the Utilitarians, seeing Indian culture, both Hindu and Muslim, as a barrier to the spread of Christianity. The Orientalists were scholars and old Indian hands who saw their rivals' project – correctly, as it turned out – as a threat to British control of India.[9]

[9] I discuss this conflict in more detail in Chapter 9.

The rights of man versus the rights of the community. Enlightenment reason stressed the rights of the individual as a rational moral and political actor. Relativist thinkers, whether Marxists, with their emphasis on class conflict, or modern social scientists, with their respect for cultural differences, have tended to come down on the side of the rights of communities, as have nationalists, who are generally romantics to the core. Defenders of the moral integrity of the community have come into conflict with advocates of the rights of the individual in such areas as sexual freedom. In past decades, the split has tended to be between conservatives supporting individual rights and liberals supporting community rights, but these lines are sometimes reversed. Right now, the conservative movement in the United States is divided between social conservatives, who support community rights – in their case, community standards of morality – and economic conservatives and libertarians, who support, respectively, the economic and social rights of individuals.

To these conflicts we could add others: Protestant textualism versus romanticism on morality, scholasticism and Protestantism versus relativism on the authority of religion, and so on. We must not imagine that a commitment to reason guarantees agreement, even in the broadest sense, for the West has harbored conceptions of reason utterly at variance with each other.

ISLAM AND WESTERN CONCEPTIONS OF REASON

At this point I would like to sketch some ways in which these conceptions of reason may illuminate debates in Islam. After all, none of these conceptions necessarily need be Western, and Western ideas now influence the intellectual atmosphere of the entire world.

Scholasticism and the Islamic religious sciences. No one familiar with European scholasticism will fail to recognize their kinship with the Islamic religious sciences, especially Islamic law. There is the same notion of revelation as the ultimate source of authority to be expounded in a highly rationalistic manner. Indeed, it has been observed that the world's last scholastics work and teach in the Shi'ite academies of Iran.[10]

[10] Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), p. 8. The book is a wonderfully vivid portrait of the lives of modern Iranian Shi'ite scholastics.

Nevertheless, the focus of European scholastics was a theological philosophy that is now largely obsolete, but the focus of the modern Muslim scholastics is law, which continues to be relevant.

Protestant textualism and Islamic revivalism. It is now almost trite to compare groups like the Salafīs to the early Protestants. Both revolted against a decayed scholastic tradition in the name of a return to scripture. Like the early Protestants and many modern fundamentalist Christian churches, they draw their strength from the newly educated and deploy the tools of modern technology in support of a religious ideology that purports to be a return to the original purity of their faith. Alnd like the early Protestants, their movement has been accompanied by violence.

The ideal of the logos, scholasticism, and the fate of philosophy in Islam. Islam met Greek philosophy fairly early in its history, oddly enough in a largely pagan form, and faced similar conflicts between reason and revelation. However, the history of philosophy in Islam was very different from its history in Christianity. The greatest figures of the early centuries of Islamic philosophy proposed a Platonic political philosophy as a way of understanding religion and revelation, an effort that failed decisively. Then, not unlike what occurred in medieval European thought, philosophy made common cause with mysticism and sacred law to achieve a permanent place in Islamic religious education.[11]

The Enlightenment, relativism, Utilitarianism, and the Sharīʿa. Islamic law continued largely unchanged into the nineteenth century, when it was abruptly displaced in most places by European codes imposed by colonial administrators. Sharīʿa law then remained largely irrelevant (and thus largely unchanged) for another century until the rise of political Islam in the 1970s, when various movements sought to reimpose the Sharīʿa as a cure – often seen as a more or less miraculous cure – for the problems of Muslim societies. But the Sharīʿa had faced neither the questions about the rights of individuals raised by Enlightenment political thinkers nor the issues of legal reform raised by the Utilitarians nor the demands for the rights of minority communities raised by those committed to a relativistic pluralism.

In the following chapters, these conceptions are in the background as I survey debates about reason within Islam. I look first at the role

[11] See Chapters 5 to 8.

of reason and anti-reason in Islamic law. I then look at two attempts to incorporate philosophy into Islam, the first associated with Fārābī and his political philosophy and the second with Suhrawardī and his use of mysticism within a Neoplatonic system. In the latter context, I discuss the role of science in medieval Islam and offer some suggestions as to why the Scientific Revolution did not occur in the Islamic world. I then return to the question of scholasticism and the Islamic religious sciences, examining the way in which reason, particularly in the form of logic, was systematically incorporated into the mature Islamic religious sciences. I also examine the more specific question of how medieval Islamic religious scholars handled the problem of disagreement. Finally, I look at the last two centuries: the rejection of the old Islamic tradition of scholasticism in favor of a new textual literalism and a Western-style secularism. I conclude by examining some of the intellectual discontents of contemporary Islam and how earlier Islamic notions of reason might guide the debates of Muslim thinkers in the twenty-first century.

3

Empirical Knowledge of the Mind of God

The medical historian Ibn al-Qifṭī, writing in the first half of the thirteenth century, reports that a certain John the Grammarian was the Jacobite bishop in Alexandria when the Muslim general ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ conquered Egypt in the mid-seventh century. John had rejected the usual Christian beliefs about the Trinity – which we may suppose means the Greek Orthodox views – in favor of a doctrine that ʿAmr found more acceptable. When the Arabs seized the city,

> John appealed to ʿAmr, "Today you have seized everything in Alexandria and taken possession of all the booty in it. I do not dispute your right to what of it is useful to you, but we have a better right to that which is of no use to you, so order it to be returned." ʿAmr said to him, "What is it that you need?" John replied, "The books of philosophy in the royal libraries. You have put a guard over them. We need them and they are of no use to you."
>
> John then explained that Ptolemy Philadelphus had established the library at great cost and effort, eventually accumulating 450,120 books. When his librarian told him that there nonetheless remained a great many more books in countries from India to Rome, Ptolemy was astonished and ordered him to continue collecting. Every ruler of Alexandria since that time had faithfully maintained the library's collection.
>
> ʿAmr was astonished at John's demand and replied, "I can give no orders without asking the permission of the Commander of the Faithful, ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb." He wrote to ʿUmar and informed him of what John had said, as mentioned above, and asked him what he should do about the matter. A letter came back from ʿUmar saying, "As for the books that you mention, if what is in them is in agreement with the Book of God, then what is in the

Book of God makes them unnecessary, but if what is in them contradicts the Book of God, then there is no need for them and you should undertake to destroy them." 'Amr began distributing them among the baths of Alexandria to burn in their furnaces. I was told that the number of baths in those days, but I have forgotten. They are said to have burned for six months. Hearken to what has been said and be astonished![1]

This story is not true, as has been known since the time of Gibbon. The Alexandrian Library was already in decline at the time of the Roman conquest in the first century B.C.E., when Caesar's army accidentally burned part of it, and the suppression of paganism in the fourth century seems to have led to the loss of whatever may have been left. Libraries are fragile things, vulnerable to fire, political instability, dishonesty, insects, and leaky roofs. What interests me about this story is that it was told by a Muslim about the Caliph 'Umar. Something about it must have resonated with Muslim memories of the character of 'Umar and early Islamic attitudes toward revelation.

The order attributed to 'Umar does not represent Islamic doctrine, whether now, or in the Middle Ages, or in the age of the Prophet. Muslims have never thought that all knowledge was in the Qur'ān, except perhaps in some symbolic sense. The Qur'ān itself said, "Obey God and His Messenger," meaning the Qur'ān and the Prophet, and a widely quoted hadith urged Muslims to "Seek knowledge, if even in China." The Prophet sought advice on worldly matters from more experienced followers. Muslim legal scholars have disagreed on the number of sources of sacred law (the usual number being four), but they have never thought that the Qur'ān was sufficient in itself. In practice, they have depended more on the legal tradition itself, supplemented by the hadith, the recorded sayings and actions of the Prophet. Ibn al-Qifṭī would have known all of this, as would the Syrian Christian historian Barhebraeus, who was mostly responsible for this story becoming known in Europe. What, then, makes this a good story, one worth repeating by a scholar who certainly

[1] 'Alī b. Yūsuf al-Qifṭī, *Tārīkh al-Ḥukamā'*, ed. Julius Lippert (Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1903; reprint, Publications of the Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science; Islamic Philosophy, vol. 2; Frankfurt am Main: Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science, 1999), pp. 354–6. The story is still repeated, but no informed historian now believes it.

would not have been in sympathy with the willful destruction of ancient books of secular knowledge?

The answer is, of course, that Muslims did tend to think of revelation as encompassing all truth, or at least all of the highest kind of truth. This story portrays it more starkly than Muslim scholars usually would, but there was an absoluteness to 'Umar's Islam – 'Umar being a man of notoriously stern and ascetic piety – that makes the story plausible. The premise that underlies it is that absolute knowledge, knowledge of the highest order, can only be obtained through revelation. In particular, the knowledge that a Muslim must have to achieve salvation can be had only empirically, through a precise knowledge of the life and career of a single man, the Prophet Muḥammad, and the book that was revealed through him. Muslims undertook to acquire this salvific knowledge by gathering and evaluating of every scrap of knowledge, or purported knowledge, about the life and career of the Prophet and those who knew him. This enterprise is chiefly embodied in two Islamic intellectual disciplines: the science of hadith, which is the study of the reports of the sayings and doings of the Prophet and those around him, and the science of *fiqh*, the body of law inferred from the Qur'ān and the Prophet's instructions and example. This project is essentially empirical or, to be more exact, historical. Its methods are the collection of individual anecdotes; the weighing, classifying, and collating of this historical data; and then – very cautiously – the inference of their underlying spiritual and legal meanings so as to be able to deduce the law applying in new cases.

The intellectual presuppositions of these two enterprises have determined the relation between reason and Islamic thought to the present.

THE ENTERPRISE OF HADITH COLLECTION

A hadith (*ḥadīth,* "news" or "story") is an anecdote reporting something that the Prophet said, did, or did not do, that someone said or did in his presence without his objecting, or that one of his knowledgeable Companions said or did.[2] A typical example is:

[2] A recent survey of the hadith literature, both primary and secondary, with recommendations for further reading is Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2009). A survey of the literature from

ʿUbayd Allāh b. Mūsā related to us, "Ḥanẓala b. Abī Sufyān informed us on the authority of ʿIkrima b. Khālid on the authority of Ibn ʿUmar, 'The Messenger of God, may God bless him and give him peace, said, "Islam is built upon five things: the testimony that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is His prophet, prayer, giving alms, pilgrimage, and the Ramadān fast."'"[3]

This tradition happens to come from the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī, the most prestigious of the six authoritative Sunni hadith collections, and reports the famous five pillars of Islam, but hadith can deal with almost any conceivable religious subject. Another hadith, selected quite at random, concerns a problem arising from the animal sacrifice made during the Ḥajj pilgrimage:

On the authority of ʿAlī [the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law and the fourth Caliph], "The Messenger of God, may God bless him and give him peace, ordered me to take care of his fattened [sacrificial] camels and to give their meat, hides, and trappings as alms, but not to give anything to the butcher, saying that we would pay him ourselves."[4]

an informed Muslim point of view is Muhammad Zubayr Ṣiddīqī, *Ḥadīth Literature: Its Origin, Development, and Special Features,* ed. Abdal Hakim Murad (Cambridge, England: Islamic Texts Society, 1993). The classic Muslim summary of the science of hadith is ʿUthmān b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Shahrazūrī, known as Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Kitāb Maʿrifat Anwāʿ ʿIlm al-Ḥadīth,* commonly known as *al-Muqaddima,* ed. Nūr al-Dīn ʿIṭr as *ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth* (Damascus: al-Maktaba al-ʿIlmīya, 1387/1966) and ed. ʿĀʾisha ʿAbd al-Raḥmān as *Muqaddamat Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ wa-Maḥāsin al-Iṣṭilāḥ* (Dhakhāʾir al-ʿArab 64; 2nd ed.; Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1989); trans. Eerick Dickinson, rev. Muneer Fareed, as *An Introduction to the Science of the Ḥadīth* (Great Books of Islamic Civilization; Reading: Garnet, U.K., 2006). Briefer traditional accounts of the Muslim hadith sciences are found in Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima* VI.10; trans. Franz Rosenthal, vol. 2, pp. 447–63, and Muhammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥākim al-Nīsābūrī, *al-Madkhal ilā Maʿrifat al-Iklīl,* trans. James Robson as *An Introduction to the Science of Tradition* (London, Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 1953). The classical collections of hadith are now available in English in translations of various qualities. There are too many important collections of hadith to cite here, even when restricted to those available in English translation, but two important and representative collections of hadith are cited in notes 3 and 4 below.

[3] al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d.), Kitāb al-Īmān 2, 1.9. There are many other Arabic editions as well as English translations by Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *The Translation of the Meanings of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Gujranwala, Taleem-ul-Quran Trust, 1971–), and Aftab-ud-Din Ahmad, *English Translation of Sahih al-Bukhari* (Lahore: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaʿat-i-Islam, [1956]-1962), both reprinted several times.

[4] Baghawī, *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ* 36.7.121, in Maulana Fazlul Karim, ed. and trans., *Al-Hadis: An English Translation and Commentary of Mishkat-ul-Masabih.* (Calcutta:

Because early Islamic historians used a similar format, there is no clear line between hadith and historical reports about the Prophet's life. Muslim scholars collected hundreds of thousands of such reports during the first three centuries of Islamic history, compiling them according to various principles.

All hadith share a common format. They begin with a chain of authorities, the *isnād* or support. In principle, each of the individuals mentioned should have personally heard the hadith in question from the mouth of his predecessor, going back to the Prophet himself. In the case of the first hadith I quoted, we are to believe that Ibn ʿUmar, who was a young man during the Prophet's later years, heard him say, "Islam is built on five things . . . " and then told the story to ʿIkrima, who told it to Ḥanẓala, who told it to ʿUbayd Allāh, who told it to Bukhārī, each of the five men being careful to pass on the exact wording of the story as he heard it from the chain of previous authorities. The actual content of the hadith is called the *matn,* text, and naturally can be supported by more than one *isnād,* as more than one person may have heard the Prophet say the same thing and more than one person may have heard each of the authorities.

There are two underlying issues here: the historical problem of the reliability of these reports and the legal and theological problem of the presuppositions of the whole enterprise. I am mainly interested in the legal and theological issue, since that is what shaped Islamic thought in the long run, but I will mention the historical issue first.

THE HISTORICITY OF THE HADITH

The career of Muḥammad changed the lives of those he came into contact with, whether through their conversion to Islam, the disruption of traditional Arabian society, or the new horizons that the rise of Islam opened to the Arabs. There cannot be the slightest doubt that people who had known the Prophet told stories about him to those who had not and that these stories were passed down in families, in communities, and in

Muhammadi Press, 1938–1940; often reprinted), 3.621. This is a compilation made at about the beginning of the twelfth century, in which the hadith from all of the recognized collections are included without full chains of authority. The translation is my own. There is also a full translation by James Robson (Lahore, Pakistan: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1960–1964, and reprinted several times).

networks of scholars. It is also obvious that after a century or two, not all of the stories in circulation would be reliable. People surely mixed things up or gave their ancestors a more glorious role in the rise of Islam than perhaps they deserved. They might attribute to the Prophet what actually was said by some other early Muslim teacher. Scholars attributed to the Prophet what he ought to have said but did not get around to mentioning. Preachers invented entertaining and edifying stories. Sectarians put their doctrines into the Prophet's mouth to give them authority. By the time the collection of hadith got underway in earnest in the second Islamic century, it was obvious that a large majority of stories in circulation about the Prophet were either spurious or of uncertain reliability.

The tool that the hadith scholars devised to sort out the precious wheat from the abundant chaff was the *isnād*. If they could show that Ibn ʿUmar, ʿIkrima, Ḥanẓala, and ʿUbayd Allāh were all men of sound faith, good memory, and reliable scholarship and that each had studied with his predecessor, or at least could have, then we would know with reasonable confidence that the report attested by this chain of authorities could be relied on. If, however, ʿIkrima had been born after the death of Ibn ʿUmar or Ḥanẓala was a heretic or ʿUbayd Allāh a notorious forger of hadith or a man of unreliable memory, then we could reject the hadith as lacking authority. This led to the compilation of a fresh mass of historical data, as it had become necessary to know the dates, teachers and students, travels, and reliability of everyone who appeared in the *isnād* of a hadith along with the hadith and *isnāds* that their names appeared in. The result was that the compilations of hadith were supplemented by enormous reference books: biographical dictionaries of the Companions of the Prophet and early scholars, commentaries on the hadith collections, and analyses of special problems, such as defective *isnāds*. The synthesis of this enormously complex mass of detail was still going on seven or eight hundred years after the death of the Prophet. However, from the point of view of most Muslim scholars, the issue was put to rest in the ninth century with the acceptance of six hadith collections as authoritative, including two that were compiled according to particularly exacting standards. A similar process resulted in several comparable authoritative collections of Shiʿite hadith. And that was that, for a famous hadith assured Muslim scholars that they would never reach consensus on an error.

The *matn,* the actual text transmitted in the hadith, could also be subjected to historical evaluation, but for the most part the hadith scholars concentrated on the chain of authorities. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's standard work on the principles of hadith criticism concentrates almost entirely on the *isnād,* apart from some incidental issues like rare words in the text. The historian Ibn Khaldūn's account of the sciences connected with hadith also ignores the evaluation of the plausibility of the text. Medieval scholars did occasionally question the content of hadith – judging, for example, that hadith in praise of particular places were likely to be forgeries – but they did not reject hadith for legal or theological anachronisms, which Western scholars of hadith and Islamic legal history consider to be certain evidences of forgery. The great jurist Shāfiʿī rejected rational critique of the content of the hadith text on principle: "No one is authorized to apply reasoning (*li-mā*) or questioning (*kayf*) or anything tainted by personal opinion (*raʾy*) to a tradition from the Prophet."[5]

Modern Western scholars generally have seen the issue differently.[6] It is clear that the thousands of hadith with their libraries of supporting detail can shed great light on the religious thought of the period in which they originated. But what period, Western scholars have asked, was that? It certainly was not usually the time of the Prophet, since even the medieval Muslim scholars agreed that most hadith could not be authentic and that they originated during the legal and doctrinal controversies of the first two Islamic centuries. Thus, Bukhārī, the author of the most respected of the hadith collections, is said to have collected

[5] Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), 120–21, citing his book, *Ikhtilāf al-Ḥadīth,* "contradictory hadith."

[6] For a review of the Western academic debates between skeptics and defenders of the hadith literature, see the introduction to Harold Motzki, ed., *Ḥadīth: Origins and Developments*, The Formation of the Classical Islamic World (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate Variorum, 2004); the volume is a collection of classic articles on the hadith, most dealing with issues of authenticity. Motzki himself believes that some hadith can be identified dating from the seventh century; see his "The Question of the Authenticity of Muslim Traditions Reconsidered: A Review Article," in Herbert Berg, ed., *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins* (Islamic History and Civilization, Studies and Texts 49; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003), pp. 211–57. Herbert Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period,* ed. Andrew Rippin, Curzon Studies in the Qur'ān (Richmond, Surrey, U.K.: Curzon, 2000), gives another summary of the state of Western scholarship on the issue, coming down on the side of the skeptics after reviewing the exegetical hadith attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, a younger companion of the Prophet who became a famous scholar in later decades, and finding that these hadith do not share common patterns of content.

several hundred thousand traditions, only seven thousand of which were sufficiently reliable to be included in his collection. Western scholars soon despaired of isolating a body of hadith genuinely coming from the Prophet. In practice, they have tended to accept the biographical hadith as authentic, at least when considered as a whole. Despite some attempts at biblical-style source criticism applied to the hadith and even the Qur'ān, the general narrative of the Prophet's life as seen through biographical hadith seems coherent and plausible enough; without it, we would be able to say almost nothing about the Prophet and his career. However, there have been few Western scholars willing to concede that any significant number of hadith on theological and legal subjects can be known with confidence to be authentic. It simply is not credible that large numbers of remarks of the Prophet survive that by happy chance happen to address theological and legal issues of the later seventh and eighth centuries. Scholars who then have investigated the issue in detail have found many problems with the structure of *isnāds*. The writing of hadith started late, but written sources do survive, starting about a century before the great compilations. When compared with the standard collections, the hadith found in these early collections have less-complete *isnāds* and show signs of being in an intermediate stage of development. Hadith attributed to the Prophet in later collections are attributed to a Companion of the Prophet in the older collections. Weaker *isnāds* are later replaced with stronger ones. The *matns* of hadith in later collections are sometimes found to be concatenations of texts from several earlier hadith. All of these defects were known to Muslim hadith critics – indeed, there is an elaborate set of technical terms for them in Arabic – but Western scholars are much less sanguine about the possibility of sifting out a residue of authentic tradition going back to the Prophet.

However, when Western scholars did attempt to trace the origin of the hadith in the religious controversies of the first two or three centuries of Islam, they were not much more successful than the Muslim scholars because there is no agreement among Western scholars about how to date the hadith. Various techniques have been developed based on their ideological content or the structure of their *isnāds*, but none has won universal acceptance. Not surprisingly, modern Muslim scholars have attempted to defend the authenticity of the authoritative hadith literature, but it does not seem to me that the criticisms of the Western scholars

have been answered thus far. Whereas some recent Western scholars have been willing to date the origins of the hadith literature to as early as the late seventh century, many others remain skeptical, placing the origin of the hadith in the eighth or even the ninth century.

However, my major concern is not the historical origin or historicity of the hadith literature as we know it, but the underlying epistemological premises on which the methods of hadith scholarship are based and how these relate to other manifestations of intellectual life in classical Islamic civilization.

THE INTELLECTUAL WORLD OF THE HADITH SCHOLARS

At the basis of the hadith scholars' intellectual project are two assumptions. First, it is impossible to deduce the will of God rationally; it can only be known through such revelation as God chooses to send to mankind.

One might think otherwise. Medieval Christian thinkers often divided religiously relevant knowledge into that which can be known by reason alone, that which can be known by revelation alone, and that which can be known by both. The ancient philosophers were inclined to think that everything worth knowing can be known by reason. The Qur'ān itself, with its statement, "We will show them Our signs in the horizons and in themselves," gives ground for belief that some part of God's mind can be known through contemplation of nature and introspection, a theme that reemerges in Sufi thought in the form of a doctrine of God's self-revelation in the whole of the universe and the human heart.[7] Nevertheless, some things obviously can only be known by revelation, the number and times of the daily prayers being a classic example. The hadith scholars chose to take this class of religious knowledge as paradigmatic.

The second assumption of the hadith scholars was that the historically contingent can be known only by report. This, of course, is largely true. The date of the Battle of Qādisīya cannot be deduced by reason; it can only be known through the reports of eyewitnesses. Language and linguistic phenomena fall into the same category. Again, it is possible to disagree and argue that reason has a role to play in the form of rational criticism

[7] Qur'ān 41.53. Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, ed. A. A. 'Afīfī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1946), p. 53; trans. R. W. J. Austin, *The Bezels of Wisdom* (Classics of Western Spirituality; New York: Paulist Press, 1980), p. 54.

of historical accounts. We may judge the plausibility of an account in relation to other accounts of the same or similar events. We may make judgments on the basis of inherent plausibility, as Ibn Khaldūn did with biblical accounts of the numbers of Israelites in the wilderness.[8] We can weigh evidence for and against an account. Modern historiography uses such techniques to evaluate the claims for various kinds of historical data.

But this is not what the hadith scholars did, with the major exception of their evaluations of the reliability of the individuals named in an *isnād*. The most obvious application of rational criticism to hadith would be to reject anachronistic narratives, the hadith that obviously refer to events or controversies after the death of the Prophet. This is a basic tool of the Western scholars who have attempted to test the authenticity of hadith or have tried to use hadith to illuminate religious controversies in the first two or three centuries of Islam. Against such criticisms, the hadith scholars could reply that the Prophet Muḥammad was a prophet, someone who knew the future, and that it is thus perfectly reasonable that the revelation should include explicit foreshadowings of what would happen to the Muslim community in times to come. A second intrusion of the miraculous into hadith historiography is the assumption that all the Companions of the Prophet were reliable for the purposes of hadith transmission. To this we might add that the hadith scholars made their work more difficult by their pronounced aversion to reliance on written texts, a dislike partially justified by the defective nature of the early Arabic script. A written text might be used, but it had to be authorized by an oral transmission. Finally, they would not accept custom as evidence of revelation – that is, they would not accept the argument that "this is how we have always done it, so it must be what the Prophet told us to do." There had to be an oral report originating in the Prophet's time to confirm it.

All this yields a set of assumptions, narrow but consistent, made by the hadith scholars:

1) Only through revelation can the will of God for mankind be known fully – or perhaps, be known at all.
2) Revelation is a historically contingent event.

[8] Ibn Khaldūn, 1.9–24; trans. Rosenthal, 1.15–25.

3) The revelation of Islam was manifested through the Qur'ān and the words and actions of one man, the Prophet Muḥammad, and ended with his death.[9]
4) Facts about the revelation to Muḥammad can only be known through the reports of eyewitnesses to his words and deeds, not by reason.
5) The only way of knowing that these reports of unique and miraculous events are reliable is through continuous oral transmission through reliable transmitters.

From these assumptions, we can conclude that the historian – for this is what the hadith scholar essentially is – should transmit unchanged the word-for-word accounts of eyewitnesses. Any revision, synthesis, or analysis will only reduce the reliability of the account. Whereas a modern historian would consider analysis and synthesis a way of producing an account more reliable than any of a collection of partial or biased sources, the hadith scholar would see such an enterprise as simply the production of yet another account, one that, unlike the eyewitness accounts, has no claim to embody direct knowledge of the event.

What this means can be seen in its application by historians. Consider a passage from Ṭabarī's *History of Nations and Kings,* the most important and comprehensive early history of Islam, written in the tenth century and employing the methods of the hadith scholars. It reports an incident that supposedly took place a few years after the death of the Prophet involving the Caliph ʿUmar, the same who was later said to have ordered the burning of the books of the library of Alexandria to heat the city's bath water:

Al-Sarī wrote to me on the authority of Shuʿayb on Sayf on Muḥammad, al-Muhallab, Ṭalha, ʿAmr, and Saʿīd: When God granted victory to the Muslims, Rustam was killed. When the news of the victory in Syria reached ʿUmar, he assembled the Muslims and said: "How much of this property can the leader legally keep?" All of them said:

> As for his private needs, his livelihood, and the livelihood of his family, neither more nor less; their garments and his garments for the winter and

[9] For the Shiʿah, God's will can also be known through the Imams, the infallible appointed successors of the Prophet, and thus hadith can also originate with them, but the result is much the same.

> the summer; two riding beasts for his *jihād,* for attending to his needs, and for carrying him to his pilgrimage. . . .
>
> Al-Sarī wrote to me on the authority of Shuʿayb on Sayf on ʿUbayd Allāh b. ʿUmar: When ʿUmar received the news about the conquest of Qādisīya and Damascus, he assembled the people in Medina and said, "I was formerly a merchant, and God provided sufficiently for my family by means of my commerce. Now you have made me preoccupied with your affairs. What do you think, how much of this property can I legally keep?" The people suggested a large amount, while ʿAlī remained silent. ʿUmar said, "What do you say, O ʿAlī?", and ʿAlī replied, "What will keep you and your family in moderately good condition, but you have no right to this property beyond that." The people said: "The right words are the words of [ʿAlī] ibn Abī Ṭālib."[10]

These two versions of what is obviously the same story are followed by three others: a short version in which someone else asks the question and ʿUmar replies, mentioning moderately good conditions, the two garments, and the two riding beasts; a much longer version, in which some other Companions of the Prophet ask ʿUmar's daughter to ask the question of her father, eliciting a long reply about the austerity of the time of the Prophet; and a fifth, quite different version talking at some length about the rightful shares of the various groups entitled to part of the spoil. There is no attempt to reconcile the various versions; they are just listed in succession. A modern historian would probably dismiss the longer accounts as expansions by later writers critical of the luxury of Umayyad and early ʿAbbasid times and would see the kernel of the story as a policy instituted in ʿUmar's time about what claim the caliph had on the public purse for his personal needs, perhaps wondering if these accounts incorporated an actual document from that time. Ṭabarī simply presumes that whatever historical knowledge we may have of this event is in these five accounts and that to tamper with them or choose from among them is to risk the loss of irreplaceable historical data. And the hadith scholars would be in full agreement with him – quite naturally,

[10] Muḥammad b. Jarīr Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa'l-Mulūk,* ed. M. J. de Goeje et al. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1879–1901); *The Battle of Al-Qādisiyyah and the Conquest of Syria and Palestine*, trans. Yohanan Friedmann, SUNY Series in near Eastern Studies (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), pp. 2415–18, with slight modifications of the translation. The ten dense volumes of the original Arabic are translated in forty volumes in this series. The history begins with the creation of the world and continues to the author's own time.

as Ṭabarī himself was also a distinguished hadith scholar, the author of a famous commentary on the Qur'ān that is almost entirely a collection of hadith.

The result of these assumptions has been the largest sustained biographical enterprise in human history. If the Prophet Muḥammad's sayings and actions are the model that Muslims must follow, then every scrap of information about his life is potentially of importance: his words, his actions, and even the things he saw others doing and did not object to. Such information can be known through the reports of those who knew him and, to some extent, by their later conduct and words. The validity of these reports in turn can only be known by evaluating the reliability of those who transmitted them, resulting in the existence of an enormous secondary biographical literature.

The hadith methodology leads us to expect a particular approach to determining Islamic law. Everyone agrees that, in practice, the main source of Islamic law is the example of the Prophet. The Qur'ān has some explicit legal content, and the commentators were able to squeeze out a little more by close study of the text, but even such basic features of Islamic law as the requirement to pray five times a day are missing from the Qur'ān. Thus, we would expect that the hadith would fill in the gap. Hadith scholars tended to agree, but not everyone did. And therein lies one of the great controversies of early Islam: the authority of these transmitted reports of the Prophet's words and deeds in relation to community tradition, inference, and personal opinion in the derivation of Islamic law.

The Authority of the Hadith

The point of collecting the hadith, and indeed the point of Islamic religious knowledge in general, is to know what one ought to do in the circumstances in which one finds oneself – in other words, the application of revealed law to particular circumstances and to new kinds of cases. It is not necessary to assume that hadith are the only tool for the application and extension of the sacred law. One might suppose that the customary practice of the Muslim community or some part of it was a better guide than reports attributed to what inevitably was a small

minority of the Prophet's Companions. One might also use inference and reason based on known principles of law or practical realities. Both methods were used by Islamic legal scholars, and as we shall see, there is little reason to doubt that historically, such methods of discovering law predated the systematic collection and use of hadith. It is also clear that the exaltation of hadith as a source of law actually represents a reaction to the reliance on community tradition, reason, and personal opinion. The argument made by the hadith scholars, who insisted that the revealed texts should take precedence over human reasoning as sources of Islamic law and belief, has been repeated in various forms throughout Islamic history. Always the results have been ambiguous. Reason is made to defer to the text of revelation but soon comes to govern how the text is to be understood, the caliph in the realm of sacred text.

Classification as Codification

The hadith literature, consisting as it does of thousands upon thousands of discrete atomic units, must be put into order before it can be used. There are, broadly speaking, two ways of arranging hadith: by the *isnāds,* that is, by the sources from which they are supposed to derive, and by the contents of the *matns.* Hadith collections arranged according to the first method are called *musnads*; those arranged according to the second method are said to be *muṣannaf* or *mudawwan,* that is, arranged by subject. Obviously, the first method suits the needs of hadith scholars, who are interested in establishing the authenticity of particular hadith by reference to its transmitters; the second is more useful to readers wishing to use the hadith to establish the Prophet's views or practices on a particular subject. The six authoritative collections of hadith are all topically arranged, although the *Musnad* of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal[11] enjoys a status not far below the six.

[11] Ibn Ḥanbal (780–855) was a hadith scholar, the eponymous founder of the Ḥanbalī legal school, and one of the great figures of textual literalism in Islam. A vigorous advocate of the authority of the hadith against legal rationalism, he also opposed the Mu'tazila in theology, in particular their doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'ān. Christopher Melchert, *Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal* (Makers of the Muslim World; Oxford: OneWorld, 2006. Laoust, H., *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), s.v. "Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal."

The *muṣannaf* hadith collections are all arranged in similar order, roughly following the standard order of manuals of Islamic law. The earliest important collections of hadith actually were manuals of law, as in the case of the *Muwaṭṭa'* of Mālik b. Anas (d. 796), a legal compilation containing many hadith dating from the century before the six standard collections. These compilations may or may not begin with faith or a related topic, but then they move on to treat purity, prayer, and the other standard legal topics, along with some nonlegal topics like the excellences of the Qur'ān. Hadith are inserted under the appropriate heading – sometimes under more than one if the author's plan allows and if the content of a hadith fits logically under more than one head. The most famous of the collections, the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī (d. 870), starts most chapters with an introductory text, either a verse from the Qur'ān or a fragment of a hadith, that establishes the subject and indicates the context within which the following hadith should be understood. As a rule, there is no commentary apart from technical references to *isnād*s and variant readings. It all conveys a tone of dispassionate, empirical neutrality.

Yet if we ask what the presuppositions are that underlie these compilations and their organization, the matter is not so neutral. First, these collections represent selections, small fractions of the hadith material that was actually available. Bukhārī, for example, chose 2,602 hadith out of a supposed 600,000 that he had collected. All six of the standard Sunni collections contain a little fewer than twenty thousand hadith among them. Although some of the criteria used to choose hadith are nominally neutral – the exclusion of hadith with *isnāds* featuring known fabricators of hadith, for example – others are not. Shi'ites tend to be excluded from Sunni collections, and vice versa. Some criteria for inclusion or exclusion of narrators disguise ideological differences within Sunni Islam. Four of the collections include *ḥasan* ("good") hadith, those which do not meet the exacting criteria of *ṣaḥīḥ* ("sound") hadith. The justification for inclusion of *ḥasan* hadith seems to be, in good part, that hadith dealing with legal matters fall disproportionately into this category.

But here I am concerned with another problem. Classification introduces presuppositions that generally cannot be justified from within the corpus of texts being classified. Francis Bacon, the great philosopher of

empirical science of early modern England, reflected on the relationship between collected data and science:

Those who have handled the sciences have been either Empiricists or Rationalists. Empiricists, like ants, merely collect things and use them. The Rationalists, like spiders, spin webs out of themselves. The middle way is that of the bee, which gathers its material from the flowers of the garden and field, but then transforms and digests it by a power of its own.[12]

There is unquestionably an antlike quality to the hadith scholars. Consider two premises that underlie the collection of hadith and their compilation in classified compilations:

1) The hadith are perspicuous – that is, their meaning is clear.
2) The classification is neutral. It does not affect the understanding of the hadith because it is obvious what question a given hadith answers or is relevant to.

With regard to the first premise, although it is not likely that any hadith scholar would hold that the hadith are absolutely self-sufficient as a source of religious knowledge, the whole point was that if there was a text available with a claim to carry the authority of the Prophet, it should take precedence over other kinds of evidence. This notion is firmly implanted in Islamic intellectual culture, even though most of the legal schools were unwilling to accept this principle in so uncompromising a form.

With regard to the second premise, classification is never neutral, a point that was clear even to later Islamic scholars. The fifteenth-century scholar Suyūṭī writes in the introduction to his commentary on Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ:*

Bukhārī, however, distributes the hadith in chapters appropriate for each, though that hadith may be obvious or may be obscure. The application of the obscure hadith may be direct, implicit, related to something general, pointing to a disagreement with an opponent, or indicating that one of the paths of that hadith contains that which will yield what is intended. Even though the wording of the text does not mention it, the context points to

[12] *Novum Organum* 1, aph. 95.

what is indicated by it, so that one can cite it as proof, even though it does not rise to being its condition.[13]

Moreover, Bukhārī gives headings for his chapters: verses of the Qur'ān and fragments of hadith, some of which are not included in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* because they are defective in some way or another. In some cases, there is a chapter heading with no hadith underneath it, meaning that Bukhārī had found no sound hadith to support his point. These headings are more than neutral titles, as Suyūṭī indicates, because they are sometimes broader, narrower, or different than the meanings of the hadith that follow. Thus, they indicate Bukhārī's own view of how the hadith should be interpreted. This has led to the remark that the headings contain his *fiqh* – his legal theory.[14]

The process by which hadith collections edged toward becoming *fiqh* culminates with the *Sunan* works, hadith collections devoted to legal hadith that not only are arranged by topic but whose very criteria of inclusion are loosened, legal hadith not uncommonly falling into the lesser category of *ḥasan*.

THE HISTORICAL PRIORITY OF *FIQH* TO HADITH

Fiqh, literally "understanding," is Islamic law as expounded by human scholars, and books of *fiqh* are books of legal rules. *Fiqh* is to be distinguished from the *sharīʿa,* the law as God intended it; from *uṣūl al-fiqh,* "the principles of *fiqh,*" the rules governing the deduction of the law by scholars; and from the *sunna,* the custom of the community coming ultimately from Muḥammad – that is, the *sharīʿa* in practice. In terms of the principles of mature Islamic jurisprudence, the hadith come before fiqh, because hadith are supposed to be the main embodiment of the *sunna*. There is a dispute here between modern Western scholars of Islam and defenders of the traditional Islamic view of Islamic legal history. Western scholars, who in general have been unwilling to accept the traditional account of the transmission of the hadith from Muhammad, have also questioned the traditional account of the dependence of *fiqh* on hadith.

[13] Jalāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī, *al-Tawshīḥ Sharḥ al-Jāmiʿ al-Ṣaḥīḥ,* ed. Riḍwān Jāmiʿ Riḍwān (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1419/1998), 1.47.

[14] Ṣiddīqī, "Ḥadīth Literature," pp. 56–57.

The legal schools arose out of the legal traditions of the various important Muslim centers, notably Medina. The Mālikī school of Mālik b. Anas (whose *Muwaṭṭa'*[15] contains so many hadith that it enjoys a status not far below those of the six authoritative hadith collections) was associated with the customary practice of Medina and traced its origins to the judicial rulings of the Caliph ʿUmar. The hadith, at least as a discipline, arose later than the legal tradition and to some extent as a reaction to it.[16] Early legal texts, which can be dated with considerably more confidence than the hadith, are important sources for dating the rise of hadith, both as a discipline and as a genre, because these texts contain hadith in an obviously immature form, with improper, incomplete, or missing *isnāds.*

From the point of view of the early legal schools, the hadith scholars were demanding that hadith reports resting on the authority of one or two people supplant the authority of well-established community and scholarly traditions dating back to the time of the Prophet. There are a number of anecdotes in which Mālik criticizes legal scholars who presumed to prefer the authority of hadith to community tradition – for example, when he excoriated Abū Yūsuf, a pupil of Abū Ḥanīfa, for presuming to demand hadith in support of the form of the call to prayer used in Medina: "The call to the prayer has been done [here] every day

[15] Aisha Bewley, trans., *Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik ibn Anas* (London: Kegan Paul, 1989).

[16] The classical work on the intellectual transition to dependence on hadith is Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence.* Schacht accepted Ignaz Goldziher's denial of the overall authenticity of the hadith and constructed an account of the rise of Islamic jurisprudence in which Shāfiʿī (d. 820) played a key role in the transition from the eighth century jurisprudence based on local custom and Umayyad administrative practice to the classical legal schools, with their reliance on hadith and scholastic methods. Some more recent scholars have argued that it is possible to push our knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence back into the seventh century and recover the teachings of some of the younger Companions of the Prophet, but this remains controversial, and Schacht's view of Islamic legal history is still prevalent among Western scholars. Schacht's view is also incorporated in the many articles on law that he wrote for the second edition of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* notably s.v. "Fiqh." A recent survey of the literature is Christopher Melchert, "The Early History of Islamic Law," in *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins,* ed. Herbert Berg, (*Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts*; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003). Norman Calder, *Studies in Early Muslim Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) is a close study of sample texts from early Islamic legal compendia. Calder, one of the most skeptical of the skeptics, argues that all of these texts evolved over a period of time, usually well after the death of the putative author. Not everyone finds this plausible, but the closely analyzed sample passages are an excellent introduction to the style and method of early Islamic legal texts.

five times a day in front of witnesses, and sons have inherited it from their fathers since the time of the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace. Does this need 'So-and-so from so-and-so'?" When Abū Yūsuf presumed to question the amount of a *ṣā'*, a particular dry measure, Mālik sent the people in the room out to bring back examples of the measure to show to the impertinent visitor.[17]

Second, inference as a source of Islamic law was well-established by the time the hadith scholars became a serious influence, enough so that the supporters of hadith scornfully dubbed their opponents *ahl al-ra'y,* "people of opinion." It is unquestionably the case that the so-called "Ancient Schools" of law, those predating the work of Shāfi'ī at the beginning of the ninth century, were more inclined to use personal opinion as a basis of law, although, as we have seen, they also relied on *sunna* of a more diffuse nature than the supporters of hadith were willing to concede. This set the stage for a controversy that may be taken as an archetype for later Islamic controversies between supporters of a religious system incorporating both rationalism and custom and reformers who sought return to the text.

The problem facing any Islamic legal scholar is the new case. For Sunnis, there could be no new information about God's will for mankind after the death of the Prophet in 632. What remained were the text of the Qur'ān, the Companions' memories of the Prophet's words and actions, and the ongoing custom of the community established by the Prophet. Some sources report that as early as the time of the first Caliphs, newly appointed governors and judges were given advice about how to handle the legal cases that came before them, and there is no reason to doubt that certain of the Companions developed a reputation for legal knowledge and practical wisdom.[18] However, it was the lawyers of the Ancient Schools who first faced the problem head-on. The oldest sources show us what we would expect to find: cases decided by a combination of

[17] Yasin Dutton, *The Origins of Islamic Law* (Culture and Civilization in the Middle East (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1999), pp. 42–43. The translation of the quotation is slightly modified. Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767) was the eponymous founder of the Ḥanafī legal school. Abū Yūsuf al-Kūfī (d. 807) was his pupil and somewhat more reliant on hadith than his teacher.

[18] Baghawī, *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ* 2.26.7, ed. Fazlul Karim, vol. 2, pp. 608–14, gives a representative selection of hadith on the administration of justice.

citations from the Qur'ān and references to the customary practice of the community and the opinions of the Prophet, respected Companions, and later individuals with reputations for knowledge, all analyzed and decided according to informal reasoning, analogy, and practical common sense. By the time of the earliest surviving specialized legal texts, some degree of methodological self-consciousness had entered Islamic legal discussions, with Medina, Mecca, Iraq, and Syria being the most important centers and having slightly varying views.[19]

This balance was disturbed in the eighth century by the emergence of an assertive community of hadith scholars demanding that *sunna* be determined by reference to hadith, not by reference to local legal tradition and customary practice. From a legal point of view, there were problems with the hadith scholars' demand. In the nature of things, hadith represented the testimony of only one or a few individuals. Even if the hadith were accepted as authentic, was it reasonable to overturn the tradition of Medina, a legal tradition established by the Prophet himself, on the basis of isolated reports of what he might have said or done in the presence of, at most, a handful of people? Nevertheless, the argument of the hadith scholars carried great weight in an Islamic context, as indeed it still does. If a hadith represents what the Prophet said, ought we not to obey it? The argument for textual literalism is simple – perhaps simplistic – but it has never been an easy one for Islamic scholars committed to more complex intellectual systems to answer. Thus, from the time of Shāfi'ī, the legal scholar most responsible for making hadith the chief and almost the only determinant of *sunna,* Muslims have tended to understand *sunna* and hadith as being more or less synonymous, and hadith have assumed

[19] This is the view of Schacht, which recently has been challenged by Wael Hallaq, "From Regional to Personal Schools of Law? A Reevaluation," *Islamic Law and Society* 8/1 (2001), pp. 1–26, and *idem*, *The Origins and Development of Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 150–79. Hallaq argues that, although there certainly were clumps of legal scholars in the early Muslim cities, these regional groups were not distinguished by characteristic doctrines. The point is not of particular importance to us, because there certainly was a shift in doctrine between earlier (seventh to eighth century) and later (eighth to ninth century) legal scholars, and the term "Ancient Schools" is convenient for referring to the earlier period. For general introductions to Islamic law and its historiography, see Wael B. Hallaq, *Sharī'a: Theory, Practice, Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); idem, *The Origins and Development of Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

a status in practice, although perhaps not in theory, almost equal to that of the Qur'ān.

LITERALIST CHALLENGE AND RATIONALIST COOPTION

During the course of the ninth century, hadith gained acceptance as a source of Islamic law, largely supplanting more diffuse conceptions of *sunna.* Although the chief collections of hadith won a sort of canonical status, in the long run the results were not altogether as the early hadith scholars might have wished. The process of the rationalization of the sacred law continued relentlessly, with Shāfi'ī himself providing much of the impetus. *Ra'y,* personal opinion, the term with which the hadith scholars had tarred the Ancient Schools, largely vanished from the vocabulary of the jurisprudents, but *qiyās,* analogy, took its place. This process culminated in the emergence of *uṣūl al-fiqh,* the principles of jurisprudence, as a separate discipline, probably in the eleventh century. This discipline represented a highly rationalistic legal scholasticism, and I return to it in chapter six in the context of logic.

A similar process occurred in the discipline of Kalām theology. The term *Kalām* means "speech" or "discussion" and was used to refer to the debates about Islamic doctrine. These debates emerged in parallel with Islamic legal thought, although they never were as central to Islamic intellectual life as theology was in Christianity. The early debates dealt with issues that rose naturally from the nature of the Qur'ānic revelation and the Muslim experience:

the nature of God and how His unity and transcendence were to be harmonized with His attributes and anthropomorphic Qur'ānic verses;
free will, providence, and predestination;
whether a Muslim who has committed a grave sin remains a Muslim;
the nature of the Qur'ān.

Questions of predestination and the status of the unrepentant sinner were particularly charged because they had implications for the legitimacy of the caliphs. The earliest Kalām debates seem to have involved unsophisticated discussion using citations from the Qur'ān and commonsensical arguments.

The theological counterpart to the Ancient Schools of law was the Muʿtazila, a school that arose in the eighth century and had its greatest prominence in the ninth before gradually fading into extinction over several centuries. The central concerns of the Muʿtazila theologians are shown in the name they gave themselves, *ahl al-ʿadl wa'l-tawḥīd,* "the people of justice and monotheism." Their chief theological concern was to protect the unity, transcendence, and justice of God. Thus, they denied the separate reality of attributes in God on the grounds that these would compromise His unity. From this followed their notorious doctrine that the Qur'ān was created, not eternal. Anthropomorphic verses of the Qur'ān were to be explained as metaphorical. God's justice implied human free will and the denial of predestination. His will was necessarily in accordance with justice – not, as their opponents would usually insist, that what He willed was justice by definition. The relatively crude rationalism of the Muʿtazila received official support during the ninth century, including a systematic purge of its opponents known as the *Miḥna,* "the trial" or "persecution."

The most vehement opponents of the Muʿtazila were the same hadith scholars who were opposing rationalism in law. The great traditionist Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal was imprisoned, flogged, and threatened with death when he refused to accept the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'ān. Despite official support from the ʿAbbasid caliphs, the tide soon turned against the Muʿtazila. As with rationalism in law, rationalism in theology went against the grain of popular Islamic sentiment. Neither the word of God nor the words of the Prophet were to be explained away in so cavalier a fashion. Nevertheless, the Muʿtazila had identified genuine problems that the theology of the hadith scholars could not resolve, and it was left to Abū'l-Ḥasan Ashʿarī (873–935), a convert from Muʿtazilism, to formulate a response that combined the dialectical sophistication of the Muʿtazila with the reassuring literalism of the hadith scholars. The anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Qur'ān were to be accepted *bi-lā kayf* – without asking how – and the paradoxes to God's power and human free will ultimately made it impossible for man to comprehend the will and justice of God.[20]

[20] On *bi-lā kayf*, see Khalid Blankinship, "The Early Creed," in Tim Winter, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 53; Abū'l-Ḥasan Ashʿarī, *al-Ibāna ʿan Uṣūl al-Diyāna,* ed. Fawqīya

Nevertheless, just as Shāfiʿī's incorporation of hadith into Islamic law prepared the way for a renewed legal rationalism, Ashʿarī's anti-Muʿtazalī theology employed increasingly scholastic methods. Philosophers were becoming prominent in Islamic intellectual life at about the time of al-Ashʿarī. At the end of the eleventh century, the great lawyer, theologian, and mystic Abū Ḥāmid Ghazālī felt obliged to provide a definitive Ashʿarite response to the philosophers in a work entitled *The Incoherence of the Philosophers.*[21] The book argued that twenty philosophical doctrines were either heretical or outright unbelief. Regardless of Ghazālī's intentions, his work set the stage for the massive incorporation of arguments and concepts derived from or informed by philosophy. The new theology, as it emerged in the thirteenth century with figures such as Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī and Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, was characterized by a thoroughgoing scholastic rationalism that far transcended anything the Muʿtazila had attempted.[22]

Husayn Mahmūd (Cairo: al-Anṣār, 1397/1977), pp. 2.22, 141–240; trans. Walter C. Klein (American Oriental Series 19; New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1940), pp. 50, 88–130. On this earlier period in Islamic theology, see W. Montgomery Watt, trans., *Islamic Creeds: A Selection* (Islamic Surveys; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994); A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932); and Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976). General histories of Islamic theology are usually mainly devoted to the earlier period and include Winter, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology;* Tilman Nagel, *The History of Islamic Theology,* trans. Thomas Thornton (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2000); and Josef van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology,* trans. Jane Marie Todd (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006). Early primary sources available in English include Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, *The Theology of al-Ashʿarī: The Arabic Texts of al-Ashʿarī's* Kitāb al-Lumaʿ *and* Risālat Istiḥsān al-Khawḍ fī ʿIlm al-Kalām, ed. and trans. Richard Joseph McCarthy (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1953), and idem, *al-Ibāna,* trans. Klein.

[21] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers,* trans. Michael E. Marmura (Islamic Translation Series; Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1997; *al-Ghazali's Tahafut al-Falasifah: Incoherence of the Philosophers,* trans. Sabih Ahmad Kamali (Lahore: Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1963. Ghazali explains his attitudes towards philosophy, theology, and mysticism in his famous autobiography, *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl,* ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd (5th ed. [Cairo]: al-Kitāb al-Ḥadītha, 1385/1965); trans. W. Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazālī* (Ethical and Religious Classics of East and West; London: George Allen and Unwin, 1953) and in Richard Joseph McCarthy, *Freedom and Fulfillment* (Library of Classical Arabic Literature; Boston: Twayne, 1980). The last translation is reprinted with only the *Munqidh* and associated notes but different pagination as *Al-Ghazālī's Path to Sufism* (Louisville, Ky.: Fons Vitae, 2000).

[22] See pp. 117–9 below.

Still, there were always critics to protest the intrusion of rational methods into disciplines supposedly founded on the Word of God and His Prophet. Ibn Qudāma (1146–1223), a Syrian Ḥanbalī, condemned the whole enterprise of Kalām theology.[23] The Sufi theologian Ibn ʿArabī (1165–1240), however strange many of his interpretations of the Qur'ān and hadith may seem, was insistent that every aspect of the text be understood literally and taken seriously, and his works may be seen as a literalist counterreaction to both philosophy and the Ashʿarite theology of his time.[24] The fourteenth-century reformer Ibn Taymīya (1263–1328) vehemently criticized the rationalist legal theory and theology of his time, although he found few supporters until much later.[25] In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Akhbārī school in Shiʿite law argued that even dubious reports from the Prophet and the Imams should be preferred to the personal reasoning of the scholars of the rationalist Uṣūlī school.[26] Finally, much modern Islamic thought may be understood as a reassertion of the literal understanding of the Qur'ān and hadith against the scholastic traditions of the *madrasas.*

To this we might add the discipline of Arabic grammar, which is linked with both law and Muʿtazlite theology. Arabic grammarians employed a thoroughly rationalistic methodology that was subject to occasional, usually unsuccessful antirationalist criticism. The twelfth-century grammatical empiricist Ibn Maḍā', for example, rejected the use of hypothetical grammatical entities in favor of description of linguistic practice and criticized excessive reliance on analogy. We should not be surprised then

[23] Ibn Qudāma, *Censure of Speculative Theology: An Edition and Translation of Ibn Qudāma's* Taḥrīm an-Naẓar fī Kutub Ahl al-Kalām, ed. and trans. George Makdisi (E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series, n.s., 23; Cambridge: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 1962).

[24] Michel Chokiewicz, *An Ocean without a Shore: Ibn Arabi, the Book, and the Law,* trans. David Steight (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993). On Ibn ʿArabī, see pp. 93–5 below.

[25] H. Laoust, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, *s.v.,* "Ibn Taymiyya, Taḳī al-Dīn Aḥmad." Ibn Taymīya, *Kitab Al-Iman: Book of Faith,* trans. Salman Al-Ani and Shadia Ahmad Tel (Bloomington, Ind.: Iman, 1999) is a translation of one of his books dealing with epistemological issues.

[26] Momen, Moojan, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (Oxford: G. Ronald, 1985), pp. 117–18. Andrew J. Newman, "The Nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī Dispute in Late Safawid Iran," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies,* 55/1 (1992), pp. 22–51.

to discover that in law he was a Ẓāhirī – a "literalist" – a follower of a school that fiercely criticized the use of analogy.[27]

THERE WAS, IN SHORT, A CHARACTERISTIC PATTERN IN WHICH INDIvidual Islamic disciplines came to be dominated by various forms of scholastic rationalism and then were challenged by critics advocating a literalist return to the sources. However, the literalism either was coopted by a renewed rationalism, as in the case of the incorporation of hadith into *fiqh* or the philosophical interpretations of Ibn ʿArabī's literalist Sufi metaphysics, or was no more than a source of problems to answer, as in Ibn Maḍā's critique of rationalism in Arabic grammar. In virtually every one of the Islamic religious sciences, the mature form of the discipline was characterized by a thoroughgoing scholastic rationalism. This Islamic scholasticism, its relation to logic, its expression in the Islamic educational system, and its decline in recent times will be the subjects of later chapters. Similar reassertions of the literal interpretation of the sacred texts have taken place throughout Islamic history.

[27] Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ibn Maḍā', *Kitāb al-Radd ʿala 'l-Nuḥāt* ([Cairo], Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī 1366/1947); trans. with commentary by Ronald G. Wolfe, "Ibn Maḍā' al-Qurṭubī and the Book in Refutation of the Grammarians," (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1984); Kōjirō Nakamura, "Ibn Maḍā's Criticism of Arabic Grammarians." *Orient* (Tokyo) 10 (1974), 89–113. The intricacies of the full scholastic formulation of Arabic grammar may be seen in Mortimer Sloper Howell, *A Grammar of the Classical Arabic Language, Translated and Compiled from the Works of the Most Approved Native or Naturalized Authors*, 4 vols. (Allahabad: North-Western Provinces and Oudh government press, 1883–1911; reprinted New Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1990). An accessible introduction to the work of the greatest figure in the history of Arabic grammar is M. B. Carter, *Sibawayh* (Makers of Islamic Civilization; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004).

4

The Failure of the Fārābian Synthesis of Religion and Philosophy

There is a famous story that one night the philosopher Aristotle appeared to the Caliph Ma'mūn in a dream telling him to seek what was good according to reason. This dream, we are told, was one of the reasons that the caliph initiated a project to translate Greek scientific literature into Arabic. The caliph then wrote to the Byzantine emperor asking for manuscripts to translate. Although at first reluctant, the emperor eventually complied, and a delegation was dispatched from Baghdad to acquire the manuscripts. Perhaps the books were not easily found, for we are told that the Byzantine Christians had suppressed the study of the ancient philosophy in its full form and that one of the ambassadors had to press the emperor for permission to break into a temple library that had been locked since the conversion of Constantine. After that, as the *Fihrist* states, "[B]ooks on philosophy and other ancient sciences became plentiful in this country."[1]

[1] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist,* ed. Yūsuf ʿAlī Ṭawīl (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 1416/1996), pp. 397–8; *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm: a Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture,* trans. Bayard Dodge (Records of Civilization: Sources and Studies 83; New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), vol. 2, pp. 583–6. The *Fihrist* is a catalog made by a Baghdad bookseller of all the books that he knew of in Arabic. The seventh book of this work is the most extensive source on the translation movement, with long lists of authors and books translated. Most of these translations are now lost, which is particularly unfortunate because in many cases we no longer have the Greek originals either. Part 1, chapter 1, deals with translations, and part 7 deals with logic, philosophy, and science. For a survey of the translation movement and its political, intellectual, and social context, see Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: the Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ʿAbbāsid Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th Centuries)* (London: Routledge, 1998). A more recent summary is Cristina d'Ancona, "Greek into Arabic," in Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

There are very good reasons to doubt aspects of this story, but it is certainly true that in the eighth and ninth centuries, Muslim officials and scholars made a concerted effort to commission Arabic translations of the major works of foreign science and philosophy, especially Greek science and philosophy. There were also translations from Middle Persian, mainly works on astronomy, astrology, and practical and political wisdom, some of them originally written in Sanskrit. We can hardly doubt that the rulers and officials paying for this enterprise were most interested in science and medicine, disciplines with immediate practical import, but Greek science required Greek philosophy to be understood properly, so a great many philosophical texts, including virtually all the works of Aristotle and a very large selection of commentaries, were translated. Like Muslim rulers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they discovered that the importing of foreign technological knowledge brought with it foreign modes of thought.

There is much that we do not know about this process and why particular books were translated and others were not. The scholars from Baghdad did not simply take the works in popular among the Byzantine Greeks at that time; philosophy and science were at a very low point in Byzantium during that century. Instead, they often went back to classics that had passed out of common circulation – translating, for example, Ptolemy's *Almagest* instead of simpler works that were widely read in the ninth century. In fact, there is reason to think that Islamic demand for these works was a major factor in bringing them back into circulation in Byzantium and thus assuring the survival of the Greek originals.[2] From philosophy, they mostly took Aristotle and his sober commentators in place of more religious and colorful Neoplatonic works of a later

2005), pp. 10–31. Franz Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam*, trans. Emile and Jenny Marmorstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), is a collection of annotated translations of Arabic translations and discussions of Greek texts.

[2] Saliba, *Islamic Science*, pp. 1–73, gives a detailed critique of the medieval accounts and modern interpretations of the translation movement and argues that the beginnings of the movement must be situated in the later Umayyad bureaucracy and that the choice of books, the technical knowledge required to do the translations, and the quality of the Islamic scientific literature of the early period implies that Islamic scientists took a much more active and creative role much earlier than generally has been understood. Dimitri Gutas, "Geometry and the Rebirth of Philosophy in Arabic with al-Kindī," in *Words, Texts, and Concepts Cruising the Mediterranean Sea: Studies on the Sources, Contents, and Influences of Islamic Civilization and Arabic Philosophy and Science*, ed. R. Arnzen and J. Thielmann (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 139. Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en Departement Oosterse Studies, 2004), pp. 196–209.

period. Most important, they took pagan philosophical works instead of Christian ones.

For scholars from a civilization organized around a revealed religion, Greek philosophy posed problems and puzzles. It could scarcely be ignored, for it provided the only comprehensive, rational explanation of the universe available to the nations bordering the Mediterranean. This was especially true because it was integrated almost seamlessly with ancient science, and together the two disciplines provided a full explanation of the natural, mathematical, and supernatural realms. The compelling strength of this synthesis is demonstrated by the fact that it remained the dominant explanatory system in the western half of the old world until the seventeenth century. Indeed, parts of the ancient philosophical-scientific synthesis survive in modern science and philosophy like fragments of old buildings incorporated into the structure of a modern city: the axiomatic method in mathematics, the logic of categorical propositions, the hierarchical system of biological taxonomy, and the logic of diagnosis in medicine. The dogmatic theology of early Islam and the traditional medicine and astronomy of the ancient Arabs were naïve by comparison.

On the other hand, there were puzzling gaps and incomprehensible aspects in ancient philosophy. Some were trivial; Islamicate scholars could make little sense of Aristotle's *Poetics* because they did not understand the genres of Greek drama, a situation elegantly portrayed in a short story by the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges.[3] Two more important areas are of concern to us: the incompatibility of Greek political philosophy with medieval political realities and the lack of an adequate philosophy of religion. As we will see, it was the philosopher Fārābī's genius that made the first of these puzzles the solution to the other.

PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION BEFORE ISLAM

Greek philosophy arose in a period when the traditional worship of the Olympian gods was losing its appeal. Intellectuals of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E. may have admired Homer as a poet, but they did not take

[3] Jorge Luis Borges, "La busca de Averroes," in *El Aleph* (Buenes Aires: Emece Editores, 1949); "Averroës' Search," trans. James E. Irby, in Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings* (New York: New Directions, 1964), pp. 148–55; trans. Andrew Hurley, in Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions* (New York: Penguin, 1998), pp. 235–41.

the stories of the violent, adulterous gods of Mount Olympus very seriously, leading one modern scholar to write a book entitled *Did the Greeks Believe Their Myths?*[4] The old cults survived mostly as state religions of the various city-states – Athena as the patron goddess of Athens being the best-known. The result seems to have been a widespread spiritual hunger in this period filled by a variety of competing phenomena, of which philosophy was one.[5]

The early Greek philosophers dealt with the decline of traditional religion in one of two ways. In the first approach, they might leave aside the question of religion almost entirely. Thus, the Ionian physicists sought explanations of the universe and its phenomena that were, broadly speaking, physical or at least rationalistic. Gods might have found their places in such explanations, but they were part of the universe and thus contained within a larger explanatory system. Likewise, the Sophists left aside questions of religion and ethics in favor or rhetoric and politics. The other approach was that of the so-called "Italian School" – Pythagoras, Empedocles, Parmenides, and their followers. They were creating philosophical religions with beliefs, taboos, and worship practices – Parmenides' poem of the goddess and Pythagoras' religious order are two examples.[6]

[4] Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination,* trans. Paula Wissing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

[5] See, for example, Bruno Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind in Greek Philosophy and Literature,* trans. T. G. Rosenmeyer (New York: Harper, 1953; reprint New York: Dover, 1982), pp. 23–42; E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Sather Classical Lectures 25; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), pp. 179–235; F. M. Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation* (New York: Harper, 1957), pp. 111–23; W. K. C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952); Franz Cumont, *The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* (Chicago: Open Court, 1911; reprinted New York: Dover, 1956); Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Martin Classical Lectures, n.s., 2; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

[6] The enduring spiritual significance of this Italian philosophical tradition is argued by Peter Kingsley in a series of increasingly passionate books. He argues that our understanding of the Italian school of pre-Socratic philosophy is utterly wrong, largely because of Aristotle's tendentious interpretations, and that the tradition of Pythagoras, Empedocles, and Parmenides needs to be understood as a religious and mystical journey, quite alien to the abstract and cerebral philosophizing of Aristotle and his intellectual heirs down to our day; see his *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); *In the Dark Places of Wisdom* (Inverness, Calif.: The Golden Sufi Center, 1999); and *Reality* (Inverness, Calif.: The Golden Sufi Center, 2003). The most recent editions of the fragments of Parmenides' poem with English translations are A. H. Coxon, *The Fragments of Parmenides: A Critical Text with Introduction, Translation, the Ancient Testimonia and*

This latter approach had clear connections with the mystery cults that were becoming increasingly popular in the Greek world.[7]

These two approaches converged in the three greatest figures of ancient philosophy: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Socrates seems to have started like an Ionian physicist, if we are to take seriously Aristophanes' caricature of him in *The Clouds*, but he moved on to make ethical issues central in the philosophical enterprise, giving them a vaguely religious context. However, because he wrote nothing, it is difficult to pin down his contribution with precision, other than to know that he gathered around him a brilliant circle of disciples.

With Plato and Aristotle, we are on firmer ground. Biographical sources, both Greek and Islamic, link Plato to both the Ionians and the Italians. Muslim sources refer to him as "the Divine" (*al-ilāhī*). If this designation is fair, it suits the elderly Plato of the *Timaeus* and the so-called "Unwritten Teachings" better than the younger Plato of the early dialogues, concerned mainly with ethics, or the middle dialogues, which are preoccupied with the metaphysics of the Forms, epistemology, and politics. The most strikingly religious aspect of Plato's thought is a metaphysical and epistemological mysticism that becomes increasingly prominent in his later dialogues. First, there is the distinction between Being and Becoming, the notion that the things of this world are imperfect copies of ideal Forms. To truly know, one must somehow become

a Commentary (*Phronesis* suppl. vol. iii.; Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1986); D. Gallop, *Parmenides of Elea: Fragments* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984); G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers,* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 263–85. On the Pythagorean tradition, see W. K. C. Guthrie, *History of Greek Philosophy,* vol. 1: *The Earlier Presocratics and the Pythagoreans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), pp. 146–72; Charles H. Kahn, *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans: A Brief History* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001); Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie, comp. and trans., *The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library: An Anthology of Ancient Writings which Relate to Pythagoras and Pythagorean Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Phanes, 1987). On the Islamic philosophical reception of the Italian school, see John Walbridge, *The Leaven of the Ancients: Suhrawardī and the Heritage of the Greeks* (SUNY Series in Islam; Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), particularly chaps. 5 and 6.

[7] The subject of the so-called "mystery religions" is too complex to deal with here, but the nineteenth-century notion of the ancient Greeks as exponents of pure rationality has been thoroughly undermined by books such as E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Sather Classical Lectures 25; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), and W. K. C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952).

free of this world and behold the ideal with spiritual ideas unclouded by matter. This is most vividly portrayed in the allegory of the cave in the *Republic*, in which those who think this world is the true reality are compared to those who sit fettered in a cave, mistaking the shadows they see on the wall of the cave for the true realities. Only after they break their fetters and emerge from the cave are they able to see things for what they really are.[8] Other myths in the *Republic* and elsewhere pick up this theme in various ways. Toward the end of his life, Plato's "Unwritten Teachings" seem to have carried this further, positing a system of ideal numbers that are the true reality. This system had – or certainly can be interpreted as having – a strongly mystical and religious character, and its full doctrine was reserved for the elect.[9] For non-philosophers, religion was a matter of "beneficial lies."[10]

After Plato's death, his philosophy generated a variety of successors. The most important was Aristotlianism, which had little in the way of religion in it, although its epistemology carried over some critical elements from Plato. Aristotle seems not to have been religious at all, and his philosophy is entirely concerned with the rational categorization and explanation of the natural and human worlds. To be sure, there are gods in his metaphysics, but in exactly the number – fifty-five or forty-seven – required to explain the motions of the heavens.[11] They are motors, not objects of worship.

[8] Plato, *Republic*, book 7, 514a to 517b.

[9] This is the view of the Tübingen school, which is not universally accepted. Two authoritative expositions of the "Unwritten Doctrines" are Hans Joachim Krämer, *Plato and the Foundations of Metaphysics: A Work on the Theory of the Principles and Unwritten Doctrine of Plato with a Collection of the Fundamental Documents,* trans. John R. Catan (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), and Giovanni Reale, *Toward a New Interpretation of Plato,* ed. and trans. John R. Catan and Richard Davies (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997). The Tübingen argument is that the accounts of Plato's philosophy in early and presumably well-informed sources, notably Aristotle, differ greatly from the contents of the dialogues. Citing Plato's warning in the *Phaedrus, Epistle VII,* and other places against placing true philosophy in writing and historical references to his lecture *On the Good,* the Tübingen school argues that there was a final "Theory of the Principles," in which Plato attempted to solve the problems left unresolved in his later dialogues. Regardless of the details of the Tübingen school's reconstruction of this unwritten system, it is clear that the Plato of the Neoplatonists and of the Islamic philosophers had strong religious and mystical interests.

[10] Plato, *Laws*, book 2, 663d.

[11] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, book 12.8, 1074a.

Second only to Aristotelianism, and probably more important in ancient times, was Neoplatonism, a movement founded by Plotinus, who developed the mystical and religious aspects of Plato's thought in a system based on emanation from the One beyond being. The extent to which Neoplatonism was Platonic can be debated, depending mainly on the stress one wishes to place on the various aspects of Plato's dialogues and the unwritten teachings attributed to him in other sources. The Neoplatonists considered themselves simply as Platonists, and their interpretation of Platonism was the dominant one into early modern times. The Neoplatonists were unquestionably religious, being deeply interested in mysticism, magic, the occult, and Oriental cults.

Revealed religion first appeared as a major intellectual force in the Mediterranean world in the first and second centuries of the Common Era. There were at least four significant revealed religions of relevance to us: Zoroastrianism, whose influence in the Roman world was mostly indirect; Judaism, which at that time was a more aggressively proselytizing religion than it would later become; Christianity; and Manichaeism, a dualistic gnostic cult that for some centuries was Christianity's most dangerous rival. These religions incorporated certain innovations. They were all, in one sense or another, monotheistic or at least dualistic, representing a supreme God whose claims on man's allegiance were exclusive and incompatible with the worship of other gods. In this they differed radically from the pagan religions that had preceded them, religions that had been perfectly comfortable with the notion that different gods might be worshipped in different places or that the same gods might be worshipped under different names and in different ways in different countries. A pagan traveler would worship the local gods as a matter of prudence and etiquette, just as he would observe local laws and local table manners. Imperial officials did so as a matter of policy. The revealed religions would not permit such casual blending of cults.

Second, revealed religions had prophets, men who claimed to deliver the supreme truth from God to men, laying down doctrines that all should believe and laws that all should follow. This was not entirely unprecedented. The ancient religions had had their own prophets and lawgivers, and many cities claimed that a divinized lawgiver had given them their laws, but the absoluteness and universality of the claims of the monotheistic prophets were new. Finally, there was scripture. There

had been holy writings before, but the new scriptures – the Avesta of the Zoroastrians, the Hebrew Bible of the Jews, the Greek New Testament of the Christians, and the seven books of Mani – made claims that transcended older oracular texts, echoing the absoluteness of the claims of the Prophets who had revealed the teachings contained in these books. A technical innovation, the codex or bound book, gave greater rhetorical power to the phenomenon. The follower of one of these religions could point to the book and claim that all truth was "between the two boards," to use the Islamic term.

Philosophers and Revealed Religion. The philosophers ignored the phenomenon of revealed religion as long as they could. They were the last intellectually significant defenders of ancient paganism, providing pagan education until their schools were closed and their professors banished in the sixth century. In the end, philosophy was reconciled to revealed religion, and specifically to Christianity, not because the philosophers were converted or saw fit to develop a philosophy of religion explaining the new forms of revealed religion, but because young Christians were educated by philosophers and applied philosophy to the explication and defense of Christian doctrines. Education in the Roman world was inseparably bound up with philosophy and the pre-Christian Greek classics. Long into the Byzantine period, elite education retained a largely pagan syllabus. There were occasional efforts to Christianize the syllabus – with paraphrases of the Bible in the style of Homer, for example – but these efforts were the failures that they deserved to be. Moreover, young Christians studied with pagan professors. Saint John Chysostom, the "golden-mouthed," the greatest preacher of Constantinople, was a student of the pagan rhetorician Libanius, whose other prominent student was the Emperor Julian the Apostate. Ancient Christian writers could no more ignore philosophy than modern theologians can ignore science, nor did they wish to. Instead, in a long and rancorous process, they harnessed Greek philosophy to the service of Christian theology, thereby giving to Christian doctrine a much higher degree of intellectual clarity and probably also encouraging the tendency of Christianity to focus on doctrine as the central aspect of the religion.[12]

[12] On the transition from pagan philosophy to Christian theology, see, for example, Christopher Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture.*

In the centuries prior to the rise of philosophy in Islam, Christian philosophers and theologians had tended to favor Platonism and Stoicism. The reasons were clear enough: The fundamental Platonic distinction between the material and the intelligible fit well with the Christian notion of a realm of God and the spirit. Platonic and Stoic ethical ideals were compatible with Christian distrust of the bodily passions. The Neoplatonic "One beyond being" could easily be identified with the God of the Christians and Jews. Neoplatonic notions of emanation could be used to expound the doctrine of the Trinity. The influence of philosophy on Christian thought may go back as far as Saint Paul, who evidently had a Greek education in addition to his rabbinic training. The legitimacy of this approach can be seen in the works of pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. His book was a thoroughly Neoplatonic exposition of Christian theology attributed, falsely, to a convert of Saint Paul in Athens.[13] Christianity, in short, grew up with philosophy, and although there were many specific disputes between Christians and philosophers – one might consider the Neoplatonist Hypatia of Alexandria, lynched by a mob of indignant Christians she had humiliated in theological debate – Christian writers could neither ignore it nor fail to employ it.[14] And the form they were most comfortable with was the most religious of the ancient systems, Neoplatonism.

The Decline of Greek Political Philosophy. While philosophy's concern with religion had grown during Hellenistic and Roman times, its interest in politics had dwindled. There had been a brief golden age of political philosophy in fourth century B.C.E. Athens. Plato had written two major works on political philosophy – the *Republic* and the *Laws* – and Aristotle had written one, the *Politics.* Several other of Plato's dialogues treat political themes. The *Republic* and the *Laws* are both attempts to design an ideal city, and Plato's disastrous venture into Sicilian politics,

[13] *Acts* 17.34. Pseudo-Dionysius, *Corpus Dionysiacum*, 2 vols., ed. B. R. Suchla, G. Heil, and A. M. Ritter (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991); idem, *The Complete Works,* trans. Colm Luibhéid and Paul Rorem (The Classics of Western Spirituality; Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1987). They consist of four short books – *The Divine Names, The Celestial Hierarchy, The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy,* and *Mystical Theology* – and ten letters. They were written in the fifth or sixth century.

[14] In addition to the works cited already, see Edward Grant, *The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages: Their Religious, Institutional, and Intellectual Contexts* (Cambridge History of Science; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 1–17, on the relations among early Christianity, pagan thought, and science.

described in dismal detail in his *Seventh Epistle*, was an attempt to put his political ideas into practice. The *Politics* of the more worldly Aristotle is an analysis of political life and a taxonomy of the possible types of political regime. Both men focused on the city, the *polis,* because that was the dominant political form of ancient Greece. Almost immediately, however, this form of political organization fell into irrelevance when Aristotle's pupil, Alexander of Macedon, conquered all of Greece, most of the known world, and significant parts of the unknown world. The succeeding Hellenistic age and the Roman period that followed it were ages of kingdoms and empires. It would be two millennia before democracy reemerged as a political system, and even oligarchies were extremely rare. Not only did the dominance of monarchical empires make Aristotle's careful classification of kinds of regimes into a historical curiosity, but also the whole arena of the political became largely irrelevant for the philosopher. Apart from members of the court, few people could play any meaningful political role, and the notion that the state could be a means to develop virtue was frankly ludicrous. Ethics flourished as a philosophical discipline, but the only truly great work of political thought produced in the Hellenistic or Roman periods was Saint Augustine's *City of God,* and its politics were theological. The *Republic* came to be valued mostly as a work of metaphysics and for its allegorical myths, and the *Laws* and the *Politics* were little read for more than a thousand years.

THE FIRST ENCOUNTER OF ISLAM WITH PHILOSOPHY: FROM THE SYRIANS TO KINDĪ

The first great exponent of Greek philosophy in Islam was Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb al-Kindī (ca. 801–66), an Arab aristocrat in Baghdad who was deeply involved with the translation movement.[15] To judge by his surviving books and the titles of the many others now lost, Kindī wielded

[15] Peter Adamson, "Al-Kindī and the Reception of Greek Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy,* pp. 32–51; idem, *Al-Kindī* (Great Medieval Thinkers; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); George N. Atiyeh, *Al-Kindi: The Philosopher of the Arabs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968; reprinted several times; Alfred Ivry, *Al-Kindi's Metaphysics* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1974). Though there have been many studies of Kindī, his works, and aspects of his thought, including some particularly good work on the translations that were his source for Aristotelian and Neoplatonic

considerable expertise in science and philosophy. In attempting to construct a philosophical theology, Kindī did not have much to work with. By his time, Islamic thought had developed to a considerable degree but not, for the most part, in ways that were helpful to a philosopher's project. The Qur'ānic images of God and prophecy, the fundamental issues for a Muslim attempting to construct a philosophy of religion, were vivid but not philosophical or theological. God in the Qur'ān, like God in the Bible, was both transcendent and personal, a figure of surpassing might, mercy, knowledge, and care for the beings of the world He had created, but He was not defined or analyzed in a rigorous theological or philosophical manner. There was much that was suggestive in the Qur'ānic account of God, particularly the attributes or names by which He was described, but it was unclear how He should be explained in terms of the concepts used in the philosophical tradition. The situation with prophecy was even more difficult. The overarching image used to explain prophecy in the Qur'ān and in early Islamic thought was the messenger, *rasūl,* a very ordinary concept, as the old Arabic dictionaries make clear: someone who carries a message from one person to another, as from a lover to his beloved.[16] Muḥammad was simply a human being who had been told something by God – the message of Islam and the words of its most important embodiment, the Qur'ān – and who then faithfully conveyed this message to his people. Prophecy was simply the process by which God "taught man what he knew not" by means of a chosen human being.[17]

From a philosopher's point of view, the Qur'ān had left many critical questions unanswered: Was God part of the universe, as Aristotle and the *Timaeus* would seem to indicate, or was He beyond being, as the Neoplatonists would have it? What sorts of things did God teach through prophecy that man did not know? Were they things that man could

philosophy, the only relatively comprehensive synthetic and philosophically sophisticated study of his thought is Peter Adamson, *Al-Kindī* (Great Medieval Thinkers; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[16] Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 8 vols. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863–1893; often reprinted), 3.1081, quoting a pre-Islamic poet of the Ḥudhayl tribe: "Had there been in my heart as much as a nail-paring of love for another than thee, my messengers had come to her."

[17] Qur'ān 96.5; on Muḥammad as a man charged with a message, see 3.144, 5.99, and many other passages.

know on his own but through ignorance or neglect had not figured out for himself, or were they things that in principle were beyond human knowledge and that thus could only be known by revelation? What was it about prophets that made them prophets? Did they differ from other human beings in some fundamental way, and if so, how? And how were scriptures, and particularly the Qur'ān, to be understood? Obviously, not everything in the Qur'ān could be taken literally, but how, then, were its symbols to be interpreted, and what in the Qur'ān could be understood symbolically? And what of the practical teachings of prophetic religion, the specific laws and rituals? How did they relate to human law and rational ethics?

In Kindī's day, Islamic theology had begun to address such issues, but not yet in ways that philosophers would find satisfactory. As we have seen, a bitter theological debate was raging about the nature of God's attributes, especially the more anthropomorphic ones, like God's hand or footstool, between literalists associated with hadith scholars like Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and the more rationalist Muʿtazilite theologians. In theology, a compromise was worked out by Ashʿarī that inclined more to the beliefs of the literalists. Likewise, there was a bitter debate about the nature of the Qur'ān, with Ashʿarī eventually coming down on the side of those who had staunchly defended the puzzling doctrine that the Qur'ān was uncreated. The other great debates of early Islamic theology – the questions of the imamate, leadership of the community after Muḥammad and the question of free will and predestination – did not greatly concern the philosophers. As for the practical teachings of Islam, that was the territory of the legal scholars, the *fuqahā'*, who for the most part showed little interest in the question of the rational grounds of the Divine Law, being content to consider it the will of God.

For a philosopher, the critical issues were the relation of God to the universe – that is, whether or not He was a knowable part of being; whether the content of revelation could be known independently by reason; and the psychology of prophethood. Kindī made little more than a start on these issues. He did begin the characteristic Muslim philosophical approach to religion, holding that the truths attained by philosophy and revelation were essentially the same and, therefore, that the Qur'ān could be interpreted in the light of philosophical doctrine. He seems to have wavered in his approach, sometimes describing revelation

and philosophy as different methods of reaching the same truth and sometimes conceding that revelation can attain truths inaccessible to philosophy, thus placing theology above philosophy.[18]

At this point, we must mention another attempt to integrate philosophy with Islam: that of the Fatimid Isma'ilis. They were an esoteric Shi'ite sect that emerged into history at the beginning of the tenth century with the establishment of a regime in North Africa. For several centuries, their center was Egypt, from which they ran an aggressive campaign of religious propaganda in the central and eastern Islamic lands. Early Isma'ili thought had come out of a highly mythological strain of Shi'ism, and the Isma'ili theologians of the Fatimid period had seen fit to recast this exotic doctrine in the form of a Neoplatonic philosophy.[19] By and large, however, this philosophical tradition did not have a great deal of influence on non-Isma'ili thought, although it is interesting to note that the father of Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) had Isma'ili connections. The exception was a philosophical encyclopedia, *The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity,* which has affinities with early Isma'ili thought but cannot be shown definitely to be a product of the Isma'ilis themselves.[20]

FĀRĀBĪ'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī was born around 870, at about the time Kindī died and the translation movement was drawing to a close. He died in 950,

[18] Ivry, *Al-Kindi's Metaphysics*, pp. 28–29, citing a passage from Kindī's *On the Number of the Books of Aristotle;* Adamson, "Al-Kindī," in Adamson and Taylor, *Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy,* pp. 46–48; Atiyeh, *Al-Kindi*, pp. 16–29; Adamson, *Al-Kindī*, pp. 42–45.

[19] Paul E. Walker, "The Ismā'īlīs," in Adamson and Taylor, *Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy,* pp. 72–91. On the Isma'ilis in general, see Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). An impressive number of Isma'ili philosophical texts have been published in translation, most by the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London, as well as studies of a number of major Isma'ili philosophers. On early Isma'ili intellectual life in general, see Heinz Halm, *The Fatimids and their Traditions of Learning* (Ismaili Heritage Series 2; London: I. B. Tauris and the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 1997).

[20] Walker, "The Ismā'īlīs," in Adamson and Taylor, The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy, p. 77. On this work in general, see Godefroid de Callataÿ, *Ikhwan al-Safa': A Brotherhood of Idealists on the Fringe of Orthodox Islam* (Makers of the Muslim World; Oxford: One World, 2005) and Ian Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists: An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā')*, 2nd ed. (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002).

forty years before the birth of Ibn Sīnā. He was best known for his expertise in logic and music and for a puzzling political philosophy, the details and significance of which are still matters of intense controversy. On the one hand, readers notice the precision of his writing, the exacting care with which each word is chosen and each sentence structured. The style is nearly mathematical and utterly clear. On the other hand, the more closely his political works are studied, the more curious they seem, with shifts of emphasis in the way the same subject is discussed in different works, seeming contradictions left unexplained, and assertions made that do not seem to fit with other works.[21] For example, in his *Reconciliation of the Philosophies of Plato and Aristotle* Fārābī cites the so-called *Theology of Aristotle* to prove a point about Aristotle's agreement with Plato, yet he does not list the *Theology* among Aristotle's works in his *Philosophy of Aristotle*.[22] With the possible exception of Ibn Rushd (Averroes), Fārābī, with his expert knowledge of Aristotle's works, was the Islamic philosopher most likely to know that the *Theology* was not authentically Aristotelian – it is actually an adaptation of selections from Plotinus – and its absence from the *Philosophy of Aristotle* tends to confirm that he did know it was not authentic. Why, then, did he cite it as

[21] Recent interpretations of Fārābī's political writings include Majid Fakhry, *Al-Fārābi, Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism: His Life, Works and Influence* (Great Islamic Thinkers; Oxford: OneWorld, 2002); Miriam Galston, *Politics and Excellence: The Political Philosophy of Alfarabi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Muhsin S. Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundations of Islamic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Joshua Parens, *An Islamic Philosophy of Virtuous Religions: Introducing Alfarabi* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006); and *idem*, *Metaphysics as Rhetoric: Alfarabi's Summary of Plato's "Laws"* (SUNY Series in Middle Eastern Studies; Albany: SUNY Press, 1995). English readers are unusually fortunate in that most of Fārābī's political works are available in good English translations. More general works on Islamic political thought include Charles E. Butterworth, ed., *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Muhsin S. Mahdi* (Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs 27; Cambridge: Harvard University Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1992); Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); and Erwin I. J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam: An Introductory Outline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962),

[22] Fārābī, "The Harmonization of the Two Opinions of the Two Sages: Plato the Divine and Aristotle," in *Alfarabi: The Political Writings*, trans. Charles E. Butterworth (Agora Editions; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 155–6, 161, 164; idem, "The Philosophy of Aristotle, the Parts of his Philosophy, the Ranks of Order of its Parts, the Position from which He Started, and the One He Reached," in *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, rev. ed.; trans. Muhsin Mahdi (Agora Editions; Cornell University Press, 1969).

a genuine work of Aristotle? Muslim philosophers seem to have known there was something strange about Fārābī's political works, so they do not often cite them.

Recent scholarship on Fārābī's political thought has been dominated by the influence of the great historian of political philosophy, Leo Strauss. Strauss made a famous argument in an essay, "Persecution and the Art of Writing," that thinkers in cultures dominated by an oppressive ideological regime often write in ways that seem inoffensive to the casual reader but whose true and more dangerous meanings can be discovered by the intelligent and thoughtful reader.[23] Fārābī stated that this was the case for Plato, whom he compared to the ascetic sage who escaped from the city of a tyrannical king by pretending to be a drunken vagabond pretending to be that sage. In this way, he was able to leave the city without interference. "The wise Plato," Fārābī tells us, "did not feel free to reveal and uncover the sciences for all men. Therefore he followed the practice of using symbols, riddles, obscurity, and difficulty, so that science would not fall into the hands of those who do not deserve it and be deformed, or into the hands of one who does not know its worth or who uses it improperly."[24]

If Strauss was correct, then Fārābī must be read with the greatest of care, because a given passage may well not represent his considered views at all but may be deliberately misleading, or intended for a general rather than philosophical audience, or be understandable only on the basis of the unstated conclusions of premises that he may have given elsewhere, or be misleading in some other way. As Muhsin Mahdi, a student of Strauss and the most important of the Straussian interpreters of Fārābī, observed, the title of his famous book, *The Principles of the Opinions of the people of the Virtuous City,* does not imply that it

[23] Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1952), particularly chap. 1, which discusses the role of Fārābī in shaping Strauss' thought, and chap. 2, which lays out his theory of "exoteric books" and "writing between the lines"; idem, "On a Forgotten Kind of Writing," in *What Is Political Philosophy? and Other Studies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 221–32.

[24] Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi, ed., *Medieval Political Philosophy*, trans. Muhsin Mahdi (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963) pp. 84–85, based on Francesco Gabrieli, ed., *Alfarabius Compendium Legum Platonis* (London: Warburg Institute 1952), p. 4. For Strauss' view, see his "How Fārābī Read Plato's *Laws,*" *Mélanges Louis Massignon*, vol. 3 (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1957), pp. 319–44; reprinted in *Islamic Philosophy*, vol. 4, pp. 297–322.

contains Fārābī's own opinions or that these opinions are identical with philosophical truth, only that they are opinions appropriately held by the inhabitants of a virtuous city.[25] The difficulties of constructing a comprehensive Straussian interpretation of Fārābī's system are obvious, but the alternatives are not attractive either – constructing a theory of Fārābī's philosophical development in which the various works can be seen as representing different stages or simply admitting defeat and acknowledging gross contradictions in his philosophy.

Whatever the difficulties in understanding the nuances of Fārābī's thought, the situation is clear enough in its overall outlines, particularly in the light of Fārābī's followers in the western Islamic lands – Ibn Bājja, Ibn Ṭufayl, Ibn Rushd, and the great Jewish scholar, Maimonides, each of whom has left Fārābian expositions of the philosophy of religion. In particular, we have Fārābī's own *Book of Religion,* which is a sort of programmatic key to his philosophy of politics and religion.[26]

When seeking to develop a philosophy of religion or a religious philosophy, a philosopher's first decision is which branch of philosophy to place it in. If we think that religion tells us what to believe and how to behave, with the behavior grounded in the belief, it would seem natural to make metaphysics the point of contact between philosophy and religion, with ethics playing a subordinate role by grounding religious laws and practices. Perhaps religion teaches the same things as metaphysics, or some of the same things, or the same things expressed differently for a different audience. Perhaps what the philosopher knows by reason, the prophet knows by revelation. Another possibility is that religion and revelation tell us things that are beyond the power of reason. In Christian thought, this view is associated with such philosopher-theologians as Thomas Aquinas and the "handmaid theory," the doctrine that philosophy can assist theology but cannot discover everything known through revelation. Christian examples of truths knowable only through revelation would include such doctrines as the transubstantiation of the host in the Eucharist. Although this approach can be used to clarify the

[25] Muhsin S. Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundations of Islamic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 156–7.

[26] Muhsin Mahdi, ed., *Alfarabi's Book of Religion and Related Texts* (Beirut: Dar El-Machreq, 1965), pp. 43–76; Charles E. Butterworth, trans., *Alfarabi: The Political Writings,* pp. 93–113. Butterworth is a leading advocate of the Straussian approach to Fārābī.

relationships between specific religious and philosophical doctrines, it does not in itself provide a particularly good framework for explaining the phenomenon of religion itself. After all, why should religion and philosophy overlap in this way, and indeed, why should there be such a thing as religion at all, if truth is accessible to unaided reason, or even if it is not? Since the rise of revealed religions, philosophers had been so concerned with the relation of philosophical truth with the doctrines claimed as truth by religion that they had rarely stopped to ask themselves this question. Fārābī's particular genius was that he thought to do so.

Fārābī identified revealed religions with the city-state of the ancient political philosophers. This made sense both from the point of view of ancient political philosophy and from the point of view of Islam, although his habit of referring to the "virtuous city" when he obviously meant "true religion" must have sounded odd to medieval Islamic ears. Ancient political philosophy discussed the nature and varieties of constitutions, the founding laws of ancient cities. Their authors were often seen as divine or were divinized after their deaths. Fārābī's summary of Plato's *Laws* mentions that the laws of the city in question were laid down by a god.[27] The laws of the ancient cities were, moreover, similar in scope to Islamic law and usually contained provisions about a state religion. Religion was very much within the mandate of the ancient lawgiver. Muslims, too, commonly referred to their religion as a *sharīʿa,* a divine law, and referred to their community as an *umma*, nation. (Fārābī used the term *milla,* religious community.) This approach had the powerful advantage of leaving aside the question of the truth or falsity of particular religions, something harder to do if the analytical categories are complexes of beliefs. Rightly guided and erring religions are religious communities and can be analyzed as a class.

This choice of category naturally shaped Fārābī's analysis. The questions relating to philosophy of religion had become political questions. Laws and legislated beliefs were to be analyzed in terms of their role in furthering the goals of the community, not their inherent truth or falsehood. That role in turn was seen in the context of the well-being of the

[27] Fārābī, *Plato's Laws*, 1.1, trans. Muhsin Mahdi, in Lerner and Mahdi, *Medieval Political Philosophy,* p. 85.

community as a whole, not personal salvation. The notion of the true faith is replaced by the virtuous city, an easier concept to deal with.

Fārābī, having made philosophy of religion a branch of political philosophy, went on to work out the implications of his theory. First, religion is subsumed within philosophy as a part of political philosophy. Second, the content of religion, in terms of both doctrine and law, is to be understood as the product of reason, and therefore God Himself is to be understood in terms of intellect. Third, the phenomenon of prophecy is to be addressed within the discipline of philosophical psychology. Fourth, scripture is to be understood as a statement of philosophical truths suitable for the understanding of ordinary people. Fifth, the disciplines expounding religious doctrine and law – Kalām and *fiqh*, in Islamic terms – are subordinate to philosophy.

To briefly summarize Fārābī's theory, a virtuous religion is a system of beliefs and laws given by a lawgiver who has an unusual intellectual and imaginative gift for grasping rational truths intuitively and expressing them symbolically in a way that is comprehensible and convincing to those normally unable to understand unvarnished statements of philosophical doctrines. Religion thus is an expression of philosophical truth suitable for the understandings and circumstances of a particular community. Therefore, when the expressions of the scripture given by the lawgiver are not in literal accordance with philosophical truth, someone capable of philosophical understanding should interpret them allegorically to bring them into accordance with philosophical truth. The theologian, however, is responsible for defending the lawgiver's teachings and does not necessarily need to understand that, in many cases, the lawgiver's expressions are allegorical. The ordinary people, in any case, should not be told this, because to do so will weaken their faith without advancing their understanding. The jurist does something analogous in terms of carrying on the original intention of the lawgiver after his death. In any case, the philosopher will understand the philosophical truths beyond the doctrines defended by the theologian and the laws expounded by the jurists, but as a general matter, he should keep his superior understanding to himself lest it disturb those incapable of understanding philosophical truth.

Although Fārābī influenced Ibn Sīnā in eleventh-century Iran, his theory was most influential in Islamic Spain, with its influence reaching

a peak in four twelfth-century philosophers: Ibn Bājja (Avempace to the Latins), Ibn Ṭufayl, Ibn Rushd (Averroes), and Maimonides, the great Jewish scholar. Ibn Khaldūn, the fourteenth-century sociologist and historian, may be considered the last great representative of the school. All were men of political experience and philosophical sophistication, and each in his way was concerned with the problem of accommodating religion within a broadly Aristotelian philosophical framework. In what follows, I compare the decidedly confusing complex of Fārābī's political writings with two classic statements of Fārābian philosophy of religion, Ibn Rushd's *Decisive Treatise* and Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān.*

Ibn Rushd's text is probably the only legal opinion to ever establish itself as a philosophical classic.[28] Ibn Rushd was a practicing Islamic jurist, qualified to issue fatwas, legal opinions; he was actually better known among Muslims for his large book on the disagreements among the Islamic legal schools. The *Decisive Treatise* is a legal brief on whether the study of logic and philosophy is allowed or prohibited by Islamic law and what conditions might be attached to it. We should not be surprised to find that this study is obligatory, although, in good lawyerly fashion, he attaches restrictions. In the course of his legal analysis, he expounds his view of the relationship between religion and philosophy and between philosophy and dogmatic theology, Kalām.

Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* is a philosophical novel in which Fārābī's theory of the relation between philosophy and religion is acted out.[29] The hero, Ḥayy, is raised on a desert island without contact with other human beings. Through sheer intelligence and without language, he is able to deduce the nature of the universe and its component parts.

[28] Ibn Rushd, *Faṣl al-Maqāl,* in *The Book of the Decisive Treatise Determining the Connection between the Law and Wisdom and Epistle Dedicatory*, ed. and trans. Charles Butterworth (Islamic Translation Series; Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2001); George F. Hourani, trans., *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy* (E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series; London: Luzac, 1976); reprinted in Lerner and Mahdi, *Medieval Political Philosophy,* pp. 163–86.

[29] Léon Gauthier, ed., *Hayy ben Yaqdhân, roman philosophique d'Ibn Thofail, Texte arabe et traduction francaise*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1936); Lenn Evan Goodman, trans., *Ibn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzān: A Philosophical Tale*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles: Gee Tee Bee, 1996); Jim Colville, trans., *Two Andalucian Philosophers,* pp. 3–72. More adventurous readers might be interested in the three early English translations: George Keith in 1674, George Ashwell in 1686, and George Ockley in 1708. Their translations related to the interest of Quakers and others in the possibility of sound faith through individual inspiration.

When he comes in contact with another human being, a mystic who came from a neighboring island to meditate in solitude, he learns about religion. Finding religion to be rational truth oddly mixed with fables and metaphors, Ḥayy persuades his new friend to take him back to his home island so he can teach the people a purified form of religion based on his own, more abstract philosophy. The missionary voyage is not a success; Ḥayy realizes he must repudiate his public assertions; and he and his friend retreat to their desert island to end their lives in contemplation.

Religion Subsumed within Philosophy

One of Fārābī's most popular works is a little treatise entitled *The Enumeration of the Sciences,* written, so he tells us, for the student wishing to learn a science or to learn the rank of a science, for the person who needs to test another's knowledge of the sciences, or simply for one who wishes to appear knowledgeable.[30] Fārābī's organization of the sciences did not become normative in either Islamic philosophy or Islamic scholarship generally, being supplanted by the superior organization of a similar work by Ibn Sīnā, but it is the starting point for understanding how he conceived the relationship between religion and philosophy.

Fārābī divided the sciences into five classes: language, logic, mathematics, physics and metaphysics, and politics. He explains that political science deals with voluntary actions, the moral dispositions that lead to them, and the ends for which they are pursued. Some are pursued for the sake of ultimate happiness, whereas others are pursued for the sake of that which is imagined to be happiness. The true happiness pertains to the life to come. These actions leading to true or imagined happiness are established by a rulership that leads to them.[31] The reference to the goal of the virtuous regime being happiness in another life establishes a link

[30] Fārābī, *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm,* ed. 'Uthmān Muḥammad Amīn, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Anglū al-Miṣrīya, 1968). The fifth chapter on political philosophy has been translated twice: by Fauzi M. Najjar, "Alfarabi, *The Enumeration of the Sciences,*" in Lerner and Mahdi, pp. 22–30, and Charles Butterworth, "Enumeration of the Sciences," in Charles Butterworth, trans., *Alfarabi, The Political Writings:* Selected Aphorisms *and Other Texts* (Agora Editions: Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001). 'Uthmān Amīn, ed., *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm*, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Anglū al-Miṣrīya, 1968). The text is analyzed with great precision in Mahdi, *Alfarabi,* pp. 65–96.

[31] Fārābī, *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm,* ed. Amīn, pp. 64–66; trans. Lerner and Mahdi, p. 24; Butterworth, trans., *Alfarabi: The Political Writings*, pp. 76–77.

with religion; this is confirmed by the definition of religion in Fārābī's *Book of Religion:*

"Religion" (*al-milla*) is opinions and actions laid down and determined by conditions and that are decreed for the group by their first leader, who intends to acquire by their observance of them some specific goal for them or by them. The group may be a tribe, a city, a region, a great nation (*umma),* or many nations. If their first leader is virtuous and his leadership is virtuous in reality, then what he intends to acquire by what he decrees is the ultimate happiness and that religion is a virtuous religion.[32]

Later, he remarks that *milla* and *dīn,* the usual Islamic term for religion, are almost synonymous, as are *sharīʿa,* divine law, and *sunna,* religious custom, and that because legislated opinions can also be considered part of the *sharīʿa,* all four terms can be considered synonymous.[33] There is an obvious connection of both the discussion of political science in *The Enumeration of the Sciences* and the beginning of *The Book of Religion* to the opening of Aristotle's analysis of happiness and political regimes at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics.*

Religion, then, is a branch of philosophy that presumes to be able to analyze the bases of the beliefs and laws of religious communities. Fārābī says this directly in *The Book of Religion:*

The practical things in religion are those whose universals are in practical philosophy. . . . The theoretical opinions that are in religion have their demonstrative proofs in theoretical philosophy and are taken in religion without demonstrative proofs.

Therefore, the two parts of which religion consists [that is, opinions and actions] are subordinate to philosophy. . . . Therefore, the kingly craft responsible for what the virtuous religion consists of is subordinate to philosophy.[34]

This point is confirmed in the two texts I cite as corroboration of the nature of the Fārābian synthesis, Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* and Ibn Rushd's *Decisive Treatise.*

[32] *Alfarabi's Book of Religion* (my translation), p. 43; cf. Butterworth, trans., in *Alfarabi: The Political Writings,* p. 93.

[33] Butterworth, trans., *Alfarabi's Book of Religion,* p. 46; in *Alfarabi: The Political Writings,* p. 96.

[34] Butterworth, trans., *Alfarabi's Book of Religion,* pp. 46–47; in *Alfarabi: The Political Writings,* pp. 97–98.

In the former, when Absāl, the aspiring hermit from a neighboring island, befriends Ḥayy and teaches him his language, Ḥayy tells him about his philosophical discoveries. "Absāl had no doubt that all the traditions of his religion about God, his angels, bibles and prophets, Judgment Day, Heaven and Hell were symbolic representations of these things that Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān had seen for himself. The eyes of his heart were unclosed. His mind caught fire. Reason and tradition were at one within him."[35] Although Absāl had seen in Ḥayy's philosophy the true meaning of the religious symbols of his religion, Ḥayy saw these symbols as a faithful description of supernatural reality but also as a barrier that deluded the followers of that religion into understanding its teachings in corporeal ways. The symbols were true insofar as they corresponded to philosophical truth, but not otherwise. Likewise, Ibn Rushd makes clear that it is demonstration – that is, philosophy – by which religious truths can be understood completely.[36] If the conclusions of demonstrative philosophy differ from the apparent meaning of scripture, then the scriptural passages must be interpreted allegorically, an interpretive method whose legitimacy is universally accepted by Islamic scholars.[37]

God as Intellect and the Intelligibility of God

A correlate of this view of the relation between philosophy and religion is the intelligibility of the supernatural – that God must be or must act through mind or intellect and be knowable by concepts. This represents an Aristotelian standpoint between two positions that put God beyond reason: on the one hand, a notion of an utterly unintelligible first principle such as a more absolute interpretation of Plotinus' One beyond being or Ibn ʿArabī's Absolute, and on the other, the Ashʿarite view of a God who is in no sense bound by reason. This is a position that the philosophers

[35] Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān,* ed. Gautier, p. 144; trans. Goodman, p. 160.

[36] This is the very first point treated in Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica,* Part One, Q. 1, Art. 1, Obj. 1: "It seems that, besides philosophical science, we have no need of any further knowledge. For man should not seek to know what is above reason: *Seek not the things that are too high for thee* (Ecclus. iii.22). But whatever is not above reason is fully treated of in philosophical science. Therefore any other knowledge besides philosophical science is superfluous." Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1920), vol. 1, pp. 1–2. Aquinas, of course, rejects the doctrine of the self-sufficiency of philosophy.

[37] Butterworth, ed. and trans., Averroes, *Faṣl al-Maqāl,* pp. 3–4, 8–10.

scarcely think to argue for, because it is a fundamental presumption of their enterprise that the universe can be grasped by reason.

For Fārābī, God, the first principle of the universe, is mind or intellect thinking itself, a notion with obvious Aristotelian roots. Moreover, the first emanation from this entity is also an intellect, which knows both itself and God and is the source of all beings below it. Below is a chain of other intellects associated with the celestial spheres, going down to the Active Intellect, which is associated with the sphere of the moon and is the cause of human intellection. Not only is God intellect, but He is also most knowable in terms of philosophical concepts. Consider the opening of Fārābī's *The Principles of the Opinions of the people of the Virtuous City*:

> The first existent is the first cause of the existence of all other beings. It is free of all sorts of deficiency. . . . Its existence is the best and most primal existence, and no other existence can be better or prior to its existence. . . . Its existence and substance cannot be tainted by any non-being or contradiction, these being characteristic of what is below the sphere of the Moon. . . . Its existence has no end or purpose. . . . [38]

This kind of analysis of reaches an elegant peak in Ibn Sīnā's account of God as the utterly simple entity whose essence it is to exist, the Necessary Existent. The correlate is that the universe and God's activity within it are knowable by rational, philosophical means. This is very different from the Qur'ānic account, in which God is a personality whose actions are ultimately inscrutable. It is also very different from the Absolute of Ibn ʿArabī, the Sufi theologian, which can be comprehended only by metaphor and ultimately is inaccessible even to mystical experience.[39]

This point is vividly illustrated by Ibn Ṭufayl. Ḥayy is able to ascertain almost all the basic religious truths about the universe either by his unaided reason or by the mystical insight acquired from practices to which reason led him – a sort of self-induced revelation. The main exception was his inability to deduce whether or not the universe had a

[38] Al-Fārābī, *Mabādi' Ārā' Ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila,* ed. Albayr Naṣīrī Nādir (Beirut: al-Mashriq, 1968), pp. 37–38; Richard Walzer, ed. and trans., *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 56–59. For a summary, see Fakhry, *Al-Fārābī,* pp. 77–83, who points out that this is a break with the Neoplatonic notion of the One as beyond intellect.

[39] Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 23–35.

beginning in time. He also could not infer the specific religious practices laid down by the prophet on the neighboring island, but these were matters of practical wisdom, to be acquired only by association with society.[40] Ḥayy could deduce these matters because, for Fārābī and his school, God is mind, and His intellection governs the creation and ordering of the universe – and, as we will see, our knowledge of it.

Prophecy as a Matter of Psychology

The Islamic philosophical tradition, and the Fārābians in particular, tended to explain prophecy in terms of psychology and epistemology. Their theory goes back to the Aristotelian epistemology of *De Anima* 3.4–5 as it was understood by the Late Antique commentators.[41] The basic problem in theory of knowledge for Aristotle and his followers was how we can move from perception of individuals to necessary knowledge of abstract intelligibles. The mathematical concept of the triangle, for example, differs from any individual material triangle, so how can we know the properties of a mathematical triangle when we have never encountered anything other than specific, imperfect triangles? Likewise, natural kinds – Aristotle was usually thinking of biological species – are known through perception of individual members of the species, yet the concept of the species has a universality and necessity that no single perception of an individual member of that species possesses. Aristotle and his followers thought that we recognize the ideas of triangle and horse after coming into contact with particular triangles and horses. These concepts are more than simply the average of the individuals; they are realities. Thus, our perception of individuals is not a sufficient cause for our knowledge of the universal. A residual influence of Plato's theory of Forms is obvious. In yet another trace of Plato, true knowledge is only of universals, not of individuals. The theory is an awkward synthesis of Aristotle's temperamental empiricism, Plato's idealism, and notions of science drawn from the axiomatic methods of mathematics, particularly

[40] Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān,* ed. Gautier, pp. 81–88, 145–6; trans. Goodman, pp. 130–4, 160–1.

[41] Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

geometry. There are many difficulties with the theory, but Aristotelians labored, century after century, to solve them.

Muslim Aristotelians usually maintained that perceptions of individuals are only the occasion for the occurrence of the universal concepts in the rational mind; the intelligibles are actually emanated from the Active Intellect upon a human intellect that has been prepared for their reception by perception of the individual instances of the universal. The Active Intellect is commonly identified with the lowest of the celestial intellects, that of the moon, but because the intelligibles are thought to descend from higher to lower intellects, for all practical purposes, we acquire our knowledge of universals through mediated contact with the mind of God. As our mind becomes more practiced in intellection, this process happens more readily.[42]

The prophet, according to Fārābī and the philosophers influenced by him, is a human being whose mind is uniquely capable of this process, who receives all the intelligibles without effort, more or less in a single rush of intuition. Unlike the philosopher, the prophet also possesses a particularly strong imaginative faculty, which enables him to express the intelligibles in imaginative forms understandable to all levels of men. Finally, Fārābī also attributes a level of practical wisdom to the prophet, but in general it is the epistemological side of prophethood that receives the most attention in Fārābī's school.[43]

[42] For Fārābī's theory of intellect, see his *Risāla fī 'l-'Aql,* ed. Maurice Bouyges (Bibliotheca Arabic Scholasticorum, série arabe 8.1; Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1938); partial trans. by Arthur Hyman in *Philosophy in the Middle Ages: The Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Traditions,* 2nd ed., ed. Arthur Hyman and James J. Walsh (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1973), pp. 211–21. The theory is worked out in greater detail and clarity by Ibn Sīnā; see Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā: al-Ṭabī'īyāt* 6: *al-Nafs,* ed. George Anawati and Sa'īd Zāyid (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-'Arabīya: al-Hay'a al-Miṣrīya al-'Āmma li'l-Kitāb, 1960 [1963]), pp. 181–220; *idem, Kitāb al-Najāt,* ed. Majid Fakhry (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, 1405/1985), pp. 202–22; Fazlur Rahman, ed., *Avicenna's De Anima (Arabic Text)* [*Kitāb al-Shifā': al-Ṭabī'īyāt: al-Nafs]* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 45–51; *idem,* trans., *Avicenna's Psychology: An English Translation of* Kitāb al-Najāt, *Book II, Chapter VI . . .* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), pp. 32–56.

[43] Fārābī's theory of prophecy is scattered through his works; see the summary by Ibrahim Madkour, "Al-Fārābī," in M. M. Sharif, ed., *A History of Muslim Philosophy* (Lahore: Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1963), pp. 461–7, and Mahdi, *Alfarabi,* pp. 57–58, 131–9, and *passim.* The Fārābian view of prophecy is more clearly laid out by Ibn Sīnā; see, for example, James Winston Morris, "The Philosopher-Prophet in Avicenna's Political Philosophy," in Charles Butterworth, ed., *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy* (Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs 27; Cambridge: Harvard Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1992), pp. 152–98; Ibn Sīnā, *al-Nafs,* pp. 208–20; *al-Shifā', al-Ilāhīyāt,*

This implies that the prophet is a kind of philosopher, distinguished by the natural talents of near-instantaneous grasp of the intelligibles and a powerful faculty of imagination.[44] This is very different from the usual Islamic view of the prophet as someone given a message from God, not least because prophecy becomes a natural rather than a supernatural phenomenon.

The Symbolic Interpretation of Scripture

In the Fārābian view, scripture is essentially an imaginative rhetorical phenomenon, a way in which philosophical truths are cast in a form that will be convincing to people without the ability to follow philosophical argument.[45] Ḥayy, as we have seen, found this puzzling, failing to understand why the prophet, who obviously knew philosophical truth in its pure form, chose to express it in terms of corporeal symbols.[46] Ibn Rushd discusses this difficulty carefully, distinguishing what must be taken literally by everyone from what must be understood symbolically, and explaining that when the literal meaning of scripture is incompatible with the truth as demonstrated philosophically, the philosophical truth must prevail. The literal text of scripture must then be "interpreted" (*ta'wīl*), although this interpretation will be known only to those of the "demonstrative class." Demonstration – philosophical proof – is the ultimate standard by which the meaning of scripture is to be understood, although most people should not be told this lest their faith in the truth of scripture and revelation be shaken.[47]

This implies an esoteric doctrine in which the true meaning of religion is known only to those capable of grasping it as philosophy.

ed. George Anawati and George Zāyid (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-'Āmma li-Shu'ūn al-Maṭābi' al-Amīrīya, 1380/1960) 10.2–3, pp. 441–6; Michael E. Marmura, ed. and trans., *The Metaphysics of the Healing* (Islamic Translation Series; Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), pp. 364–9. See also Richard Walzer, "Al-Fārābī's Theory of Prophecy and Divination," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77 (1957), pp. 142–8.

[44] See, for example, Mahdi, *Alfarabi,* pp. 147–70; Fakhry, *Al-Fārābī,* pp. 88–91; Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt,* pp. 205–06; Rahman, trans., *Avicenna's Psychology,* pp. 33–34.

[45] Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy,* pp. 133–4.

[46] Gautier, ed., pp. 145–5; Goodman, trans., p. 161; Colville, trans., pp. 61–62.

[47] Ibn Rushd, *Faṣl al-Maqāl,* ed. and trans. Butterworth, pp. 26–32.

The Role of Fiqh *and Kalām*

A correlate of Fārābī's view of the relation between philosophy and religious teachings and between philosophical explication and scripture is that theologians and religious jurists are subordinate to philosophers.[48] This is grounded, among other things, in the way he reorganized the disciplines of logic into nine disciplines: four formal, dealing with terms, categories, propositions, and syllogism; and five substantive, dealing with – in decreasing order of authority – scientific or philosophical demonstration, dialectic, rhetoric, poetics, and sophistry. A philosopher is the one who knows things demonstratively, which is to say that he knows them through valid proofs based on premises known with certainty to be true. Dialectic, on the other hand, is argument from premises that are accepted as true by the other party, whether or not they can be known to be true with certainty. In this case, such premises would be drawn from scripture or generally accepted belief. Rhetoric has an even lower standard of proof, requiring only that the argument sway the listener and implying no special expertise in the person being convinced.[49] Theologians are those who use dialectic to understand religion and use dialectic and rhetoric to defend it; hence, the curious Islamic term for dogmatic theology: Kalām, which literally means speech or argument. Jurists occupy a somewhat analogous position in relation to the laws laid down by the founder of the community; it is their job to explicate the law in such a way that the founder's intentions are preserved intact as time passes and new types of case arise. They need to be able to reason correctly from the evidences of the founder's intentions, but they do not need to understand the universals that lie beyond the particulars of the legislation they interpret, which philosophers can do. Thus, theologians and jurists are both subordinate to the philosopher.[50] In his legal judgment, Ibn Rushd lays out careful rules delimiting the scope of theologians and jurists. It is possible for a theologian or jurist to also be a philosopher. Ibn Rushd himself was a qualified jurist, as witnessed by the fact that he

[48] Al-Fārābī, *Iḥṣā',* pp. 130–8; trans. Butterworth, pp. 80–84.

[49] Fārābī, *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm,* ed. Amīn, pp. 79–85.

[50] Fārābī, *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm,* ed. Amīn, pp. 107–09; trans. Butterworth, pp. 80–81; *idem, Kitāb al-Milla,* ed. Mahdi, para. 7–10, pp. 48–52; trans. Butterworth, pp. 99–101.

explains these issues in a fatwa.[51] He also seems to concede that Ghazālī was a philosopher – although not a good one – as well as a theologian and jurist. Nevertheless, it is not necessary for either the theologian or the jurist to be a philosopher or to know what philosophy has to say about the real meanings of religious symbols or laws, and if he is not, he should not be told.[52]

The issue is displayed more vividly by Ibn Ṭufayl, who shows the disastrous results of Ḥayy's attempts to substitute philosophy for theology and religious law. He shakes the faith of some, angers others, and in the end publicly (and insincerely) disavows his philosophical opinions, then retreats with his friend to his desert island. He has realized just in time that any attempt to reveal the truth in its literal form to members of either the dialectical class – the theologians and jurists – or the rhetorical class – the common people – either will shake their faith and lead them into heresy or irreligion or rouse them to anger against the philosophers.[53]

Fārābī and his followers would divide the Muslim community into three classes, each of which for its own good should remain unaware of the true nature and beliefs of the classes above it. The true meaning of Islam can only be known to a small class of philosophers of the demonstrative class of men.

THE FAILURE OF THE FĀRĀBIAN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Although there is every reason to believe in the sincerity of the Islam of men like Fārābī and Ibn Rushd, it is not surprising that religious scholars greeted their theory of religion without enthusiasm. These scholars had long since sharpened their dialectical tools in conflict with the rationalist Mu'tazila. The grammarians took on the task of deflating logic, the ultimate basis of the philosophers' pretensions to higher knowledge,

[51] He was known in North Africa for his study of disagreements among legal schools, *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid wa-Nihāyat al-Muqtaṣid* (n.p.: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.); Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee, trans., *The Distinguished Jurist's Primer*, 2 vols. (Great Books of Islamic Civilization; Reading: Garnet, U.K., 1994). It is a long and deeply learned weighing of the evidence having nothing to do with philosophy.

[52] Ibn Rushd, *Faṣl al-Maqāl*, ed. and trans. Butterworth, pp. 26–27.

[53] Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*, ed. Gautier, pp. 148–54; trans. Goodman, pp. 162–5; trans. Colville, pp. 62–65.

pointing out, with some justice, that a good deal of Greek logic was actually Greek grammar, with the copula and its Indo-European peculiarities and tacit metaphysical presumptions.[54] The Ash'arite theologians, deeply suspicious of any compromise on the absolute power of God, denounced the naturalism of the philosophical conception of nature, criticizing both "natures" and natural causation of every sort. The clearest and most intelligent attack on philosophy was that of Ghazālī in his autobiography, *The Deliverer from Error,* and in his *Incoherence of the Philosophers.* In the former work, he correctly points out that the rigor and certitude that the ancients had achieved in mathematics was not carried over into metaphysics, whose doctrines were hotly debated among the philosophers themselves.[55] In the *Incoherence*, he attempts to show that the views of the philosophers on some twenty important points were wrong or indefensible, even on the assumption of the philosophers' own presuppositions. Ghazālī sometimes seems to be stretching a point in the seventeen heretical doctrines held by the philosophers, but he insists that three philosophical doctrines are completely incompatible with Islam: their view that the universe has no beginning in time, which seems to imply that God is not its creator; their denial of the bodily resurrection; and their view that God knows only universals, not particulars, thus making individual reward, punishment, and divine providence impossible.[56] Ibn Rushd attempts to defend the philosophers in his *Incoherence of the Incoherence,* a point by point refutation of Ghazālī's work, and in the

[54] See the dialogue between the Christian logician Mattā b. Yūnus, the teacher of Fārābī, and the grammarian Abū Sa'īd Sīrāfī, recorded in Abū Ḥayyān Tawḥīdī, *al-Imtā' wa'l-Mu'ānasa,* ed. Aḥmad Amīn and Aḥmad al-Zayn (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta'līf, 1939–44), 1:108–28; trans. D. S. Margoliouth, "The Merits of Logic and Grammar," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1905), 111–29. A French translation, along with analysis and translations of related texts, is A. Elemrani-Jamal, *Logique aristotélicienne et grammaire arabe: études et documents* (Études Musulmanes 26; Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1983), pp. 149–63.

[55] Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh,* ed. Maḥmūd, pp. 100–07; trans. Watt, *Faith and Practice,* pp. 37–38; trans. McCarthy, *Freedom,* pp. 74–75.

[56] Al-Ghazālī, *Tahfut al-Falāsifa*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Dhakhā'ir al-'Arab 15, 2nd ed.; Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.), pp. 67, 72–73, 293–5; *Al-Ghazali's Tahafut al-Falasifa [Incoherence of the Philosophers],* trans. Sabih Ahmad Kamali (Pakistan Philosophical Congress Publication no. 3; Lahore: Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1963), pp. 8, 11–12, 249–50; Michael E. Marmura, ed. and trans., *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* (Islamic Translation Series; Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1997), pp. 7, 10–11.

The Decisive Treatise, but his rebuttal did not satisfy more traditional theologians.[57]

However, it seems to me that the real objections were to the Fārābian theory of religion as a part of political philosophy rather than to philosophy as such. After all, later Islamic philosophers and theologians held variations of these doctrines and others that were sometimes far stranger, particularly under Sufi influence. Fārābī's theory, no matter how philosophically reasonable it might seem, diminished revealed religion in a way that few serious Muslims, then or now, could accept.

First, Fārābī had made religion subordinate to philosophy, thus denying religion its transcendence. It was no longer the most profound window through which human beings could contemplate the absolute; it was only a Platonic likely story, a beneficial lie told for the benefit of those incapable of doing metaphysics on their own.

Second, the God of the philosophers lacked spiritual vitality. Whatever else the God of the Qur'ān might be, He was, as Ibn ʿArabī rightly saw, both transcendent – mighty and awe inspiring, hidden by veils of light and darkness beyond human conception – and imminent, deeply involved in the smallest affairs of human beings. The God of the Fārābian philosophers, begotten of the One beyond being of Platonic number mysticism and of the Aristotelian mover of the spheres, was too abstract and inhuman to be identified with the merciful and terrifyingly distant and omnipresent God of the Qur'ān.

Third, the notion of the prophet as philosopher was scarcely credible, nor did it do justice to the central spiritual fact of prophecy, at least in Judaism and Islam: that God chooses an ordinary man to bear the burden of delivering his message to an ignorant humanity. To make him into a philosopher who happened to have an unusual knack for making philosophical doctrines appealing to the masses demeaned the Prophet – and anyway was historically and theologically preposterous.

Finally, the notion that the Qur'ān needed to be treated as a symbolic document, correctly understood only in the light of philosophical demonstration, did not do justice to the text of the Holy Book.

[57] Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut,* ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Dhakhā'ir al-ʿArab 37; 2nd ed.; 2 vols.; Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif bi-Miṣr, 1969); Simon van den Bergh, trans. *Averroes' Tahafut al-Tahafut* (E. J. W. Gibb Memorial, n.s., 19; 2 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954); *Faṣl al-Maqāl,* ed. and trans. Butterworth, p. 12.

Sophisticated Muslims might know perfectly well that God could not possibly mount a throne like an earthly king, but few Muslims would be comfortable with the notion that God's throne was just a symbol for some part of the skies known better to the astronomers. A symbol in scripture must have some reality in itself, not just be a sign for some natural entity. We may compare the Fārābian philosophers with Ibn ʿArabī, whose *ta'wīl,* esoteric interpretation, of scripture was far more outrageous than anything the philosophers had dreamed of but whose interpretations carried power and conviction because of his burning belief that every jot and tittle of the Qur'ān carried uncountable layers of meaning that no ordinary human being could ever completely grasp.

AS AN HISTORICAL MATTER, FĀRĀBIAN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY DIED IN Islam with Ibn Rushd. Fārābī's books were still sometimes read and copied. Copies of his works are not uncommon in manuscript philosophical anthologies. I found a translation of his *Aphorisms of the Statesman* included in an early fourteenth-century philosophical encyclopedia as an example of political philosophy conducted from a purely rational point of view, but even then it was a curiosity, not a relic of a living movement.[58] It seems to me that it failed not because of its enemies – other, much more successful movements in Islam had more enemies – but because it lacked appeal to serious Muslims. And it lacked appeal because it did not do justice to the Islamic view of God, religion, revelation, and the Qur'ān.

[58] Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī, *Durrat al-Tāj li-Ghurrat al-Dubāj: Bakhsh-i Ḥikmat-i ʿAmalī wa-Sayr wa-Sulūk,* ed. Māhdukht Bānū Humā'ī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i ʿIlmī wa-Firhangī, 1369/1990), pp. 79–96. I discuss this text in John Walbridge, "The Political Thought of Qub al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī," in Butterworth, ed., *Political Aspects,* pp. 351–3.

5

Mysticism, Postclassical Islamic Philosophy, and the Rise and Fall of Islamic Science

The final third of the twelfth century was a decisive turning point in the history and the historiography of Islamic philosophy. The last great figure of the tradition of Islamic Aristotelianism, Ibn Rushd, was writing his commentaries on Aristotle and died in 1198. He was to have enormous influence, but in Europe, not in the Islamic world. His death marked a break in Western Europe's knowledge of Islamic thought, for he was the last medieval Islamic writer of real significance to be translated into Latin in the Middle Ages. Thus, his death is influential in the Western historiography of Islamic philosophy because, until recently, it was assumed that he was the last philosopher of consequence in the Islamic world, an attitude that even today is not altogether dead. Ibn Rushd's old age coincided with the adulthood and premature death of Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī (1154–1191), the philosopher-mystic responsible for popularizing Neoplatonism as an alternative to the Aristotelianism of Ibn Sīnā. His masterwork, *The Philosophy of Illumination,* was completed in 1186. Ibn Rushd's old age also coincided with the youth of the third great intellectual figure of this period, Muḥyi'l-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī (1165–1240), the greatest of all Muslim mystical theologians. He actually had met Ibn Rushd as a teenager and was beginning serious mystical study at about the time that Suhrawardī was writing The Philosophy of Illumination. Ibn Rushd represented the past of Islamic philosophy, the Fārābian political philosophy of religion; Suhrawardī and Ibn ʿArabī represented its future and, in particular, the alliance with mysticism that was to give metaphysics and philosophical psychology a lasting place in the Islamic world.

THE EMERGENCE OF MYSTICISM

The Sufis, the mystics of Islam, say that their school goes back to the time of the Prophet. In a sense, they are certainly right, because the Qur'ān and the hadith, particularly the so-called *ḥadīth qudsī*, the "holy traditions," those which purport to relate the words of God, sometimes have a strongly mystical quality. As a matter of documented history, however, Sufism emerged from a tradition of asceticism and pietism in about the eighth century and became an organized and self-conscious movement at more or less the same time that the disciplines of the Islamic religious sciences were assuming their mature forms. The oldest surviving systematic Sufi texts date from around the end of the ninth century and systematic manuals of Sufism from the late tenth.[1] By the twelfth century, Sufism was crystallizing into organized monastic orders, although they differed from other monastic traditions in that laymen were commonly active members, even if they were not necessarily "professional" Sufis. These orders played an enormous role in the religious and social life of Islamic society up to the twentieth century. They are still central to religious life in much of the Islamic world. With mosque worship frozen in the form of the daily prayers fixed by the Prophet, it was in the context of the Sufi orders that Islamic devotional and liturgical life continued to

[1] The literature of Sufism is enormous. On Sufism in general, see the Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975); Julian Baldick, *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism* (New York University Studies in Near Eastern Civilization 13; New York: NYU Press, 1989); and Carl W. Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1997), among many other introductions and surveys. On Muḥammad and his Companions as the founders of Sufism, see ʿAlī b. ʿUthmān Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb,* trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series 17; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1911, and often reprinted), pp. 70–82; Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, pp. 24–30; and more generally Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Studies in Religion; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985). A selection of early Islamic mystical literature is found in Michael Sells, ed. and trans., *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'an, Mi'raj, Poetic and Theological Writing* (Classics of Western Spirituality; New York: Paulist Press, 1996). A number of classical Sufi manuals are available in English translation, usually abridged: Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb,* trans. Nicholson; Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayrīya,* trans. Alexander D. Knysh, as *Al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism* (Great Books of Islamic Civilization; Reading: Garnet, 2007); and Abū Bakr al-Kalabādhī, *Kitāb al-Taʿarruf li-Ahl Madhhab al-Taṣawwuf,* trans. Arthur J. Arberry, as *The Doctrine of the Ṣūfīs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), among others.

develop. By the end of the twelfth century, Sufism was no longer separate from Islamic religious life in general. For most of the last millennium, adult male Muslims normally have been initiated members of at least one Sufi order, a state of affairs that still prevails in many parts of the Islamic world. The shrines of Sufi saints were the locus of much of women's devotional life. The orders often played important political, social, and economic roles with their control of endowments and links with guilds and other groups within the larger society. Occasionally, Sufi masters were political rulers; everywhere they were important figures in local, provincial, and national life. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they sometimes were centers of resistance to European colonial rule.[2]

The growth of Sufi influence in religious, social, and political life had an impact on intellectual and literary life as well. In the Persianate areas, the vast region stretching from the Balkans through Turkey and Iran to India, Persian was cultivated as the language of gentlemen, and Persian culture enjoyed enormous prestige. Masses of Sufi poetry were written in Persian and other vernacular languages, and non-Sufi poetry drew heavily on Sufi themes. Thus, in Persian and Persianate poetry, it became almost impossible to distinguish secular love poetry from Sufi devotional poetry, as they shared the same symbols and themes.[3]

Late in the eleventh century, a promising legal scholar and popular teacher in Baghdad, Abū Ḥāmid Ghazālī, suffered a crisis of faith in which he fell into doubt about all the certainties of the Islamic doctrines he had been teaching. We have met him already as a critic of the philosophy of Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. In his spare time, he furiously studied the chief claimants to knowledge of divine things in his time and place: Kalām

[2] The classic account of the Sufi orders is J. Spencer Trimmingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). Examples of the numerous studies of Sufi orders from an historical or anthropological point of view are Dina Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandīs in the Ottoman World, 1450–1700* (SUNY Series in Medieval Middle East History; Albany: SUNY Press, 2005); Carl W. Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center* (SUNY Series in Muslim Spirituality in South Asia; Albany: SUNY Press, 1992); Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998); Frances Trix, *The Sufi Journey of Baba Rexheb* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2009).

[3] A representative collection of studies of Persian and Persianate Sufism is Leonard Lewisohn, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism*, 3 vols. (Oxford: OneWorld, 1999).

theology, philosophy, the esoteric Shi'ism of the Ismā'īlīs, and Sufism. He found the first three to be wanting but found peace and certainty in Sufism. Retiring to his home town, he wrote his greatest work, *The Revival of the Sciences of Religion*, an explanation of Islamic law in which the legal concepts are explained in terms of Sufism.[4] Although Ghazālī can scarcely be given credit for an intellectual development that probably was inevitable, he does symbolize the integration of mysticism into the mainstream of Islamic intellectual life.

MYSTICISM AND PHILOSOPHY

By the twelfth century, Sufi writers were beginning to move from practical and devotional literature to speculative mystical theology. If this theology is not philosophy as such, it certainly can be analyzed in philosophical terms. As we have seen, the philosophy of religion was the fundamental problem faced by Islamic philosophers trying to apply Greek philosophy in a setting dominated by a monotheistic revealed religion. Whereas for the Fārābian tradition, the basic problem was explaining revelation and religious law, the problem of mysticism increasingly became central to later Islamic philosophers. At first, mysticism was a phenomenon for philosophers to explain, but eventually it also became a philosophical tool central to the metaphysics and epistemology of the postclassical Islamic philosophers.

Suhrawardī

The problem of mysticism first arrives in Islamic philosophy in a serious way in the works of Ibn Sīnā. In contrast to Fārābī's treatment of religion under political philosophy, Ibn Sīnā tended to deal with the subject as an appendix to metaphysics, although some aspects of prophecy are treated under psychology. Thus, the metaphysics of his

[4] For his intellectual autobiography, see Ghazālī, *Munqidh;* trans. Watt, *Faith and Practice;* trans. McCarthy, *Freedom and Fulfillment.* Ghazālī's *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn,* 5 vols., ed. 'Abd Allāh Khālidī (Beirut: Dār al-Arqam, 1998) and dozens of other editions; trans. Fazlul Karim, *Gazzali's Ihya Ulum-id-Din: The Revival of Religious Learnings*, 4 vols. in 5 (Dacca: F. K. Islam Mission Trust, 1971). Many of the forty books of the *Iḥyā'* have been published separately in English translation.

largest surviving philosophical work, the *Healing*, ends with a tenth chapter dealing with various religious topics, as well as with ethics and political philosophy.[5]

However, the key figure in the introduction of mysticism into Islamic philosophy was the colorful twelfth-century philosopher Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī. He was educated in the Aristotelianism of Ibn Sīnā, which he refers to as the Peripatetic philosophy. Born in northwestern Iran near the town of Zanjān, he wandered in search of teachers and then patrons. We cannot trace his travels exactly, but he studied as far south and east as Isfahan and then traveled among the petty kingdoms of eastern Anatolia before reaching Damascus near the time of its conquest by Saladin. He settled in Aleppo in about 1182. There his alchemical and magical skills drew the attention of Saladin's teenaged son, al-Malik al-Ẓāhir, who had, in the traditional way, been made governor of the city to gain political experience. Suhrawardī cut a strange figure. Rejecting the conventional scholarly path of endowed posts in *madrasas* and mosques, he wore dervish dress so shabby that he was mistaken for a donkey driver. When he arrived in Aleppo, the director of the *madrasa* where he was staying tactfully had his young son take him a set of presentable clothes. The prince became his disciple, and the more conventional scholars became jealous. Saladin became alarmed at the prospect of his son, the governor of an important city solidly astride his lines of communication to the east, being under the influence of a magician of uncertain orthodoxy and loyalty at a time when the Third Crusade was bearing down on his

[5] There is a scholarly debate about the interpretation of this series of developments. One group of modern scholars of Islamic philosophy believes that Ibn Sīnā himself formulated a Neoplatonic mystical philosophy, which he called the "Oriental wisdom." This seems to put too much stress on a few passages of his philosophy. Moreover, there is reason to think that his later philosophy was "Oriental" because it belonged to the philosophers of eastern Iran and differed from that of the Occidentals, which is to say, Fārābī and the other philosophers of Baghdad. At the other extreme, those scholars of Islamic philosophy whose interests are confined to the period from Kindī to Ibn Rushd are inclined to see the postclassical Islamic philosophers as mystics rather than philosophers and to deny to Sufi theologians like Ibn ʿArabī any philosophical relevance. This seems to me to be the application of a Proscrustean – or rather Aristotelian – bed to the philosophers of Islam. In my view, Ibn Sīnā was a thoroughgoing Aristotelian, apart from the use of a mildly Neoplatonic pyramidal cosmology, and the most original and interesting period of Islamic philosophy began with Suhrawardī and culminated in the so-called School of Isfahan in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Iran.

newly conquered province of Palestine. He ordered his son to execute Suhrawardī, and his son reluctantly obeyed.[6]

At some time during his wanderings, Suhrawardī had rejected the Avicennan Peripatetic philosophy of his training in favor of a mystically oriented Neoplatonism, a conversion he attributed to a dream of Aristotle. Despite the exotica of Suhrawardī's life – the dervish dress, the public displays of magic, the invocation of visions and mystical experiences, and the mystical allegories that are now his most widely read works – he was nonetheless a philosopher who developed a coherent philosophical system based on argument and who expounded it in the normal philosophical language of Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. The later Islamic philosophers treated him as a philosopher, discussing him as an innovative philosophical critic, an epistemologist, and a metaphysician. His philosophical school came to be known as Illuminationism and was the point of departure for the later Iranian philosophical tradition.

Suhrawardī's philosophical development is preserved in his writings. In his most famous work, the *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq, The Philosophy of Illumination*, he reports that his works consist of juvenalia, "other works," in which we may include his allegories, works according to Peripatetic principles, and finally *The Philosophy of Illumination* itself, which has "another method and a shorter path to knowledge." This last, he makes clear, is the path of Plato, Empedocles, Pythagoras, and the ancient sages of the Oriental nations.[7] This appeal to occult ancient wisdom has greatly muddied the modern study of his thought, although as a rule, later Islamic philosophers were more clear-eyed about the matter. He had something philosophically precise in mind. Earlier in his career, he had struggled with the problem of epistemology in the Peripatetic philosophy. Evidently, Aristotle had learned in the afterlife that his rejection of his

[6] On the circumstances of Suhrawardī's death, see Hossein Ziai, "The Source and Nature of Authority: A Study of al-Suhrawardī's Political Doctrine, in *Political Aspects,* ed. Butterworth, pp. 304–44, and Walbridge, *Leaven,* pp. 201–10.

[7] Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination,* ed. and trans. John Walbridge and Hossein Ziai (Islamic Translation Series; Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1999), p. 2, paras. 3–4). This interpretation of Suhrawardī's views summarizes the argument in John Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights: Qutb al-Din Shirazi and the Illuminationist Tradition in Islamic Philosophy* (Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs 26; Cambridge, Mass.: Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, 1992), idem, *The Wisdom of the Mystic East: Suhrawardi and Platonic Orientalism* (SUNY Series on Islam; Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), and idem, *Leaven.*

teacher Plato's views had been a mistake, for in a dream he counseled Suhrawardī that the true philosophy was that of Plato and the Muslim mystics. In particular, Aristotle explained what came to be called the theory of knowledge by presence. Any true knowledge, whether sensible or intellectual, involved the unmediated presence of the known before the knower. In the case of sensation, this involved the rejection of the two common theories of vision, intromission and extramission, in favor of a theory in which light made the visible object manifest to a sound eye that was in its unveiled presence. Suhrawardī also allowed a kind of intellectual intuition that explained knowledge of metaphysical entities.[8]

Suhrawardī expresses his theory most strikingly in *The Philosophy of Illumination.* Following a critique of key doctrines of Peripatetic philosophy, he expounds a system of metaphysics and cosmology in which light and darkness are the ingredients of the universe. Light can be either an accident in something that is substantial but dark, which is our visible light, or it can be substantial in itself – abstract light, which is mind, whether embodied like animals, human beings, and the celestial bodies, or beyond need of body, like God and the angelic minds. Substantial light is the cause of being and change in the corporeal universe. The properly prepared mystic can intuit this substantial light and thus behold the glory of God and His angels.

His system is thus Neoplatonic in its structure, nominalist in its treatment of universals, and empiricist in its methods, at least if one is willing to concede that mystical intuition counts as empirical experience. What is most important for our purposes is that he adopted mysticism as a philosophical tool, something characteristic of that part of the Platonic tradition that we refer to as "Neoplatonic," although, as Suhrawardī correctly insists, it has its roots in Plato's own thought and ultimately in the Presocratics of the Italian school. This use of mysticism as a legitimate philosophical tool has remained characteristic of most of the Islamic philosophical tradition from his day on. Iranian philosophers still expound systems owing allegiance to Suhrawardī in the theological academies and universities of contemporary Iran. Peripatetic philosophy

[8] Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi, *The Principles of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy: Knowledge by Presence* (SUNY Series in Islam; Albany: SUNY Press, 1992).

is also taught in Iran but, following Suhrawardī's own recommendation, usually as a propaedeutic to the various forms of Illuminationist philosophy derived from or reacting to *The Philosophy of Illumination*.

Ibn ʿArabī

Ibn ʿArabī was the converse of Suhrawardī – a mystic who made mysticism philosophical. He was an Andalusian of an old Arab family and another colorful and unconventional character. He was born in Murcia in Spain in 1165, the son of a government official from an elite Arab family.[9] In one of those ironies of history, he actually knew Ibn Rushd, his father being a friend of the philosopher.

One day when I was in Cordoba, I went to visit its judge Abū'l-Walīd Ibn Rushd [Averroes]. He had wished to meet me because he had been astonished at the things he had heard that God had revealed to me during my retreats. My father sent me to him on the pretext of some business with him so that he could meet me, he being one of my father's friends. At the time I was a youth who had yet to grow a beard or mustache. When I came in, he rose from his place with the greatest affection and respect, hugged me, and said, "Yes!" I replied, "Yes." He was even more pleased with me because I had understood him. I then perceived why he was pleased and said, "No!" He was dismayed, flushed, and doubted his own opinion. "What," he said, "have you all discovered through unveiling and the divine emanation? Is it the same as what we have found through reason (*naẓar*)?" I replied, "Yes, no. Between the yes and the no, spirits take flight from matter and heads are severed from bodies." He turned pale and was seized with trembling. He sat down, saying, "There is no power or might save in God!" For he had understood what I was hinting at. . . . Later he asked my father if he could see me again so that he could submit his views to us so as to see whether they were compatible or not, for he was one of the masters of thought and rational speculation, but he thanked God that he lived in a time in which he could see one who went into a retreat ignorant and emerged with such knowledge, yet without any study, investigation, or reading. "I have shown that such a thing can be," he said, "but I had not seen any who had attained it. . . . " I wanted to see him again, so God in His mercy sent me a vision in which, as it were, there was a thin curtain between us so that I could see him but he could not see me

[9] There is a good spiritual biography, based largely on autobiographical comments in his own works: Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn ʿArabī,* trans. Peter Kingsley (Golden Palm Series; Cambridge, U.K.: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993).

and was unaware of me, being busy about his own work. I did not see him again until the year 1199 in the city of Marrakesh. He was being carried back to Cordoba, where he is buried. His coffin was on one side of the beast and to balance it they had put an equal weight of his writings. . . . I recited this verse:

This is the Imam and those are his works.
Would that I knew if his hopes were fulfilled![10]

Whether or not we believe the details of the story, there is no reason to doubt that the two met, and the story captures the gist of the differences between the old Aristotelian rationalist and the young mystic.

Ibn ʿArabī's writings are voluminous and difficult, but his basic idea can be expressed simply enough. The universe is the self-manifestation of God to Himself. Thus, every being in the universe is an expression of some aspect of God, a notion that Ibn ʿArabī finds in the Qur'anic verse, "Whithersoever you turn, there is the face of God." God's ultimate essence is unknown and unknowable, but He manifests Himself in various ways and on various levels: in His names and attributes, of which "Allāh" is the highest, including all the others; in the beings of the universe, which are the expressions of the names and attributes of God; in the souls of the saints; and in particular in the Prophet Muḥammad and in the "Seal of the Saints" – Ibn ʿArabī himself – and in the Book of God. There are also degrees of relation to God, with what is comprehensible to those of higher degrees being beyond those of lower degree. Thus, the Qur'an can be understood on various levels, depending on the spiritual attainments of its readers, but in all cases, the Word of God is to be understood literally, although his notion of the literal sense is often very far from ours or from the understanding of more conventional religious scholars. The task of the mystic is to recognize the face of God wherever he encounters it and to acquire ever deeper mystical insight and thus ever higher spiritual stations, leading perhaps to the highest human station, that of the Perfect (or complete) Man, he who perfectly manifests all the names and attributes of God.[11]

[10] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīya* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d., a reprint of the Bulaq edition), vol. 1, pp. 153–4.

[11] The fullest expression of Ibn ʿArabī's system is the enormous and sprawling *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīya,* of which no complete translation exists. Two volumes of extracts have been published: Ibn al-ʿArabī, *The Meccan Revelations,* ed. Michel Chodkiewicz, trans.

The result was a complex system of deep philosophical interest. Ibn ʿArabī himself had little use for philosophy or philosophers, being if anything an Ashʿarite theologian in matters of metaphysics, and he made no use of arguments that conventional philosophers would recognize. Nevertheless, the philosophical significance of his system was obvious. Certainly by the time of the flourishing of philosophy in seventeenth-century Iran, Ibn ʿArabī was a philosophical influence too great for any serious Islamic philosopher to ignore. Thus, postclassical – or perhaps we should say, "mature" – Islamic philosophy could trace its origins to three roots: the Aristotelianism of Ibn Sīnā, the Neoplatonism of Suhrawardī, and the monism of Ibn ʿArabī. Iranian philosophers tended to see the issue as a disagreement between the advocates of the primacy of essence (Suhrawardī) and the advocates of the primacy of existence (Ibn ʿArabī), with some residual Peripatetics.[12]

Aristotelianism in the Madrasas

In fact, Peripatetic philosophy was already firmly entrenched in Islamic education. In a development parallel to the domestication of mysticism,

William C. Chittick and James W. Morris (vol. 1), trans. Cyrille Chodkiewicz and Denis Gril (vol. 2) (New York: Pir Press, 2002–2004). William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabī's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989) and idem, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-ʿArabī's Cosmology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998) are topically collected extracts from *al-Futūḥāt* with commentary. However, his system is most easily approached through a shorter work summarizing his system, the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam, The Bezels of Wisdom,* ed. Abū'l-ʿAlā' ʿAfīfī (Cairo: al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1946). There are two translations made directly from the Arabic: R. W. J. Austin, trans., *Ibn al ʿArabi: The Bezels of Wisdom* (Classics of Western Spirituality; New York: Paulist Press, 1980) and Caner K. Dagli, trans., *The Ringstones of Wisdom* (Great Books of the Islamic World; Chicago: Kazi Publications, 2004). This work was commonly read with the aid of commentaries, one of which is available in English: *Ismail Hakki Bursevi's Translation of, and Commentary on Fusus al – Hikam,* 4 vols., trans. Bulent Rauf (Oxford: Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi Society, 1986–1991). A number of his other works are also now available in translation.

Incidentally, his family name is properly "Ibn al-ʿArabī," "son of the Arab," which refers to the family's descent from one of the first conquering Arab families in Spain. He is more usually called "Ibn ʿArabī" without the article to avoid confusion with another scholar of the same name. He is also referred to be the titles "Muḥyī 'l-Dīn," "Reviver of the Faith," and "al-Shaykh al-Akbar," "the Greatest Sheikh."

[12] The metaphysical dispute, to simplify it greatly, was between those who thought the universe was composed of discrete concrete entities, the primacy of essence, and those who thought it was ultimately a single substrate infinitely differentiated, the primacy of existence.

logic and Avicennan natural philosophy and metaphysics were being allowed into the *madrasa*, an institution that became increasingly important from the eleventh century on. In Europe, universities had been founded in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and the coincidence of their need for a curriculum and the arrival of the new translations of Aristotle had led to Aristotelian logic and natural philosophy becoming basic subjects in the curricula of the new universities. Something similar occurred in the Islamic world in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. At the beginning of the twelfth century, Ghazālī had included an introduction on logic in his work on the principles of jurisprudence. Later scholars did not follow his example because there was no need; logic had become a basic part of the curriculum of the *madrasas.* The most important basic textbooks of logic were composed in the thirteenth century; although there were later works, they were imitations of the thirteenth-century models. I return to the role of logic and philosophy in *madrasa* education in Chapters 6 and 7.

THE "FAILURE" OF ISLAMIC SCIENCE

Between 1550 and 1700 in Western Europe, something extraordinary happened to science, a process known as the Scientific Revolution. Prior to this, science had not greatly changed from what it had been among the Greeks: a system of thought based mostly on theory rather than on experiment and developing slowly and without much regard for practical application. After this period, science was recognizably what it is today: a constantly developing system of thought based on experiment and mathematics and generating a rapidly developing technology. This scientific and technical prowess is certainly a major factor in the conquest of the world undertaken by Europeans between 1492 and 1936. Unfortunately, it has not turned out to be easy to understand what caused this event or even what it was. It was certainly not just that Galileo dropped objects of differing weights from the Tower of Pisa, saw that they fell at the same rate, realized that Aristotle must have been wrong, and thereby broke with the inherited authority of Aristotle and the church. The process was considerably more complicated than that, involving at least two more or less distinct histories: one involving the mathematization of science, especially physics, running from Galileo's experiments to Newton's

physics and including also the development of heliocentric astronomy, and the other making experimental methods central to chemistry and biology, a process with embarrassing roots in alchemy and magic.

But however the nature of the Scientific Revolution is understood, there is also the problem of understanding its causes. There have been many theories offered in the last century and a half since the emergence of the history of science as an academic discipline. These have varied in a number of ways – in what sciences are taken as central to the Scientific Revolution, for example – but they can be grouped into two broad families, depending on whether they understand the Scientific Revolution as a break with earlier scientific history or as a continuation of something that started earlier. The latter group of theories see the Scientific Revolution as the culmination of developments in medieval European science: early experiments with using mathematics in physical problems, thought experiments and philosophical speculation about the natural world, and the like. Scholars offering such theories can point, for example, to continuities between late medieval natural philosophy and Galileo's terminology.[13]

However, any theory that bases the rise of modern science on medieval developments must then explain why the Scientific Revolution did not take place in the Islamic world, a problem also faced by historians of Islamic science. After all, Islamic scientists read the same Greek scientific texts as medieval Europeans, and they were sometimes even the channel by which these texts passed to the Europeans. In a number of cases, scientific texts originally composed in Arabic were important influences on medieval European science. Science was a systematic enterprise in the Islamic world several centuries before it began in Western Europe. The Islamic world in the Middle Ages and early modern periods was richer and generally more stable than Western Europe, and there is good reason to think that Islamic science remained more advanced than European science to at least 1500. The influence of Islamic mathematical astronomy on Copernicus, for example, is now well established.[14] Why, then, did

[13] In what follows, I have been most influenced by Grant, *Foundations of Modern Science*, and Toby E. Huff, *The Rise of Early Modern Science: Islam, China, and the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), though I disagree with their treatment of Islam. My taxonomy of theories of the origins of modern science is mainly based on Cohen, *Scientific Revolution;* see p. 22, n. 6 above.

[14] See p. 12, n. 2 above.

Islamic scientists not go on to create a scientific revolution of their own? "What went wrong?" (One might also ask, "What went right in Europe?" but that points to the theories arguing that the Scientific Revolution represented a break, not a continuity.)

Various theories have been offered. Perhaps successive barbarian invasions of the Middle East by Turkic and Mongol hordes exhausted the economic and cultural resources of the Islamic world, thus draining Islamic science of the resources that it needed to flourish. Other theories posit an Islamic hostility toward the rational sciences, leading to their exclusion from the *madrasas* and the persecution of Islamic scientists. Finally, it has been suggested that science generally failed to capture the imagination of Muslim intellectuals. None of these theories is particularly convincing. The problem with most of the discussions of Islam and the Scientific Revolution is that they have been conducted by historians of medieval European science dependent on a very narrow range of Islamic sources. In this they have not been much aided by historians of Islamic science, who have been overwhelmed by the number of unread and unedited medieval Islamic scientific texts and have understandably been reluctant to generalize about the larger questions of the role of science in Islamic civilization and the causes of its ultimate failure.

The barbarian invasion theory is undermined by the fact that one of the greatest efflorescences of Islamic science took place precisely under the barbarians who had inflicted the greatest damage on Islamic civilization: the Mongol Īl-Khānid state, which supported the Marāgha observatory in the third quarter of the thirteenth century. Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, the great Shi'ite philosopher and scientist, was able to convince the Īl-Khān Hülegü to underwrite the compilation of a new set of astronomical tables to allow more accurate astrological predictions. These funds allowed Ṭūsī to bring together the finest team of scientists ever assembled in the Islamic world. These astronomers and mathematicians revolutionized Islamic mathematical astronomy, creating a tradition of mathematical astronomy that lasted for at least two hundred and fifty years in the Islamic world and were the source for Copernicus's mathematical methods. Finally, although Western Europe was largely free of barbarian invasions, at least after the Vikings had become rulers rather than plunderers, the Middle Ages saw constant feudal warfare, and the

Scientific Revolution itself took place amidst the religious warfare of the Reformation.

The second theory, positing an innate Islamic hostility toward science, has similar problems. Those advocating it tend to contrast European scholastic rationalism with a supposed antirationalism in Islam. As evidence, they cite a small set of well-known texts, especially Ghazālī's *Deliverer from Error*, in which Muslim theologians condemn science and philosophy. Because of this hostility, they claim, natural science and mathematics were excluded from the *madrasa* curriculum. But it is difficult to argue that Ghazālī's book was either typical or decisive, and the pinnacle of Islamic astronomy came after, not before, Ghazālī. Few other such texts exist, and in contrast to the situation in Europe, prosecutions for heresy were rare. The Islamic world produced no martyrs for science like Bruno and Galileo. Muslims, by and large, cared more about whether people practiced the laws of Islam than about the nuances of their beliefs. Moreover, as later recorded curricula show, science actually was taught in the *madrasas* along with logic, natural philosophy, and metaphysics. Mathematics, astronomy, and medicine were all widely taught – on a basic level at least. Mathematics was needed to divide inheritances, which religious lawyers were required to do, and astronomy was needed for mosque timekeeping. Manuscripts on geometry, arithmetic, algebra, basic astronomy, advanced mathematical astronomy, and the construction and use of astrolabes are common. Manuscript anthologies of *madrasa* textbooks routinely contain works on astronomy and mathematics. Medical manuscripts are everywhere. As we will see in Chapter 9, Islamic reformers, Islamic revivalists, and colonial administrators of the nineteenth century were united in their complaints that *madrasa* education was too rationalistic and scholastic.

The question of the appeal of science can be settled by examining vernacular-language literature. Iranian and Turkish scientists commonly wrote more popular – though still sometimes quite technical – versions of their scientific works in Persian or Turkish. The patrons of scientific works were often highly placed court officials, and the biographies of Islamic scientists demonstrate the importance of the court as a locus of scientific patronage and interest. Recent bibliographical studies show that as late as the Ottoman period, there were large numbers of scientists

writing and practicing.[15] Royal libraries in Istanbul included elegant new copies of classic scientific works like those of Galen. Works such as bestiaries were popular. Encyclopedias composed for the education and use of officials included chapters on scientific topics that an educated man was clearly expected to be conversant with.

What, then, accounts for the absence of a scientific revolution in Islam? Without a well-established explanation of the causes, or even of the nature, of the Scientific Revolution in Europe, there can be no definite answer. Some observations can be made, however, and I will make a suggestion for a partial explanation.

First, it seems likely that the explanation of the Scientific Revolution involves something extraordinary that happened in Europe rather than something that failed to happen in the Islamic world – or in India or China, for that matter. This has something in common with another great historiographical puzzle: Why was Western Europe, a small and politically divided peninsula of Eurasia, able in the course of four centuries to move from relative insignificance to almost total dominance of the world? While older explanations invoked "decline" or "decadence" in traditional states like China and the Ottoman Empire, it has become increasingly clear that these traditional states continued to function much as they always had but that the statesmen in charge of these regimes, some of them very able men indeed, struggled to cope with the accelerating and indeed unprecedented growth of European innovation and power, power whose sources they attempted, usually more or less unsuccessfully, to duplicate and employ on their own behalf. We have to feel sorry for them, as we still do not clearly understand what, for example, allowed a small island state like Britain to become the world's strongest power and maintain its position for a century.

There have been a number of suggestions proposed to account for the Scientific Revolution in terms of European exceptionalism: the printing

[15] Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu et al., *Osmanlı Astronomi Literatürü Tarihi* [History of Ottoman Astronomical Literature], 2 vols. (Istanbul: IRCICA, 1997), lists works by 582 Ottoman authors as well as more than two hundred anonymous works. Similar bibliographies have been published on Ottoman medicine, mathematics, geography, and military science. See Cemil Aydın, "Beyond Culturalism? An Overview of the Historiography on Ottoman Science in Turkey," in Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, Kostas Chatis, and Efthymios Nicolaïdis, *Multicultural Science in the Ottoman Empire* (De Diversis Artibus 69, n.s., 32; Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003), pp. 201–15.

press, the nature of the medieval European university curriculum, the Protestant Reformation with its rejection of inherited authority, or simply the accumulation of a critical mass of scientific knowledge and expertise, enabling the scientific enterprise to snowball and produce technical innovations that encouraged more scientific research. The explanations for the absence of an Islamic scientific revolution would be the converse of these: the Islamic failure, for reasons that also require explanation, to adopt the printing press until the nineteenth century, the absence of an institution that made scientific research a central activity, the comparative continuity of Islamic religious life, or a more scattered scientific community.

I suggest that mysticism played a role in directing the attention of Islamic scholars and philosophers away from physical science. It should not be forgotten that for the most part, science in both the Islamic world and medieval Europe was an outgrowth of philosophy. It has, in fact, been remarked that fields make the transition from being philosophy to being science when they are able to produce solid and agreed-upon results. From Aristotle through Ibn Sīnā up to the early modern scientists, areas like biology, astronomy, mineralogy, and so forth were seen as branches of philosophy, and the term "natural philosophy" was used for science in general as late as the nineteenth century.[16] In the Islamic world, for at least five hundred years philosophers were typically also scientists, either physicians or astronomers or both, typically with broader interests including other branches of science. This was less the case in medieval Europe, where philosophers typically were theologians by profession. Nevertheless, philosophers in Europe and the Islamic world had moved in quite different directions by the seventeenth century. In Europe, philosopher-scientists had turned away from their theological heritage and had begun to make the study of the natural world central to their intellectual investigation. It is not obvious why they should have done this. To be sure, the astronomers obviously were doing something with great implications for metaphysics and theology, but it is not clear why

[16] Edward Grant analyzes the relationships among natural philosophy, which is the portion of philosophy giving philosophical explanations of natural phenomena; early mathematical sciences like astronomy and statics; and modern science, which merges mathematical description and causal explanation, in his *A History of Natural Philosophy from the Ancient World to the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Galileo's attempt to describe the motion of falling bodies mathematically should have been seen in its time as anything other than an eccentric project showing the cleverness of a single scientist in solving a problem that was in itself trivial, not unlike Islamic mathematicians' delight in creating ever-larger magic squares. Yet Galileo's project did have enormous implications both in practical terms – the excellence of European artillery had much to do with their conquest of the world – and in the philosophical understanding of the universe.

Muslim philosophers had turned in another direction, pursuing the philosophical understanding of the experience of the soul in the direct presence of the Godhead. On the face of it, this must have seemed a promising project. Suhrawardī had shown how to use mysticism systematically as a philosophical tool, and Ibn ʿArabī had shown how to understand the inner and outer life of man as the experience of God in every aspect of the world. This approach to philosophy reached its peak in the School of Isfahan, the philosophers of Iran in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They pursued a subtle scholastic investigation of the depths of the human spirit, developing intricate systems combining the phenomenological experience of reality with the exposition of the teachings and scriptures of Islam. The traditional forms of Islamic science continued to be practiced, but, so far as anyone knows, Muslim scholars produced nothing to compete with the productions of European scientists after about the year 1550.

Not everyone thinks that Muslims were wrong to prefer mystical contemplation to mathematical physics and the resultant superior artillery. There are many in both the Islamic and Christian worlds who see the turn away from the spirit towards the intensive study of the material world as a catastrophe for the inner life of Western man. But that is not a question for a historian to answer. What can be said is that the centrality of mysticism in Islamic society set Islam on a very different path intellectually from that of the West.

WHILE ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHERS WERE TURNING AWAY FROM THE natural world as a central concern of philosophy, philosophical rationalism was becoming central to the curriculum of the *madrasas*, particularly in the form of a semantically oriented logic, and rationalistic methods

were transforming both Islamic legal thought and Kalām theology. This philosophical turn in the religious sciences is the subject of Chapters 6 and 7. At this point, we turn from examining science and mysticism in a very general way to looking closely at logic, the discipline central to scholastic rationalism in Islamic civilization.

PART TWO

LOGIC, EDUCATION, AND DOUBT

6

Where Is Islamic Logic? The Triumph of Scholastic Rationalism in Islamic Education

"WHERE IS ISLAMIC LOGIC?"

By this question, I ask what books contain the analyses made by learned, non-Westernized Muslims, usually writing in Arabic, that are comparable with what in the West is called "logic" – in particular, those that are comparable with what the medieval West called logic.

"Why, surely in books of logic," we would likely say, by which we would mean the discipline learned by the Muslims from Aristotle and his commentators, a discipline known in Arabic as *'ilm al-manṭiq*, "the science of speech."

But by even posing the question explicitly, we begin to have doubts. The translations of scientific and philosophical texts from Greek and Syriac into Arabic were mostly done in the ninth century, and it was not until the tenth century that indigenous Islamic logicians began to appear. The logic that they promulgated and that was carried on for century after century is generally held to have remained very close to its Greek models. Even a modern Islamic logician can observe, "To the subjects studied in logic, the modern [i.e., Islamic] logicians added semantics [lit., "the investigation and classification of terms"] and the hypothetical proposition and syllogism. They omitted the study of the ten categories and neglected almost completely the five arts [material logic]."[1] Modern critics dismiss the later logic – by which they mean everything but the

[1] Shaykh 'Alī Shibl Kāshif al-Ghiṭā', *Naqd al-Ārā' al-Manṭiqīya wa-Ḥall Mushkilātihā*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Nu'mān, n.d.), p. 6. He may be paraphrasing Ibn Khaldūn or some source used by Ibn Khaldūn. And, in fact, the logic of hypotheticals comes from the Stoics through galen.

first three centuries – as sterile reworking of familiar material, "the age of the schoolmasters," to use the derisive phrase of a modern historian.[2] The supposed "ossification" of Islamic logic, especially in the later Middle Ages, would be in stark contrast to the extraordinary developments in European logic in roughly the same period.

But this is strange. The medieval Muslims were profound students of language and of law, so it seems hardly credible that they would not have gone on to reflect on the rules of thought and the relations among thought, argument, language, and things. By the middle of the tenth century, all of the major indigenous Islamic sciences had two or three centuries of vigorous development behind them and had assumed something like their permanent form, including strictly religious sciences like Kalām theology and law and linguistic sciences like Arabic grammar, philology, prosody, and rhetoric. We would expect that during this period of independent development, Muslim theoreticians in the various disciplines surely would have systematically pondered the nature of thought and the methods of right reasoning. Indeed, some early Islamic critics of logic insisted that such was the case – that their own disciplines supplied systematic canons of reasoning that made Greek logic redundant or counterproductive. The grammarian Sīrāfī, in his famous debate with the Christian logician Mattā b. Yūnus in the tenth century, criticized logic from two directions.[3] On the one hand, he complained that logic was actually Greek grammar and that for one to speak correctly in Arabic – even to reason correctly in Arabic – it was necessary to know Arabic grammar and the meanings of the words of the Arabic language. On the other hand, there were no really useful universal laws of thought. To reason correctly, one had to know the principles of the individual sciences. For Sīrāfī, logic was Greek grammar and therefore not useful to Arabic-speaking Muslims. Ghazālī also held that logic was redundant, although he accepted its validity.[4] His complaint was that it was not new and that much the same material was found in the

[2] Nicholas Rescher, *The Development of Arabic Logic* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964), p. 73.

[3] See pp. 82–3, n. 54.

[4] Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, ed. Maḥmūd, pp. 98–99; trans. Watt, p. 35; trans. McCarthy, pp. 74–75.

introductions to books of dogmatic theology, where it was known as *naẓar,* "investigation."

Further doubts arise if we look at attempts to write the history of logic in general. The historians of logic have had considerable disagreements about what properly belongs to their subject matter. William and Martha Kneale, in their magisterial *The Development of Logic*, stated that their task was "to record the first appearances of those ideas which seem to us most important in the logic of our day." They believed that they had written "an account of the growth of logic, rather than an attempt to chronicle all that past scholars, good and bad, have said about their science."[5] I. M. Bocheński conceived his task in a similar way – to collect the texts and ideas that prefigure the results of modern mathematical logic.[6] The Romanian historian of logic, Anton Dumitriu, objected to these procedures:

> Generally, the ideas about any science vary over time; even the content of a well-defined science may completely change. . . . This is especially true of logic, for logic has no unique definition. We do not know exactly what logic is. . . . Thus the history of logic should comprise all the factors which have contributed to its development. Logic is the whole of its own becoming. . . .[7]

He goes on to protest that limiting the history of logic to the prefigurations of modern formal logic distorts or omits much that was most important to the logicians of the past. It is perhaps for this reason that his book is twice the length of the Kneales'. Dumitriu is telling us that it is unwise to begin with premature assumptions about what constitutes logic in any given intellectual tradition.

An example is his account of Stoic logic. Stoic logic, he tells us, is divided into 1) rhetoric and 2) dialectics. Dialectics, in turn, is divided into 2a) the sciences of speech and 2b) the sciences of meaning. The sciences of speech are divided into 2a1) the physiology of speech, 2a2) grammar, 2a3) poetics, and 2a4) the theory of music. The sciences of meaning are divided into the theories of 2b1) criteria, 2b2) concepts,

[5] William and Martha Kneale, *The Development of Logic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. v.

[6] Joseph M. Bocheński, *A History of Formal Logic*, 2nd ed., trans. Ivo Thomas (New York, Chelsea Pub. Co. [1970]), pp. 2–4.

[7] Anton Dumitriu, *History of Logic*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 1991), p. ix.

2b3) categories, 2b4) sentences, and 2b5) reasoning.[8] Most of these areas would not be considered part of logic by modern logicians, and only the "sciences of meaning" would be considered to belong even to philosophy. Islamic philosophers would exclude the theory of music from logic and exclude grammar and the physiology of speech from philosophy entirely. Nonetheless, the Stoics' notion of the close relation between speech and thought gave them warrant for defining logic as they did. Others might define the scope of logic differently or apportion its possible subjects in other ways.

So perhaps *manṭiq* is not the whole of Islamic logic but rather the name of a particular tradition of Islamic logic, and the indigenous traditions of Islamic thought might supply other logics. Where, then, would we find these other logics? I think that there are four plausible major candidates:

1) Arabic grammar;
2) Arabic rhetoric;
3) *Uṣūl al-fiqh,* the science of the principles of the deduction of Islamic law; and
4) Kalām, Islamic dogmatic theology.

That these traditions might be linked, especially in the postclassical period, is shown by the fact that the authors of the standard texts in each of these fields usually also wrote on the others. For example, the great writer of textbooks al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (1339–1413), who would be classed as a *faqīh,* a scholar of religious law, wrote original works, glosses, or commentaries on popular works of Qur'ān commentary, hadith, Arabic grammar and rhetoric, logic, philosophy, Kalām theology, Islamic law, disputation theory, and astronomy, among other subjects. Two of his elementary textbooks on logic in Persian were still in use in India in the nineteenth century. There were many others like him, and in later centuries it would be unusual for a major religious scholar not to have also written on the rational sciences. Even Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī – the leading Islamic scientist at the end of the thirteenth century, a man whose reputation was based on his writings on astronomy, medicine, and mathematics – also wrote extensively on the "Arab sciences," including a huge commentary on the

[8] Dumitriu, vol. 1, p. 222.

Qur'ān, glosses on another famous commentary, a specialized work on apparent contradictions in the Qur'ān, and a widely read commentary on a famous textbook of Arabic rhetoric.[9] Biographical dictionaries of later Islamic scholars routinely note that individuals were "expert in both transmitted and rational sciences."

ARABIC GRAMMAR

Grammar, we may recall, was classed by the Stoics as a part of logic, one of the branches of the "science of speech." The Stoics, moreover, were interested in kinds of sentences other than simple declarative propositions: questions, imperatives, oaths, requests, and so on. Much the same happened in medieval European logic, which grew to embrace a rich range of issues arising from the nature and relations of thoughts, words, and concepts.[10]

For Islamic scholars, grammar was a fundamental discipline, the common possession and affliction of even the lowliest student. Arabic is an intensely grammatical language, much as are Latin and Greek (and Persian and English are not), so the understanding and skillful use of Arabic required a precise mastery of Arabic grammar. The structure of the language is such that Arabic grammar is singularly logical, with meaningful triliteral roots combining with meaningful morphological forms to create words whose meanings can often be deduced by knowing only meaning of the root and the meaning of the word form: *istaktaba* combines a root *k-t-b*, which means "writing" with a morphological form that means "to ask for [the meaning of the root]," thus yielding "dictate." Although the morphological system is complex, it is almost completely regular, and the resulting grammar is nearly a deductive system.

While student textbooks might be no more than lists of rules, Arabic grammar as presented in advanced texts starts with reflection on the nature of words and meanings, the distinctions among the parts

[9] Walbridge, *Science of Mystic Lights,* pp. 178–91.

[10] For introductions to these issues, see Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, Jan Pinborg, and Eleonore Stump, eds., *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 99–382, and Paul Vincent Spade, *Thoughts, Words, and Things: An Introduction to Late Mediaeval Logic and Semantic Theory*, http://pvspade.com/Logic/index.html.

of speech, and the various categories within each. It is the same sort of semantic analysis that is the starting point of Islamic logic. There can be little doubt that much of the advanced Islamic thought on semantics, the nature of propositions, and even categories took place in the context of grammar rather than logic. Likewise, grammarians could import logical terms and analyses into their grammatical analysis. For example, the thirteenth-century grammarian Muwaffaq al-Dīn Yaʿīsh b. ʿAlī, commenting on a manual of grammar by Zamakhsharī, writes:

> The author [Zamakhsharī] writes: "A word is an expression indicating a single meaning by convention. It is a genus embracing three species – the noun, the verb, and the particle. . . . " When they wish to indicate the reality of a thing and distinguish it essentially from everything else, they define it by an essential definition *[ḥadd]*.[11]

Almost all the technical terms – expression, indicate, meaning, convention, genus, species, definition, define, essentially – come directly from logic. The commentator proceeds to analyze the definition of "word" in terms of the logical categories of genus and differentia. The substance of the analysis also seems to reflect logical concepts. When we examine the literature of Arabic grammar, we find the same apparatus of textbook, commentary, supercommentary, and glosses that was used for logic, with the same scholastic structure of statements of general principle, objections, and resolution by further distinction and finer analysis.[12]

Nonetheless, it must be admitted that it would not have occurred to an Islamic logician to categorize grammar as a part of logic. The reason is that in most Islamic schemes for the division of the sciences, the main distinction is between the sciences known by transmission, the so-called "Arab sciences" and those known by reason. All the linguistic sciences, grammar included, belong in the first category, while logic belongs in the second. Still, as Sīrāfī insisted, logic and grammar are analogous in that both deal with the proper use of speech, and he maintained that logic

[11] *Sharḥ al-Mufaṣṣal*, vol. 1 ([Cairo]: Idārat al-Ṭibāʿa al-Munīrīya, n.d.), p. 18.

[12] The standard reference grammar of Arabic in English is William Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1898, and often reprinted), but Wright is a prescriptive grammar. A better introduction to the spirit of Arab grammatical analysis is Howell, *A Grammar of the Classical Arabic Language*.

actually was Greek grammar. For the first few Islamic centuries, most Muslim scholars were content to assume that grammar equipped a man with what he needed to think and speak correctly.

ARABIC RHETORIC

There are actually two distinct forms of rhetoric among the Islamic sciences. One is a branch of logic, one of the "five arts" of applied inference. It differs from the other four arts – demonstration or scientific reasoning, dialectic, poetics, and sophistics – in that it uses premises that convince but are not necessarily either certain or generally accepted. We have met it already in the Fārābian explanation of the difference between scripture and true philosophical texts, scripture being the rhetorical presentation of philosophical truth in a way that is comprehensible to everyone. This philosophical rhetoric is derived from the *Rhetoric* of Aristotle. It was not a widely cultivated discipline in the Islamic world. Ibn Sīnā has a volume on rhetoric in his *Healing* and Ibn Rushd commented on Aristotle's *Rhetoric,* but few later writers dealt with it at any length, and there is no reason to suppose that it was influential as a discipline. It was certainly virtually ignored in the teaching of logic in the *madrasas.*

A far more vigorous discipline was Arabic rhetoric, known as *balāgha,* "eloquence," with its three branches of *maʿānī,* "notions"; *bayān,* "modes of presentation"; and *badīʿ,* "tropes." *Balāgha* was a practical science, intended to guide authors of poetry and prose, and it arose naturally from Arabic literature. Nonetheless, it has aspects that are related to logic. First, the logicians claim rhetoric as a part of logic, although the applied and linguistically grounded rhetoric of *ʿilm al-balāgha* certainly belongs to the linguistic rather than the rational sciences. Second, the classification of tropes, forms of metaphor, kinds of sentences, and the like inevitably touch on more general logical concerns. Third, in the standard manual of Arabic rhetoric, Sakkākī's *Miftāḥ al-ʿUlūm* [key to the sciences], one of the divisions concerns argument and its forms. In fact, it is a manual of logic not very different in content and organization from the standard logical textbooks. The first commentator on this book was the scientist philosopher Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī.[13]

[13] Walbridge, *Science of Mystic Lights,* pp. 23, 25, 189.

UṢŪL AL-FIQH

This is the science of the "principles of religious law," the rules by which the details of Islamic religious law are deduced.[14] Like the law of Judaism, Islamic law is in principle complete, revealed in its entirety through the Qur'ān and the life and practice of Muḥammad. Legislation, the making of wholly new Islamic law, ceased with the death of Muḥammad. Therefore, any expansion of the law to meet new circumstances and problems must be done by interpreting materials dating from the time of the Prophet. The various sects and legal schools of Islam differ somewhat on the details of how this is to be done, but virtually all agree that new law must be deduced from the sources of existing Islamic law. As we saw in Chapter 3, there was considerable disagreement at first as to how this ought to be done – and it is virtually certain that much of the material purporting to originate with the Prophet actually reflects legal debates during the first two centuries of Islam – but by the year 1000 or so, there was broad consensus on the intellectual methods that could appropriately be used to explicate the law. The science expounding these rules is *uṣūl al-fiqh.* Refinements were later made, but the general pattern was clear.

By the late eleventh century, Islamic legal scholars were conscious that there was a close relationship between *uṣūl al-fiqh* and logic. Ghazālī (d. 1111), the great theologian whose work marks a watershed in a number of areas of Islamic thought, is considered the first to have incorporated logic systematically into the Islamic sciences, although the ground had been prepared at least a generation earlier.[15] Ghazālī went on to write two manuals of logic, one of which drew its examples from the Qur'ān. In his manual of *uṣūl al-fiqh, al-Mustaṣfā fī 'Ilm al-Uṣūl,* "The Purification of the Science of Jurisprudence," Ghazālī treats logic in some detail, spending forty pages discussing essential definition, demonstration (*ḥadd, burhān,*) and related topics.[16] He denies that this logical introduction, a

[14] On the discipline of *uṣūl al-fiqh,* see Wael B. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to Sunnī* Uṣūl al-Fiqh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Bernard G. Weiss, *The Search for God's Law: Islamic Jurisprudence in the Writings of Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī* (Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press, 1992).

[15] Kāshif al-Ghiṭā', *Naqd,* p. 6. On logic in Ghazālī's *Munqidh,* his intellectual biography, see p. 83 below. He says that logic is theologically unobjectionable, except insofar as it gives students unjustified confidence in the metaphysical views of the philosophers.

[16] Ghazālī, *Mustaṣfā fī 'Ilm al-Uṣūl,* vol. 1 (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-Amīrīya, 1322/1904), pp. 10–55. They are half-pages, actually, because the book is printed with another work on *uṣūl al-fiqh.*

summary of his two manuals of logic, forms a proper part of *uṣūl al-fiqh,* explaining that logic is necessary for all theoretical sciences. The student is therefore free not to copy this part of the book.[17] Ghazālī was a pioneer in using logic in *uṣūl al-fiqh,* and later works do not usually contain full expositions of elementary logic. They would have been unnecessary, because *uṣūl al-fiqh* was an advanced subject, and the Islamic colleges from the thirteenth century forward commonly taught logic starting with the first year of theological studies. Nonetheless, the spoor of logic is easily found in the use of characteristic logical terms and doctrines such as conception and assent (*taṣawwur, taṣdīq*).

Not everybody approved of this development. In his book *The Refutation of the Logicians,* the great fourteenth-century fundamentalist Ibn Taymīya commented acidly:

> [Essential definition] enters the discussions of those who deal with the principles of religion and *fiqh* after Abū Ḥāmid [Ghazālī] at the end of the fifth/[eleventh] century and the beginning of the sixth/[twelfth]. Abū Hāmid placed a logical introduction at the beginning of the *Purification* and claimed that the sciences of whoever did not possess that knowledge were unreliable. On that subject he composed *The Touchstone of Speculation* and *The Gauge of Knowledge* [Ghazālī's two manuals of logic], and his confidence in it increased steadily. More astonishing than that is the fact that he wrote a book named *The Just Scales* in which he claimed to have learned logic from the prophets – but actually he learned it from Ibn Sīnā, and Ibn Sīnā learned it from the books of Aristotle. Those who wrote about the principles of jurisprudence after Abū Ḥāmid talked about definitions according to the method of the practitioners of Greek logic.[18]

Ibn Taymīya was right, of course, but he was on the losing side of this debate. By his time, as we have seen, theology students were routinely taught logic in preparation for advanced legal study.

However, this only demonstrates that people who practiced *uṣūl al-fiqh* were expected to know logic; the interesting question is what sort

[17] Ghazālī, *Mustaṣfā,* 1.10.

[18] Ibn Taymīya, *Kitāb al-Radd ʿalā al-Manṭiqīyīn* (Ri'āsat Idārat al-Buḥūth al-ʿIlmīya wa'l-Iftā' wa'l-Daʿwa wa'l-Irshād; Mecca: al-Maktaba al-Imdādīya, 1404/1984), pp. 14–15. Ibn Taymīya, although an advocate of the narrowest sort of literalism, knew the Islamic and philosophical sciences inside out and, what is more, knew exactly where all the bodies were buried. His critiques of philosophy and logic are extremely interesting. There is a translation of one of his shorter refutations of logic: Wael B. Hallaq, trans., *Ibn Taymiyya against the Greek Logicians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

of logical thinking took place within the discipline of *uṣūl al-fiqh* apart from elements directly imported from traditional logic. *Uṣūl al-fiqh* or jurisprudence is the science of the rules for deducing law and thus is the logic of Islamic law. It has two aspects that clearly can be considered logical in some plausible sense: the proper interpretation of religious texts and the deduction of obligations. The first relates to semantics and philosophical rhetoric, the second to inference, particularly analogy, and to deonitic logic.

In his book *The Upshot of the Science of Jurisprudence,* Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī (1149–1209) discusses how the various divisions of *uṣūl al-fiqh* arise from the nature of the subject matter:

> You have learned that *uṣūl al-fiqh* is an expression for all the methods of *fiqh* and the method of inference in them and what can be deduced by them. These methods are either rational or traditional. I myself think that the rational methods are only valid if endorsed by traditional methods. . . . These are the divisions of *uṣūl al-fiqh:*
>
> First, semantics *[lughāt,* lit., "words"]; second, command and prohibition; third, the general and specific; fourth, the ambiguous and unambiguous; fifth, actions; sixth, abrogation; seventh, consensus; eighth, reports [of the Prophet's words and deeds]; ninth, analogy; tenth, probabilities *[tarājīḥ];* eleventh, independent judgment *[ijtihād];* twelfth, issuing legal opinions; thirteenth, differences of opinion about proper methods of legal reasoning.[19]

A number of these headings are distinctly logical, certainly logical within the broad sense laid out by the Stoics in their science of speech and thought. The first book is on semantics and deals both with general questions of language and rhetorical questions like metaphor. The material is obviously borrowed from both logic and rhetoric. The bulk of *uṣūl al-fiqh* consists in the elaboration of an applied five-value deonitic logic quite systematically expounded. It treats such questions as the levels of obligation (commanded, recommended, indifferent, discouraged, prohibited), the degree of certainty required for establishing duties, the effect of doubt or contradictory evidence on an obligation, and the relationships between individual and collective duties, among others.

[19] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣūl fī 'Ilm al-Uṣūl,* vol. 1, ed. Ṭāhā Jābir Fayyāḍ al-'Alwānī (Lajnat al-Buḥūth 13; Riyad: Jāmi'at al-Imām Muḥammad b. Sa'ūd al-Islāmīya, 1399/1979), pp. 223, 226–7. On semantic analysis in Sunnī *uṣūl,* see Šukrija (Husejn) Ramić, *Language and the Interpretation of Islamic Law* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2003).

It deals, moreover, with modes of inference, particularly analogy *[qiyās]*, which is the most important method for establishing law in new situations.

Muslim scholars were perfectly well aware that *uṣūl al-fiqh* had connections to logic – it seems to have been the main reason that logic was taught in the seminaries – and in logical texts they sometimes remark on particularly important connections such as the use of analogy and lesser levels of certainty in legal reasoning. They imported logical terms and concepts into *uṣūl al-fiqh*, but they seem not to have done the opposite – that is, explicated legal reasoning as such within logical texts. For this reason, the connection between the two disciplines is not necessarily obvious if only the specifically logical texts are considered.

KALĀM

Kalām is Islamic theology – literally, "talk" about religious topics. Of all the major disciplines of the Islamic religious sciences, with the possible exception of mysticism, Kalām changed the most in its history. It arose from the arguments that occurred in the first generations of Islam, when Muslims realized that the implications of Islamic doctrines were not necessarily clear and that the varying interpretations of the Qur'ān might have different theological and practical consequences. The older surviving theological texts are somewhat random collections of doctrines, creeds supported without great system by proof texts and simple rational arguments. Writing his *Highlights of the Polemic against Deviators and Innovations* in the first third of the tenth century, al-Ashʿarī, after two paragraphs of introduction, launches straight into a commonsense proof that God is the creator of the world:

> Q. What is the proof that creation has a maker who made it and a governor who wisely ordered it?
>
> A. The proof is that the completely mature man was originally semen, then a clot, then a small lump, then flesh and bone and blood. Now we know very well that he did not translate himself from state to state. For we see that at the peak of his physical and mental maturity he is unable to produce hearing and sight for himself, or to create a bodily member for himself. . . . [20]

[20] Al-Ashʿarī, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, trans. Richard J. McCarthy, *The Theology of al-Ashʿarī* (Beirut: Imprimérie Catholique, 1953), p. 6.

The argument is a simple elaboration of two Qur'ānic verses citing the development of the embryo as evidence of God's power. Māturīdī, writing about a century later in his *Book of Monotheism*, felt the need to begin with an introduction on epistemology, but it occupies only fifteen pages of a six-hundred-page book.[21] Māturīdī's follower Usmandī, writing a much smaller book a century later near the middle of the twelfth century, devotes about a tenth of a two-hundred-page book to epistemological issues. A similar book by the Ashʿarite Imām al-Ḥaramayn Juwaynī, writing at about the same time, has a comparable format.[22]

Sometime around 1300, the situation changed completely. Large, systematic theological treatises appeared, the bulk of which consisted of discussions of inference and metaphysics, with obvious heavy influences from philosophy. An example is Saʿd al-Dīn Taftazānī's *Intentions*,[23] a work that later scholars frequently wrote commentaries on. Taftāzānī's Kalām is now largely concerned with what theologians referred to as *umūr ʿāmma,* "general matters." In this case, most of the book is almost indistinguishable from philosophy, with the first four "Intentions" dealing with first principles, general entities, the temporal and eternal, and atoms. The fifth Intention is devoted to "the divine" but is heavily influenced by philosophy, as evidenced by such things as its use of the term "Necessary Being" to refer to God. Only the sixth Intention, on "things known by report," deals with what the early Kalām theologians would have recognized as the characteristic subjects of their discipline. In the three centuries after Ghazālī, philosophy had moved from being a rival of Kalām theology to a central concern and source of inspiration. The content and methods of this later Islamic theology are not well understood by modern scholars, but it is clear that by the fourteenth century, Kalām had become a full-blown scholastic discipline not unlike the philosophical theology cultivated by European philosopher-theologians of the same

[21] Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd,* ed. Bekir Topaloğlu and Muhammed Aruçi (Istanbul: İSAM, 2005), pp. 11–24.

[22] ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Samarqandī al-Usmandī, *Lubāb al-Kalām,* ed. M. Sait Üzervarlı (Istanbul: İSAM, 2005), pp. 33–50. Al-Juwaynī, *A Guide to Conclusive Proofs for the Principles of Belief: Kitāb al-Irshād ilā Qawāṭiʿ al-Adilla fī Uṣūl al-Iʿtiqād,* trans. Paul E. Walker (Great Books of Islamic Civilization; Reading, U.K.: Garnett, 2000).

[23] Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid,* 5 vols. in 4, ed. and comm. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿUmayra (n.p., al-Sharīf al-Riḍā, 1989). The extensive commentary in this edition is modern in date but traditional in its methods and content.

period. It is also clear that the concerns of this discipline embraced much that might be considered to belong to logic.[24]

INSTITUTIONS AND THE BOUNDARIES OF LOGIC

It is interesting to reflect on why logical thinking, especially with regard to the disciplines within which it was pursued, developed so differently in Islam than in medieval Christian Europe. Much of the reason seemingly has to do with institutional arrangements.

In the medieval European university, there was a strict division between what Masters of Arts were allowed to teach to undergraduates and what could be taught to doctoral students in the faculties of theology. The Masters of Arts – graduate students in modern terms – could teach logic and natural philosophy to undergraduates. They were forbidden to teach or write about the very much more sensitive theological topics. This seems to have had two effects on the development of logic and natural philosophy in medieval Europe. First, these two disciplines were much more intensively cultivated than they would have been without such restrictions. Bright young scholars were forced to focus their attention on logic and not on issues like the Trinity, which only the professors of theology were allowed to teach and write on. Second, these younger scholars expanded the boundaries of logic, developing new branches of logic dealing with questions like the philosophy of language and topics that we would consider epistemology or even metaphysics.[25]

The situation was very different in the Islamic world, where few institutional rules restricted what young scholars could write or teach. Instead,

[24] Halverson, *Theology and Creed,* pp. 33, 44–5, cites Ibn Khaldūn as saying that Kalām had become unnecessary in his time and that in any case it had been thoroughly infiltrated by philosophy. Halverson argues that this transition to philosophically-oriented Kalām made the discipline irrelevant in later Islamic thought, thus leaving modern Islam without an active tradition of rational theology. While it is difficult to judge the relative importance of Kalām theology in the last few centuries, it certainly is the case that Islamic law is studied much more commonly and that both popular expositions and advanced works of Kalām are far less commonly published than works on other major areas of Islamic thought. The relevant passage of Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima* is 3.27–43, trans. Rosenthal, 3.34–55.

[25] Paul Vincent Spade, personal communication, January 8, 1998. On the universities and their role in the development of logic and natural philosophy, see Grant, *Foundations of Modern Science,* pp. 33–51, 172–4.

development took place within the lines laid out by established disciplines and practices of teaching. Logic retained the generally Aristotelian form it had been given by Ibn Sīnā, and advances took the form of the discovery of new problems to be resolved by clarifications and further distinctions. The situation was rather different in *fiqh* and Kalām. In both disciplines, there were major reformulations of their foundations without fundamental changes in the actual content of their subjects. The process happened earlier in *fiqh*, with the rise of *uṣūl al-fiqh* as a distinct discipline. The latter discipline rigorously grounded the legal rules established by early generations of Islamic legal scholars through an elaborate analysis of language, legal inference, and evidence. The process occurred later in Kalām in response to the challenge of philosophy. By the fourteenth century, Kalām works had come to be dominated by *umūr ʿāmma,* "general matters," elaborate epistemological and philosophical discussions providing the basis for the traditional theological doctrines.

Looking at the problem superficially, as most historians of logic have done, it appears that logic in the Islamic world stalled after Ibn Sīnā, endlessly repeating the same doctrines through commentaries and supercommentaries. This, I believe, misses three important points:

First, the content of the commentaries and supercommentaries is virtually unknown to modern scholarship. The twentieth century Iraqi logician, ʿAlī Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ, identifies some five hundred points of dispute in the traditional logic dealing with almost every significant topic discussed.[26] A disciplinary tradition that has engaged intelligent men for over a thousand years is not likely to be completely sterile.

Second, as we have seen, much analysis that we – or the Stoics, or the medieval Latins – would consider to be logic was practiced in other disciplines, notably Arabic linguistics and the principles of jurisprudence. Any sound analysis of Islamic achievements in logic, considered in a larger sense, must examine what was done in those disciplines.

Third, for our purposes, the critical point is not whether logic developed or not; what is important is that it was central to Islamic intellectual life and education. That is the subject of the next chapter.

[26] See p. 107 n. 1 above.

7

The Long Afternoon of Islamic Logic

As we have seen, what the Stoics and the medieval Europeans considered to be logic is, in Islamic intellectual life, spread across a number of disciplines, including legal theory, grammar, and literary rhetoric. Nevertheless, logic in its narrow Aristotelian sense played an important role in Islamic intellectual life. This tradition of study and teaching of logic is interesting and important in its own right, but it is also an especially good illustration of the role of scholastic rationalism in Islamic intellectual culture, particularly in education.

For some seven hundred years, seminaries across the Islamic world have required that students take a rigorous course of traditional logic. Instruction was based on a series of short textbooks, explicated through commentaries and glosses. The textbooks of this "school logic" reflected the essentially oral quality of instruction in the seminaries. Given that the seminary training equipped students to explicate Islamic law from sacred texts, it is not surprising that the emphasis of the school logic was on semantics. The school logic was closely linked with philosophical logic, which differed from it in emphasis, and with the disciplines of the principles of jurisprudence and Arabic linguistics. Despite some influence from Western logic, the school logic is still taught as a basic part of the curriculum in Islamic seminaries in Egypt, Iran, and the Subcontinent.

IN *THE MANTLE OF THE PROPHET*, ROY MOTTAHEDEH'S WONDERFUL book on religion and politics in modern Iran, there is a description of the ten-year-old seminarian Ali Hashemi attending his first classes on logic. The students sit cross-legged in a circle around their teacher, who

reads from a large book, the *Commentary of Mulla Abdullah,* about the distinction between conception and assent. The students – the brighter ones, at least – pepper the teacher with questions and objections, which the teacher uses to bring out the subtler aspects of the text.[1] The scene took place in Qom in Iran in the early 1950s, but it might have taken place in any major Islamic seminary between Cairo and Hyderabad at any time since the fourteenth century and, with the names and some details changed, could equally well have taken place in a medieval European university. Logic seems to have become a regular subject of instruction in Islamic institutions of higher education about 1300, at least in the more sophisticated centers of learning, and it continued even in areas like Egypt and North Africa, where interest in philosophy had virtually died out.

The effort devoted to logic in the seminaries was considerable. For example, in the first four years of the eight-year program in the religious college in Deoband in India in the 1880s, one of the three daily lessons was devoted to logic. Eighteen texts were studied, including several series of text, commentary, and supercommentary.[2] Intellectually, this tradition centered on a series of short, standard textbooks, each the subject of hundreds of commentaries. Most of the commentaries were intended for students or were actually student exercises themselves, but some were major works of scholarship. The tradition remained sufficiently vigorous that scores of editions of major and minor texts were printed in the second half of the nineteenth century, as soon as printing came to be accepted in Islamic countries. Elementary texts were published for students, just as in earlier generations scribes had prepared copies for purchase by them,

[1] Mottahedeh, *Mantle,* pp. 69–78. "The Commentary of Mulla Abdullah" is the *Sharḥ Tahdhīb al-Manṭiq* of Najm al-Dīn ʿAbd Allāh al-Yazdī (d. 1015/1606), a commentary on a short logic textbook by Saʿd al-Dīn Taftazānī (d. 792/1392), a well-known author of textbooks and commentaries in several fields, including logic.

[2] On the curriculum of the seminaries in recent times, see, for Egypt, J. Herworth-Dunne, *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt* (London: Luzac, 1938), pp. 41–65; for Iran, Seyyed Hossain Nasr, "The Traditional Texts Used in the Persian Madrasahs," in Mohamed Taher, ed., *Encyclopaedic Survey of Islamic Culture,* vol. 3: *Educational Developments in Muslim World* (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1997), pp. 56–73, esp. 65–67, and Aqiqi Bakhshayeshi, *Ten Decades of Ulama's Struggle,* trans. Alaedin Pazrgadi and ed. G. S. Radhkrishna (Tehran: Islamic Propagation Organization, 1405/1985), pp. 175–80, 258–9); and for India, G. W. Leitner, *History of Indigenous Education in the Punjab since Annexation and in 1882* (1882; reprinted Delhi: Amar Prakashan, 1982), pp. 72–79.

and major commentaries were published, obviously for scholarly use. Many of these texts are still being reprinted for student use.

Traditionally this material is dismissed as hopelessly arid – and it is indeed dry – but surely a school of logic whose earliest members were contemporaries of Thomas Aquinas and whose most recent members have seen Russell buried is worthy of attention, as a sociological phenomenon if nothing else. This tradition must have spoken in some way to the many generations of students and teachers who passed it on – Mottahedeh documents its influence on a series of major intellectuals of modern Iran – but how? Was it an archaic relic preserved in the curriculum out of misplaced academic conservatism, like Latin in the British public schools? Was it a tool for sharpening the minds and memories of aspiring jurisconsults, as an enthusiastic young logic teacher from a Pakistani seminary once told me? Did it aid in debate? Was it used in jurisprudence? Did it introduce students to philosophy? Did it aid the teachers in their own scholarly research? Surely all of these are true to some degree, but how should we weight these factors, and what were the details?

Historians of philosophy or logic oriented toward the European tradition – Kneale and Kneale or Dumitriu, for example – have nothing to say about later Islamic logic because they are working mainly from the Latin sources, and no Arabic logical works after Ibn Rushd were translated into Latin in the Middle Ages.[3] The historians of Islamic logic, repelled by the mass of commentaries and supercommentaries, unpublished or in hard-to-read lithographs and old Bulaq editions, dismiss the period – two-thirds of the history of Islamic logic! – as a period of stagnation.[4]

[3] Kneale and Kneale, *Development*, have nothing on Islamic logic apart from several references to doctrines of Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd discussed by European logicians. Dumitriu, *History,* vol. 2, pp. 19–36, has a little more.

[4] This is the view of Rescher, *Development,* pp. 73–75, 80–82, whose account of Islamic logic stops with the fifteenth century; of R. Arnaldez, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 2nd ed.; *s.v.*, "Manṭiq," whose account goes up to Ghazālī (d. 1111), and Shams Inati, "Logic," in Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, eds., *History of Islamic Philosophy*, vol. 2 (Routledge History of World Philosophies I:1; London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 802–23, whose account stops with Avicenna, nine hundred and fifty years ago. Tony Street, "Arabic Logic," in Dov M. Gabbay, *Handbook of the History of Logic*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2004–). *Greek, Indian, and Arabic Logic,* attempts to deal with the doctrinal development of philosophical logic between Ibn Sīnā and the fourteenth century but has little to say about the school logic. *Idem*, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, s.v.*, "Arabic and Islamic Philosophy of Language and Logic," http://plato.stanford.edu/

That judgment might be warranted in part, although no one has yet seen fit to demonstrate it, but as we have seen, it neglects three points: first, the evidence of intellectual development within Islamic logic; second, the intellectual question of where we should draw the boundary lines of Islamic logic, and finally, the sociological question of why this kind of logic was taught for so long.

ISLAMIC LOGIC TO THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

The school logic – as I call it to distinguish it from the philosophical logic found in texts like Ibn Sīnā's *Healing* and the logical elements of disciplines like grammar and jurisprudence – is largely Aristotelian logic as systematized by Ibn Sīnā. Obviously there is more to it, but this is the central fact of the history of Islamic logic.

The pagan philosophical schools in the Byzantine Empire were finally closed in the early sixth century. Early Islamic sources tell us that thereafter, the most important practitioners of Greek logic were the Syriac-speaking Christians, who taught logic up to *Prior Analytics* 1.7 in their seminaries. Islamic logic began in the middle of the eighth century with

entries/arabic-islamic-language, Feb. 14, 2010, deals with some points at which the earlier school logicians broke with Ibn Sīnā. Rescher's work is mainly a catalog of the major Islamic logicians through about 1500 but is nonetheless the only attempt to write a book-length history of Islamic logic. I wish I could say that it was outdated, but I do not know of any work that attempts to supercede it. Rescher also wrote or co-authored a number of other articles and monographs on various aspects of Islamic logic, especially modal logic. Most recent research on Islamic logic has been devoted either to editions, translations, or explications of particular texts, almost all from earlier than the period I discuss here, or to the discussion of particular problems. An exception to this pattern is Khaled El-Rouwayheb, "Sunni Muslim Scholars on the Status of Logic, 1500–1800," *Islamic Law and Society* 11.2 (2004), pp. 213–32. ʿAlī Sāmī al-Nashshār, *Manāhij al-Baḥth ʿinda Mufakkirī al-Islām waʾktishāf al-Minhaj al-ʿIlmī fī ʾl-ʿĀlam al-Islāmī* [Research methods of the thinkers of Islam and an investigation of scientific method in the Islamic world], 2nd ed. (Cairo Dār al-Maʿārif, 1965), discusses the whole question of research methodology in the mature Islamic sciences, dealing with both logic proper and the applied logic of such disciplines of law, theology, and rhetoric. Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ, *Naqd,* is a survey of the disputed points in the school logic, an essential reference for anyone studying the subject, and is a complement to Muḥammad-Ridā al-Muẓaffar, *al-Manṭiq* (Baghdad: al-Tafayyuḍ, 1367/1948, and reprinted several times in Najaf, Qum, and Beirut), which has been for some decades the standard textbook for students studying logic in the Shiʿite seminaries in Iraq and is apparently also used in Iran. On the adoption of the rational sciences in Islamic education, see Sonja Brentjes, "On the Location of the Ancient or 'Rational" Science in Islamic Educational Landscapes (AH 500–1100)," *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 4.1 (2002), pp. 47–71.

the earliest translations of Aristotle's logical works, but it really was not firmly established until about the end of the ninth century, when high-quality translations of all of Aristotle's logical works and many of their Greek commentaries were in circulation. Most were done by Syriac-speaking Christian scholars. The tenth century saw attempts to assimilate this material into Islamic intellectual culture, with the highlight being Fārābī's commentaries on and popular adaptations of the books comprising Aristotle's *Organon*.

It was Ibn Sīnā, writing in the early eleventh century, who gave Islamic logic its definitive shape. Even in Arabic, Aristotle was Aristotle, and not easy reading. Ibn Sīnā had a happy gift for clarity, system, and lucid Arabic, and his works replaced Aristotle's in the Islamic world. Today, only one full manuscript of the Organon survives in Arabic, and almost all the Arabic translations of Greek commentaries are lost, but manuscripts of Ibn Sīnā and his commentators choke the libraries of the East.[5]

The three centuries following Ibn Sīnā's death saw several determined attacks on his logic, both by supporters and opponents of logic. We have already seen the attacks of the grammarian Sīrāfī[6] and the theologian Ghazālī.[7] The mystical philosopher Suhrawardī (d. 1191), the younger contemporary of Averroes, rejected the essentialism of Aristotelian logic on epistemological and metaphysical grounds, although his criticisms and proposed simplification of logic do not seem to have been influential.[8] Suhrawardī's attacks were extended in the early fourteenth century by Ibn Taymīya (d. 1328), the greatest fundamentalist of Islamic history, who attacked logic in the name of a radical nominalism and atomism derived from the Ash'arite theologians.[9]

However, the tide had already turned more than half a century before Ibn Taymīya. Two influential commentaries on Ibn Sīnā's *Hints and*

[5] The translation movement was discussed on pp. 55–57, and n. 1 above. On the translations of Aristotle, see F. E. Peters, *Aristotle and the Arabs* (New York Studies in Near Eastern Civilization, no. 1; New York: NYU Press, 1968), and *Aristoteles Arabus: The Oriental Translations and Commentaries on the Aristotelian Corpus* (New York University Department of Classics Monographs on Mediterranean Antiquity; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968).

[6] See pp. 82–3, n. 54 above.

[7] See p. 83, nn. 55–6 above.

[8] Hossein Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination: A Study of Suhrawardī's "Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq"* (Brown University Judaic Studies Series 97; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).

[9] See p. 115, n. 18 above.

Admonitions, an aphoristic textbook of philosophy, had reestablished Ibn Sīnā's popularity. The first, by the theologian Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 1209), a schoolmate of Suhrawardī, was critical of Ibn Sīnā but nonetheless helped make philosophy a respectable object of study for theologians. The second, by the great thirteenth-century philosopher and scientist Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 1274), answered Rāzī's criticisms and became the object of innumerable glosses and supercommentaries.[10] It is Ṭūsī's circle that is the starting point of the school logic.

THE TEXTBOOKS AND THEIR COMMENTARIES

Ṭūsī was one of those who made common cause with the Mongol invaders in the 1250s, and he was rewarded with a lavish grant to establish an observatory at Marāgha, at that time the capital of the Mongol state in Iran.[11] Although the observatory's main business was astronomy, the whole range of the rational sciences were studied and taught there, including logic.[12]

Ṭūsī had written extensively on philosophical logic, including a manual of philosophical logic in Persian, *The Basis of Acquistion,*[13] the commentary on the logic of Ibn Sīnā's *Hints,* and several other works. Although these were popular, they did not come into use for teaching. However, several short summaries of logic by Ṭūsī's contemporaries did achieve lasting popularity and have remained the basis, directly or indirectly, for most logic teaching in Islamic seminaries to the present. These logicians were Najm al-Dīn Dabīrān Kātibī Qazwīnī, Athīr al-Dīn Abharī, and – of somewhat less importance – Sirāj al-Dīn Urmawī. Kātibī (d. 1276) is best known for his *Shamsīya,* "the Sun Epistle," an introduction to logic, as well as for an equally influential textbook of philosophy,

[10] There are many editions, of which the most accessible is Sulaymān Dunyā, ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1960).

[11] See p. 98 above. On the observatory, see Parvīz Varjāvand, *Kāvush-i Raṣd-khāna-i Marāgha* [Excavation of the Marāgha observatory] (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1366 Sh./1987). On one of Ṭūsī's students, see Walbridge, *Science,* chap. 1.

[12] Rescher, *Development,* pp. 197–99, from which other bibliographical references may be traced. A very thorough compilation of the information on Ṭūsī is Mudarris Riḍawī, *Aḥwāl wa-Āthār-i Khwāja Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī* (Intishārāt 282; Tehran: Tehran University Press, 1334/1955). Manuscripts of Ṭūsī's works on many subjects are abundant.

[13] *Asās al-Iqtibās,* ed. Mudarris Riḍawī (Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tihrān 12; Tehran: Khūrdād, 1324/1947).

Ḥikmat al-ʿAyn, "the Wisdom of the Source."[14] Abharī (d. 1264) is best known for his *Īsāghūjī,* "Eisagoge," an immensely popular elementary introduction to logic, but he, too, wrote other short texts that also have remained popular, along with a manual of philosophy, *Hidāyat al-Ḥikma,* "The Guidance of Wisdom."[15] The last of the three, Sirāj al-Dīn Urmawī (1198–1283) is somewhat less important, but his manual of logic, *Maṭāliʿ al-Anwār,* "the Dawning Places of Lights," drew some commentators.[16]

The fact that three scholars working at the same time produced similar textbooks indicates that there was a need for works of this kind in instruction. Their lasting popularity was secured through the works of several scholars writing in the fourteenth and early fifteen centuries. The first was Quṭb al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 1365), known as Taḥtānī, "who lives downstairs," to distinguish him from another Quṭb al-Dīn who lived upstairs in the same seminary. Taḥtānī wrote popular commentaries on several of these textbooks, of which the most important was a commentary on the *Shamsīya,* known affectionately to generations of students as *Quṭbī.* He also wrote the standard supercommentary on Ibn Sīnā's *Hints* dealing with the disagreements between Ṭūsī's and Rāzī's commentaries.[17]

Later in the fourteenth century, his work was taken up by two gifted writers of textbooks, Sharīf Jurjānī (d. 1340) and Saʿd al-Dīn Taftazānī (d. 1390).[18] Each produced popular supercommentaries on several of the earlier textbooks as well as short textbooks of their own that in turn became objects of commentaries, supercommentaries, and glosses. Jurjānī's textbooks, *The Larger* and *The Smaller,* were written in Persian. This was a sign of the increasing Iranization of philosophy and logic, as previously, works in the vernacular had always been written for laymen, not for scholars or students, who were expected to work in academic Arabic. Both Taftazānī and Jurjānī also wrote popular textbooks on other subjects, such as grammar.[19] After this, the bibliographical trail

[14] Rescher, *Development,* pp. 203–04.
[15] Rescher, *Development,* pp. 196–7.
[16] Rescher, *Development,* p. 195.
[17] Rescher, *Development,* pp. 215–16.
[18] See p. 118 above.
[19] On Taftazānī, see Rescher, *Development,* pp. 217–18. On Jurjānī, see Rescher, *Development,* pp. 222–3.

becomes too complicated to recount in detail, with the commentaries and supercommentaries numbering in the hundreds.

The next major event is the conversion of Iran to Shi'ism in the sixteenth century, which split the tradition into Iranian and Indian branches (though the two branches continued to influence each other). Many Sunni Iranian scholars immigrated to India to escape persecution, and they were followed by Shi'ite scholars seeking to make their fortunes in that land of fabulous wealth and urbane princes. Although the seminarians in Iran and India continued to study the same underlying textbooks, they increasingly did so through different commentaries. Whether logical doctrines also diverged is not yet clear, but the logicians of Shi'ite Iran are still viewed with grudging respect by their Sunni Indian peers. Logic was also taught in the great Islamic university of al-Azhar in Cairo and presumably in other places as well, but it seems to have been a less vigorous tradition.[20] When the learned Cairo publisher Faraj Allāh Zakī Kurdī printed a two-volume anthology of logic for use at al-Azhar at the beginning of the twentieth century, his main texts were the *Shamsīya,* the early commentary by Taḥtānī, and supercommentaries by Jurjānī, Taftazānī, and the seventeenth-century Indian 'Abd al-Ḥakīm Siyālkūtī. He was able to include only two Egyptian works, a supercommentary of some merit by Disūqī and notes by the then Grand Shaykh of Azhar. The latter were probably written at the request of the publisher – presumably they would have guaranteed classroom adoption – but they are no more than puerile glosses of difficult words, a small but telling indication of the standard of logical scholarship in the leading Sunni Arab institution of Islamic learning.[21]

When printing finally came into common use in the middle of the nineteenth century, the standard logical texts were published, mainly for the use of students. I have already mentioned one such collection published in Cairo; there were many others, as well as the beautiful lithographed collections published in Tehran, Istanbul, and all the major centers of Islamic publishing in India, particularly Delhi, Lucknow, Cawnpore, and Lahore. Scores of collections were published. I reproduce a sample page

[20] But see Khaled El-Rouayheb, "Was There a Revival of Logical Studies in Eighteenth Century Egypt?" *Die Welt des Islams* 45.1 (2005), pp. 1–19.

[21] *al-Majmū' al-Mushtamil 'alā Sharḥ Quṭb al-Dīn . . .*, 2 vols. (Cairo: Faraj Allāh Zakī al-Kurdī, 1323/1905).

from one as Illustration 1.[22] There were also works published in vernacular Islamic languages, either as introductions or as trots. Persian manuals of logic were published in Iran in the twentieth century and in India, where Persian was the language of the educated, in the nineteenth. In India, Urdu translations and commentaries increasingly appeared in the twentieth century as Persian passed out of common use and the standards of Arabic instruction declined. In Cairo, works on logic in the Islamic languages of Southeast Asia were published for the benefit of students from those distant lands.[23] The old lithographs continue to be reprinted for use in the seminaries, and original works occasionally are still published. To this day, theology students in Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, and India are taught this form of logic as a basic part of their training.

THE EDUCATIONAL USE OF THE SCHOOL LOGIC TEXTS

The theology students and professors who have always been the primary users of these texts were and are scholastics, and their use of these texts reflects scholastic methods of teaching. Two factors have been mainly responsible for determining the form and use of these texts: the limitations of manuscripts and the Islamic preference for the oral transmission of knowledge.

Few now appreciate the practical difficulties faced by those who wished to preserve and transmit knowledge in the age of manuscripts. Scholars had the choice of making their own copies of books they needed, commissioning copies from professional scribes (or their own students), or buying them from booksellers. Paper was handmade and therefore expensive.[24] Whatever the source, a book was expensive in time, money, or both. Moreover, a scholarly book had to be carefully checked before it could be used, preferably by reading it to someone who had authoritative knowledge of that text or by correcting it from the dictation of such a

[22] *Majmūʿah-yi Manṭiq* [Anthology on logic] (Lucknow: Munshī Naval Kishore, October 1876/Ramadan 1293). This collection is described in John Walbridge, "A Nineteenth Century Indo-Persian Logic Textbook," *Islamic Studies* (Islamabad) 42:4 (Winter 2003), pp. 687–93.

[23] I owe this information to Michael Feener.

[24] Abdullah Tasbihi has described to me seeing villagers in Siyalkot, once a major Indian center of paper manufacture, gather the straw and other vegetable matter left behind by flooding to use for papermaking.

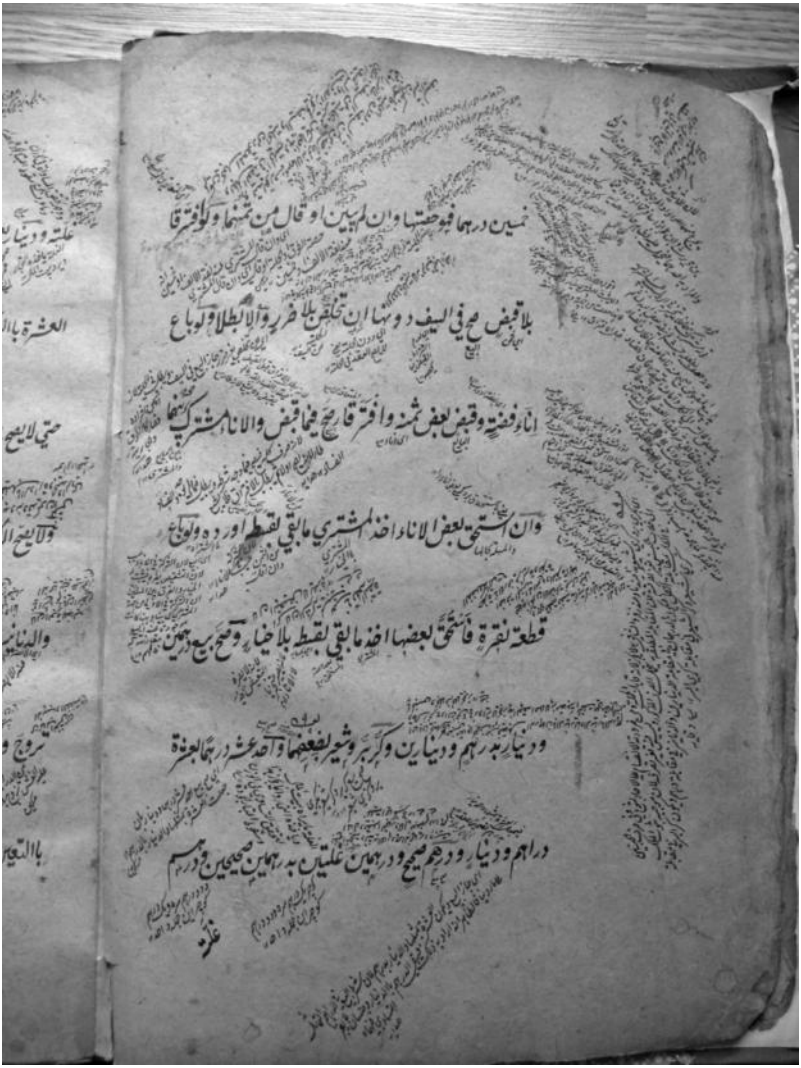
1. A page from a lithographed logic textbook.

person. Citing a book without checking it in one of these ways was an academic sin roughly akin to the modern offense of copying footnotes without verifying the reference personally. Understandably, there was a strong preference for books that were concise, comprehensive, and current. For that reason, earlier texts tended to disappear, replaced by more complete and up-to-date works incorporating their contents.[25]

Second, Muslim scholars have always preferred the oral transmission of knowledge. This has roots in the particular history of Islamic religious learning, where the hadith were transmitted orally. It also has to do with the ambiguity of the Arabic script, particularly in its earlier forms, and with a shrewd evaluation of the limitations of manuscripts and of the written transmission of knowledge generally. The aversion to the use of written texts was not quite as strong in the rational sciences like logic and philosophy, because one can in theory deduce the correct reading for oneself, but pedagogical considerations and academic traditions encouraged oral transmission even in these fields. The Islamic logicians who taught in the seminaries were in full agreement with Plato that philosophy must be learned through discussion. The occasional Islamic autodidact was a faintly ridiculous figure, however impressive his achievements might have been.

The form of the school texts reflects these circumstances and prejudices, and the manuscripts and lithographs show clearly how these texts were produced and used. The basic text was the short textbook, such as the *Sun Book* of Kātibī or the *Eisagoge* of Abharī. These are typically about ten to twenty pages in length (I translated the *Eisagoge* in a day), so they are delphic in their terseness. The student might buy the text in the market or, more likely, take it down in dictation in class and copy it out fair at home. He also might very well memorize it verbatim, which explains why some of these textbooks were rewritten as verse. In manuscripts, this primary text was often written with only eight or ten lines per page, with a space of up to a centimeter between lines and wide margins. This deviation from the usual manuscript principle of never wasting paper allowed the classroom use of the text as a notebook. The teacher would go through the text line by line – indeed, word by

[25] Franz Rosenthal, *The Technique and Approach of Muslim Scholarship* (Analecta Orientalia 24; Rome: Pontificium Institutem Biblicum, 1947), p. 61.



2. A manuscript showing a student's interlinear and marginal notes.

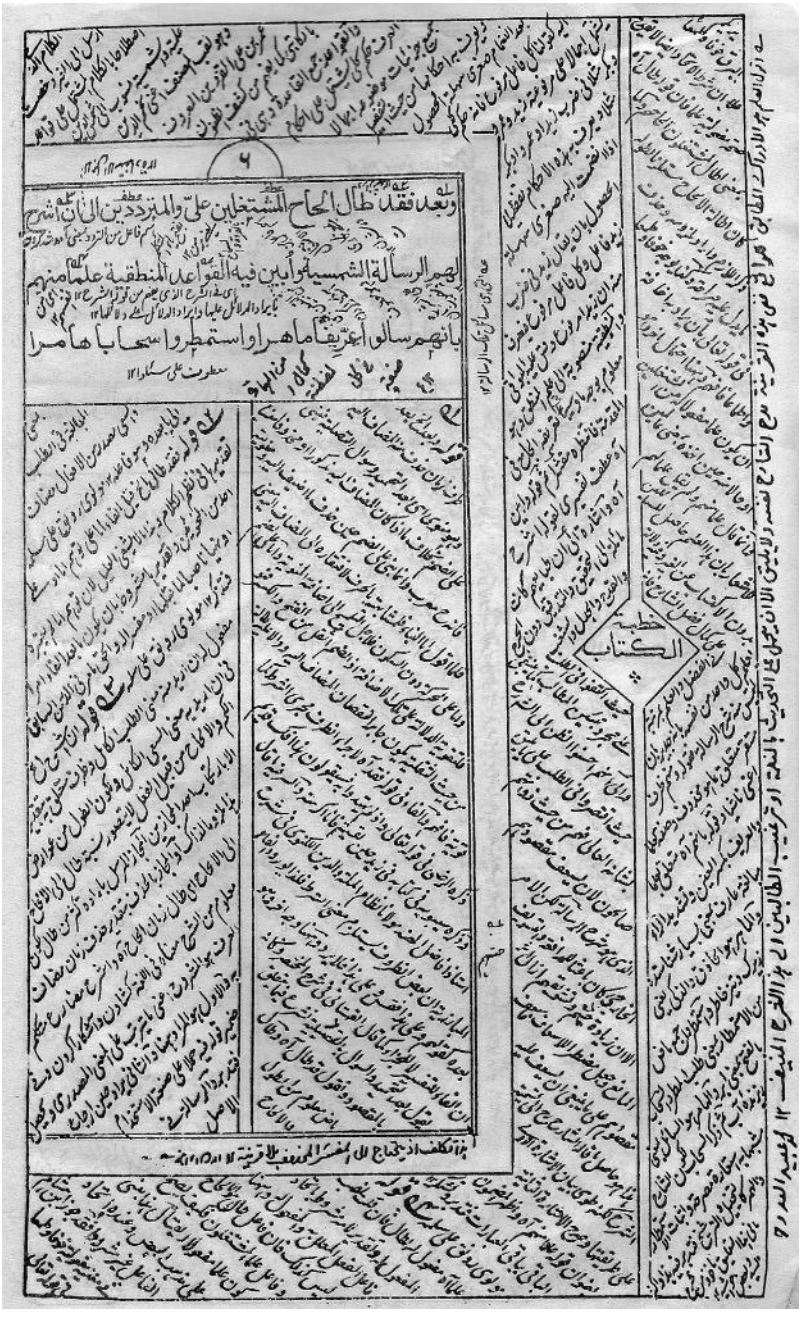
word – and explain it. The student would gloss difficult words and phrases between the lines and write more extended comments in the margins.[26] The students might then collate these marginal notes taken down from their teacher's dictation and publish them in his name as a commentary – usually called a *ḥāshiya,* "gloss."

This process sounds mind-numbingly dull, but in the hands of a skillful teacher it clearly was not. Students were encouraged to raise difficulties or objections, to which the teacher or other students would respond. A student's status in the eyes of his teachers and other students was largely dependent on his ability to hold his own in this lively cut-and-thrust.

Written commentaries were often used to supplement the underlying text. These would not be memorized, but they did serve to explain and amplify the original textbook for students in their private study and provide texts for more advanced study of the material. Like modern textbooks, they also served to extend the reach of the most gifted teachers. Because the curriculum tended to visit the same topics repeatedly in greater depth, a succession of commentaries and supercommentaries was often used to accommodate students at different levels and probably also as teachers' guides. The most famous such series in logic was Kātibī's *Sun Book,* with Taḥtānī's *Quṭbī,* Jurjānī's supercommentary *Mīr Quṭbī,* and Siyālkūtī's *Gloss,* commonly accompanied in India by Mīr Zāhid's *Gloss* on the *Quṭbī,* and Bihārī's *Gloss* on Mīr Zāhid. Read together, such collections of texts are a written imitation of the lively debate in the seminary classroom and a preparation for the student who had to be able to engage successfully in that debate. There is also a genre of textbooks on debating techniques or dialectic. They are far less common, but they had the same pattern of textbooks and supercommentaries. Most likely, they were intended for the use of more advanced students who would make their careers teaching in the seminaries or perhaps in the royal courts, both arenas where debates were a popular entertainment. As far as I know, disputations in this format are no longer held, but the rules of disputation are reflected in the arguments in texts on *uṣūl al-fiqh.*[27]

[26] See Illustration 2 for a sample. Illustration 3 shows how this form was adapted to lithographed textbooks.

[27] A fact pointed out to me by Khalil Abdur-Rashid. On disputation theory and its history, see Larry Benjamin Miller, "Islamic Disputation Theory: A Study of the Development of Dialectic in Islam from the Tenth through the Fourteenth Centuries," Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1984.



3. A commentary in a lithographed textbook.

Such texts were the product of an educational system that was narrow but intellectually challenging. Mottahedeh points out that many of the leading intellectuals of modern Iran were the product of this sort of education and remarks that although many of them rejected traditional religion, they invariably remembered their religious education with great fondness.[28]

CONTENT OF THE SCHOOL LOGIC

As in other areas of Islamic philosophy, the outline of Islamic logic was set by Ibn Sīnā, and it is almost certain that the school logic texts are modeled directly on the logic of Ibn Sīnā's last major work, the *Hints and Admonitions*. Despite some efforts to impose new organization on the subject, notably by Ghazālī in his *Mi'yār al-'Ilm*, "the *Gauge* of Knowledge," and by Suhrawardī in his *Philosophy of Illumination,* Ibn Sīnā's pattern for the most part stuck.

In philosophical encyclopedias, logic comprises nine major topics, all except one corresponding to a work of Aristotle:

Terms: Porphyry's *Eisagoge*
Categories: *Categories*
Propositions: *De Interpretatione*
Syllogism: *Prior Analytics*
Demonstration and essential definition: *Posterior Analytics*
Dialectic: *Topics*
Rhetoric: *Rhetoric*
Sophistry: *Sophistical Refutations*
Poetics: *Poetics*

This list includes two works that are not considered part of the *Organon* in the Greek tradition: the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*. The last five comprise the "Five Arts" of the applied syllogism. Whereas the *Prior Analytics* deals with the syllogism in general, the Islamic logicians assumed that each of the remaining books – *Posterior Analytics, Topics, Rhetoric, Sophistical Refutations,* and *Poetics* – dealt with syllogisms using a different kind of premise and thus yielding a different kind of conclusion. These are

[28] Mottahedeh, p. 109 and passim.

respectively certain, generally accepted, convincing, fallacious, and imaginative premises. They yield demonstrative, dialectical, rhetorical, false, and poetic conclusions. The logic of Ibn Sīnā's most important work, the *Healing*, thus consists of nine volumes, each treating one of these subjects. Ṭūsī's *Basis of Acquisition* follows exactly the same outline.

The school logicians modify this pattern somewhat. They begin with the premise that all knowledge is either conception or assent, the subject of Ali Hashemi's memorable first logic class. The former is a notion in the mind and the latter a notion accompanied by an affirmative or a negative judgment. These are terms and propositions. This distinction is not unique to the school logicians; it is found in Aristotle and Ibn Sīnā and is also the starting point of Ṭūsī's *Basis*. They then divide their works in accordance with this division, with chapters on terms, propositions, syllogisms, and the five arts.

After making the initial distinction between conception and assent, the school logicians turn to the question of semantics, the various ways in which a word can indicate its meaning. After distinguishing universal and particular terms, they next treat Porphyry's five predicables – genus, species, differentia, property, and common accident – accepting in the process the Aristotelian distinction of essential and accidental predicates. They conclude their discussion of terms with the kinds of definitions, accepting the Aristotelian essential definition, although the existence and legitimacy of such definitions were hotly disputed points in Islamic philosophy. The categories are generally not treated, at least not in the elementary textbooks, because they are more a metaphysical than a logical problem.

The second division of school logic dealt with propositions, both categorical and hypothetical. The more advanced books, such as the *Shamsīya*, dealt with modals, necessary or contingent propositions, but most of the textbooks did not, even though Islamic logicians had a highly developed theory of temporal and modal logic.[29] This section also dealt with such topics as conversion, contradiction and contrariety, and the square of opposition.

[29] Nicholas Rescher, *Temporal Modalities in Arabic Logic* (Foundations of Language, Suppl. Series 2; Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1967); idem, "The Theory of Temporal Modalities in Arabic Logic and Philosophy," in idem, *Studies in Arabic Philosophy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1966), pp. 81–110; idem, and Arnold van der Nat, "The Arabic Theory of Temporal Modal Syllogistic," in George F. Hourani, ed., *Essays on Islamic Philosophy and Science* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1975), pp. 189–21.

The third division dealt with categorical and hypothetical syllogisms. If the particular text has discussed modal propositions, there is likely to be some reference to modal syllogisms, but not in full detail. The works end with brief reference to the "matter" of syllogisms, which is to say the five arts, dealing mainly with the kinds of premises used in demonstration. In a twenty-page text, this subject is likely to occupy no more than a page or two and is clearly an afterthought. The Islamic logicians themselves observed that the standard texts of their tradition added a much more detailed discussion of semantics to the Aristotelian logic, dropped the categories, and reduced the discussion of the five arts to a minimum.[30]

This general pattern seems to have gone unchallenged throughout the long history of the school logic. There were certainly disagreements, but they took place in the supercommentaries and dealt with details, not with the basic structure of the logical system. The content of these debates will have to be ascertained by tediously combing through the commentaries, which has not yet been done.[31] One example of a point of disagreement, easy to identify because it happened to be the subject of a separate treatise, was the status of the fourth figure of the syllogism, unrecognized by Aristotle but advocated by some later logicians.[32] We know somewhat more about the debates on logic carried on in works of philosophy, but it is not clear whether these same debates were also carried on by the school logicians.

The structure of the textbooks makes quite clear the logical interests of the authors and students. Above all, they were interested in semantics, in the relationship between words and meanings. Semantics and the classification of terms, corresponding to the *Eisagoge,* occupies about 5 percent of Ṭūsī's *Basis,* a philosophical text. It occupies a quarter of Kātibī's *Shamsīya* and a third of Abharī's *Eisagoge.* It is also clearly a matter of creative thought; one elementary text identifies nine distinct ways in which a word can relate to a thing.[33] Apart from that, the school logicians seem to be primarily interested in conveying enough logic to avoid simple errors of inference. The Five Arts, which one might think were the point of logic, are given no more than a kiss and a promise,

[30] Kāshif al-Ghitā', *Naqd,* p. 6. Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimat al-'Allāma Ibn Khaldūn,* 4th ed., vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Ilmīya, 1978), pp. 188–9; trans. Rosenthal, pp. 142–3.

[31] Except by Kāshif al-Ghitā', *Naqd.*

[32] *Risāla fī Intāj al-Shikl al-Rābi'*, "Essay on the validity of the fourth figure of the syllogism," pp. 83–84, in *Majmū'ah-yi Manṭiq,* pp. 83–84.

[33] In *Majmū'ah-yi Manṭiq,* p. 120, margin.

with such attention as there is going to demonstration. In fact, the most important form of argument in Islamic law is analogy, which is not a syllogism at all and whose legitimacy has been the subject of bitter debate among Islamic lawyers throughout the centuries.[34]

The reason for this choice of topics seems plain. The school logic texts were mainly intended for students studying Islamic law. They were not being trained as philosophers. Although some would become preachers, rhetorical training was done in other ways – and the Islamic rhetoricians, heirs of the sophisticated Arabic tradition of rhetorical analysis, had little use for advice from Aristotle. What the students of law needed above all else was an understanding of how words and meanings were related. Islamic legal theory has as its most basic assumption the proposition that law is to be deduced from religious texts, not made by human legislators. The Islamic legal scholars had to squeeze meanings from the dry husks of the ancient texts and to do so in a way that was not arbitrary, even if it could not always be absolutely certain. They were perfectly well aware that Islamic law, as they expounded it, was not a system of unchallengeable truths but rather a tissue of informed conjecture *(ẓann)*.[35] Thus, they had little need of demonstration, which set too high an ideal, nor did they need to be able to distinguish between levels of logical authority.

And, in fact, the ability of the Islamic lawyer to use his logic to make subtle distinctions of meaning and dubious inferences is proverbial and often a subject for ridicules. It is told, for example, that a very poor young theology student, home for the holidays, sat down with his father to share an egg for dinner. "What are you learning these days?" the father asked. "Logic." "What is that?" "It is a science," said the son, "by which I can prove that this one egg is two." The young man proceeded to prove his point by high-sounding and quite incomprehensible arguments. "I am very glad," said his father, "that you have proved the existence of two eggs in this dish. I shall take this one, and you can take the other."[36]

[34] Ahmad Hasan, *Analogical Reasoning in Islamic Jurisprudence: A Study of the Juridical Principle of* Qiyās (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1986). *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 2nd ed., s.v., "Ḳiyās."

[35] This is particularly true when *qiyas,* analogy, is used; see Hasan, *Analogical Reasoning,* pp. 24–25. For a discussion of whether *fiqh* is a demonstrative science, see Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qurāfī, *Nafā'is al-Uṣūl fī Sharḥ al-Wuṣūl,* vol. 1, ed. ʿĀdil Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Mawjūd and ʿAlī Muḥammad Maʿūḍ (Mecca: Nizār Muṣṭafā al-Bāz 1418/1997), pp. 139ff.

[36] M. G. Zubaid Ahmad, *The Contribution of India to Arabic Literature from Ancient Times to 1857* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1967), p. 133.

The school logic is a subset of the logic of the philosophers, but the two differ in emphasis and goals. The school logic never frees itself entirely from its pedagogical purposes. The school logicians also have little interest in the metaphysical implications of logic. Partly this reflects the pedagogical purposes of the school logic, but it probably also reflects the criticisms made of philosophy by Ghazālī and many others. Philosophical logic texts generally were part of the larger philosophical *summas* that the Islamic philosophers tended to write. They also are far more likely to involve arguments about basic logical principles. Suhrawardī, for example, rejected essential definition and condemned advanced logic as useless shuffling of words. Philosophical logicians also were interested in aspects of logic with metaphysical implications, such as the categories. Finally, philosophical logic was commonly harder, with advanced discussions of such matters as modal logic. Still, this distinction can be overemphasized, because authors could and did write in both modes – for example, Kātibī and Taḥtānī.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the school logic was related to other disciplines, particularly *uṣūl al-fiqh*, Kalām, and the Arabic linguistic sciences. The close relationship of logic to these disciplines, especially to grammar, is seen in the number of occasions when these works are found in the same manuscripts or are published together in the nineteenth-century lithographs. This reflects not only their intellectual kinship but also the fact that students were studying the subjects at the same time.

THE MODERNIZATION OF THE SCHOOL LOGIC

The school logic was a stable tradition that lasted for a very long time, nearly eight centuries thus far. Its preferred literary genre – the commentary on a textbook – tends to conceal its inner tensions and debates, giving it a surface uniformity. Certainly its long survival and the continuing popularity of its earliest texts indicate that change came slowly and in the form of further distinctions and clarifications rather than fundamental reformulation. Yet the debates characteristic of instruction in this form of logic, the hundreds of commentaries written on the standard texts, and the long popularity of the tradition indicate that it had a lively

inner life capable of engaging the interest of teachers and students for century after century.

Recognition in the school tradition of developments in modern logic has been slow and incomplete. External signs of Western influence appear very slowly. In the nineteenth-century Indian lithographs on logic and other seminary subjects, we find numbered notes connecting glosses to the text, although this device had been used less systematically in manuscripts. Eventually, copyright notices begin to appear in lithographs that otherwise are imitations of manuscripts written two centuries earlier. A subcommittee was appointed at Punjab University in Lahore in the 1890s to devise standard Arab equivalents of the English vocabulary of traditional logic; the members were Indian scholars clearly at home with both Islamic and European traditional logic and with both Arabic and English, but the European logic they were dealing with was Aristotelian logic not very different from their own, not the mathematical logic beginning to develop in Germany and England.[37] By the middle of the twentieth century, Iranian logic books sometimes provided English equivalents of Arabic logical terms. Books on recent developments in Western logic begin appearing in Islamic languages in increasing numbers throughout the twentieth century, although such works had little direct influence on the teaching in the seminaries. Their authors were Western educated and usually not that familiar with logic as practiced in the seminaries. As a result, their works seem not to have addressed the concerns of the seminary logicians. The situation was somewhat better in Iran, where seminary-trained philosophers taught in the modern universities, but to this day in Pakistan, for example, there is almost no contact between the traditional logicians and philosophers of the seminaries and the Western-oriented logicians in the philosophy departments of the colleges and universities.

I cannot resist closing with one unusual exception to this pattern, the Iraqi Shiʿite Ayatollah Muḥammad-Bāqir al-Ṣadr (d. 1980). He was educated and taught in Najaf, the Shiʿite university town in central Iraq that is the chief modern rival of Qom, the Iranian center of Shiʿite scholarship. Ṣadr, of the first generation of seminarians to have also received a

[37] Chaudhri Ali Gauhar, "Glossary of Logical Terms," bound with supporting documents, Punjab University Library, Oriental Division manuscripts, catalog number Ar h II.45.

modern education, wrote very influential attacks on Marxism and liberal capitalism from an Islamic perspective.[38] Later, he seems to have become convinced that the traditional Islamic Neoplatonism did not give a satisfactory basis for religion, so he rejected the "realist" underpinnings of his early work and began constructing a system that he called "Subjectivism." The only surviving fruit of this effort – he was shot by Saddam Hussein in 1980 after Iranian propaganda broadcasts acclaimed him as "the Khomeini of Iraq" – was *The Logical Bases of Induction*,[39] in which he attempts to deal with the epistemological challenge of the British empiricists. The centerpiece of the book is an elaborate proof in which he tries to show, using the theory of probability from Russell's *Human Knowledge*, that a belief in God is presupposed when one chooses to act on any other piece of knowledge. The book has been a great puzzlement to the traditional logicians of the seminaries, who are particularly baffled by its detailed discussion of probability. And Russell, we may safely assume, would have been much more comfortable with the abstract and semantically oriented school logic.

LOGIC, EVEN WHEN GROUNDED IN PHILOSOPHICAL REASON OR REVElation passed down with all the fidelity scholars are capable of, does not guarantee agreement. There were certainly religious issues on which Muslims were willing to risk schism, but there were far more issues on which reasonable men could disagree, issues that were of intrinsic importance but over which sincere men could not justify dividing the community. And therein lies the remarkable tale of the Islamic institutionalization of disagreement.

[38] *Falsafatunā*, many editions; *Our Philosophy*, trans. Shams C. Inati (London: Muhammadi Trust and KPI, 1987). *Iqtiṣādunā* [Our economics], many editions.

[39] *Al-Usus al-Manṭiqīya li'l-Istiqrā'*, published in many editions.

8

The Institutionalization of Disagreement

Asking questions and disagreeing about their answers is at the heart of the Islamic experience. The first believers – and, equally important, the first unbelievers – came to the Prophet with questions. A significant portion of the Qur'ān and an even larger portion of the hadith consist of answers to those questions. After the Prophet's death, the believers came with their questions to those who had known the Prophet. Later they came to those who knew the stories passed down from the first generation of believers or who were the bearers of the accumulated religious wisdom of the Islamic community. And still they come with their questions to those who are reputed to have knowledge. But the answers they are given are not always the same. And therein lies one of the puzzles and achievements of medieval Islamic civilization.

THREE PHENOMENA – EACH IN ITS WAY RELATING TO THE ROLE OF disagreement in Islamic society, have puzzled me. Each relates to the same underlying feature of the Islamic religion in its premodern expression: a willingness to institutionalize permanent disagreement.

1) Why did Muslim scholars endorse diversity in matters that would seem to have only one right answer: legal schools, texts of the Qur'ān authoritative collections of hadith, and the like?
2) Why did Muslims adopt a curriculum for training clergy that stressed form over content, an educational method that stressed interpretive methods that only a handful of scholars would actually have practical use for?

3) Why is it that Muslims were successful in generating a consensus about the relation of religion and society in the Middle Ages but have been unsuccessful in doing so in modern times?

The first two questions are the subject of this chapter; the third is addressed in Chapters 9 and 10.

THE CLASSICAL ISLAMIC ATTITUDE TO DISAGREEMENT

Islam is a religion of unity and of law, yet medieval Muslims came to tolerate systematic and institutionalized disagreement. There are a number of examples of such permanent disagreement.

The four madhhabs. Muslims, being human beings, disagreed with each other even in the time of the Prophet, but disagreement posed no intellectual problem in those glorious days: Issues could simply be put to the Prophet himself, and he would settle them. Islam faced its first great crisis very early in the first *fitna,* the civil war that followed the murder of the Caliph ʻUthmān. Muslim armies faced each other in battle over the gravest of religious issues: the nature of leadership after the Prophet. Other *fitnas* followed. Many were battles for leadership, often in protest at corrupt rule, but there were also intellectual *fitnas.* Early Muslims argued about the nature and content of Islamic law, about the fundamental beliefs of Islam, about the text of the Qur'ān, and about which hadith were to be accepted and which to be rejected as unreliable or forged.

It was not until the emergence of distinct legal schools two centuries or so after the Prophet's death that the question of disagreement became a serious intellectual problem. Before that, there certainly had been disagreements among eminent Muslim scholars, but the issues had been argued on the assumption that only one party could be right and the others must therefore be wrong – in other words, without asking questions about the nature and causes of disagreement as such. Gradually, though, fair-minded scholars realized that they risked splitting Islam over fine points of law on which there could be honest disagreement. Unwilling to do so, they conceded that disagreement over points of law and other religious issues was going to be a permanent feature of Islam.

This tolerance of difference of opinion is expressed in a hadith: "Whatever has been brought to you in the Book of God, do it; there is no excuse for failing to do so. If it is not in the Book of God, then follow my *sunna.* If there is no *sunna* from me, follow what my Companions say, for my Companions are like the stars in the sky, so whatever you take from them will be guidance to you. The disagreement of my Companions is a mercy to you."[1] This hadith is certainly spurious, as are similar hadith justifying diversity of Qur'ānic texts, but it is nonetheless valuable. Like most spurious hadiths, it reflects a legal or theological position that someone felt strongly enough about to put it into the mouth of the Prophet.

Although a spurious hadith might not be legally decisive, a consensus of the learned (*ijmā'*) certainly was, and a consensus eventually formed that four major legal schools, *madhhabs,* all were legitimate, as were the various trends of opinion within each school. In practice, Twelver Shi'ite law tended to be accepted as well, although there was not as much intellectual contact between Shi'ite and Sunni scholars. It was quite common for scholars of one *madhhab* to study and comment on works from another *madhhab.* There was occasional friction, but scholars rarely called into question the Islamic legitimacy of scholars of other *madhhabs.* Even the term *madhhab* indicates this tolerance. It is a noun of place from a root meaning "to go" and thus means "approach," "method," or "way of proceeding." They did not use the word *firqa,* "sect," which would have carried a more derogatory connotation. This approach of accepting permanent disagreement was then used in other areas of Islamic scholarship and thought.

There seem to have been two factors leading to such tolerance of diversity. On the one hand, Muslims have always placed great value on unity. The Muslims are one *umma,* one nation, and no Muslim is entirely comfortable with an outright split in the community. The Islamic community was united politically for only about a century, even ignoring several civil wars, but the yearning for a restoration of that unity is still of real political importance; there is no Christian or Buddhist equivalent of the Organization of Islamic Conference, the modern umbrella organization of Islamic states. Likewise, Muslim scholars are uncomfortable

[1] Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Ikhtilāf al-Madhāhib,* ed. 'Abd al-Qayyūm b. Muḥammad-Shafī' al-Bastawī (Cairo: Dār al-I'tiṣām, 1989), pp. 19–20.

with using schism as a way to resolve disputes. Certainly, Muslims have failed to live up to this ideal of unity, but the ideal is real and carries some power nonetheless.

However, the nature of the Islamic religion made disagreement a continuing fact of life. Islam is a religion of law; in principle, every possible human action falls into one of five categories of legal acceptance or condemnation. Moreover, as we have seen, after the death of the Prophet, the wellsprings of the law were closed; all future legal questions would have to be answered by applying fallible human reason to the Qur'ān and the community's memories of the words and actions of the Prophet and his Companions. Under such circumstances, honest disagreement was inevitable. Islamic scholars were constantly faced with the problem of deciding what the Prophet would have told them to do about problems that had not arisen during his lifetime – and the most fundamental such problem was precisely how to resolve such disputes about what the Prophet would have said.

Obviously, many thought that some disagreements were important enough to call into question the legitimacy of an opponent's faith – the question of free will and predestination was sometimes one such issue; the identity of the Prophet's rightful successor was another – but equally obviously, one could not call another scholar an unbeliever over a disagreement about a fine point of contract law. And so a characteristically Islamic compromise emerged. Islamic law became the domain of opinion. A believer was obliged to make a sincere effort to ascertain the law and follow it, either by studying it deeply himself or by following the best judgment of someone who had made such a study for himself. God would reward his good intentions if he was in error and would reward him additionally if he had correctly divined the law and followed it. By the twelfth century, the various Islamic sciences had assumed their permanent forms, in which institutionalized disagreement and diversity were central.[2]

Medieval Muslims were able to maintain religious unity by this device of systematically tolerating diversity and disagreement within a certain

[2] Some indication of the range of such disagreements can be had from Ibn Rushd, *Bidāyat,* trans. Nyazee, *Distinguished Jurist's Primer.* See also Hallaq, *Sharī'a,* pp. 60–71 and passim, and idem, *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law* (Themes in Islamic Law 1; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 150–77.

range. This tolerance was based on an honest understanding of the tentativeness of each of the great legal schools, as well as of the scope for disagreement in other areas of Islamic religious scholarship. Eventually, the understanding of the bases of this disagreement became, in effect, the central theme of Islamic education. The fact that Islamic law influenced the state but was not usually enforced by the state allowed diversity of legal opinion and practice to continue without violating the consciences of individual scholars and thus forcing schism. The fact that travel was slow and Muslims isolated from each other made such tolerance easier to maintain, especially because there was usually a tolerance of local custom.

The *madhhabs* do not differ greatly, even if Shi'ism is included, but they arose out of deep controversies in early Islam about the sources and methods of Islamic jurisprudence. The differences can matter; Ḥanbalīs and Ḥanafīs differ, for example, on the question of whether a woman can marry without the permission of her guardian. It is an issue that has troubled Pakistanis on occasion. Nevertheless, even though the *madhhabs* claim to reflect the divine law as revealed to Muhammad, by about the eleventh century, Muslims seemed quite comfortable with the notion that there were at least four equally acceptable versions of Islamic law. Mosque complexes containing *madrasas* for each of the schools were built. Scholars of one school wrote commentaries on works of another school. Diversity in divine law had become institutionalized.

The seven readings of the Qur'ān. The most startling example of Islamic tolerance of diversity relates to the text of the Qur'ān. The Holy Book was revealed to Muhammad in sections ranging in length from a few lines to a few pages. Most scholars, medieval and modern, think that it had not been fully edited at the time of the Prophet's death. Although it seems certain that some chapters took their present form under the Prophet's hand, there is much evidence that he did not himself compile all of the revelations into their present form and order. Most serious early Muslims had memorized parts of the Qur'ān; a few are reported to have had their own written collections. As a result, there were several different versions of the Qur'ān in circulation after the Prophet's death; 'Alī, the Prophet's son-in-law, is said to have had a copy of the Qur'ān in which the chapters were in chronological order, and some other Companions of the Prophet had copies in which the chapters were arranged in other

ways. There were also some differences in wording between the various versions as well as a few larger differences. There was a disagreement, for example, about whether the Fātiḥa, an important prayer that forms the first chapter of the Qur'ān, the last two chapters, and two other similar short prayers were properly part of the Qur'ān. 'Uthmān, the third caliph, is said to have become concerned because disagreements had arisen about the exact text of the Qur'ān and because so many of the Companions of the Prophet who had memorized parts of the Qur'ān had been killed in battle. He appointed a committee to prepare an official edition of the Qur'ān, and the other versions were destroyed. This, according to the medieval Islamic accounts, is how we came to have the Qur'ān that exists today – *mā bayn al-ḍaffayn,* "what is between the two covers," to use the medieval expression. Although few seriously questioned the authenticity of 'Uthmān's Qur'ān, the Arabic script of the seventh century lacked the dots and vowel signs of modern Arabic, so there was considerable disagreement about the exact text of the Qur'ān in the early centuries. These mostly concerned rather minor points that usually did not affect the meaning, such as whether a given verb was masculine or feminine, active or passive. Such matters could be settled only by the dots and vowel markings that were only invented later. There were also some disagreements about grammar and pronunciation based on scholarly disagreement about the exact nature of the Arabic in which the Qur'ān was revealed. Finally, there were occasional disagreements about what the underlying 'Uthmānic text actually had been. All of these issues are discussed in great deal in the medieval manuals of the sciences of the Qur'ān and *qirā'āt,* "readings" – that is, Qur'ānic textual variants.

In the end, Muslim scholars came to a remarkable compromise, agreeing that there were seven equally authoritative readings of the Qur'ān, each of which had two slightly different versions. Three additional readings were of slightly lesser authority, and four more of still less authority than those. This diversity was said to be a sign of God's bounty to Muslims, and all of the seven versions were and are considered to be authentic and to derive from the Prophet. To this day, there are Qur'ān reciters who can chant the Holy Book according to all seven versions.[3]

[3] The matter of the editing of the Qur'ān and the seven *qirā'āt* is a matter of considerable historical and theological controversy, and virtually every point of the account I have given could be and has been challenged on historical or theological grounds. My

Six books of hadith. As we saw in Chapter 3, it is commonly accepted that vast numbers of hadith were forged in the early centuries of Islam, so it is scarcely surprising that there was a great deal of disagreement about exactly which hadith were authentic. Early Muslim scholars developed various ways of dealing with this embarrassment of riches. Again, they agreed to disagree. Two rival collections of hadith were accepted as having the highest authority, and four others were also accepted as being authoritative in a slightly lesser degree. Shi'ites have their own alternative collections of hadith.

The marāji' al-taqlīd *in Shi'ism.* Shi'ite law works slightly differently than Sunni law, although the content is much the same. Shi'ites believe that the Prophet passed some significant portion of his spiritual and religious authority by inheritance to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, his cousin and son-in-law, and that 'Alī passed it on to a line of his descendants, the last of whom vanished in the ninth century but who is generally believed to be alive and in occultation. Thus, in principle, Shi'ites remain in the position that all Muslims were during the time of the Prophet of being able to ascertain the sacred law directly. In practice, though, the Hidden Imam rarely reveals himself, and Shi'ites are left to their own devices in legal matters in his absence. Each Shi'ite – like any other Muslim – is obliged to make a good-faith effort to ascertain the relevant Islamic law in any situation and to follow it. The Shi'ite community is divided into a

account is mostly based on the accounts of *jam' al-Qur'ān,* "the editing of the Qur'ān," in the medieval Islamic manuals of Qur'ānic sciences, of which Suyūṭī's *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* is the best known. An account of the history of Western scholarship on the matter is found in *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 2nd ed., s.v., "Ḳur'an" 3. Western scholars have disagreed among themselves, placing the origins of the final text of the Qur'an anywhere from the Prophet's lifetime to the ninth century, with most thinking that the emergence of the final text of the Qur'ān was a more gradual process than was portrayed in the various (and inconsistent) medieval accounts of the collection of the Qur'ān in the caliphates of Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthmān.

Whereas the background to 'Uthmān's Qur'ān can be disputed, there is little doubt about the historicity of the Seven Readings. These were popularized by Ibn Mujāhid in the tenth century as a way of bringing order to the very complex disputes among schools of Qur'ān reciters. An interesting account of an attempt to make recordings of all ten versions and the resulting controversy is found in Labīb as-Sa'īd, *The Recited Koran: A History of the First Recorded Version,* trans. Bernard Weiss, M. A. Rauf, and Morroe Berger (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1975). Nowadays, however, the reading used in Egypt and Saudi Arabia is favored almost everywhere, partly because of massive distribution of high-quality printed Qur'āns by Saudi Arabia, and printed copies of the Qur'ān using other readings are uncommon in most places.

small group of individuals with the legal training to ascertain Islamic law for themselves – the *mujtahids* – and a much larger number of people who do not have such training or who do but choose not to use it – the *muqallids*. Now, at any given time there might be hundreds of Shi'ite *mujtahids*, but in practice, only a few of them will give legal rulings to others. Each *muqallid* is under an obligation to seek out the most learned of the *mujtahids* for such legal advice as he needs. An individual who is followed by a significant number of *muqallids* is called a *marja' taqlīd* – a "source of emulation," as it is sometimes translated. Now we return to our theme: Shi'ites are not bothered by the fact that there may be a number of such supreme *marājiʿ*, and an individual believer may follow any one of them he chooses. The Iranian government, for example, has pressed the claim of Ayatollah Khamane'i as *marja'* but has been unable to prevent pious Iranians from following *marāji'* who live in Iraq or even *marāji'* who are in disfavor or imprisoned in Iran.[4]

Contrary conclusions in different disciplines. The thirteenth-century Iranian scientist and scholar Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī, the 'Allāma, "very learned," as he was later known, wrote in a number of disciplines, both rational and religious. Although a philosopher, a scientist, and a great scholar, he seems to have been quite content to pursue these disciplines independently, without harmonizing their conclusions or fitting them into a single larger intellectual framework. In particular, toward the end of his life he wrote a large survey of the sciences in Persian called *The Pearly Crown,* much of it consisting of translated extracts from Arabic works of other authors. The bulk of this work was a survey of philosophy, science, and mathematics. Later, he added a long appendix in which he treated ethics and political science, *fiqh,* Kalām theology, and mystical practice and theology. This work contains three comprehensive and incompatible accounts of the nature of the universe: one philosophical, following Ibn Sīnā, Suhrawardī, and the Jewish philosopher Ibn Kammūna; one

[4] On the institution of the *marja' taqlīd,* see Ahmad Kazemi Mousavi, *Religious Authority in Shi'ite Islam: From the Office of Mufti to the Institution of Marja'* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1996); Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985), pp. 184–207. On the actual functioning of the institution, see several articles in Linda S. Walbridge, ed., *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of the* Marja' Taqlid (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), particularly chap. 8 and 12 by Talib Aziz and chap. 13 by Linda S. Walbridge.

atomistic, following the Kalām of Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī; and one monistic, following the *waḥdat al-wujūd* tradition of Ibn ʿArabī. There were also two accounts of politics, one based on the Iranian practical tradition of the mirrors for princes literature and one Platonic, a translation of a work by Fārābī. Quṭb al-Dīn seems to have simply thought that it was natural that pursuing the truth using different methods would produce different results.[5]

The study of Ghazālī's thought has been hindered by similar difficulties. His works in different disciplines seem almost to have been written by different people. The authenticity of *The Niche for Lights,* an essay on mystical metaphysics, has been questioned because some of its doctrines do not appear elsewhere in Ghazālī's works.[6] There are also inconsistencies between his use of and his attacks on logic, philosophy, and theology. So who is the real Ghazālī? All of them, it seems.

I COULD GIVE MORE EXAMPLES, BUT THESE ARE SUFFICIENT FOR OUR purposes. The point is that medieval Muslims were content to accept equally authoritative versions of things that we might think could have only one correct version: Islamic law, the text of the Qur'ān, authoritative collections of the Prophet's sayings, even accounts of the nature of reality. The principle applied also to leadership. In Europe there is always, in theory, a rightful holder of any post – a rightful king of Scotland, for example. In Islam, except theoretically among Shiʿites, this is not the case. There are rulers in Islam, and there are religious obligations that apply specifically to rulers, but there is no rightful ruler before he becomes ruler. Instead, a rightful ruler is a man who has come to power, who has the minimum qualifications of sound body and mind, and who rules according to Islamic standards. It is a remarkable phenomenon: a willingness to tolerate equally authoritative alternative versions of religious truth.

[5] Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī, *Durrat al-Tāj li-Ghurrat al-Dubāj: Bakhsh,* 1, ed. Sayyid Muḥammad Mishkāt (5 vols. in 1; Tehran: Majlis, 1317–1320/1939–1942), on philosophy; *Bakhsh* 2, ed. Ḥasan Mishkān Ṭabasī (Tehran: Majlis, 1324/1946), covering arithmetic, astronomy, and music; *Bakhsh-i Ḥikmat-i ʿAmalī wa-Sayr wa-Sulūk,* ed. Māhdukht Bānū Humā'ī, on practical philosophy and mysticism.

[6] Al-Ghazālī, *The Niche for Lights,* trans. David Buchman (Islamic Translation Series; Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1998).

An even more radical interpretation of disagreement swept the Islamic world in the thirteenth century: Ibn ʿArabī's theory of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, the oneness of existence, which is discussed in Chapter 5. Ibn ʿArabi argued that all beings are manifestations of some aspect of God. Human beings, unlike other creatures, can progress toward God, but except for a handful of saints and prophets, we inevitably see God from a limited and idiosyncratic perspective, which is, however, our own particular way of understanding God. There is not really any right or wrong in these perspectives, only varying degrees of deficiency and completeness. Thus, Sufis have recognized the legitimacy of varying spiritual paths based on the diverse temperaments of human beings.

AN EDUCATION OF FORM WITHOUT CONTENT

Although the superficial substantive content of the Islamic sciences has changed little in the last thousand years, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries saw two major new influences on the way they were understood: formal logic and Ibn ʿArabī's theory of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. It was logic that was to shape the way the Islamic sciences would be studied in coming centuries. Greek logic and philosophy had reached the Islamic world too late and remained controversial for too long for them to have more than an indirect role in shaping the Islamic sciences. However, they came to be central to the teaching of the religious sciences.

We have already discussed the role of logic in education and the way it was taught. Among the Muslims of South Asia, the curriculum within which this logical instruction was embedded was known as the *Dars-i Niẓāmī*. This curriculum was devised in the beginning of the eighteenth century by the Indian Muslim scholar Niẓām al-Dīn Sihālawī. It was not an innovation on his part, as it was based on versions of an Islamic curriculum that date back to about the thirteenth century. Niẓām al-Dīn's curriculum stressed dialectical skill. The student was expected to spend a great deal of time studying traditional logic, Arabic grammar, and rhetoric. As we have seen, instruction was based on a set of extremely concise textbooks, supplemented by a series of commentaries and supercommentaries. Classes consisted of detailed explorations of the difficulties implicit in the texts, with students and teachers competing to raise and resolve difficulties. Its most remarkable feature was that it

contained relatively little study of religion as such; Islamic law, Qur'ān interpretation, and hadith were rather neglected. This last feature was much criticized by Muslim reformers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and as a result, the Dars-i Niẓāmī has been partially supplanted by new curricula like that of Deoband, which place more stress on primary religious texts and less on logic.

But why should Muslims have adopted such a curriculum? It was not the result of some accident of historical development in India, because very similar curricula had been in use earlier throughout much of the Islamic world and are still used in places like Qom in Iran and the faculties of divinity in modern Turkish universities. For now, I simply observe that the central goal of the Dars-i Niẓāmī curriculum was to teach the student how to understand texts through a deep knowledge of logic, the inner workings of language, and rhetoric. It did not focus on teaching the sacred texts themselves to the students or explaining to the students what these texts meant. This did have the virtue that the Dars-i Niẓāmī and its cousins could be pan-Islamic curricula that Shi'ites and Sunnis of any of the four *madhhabs* could equally well study. Thus, Shi'ite texts on logic and even on theology were taught in Sunni *madrasas.*

So far as I know, the Islamic scholars of that time do not explain the reasons for this turn toward logic. Something similar happened in Europe in about the same period, partly because of the intellectual excitement at the rediscovery of Greek philosophy and partly because university authorities did not want undergraduates studying or graduate students teaching theology, the central intellectual discipline of medieval Christianity. As we saw in Chapter 6, younger scholars in medieval European universities focused their attentions on problems of Aristotelian logic and natural philosophy. Perhaps similar forces were at work in the Islamic world. Islamic law, Qur'ān interpretation, hadith, and traditional Kalām were mature disciplines, whereas the applications of logic, the new rhetoric, and philosophy to their foundations were new and exciting areas of research. Yet this does not explain the long-term popularity of the curricula like the *Dars-i Niẓāmī*, in which logic, dialectic, and the profound study of language were and are central.

Whatever the conscious reasons for adopting a curriculum that stressed the methods of Islamic research over the content of Islamic law and belief, the fact is that the curriculum suited the situation in

which Islam found itself. No religious scholar could doubt that there was a true and single Law revealed by God to the Prophet Muḥammad, but our knowledge of the Law is imperfect. *Fiqh* is a delicate web of inferences whose strength comes from a deep understanding of the texts on which it is based and from the efforts of dozens of generations of scholars patiently weighing and piecing together thousands of bits of evidence, employing all the tools of Arabic linguistics and rhetorical and logical analysis. An education in which logic and linguistics are studied dialectically may have sharpened the mind of the student, but it also taught him a good deal of humility as he sought to divine the will of God. Sincere disagreement under such circumstances is inevitable and shows only that we are servants before God, not His privileged counselors.

THE *MADRASA* SYSTEM, WITH ITS RATIONALISTIC CURRICULUM, PROSpered for some six centuries, dominating religious education in the Islamic world and deeply influencing parallel systems of education. In the nineteenth century, it abruptly collided with the forces of modernism – colonial administrators, Christian missionaries, Muslim reformers, and Muslim revivalists. Where it survived at all, it was usually a shadow of its former self, reduced in wealth and prestige and often warped by the conflicting demands of modernism and its own past. Islamic education was swept up in a debate embracing European colonial administrators and intellectuals and parents in virtually every Islamic country. It was a debate that the *madrasa* professors were ill equipped to participate in.

PART THREE

THE FALL AND THE FUTURE OF ISLAMIC RATIONALISM

9

The Decline and Fall of Scholastic Reason in Islam

THE COLLAPSE OF TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

In 1882, Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner, the extremely disagreeable Hungarian principal of Government College, Lahore, published a fat book, stuffed with lists and statistics, entitled *History of Indigenous Education in the Punjab to the Year 1882*.[1] Leitner was a brilliant linguist with a career that was strange even by the standards of the eccentrics of British India. He was born in Budapest in 1840 to a Jewish family and moved to Turkey in 1847. By the time he was fifteen, he knew Turkish, Arabic, and a wide range of European languages, which led to his appointment as an interpreter in the British army with the rank of colonel during the Crimean War when he was still only fifteen. By the age of twenty-one, he was a professor at King's College, London, three years after entering as a student. He received his doctorate at Freiburg in 1862. In 1864 he was appointed the first principal of Government College, Lahore, the nucleus of the future University of the Punjab, the first university in northwestern India. Leitner would disappear for months at a time into the mountains, collecting material for other fat books on the languages and cultures of the isolated valleys of the Afghan frontier. This book, however, was part of another project, a feud that Leitner was conducting with the director of public instruction of the Punjab. (The latter drowned soon after, swept away while crossing a flooded river, to Leitner's barely concealed satisfaction.) Some decades earlier, the British had faced the decision of how to modernize education in the traditional Hindu and Muslim schools and improve their curricula

[1] Leitner, *Indigenous Education*. On returning to England, he established the Oriental Institute in Woking, which did not survive him. He died in Bonn in 1899.

with modern science and other European subjects. They decided that the most practical solution would be to establish a modest English language college and university system that would begin training Indians for roles in the civil service and technical professions like medicine and engineering and that also would supply teachers for the soon-to-be-improved vernacular educational systems. The system promptly metastasized and by the early 1880s was grinding out masses of unemployable semiliterates who considered it beneath their dignity to take any but the government desk jobs they were unqualified to fill. It was a problem that has not been wholly solved to this day. In the meantime, the traditional educational systems collapsed as parents struggled to get their children into the more prestigious English schools.[2]

In 1882, the British educational authorities in the Punjab, an area that had been under British control for less than forty years, sent out a request for interested parties to submit memos with recommendations for dealing with what already was a crisis. Leitner's massive book was his response. In damning detail and dripping sarcasm, he demonstrated, district by district, that in less than four decades, British educational administration in the Punjab had reduced the number of children attending school by more than a third.[3] Leitner pointed out that there had been seven educational systems functioning in the Punjab before British rule: elementary and advanced Islamic schools, using Arabic and Persian, which was the scholastic *madrasa* system that we have discussed in previous chapters; Hindu and Sikh schools, using Sanskrit and classical Punjabi; aristocratic tutorial schools, using Persian and catering to the traditional political elites, mostly but not entirely Muslim; and several vernacular

[2] Syed Mahmood, *A History of English Education in India* (Aligarth: M.A.O. College, 1895), gives a more sympathetic account of English education in India, with extensive citations of documents and earlier writers. He was the son of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, a famous Indian educational reformer. In general, the documentation of education in British is extensive and lucid, making it a particularly rewarding case study of education in the era of imperialism.

[3] Leitner, *Indigenous Education,* p. i. The case is documented in the 200 pages of part I of the book. Part II consists of detailed district-by-district statistics on education, part III is a summary of the statistics, part IV notes on part I, and part V lists teachers and other indigenous intellectuals in the Punjab. There are also fifty pages of extracts from British Indian government documents relating to Punjab education and seven appendices on various relevant topics, including ninety-three pages of samples of various alphabets and scripts used in western India. The book is a mine of information.

systems. We can concentrate on the Arabic Islamic and Persian aristocratic systems, but Leitner considered the others to be essentially the same. He argued that each was a traditional literary educational system, precisely analogous to the curriculum of Latin and Greek classics that formed the basis of most European education at the time. At the core of the curriculum were a classical language and a set of prestigious classics. The elementary school pupil began by learning the classical language from his own vernacular, usually Punjabi or Urdu in this region. As he grew, he would gradually work his way through the curriculum of classics, mastering the books that had been the basis of education for centuries. The books studied were either religious or didactic, and there was a strongly moralistic element to the instruction. Thus,the first serious book the student studying in the Persian system would read was Sa'dī's *Gulistān,* a collection of stories and fables providing moral guidance for life. Later books would tell tales of kings and their good and bad deeds, valuable guidance for someone who might eventually be one of what the British referred to as the "Chiefs of the Punjab." A boy in the Islamic schools might, if he was bright and interested, go on to be a professional cleric, but if not, he could return to take over his father's shop or farm, with the right to wear a turban and receive respect as a local leader of the Islamic community. In either case, he would emerge literate and able to use one of the prestigious classical languages and to read and write in his own vernacular language. Instruction in modern science was beside the point as far as Leitner was concerned; the point of the traditional educational systems was to produce cultivated, moral individuals who would become responsible members of their own communities. There was even a system of female education.

There was another problem. The new educational system had produced a breach between generations. Whereas a boy coming home from school would once have discussed his Sa'dī with a father who had fond memories of his own study of the same classic, now the strange English books (usually only extracts of mediocre English works, as Leitner pointed out) set the boy apart from his father, uncles, and their friends. What was worse, because everyone knew that the English education was undertaken with the ultimate goal of getting a government desk job, the former student could no longer return with dignity to his father's store or workshop, as his father or grandfather would have done.

These unemployable young men were quickly becoming a nuisance to all concerned.

Finally, the arrival of the new system had effectively destroyed support for the old systems. In the past, a landlord might have hired a teacher for his son and allowed his tenants' sons to attend the classes, a local cleric would have taught Qur'ān in his mosque, and a wealthy merchant or aristocrat would have endowed a school to announce his status, but now education was seen as the responsibility of the government, and anyway few families wanted the old education anymore. Now the landlords and the prosperous merchants sent their sons to Leitner's college in Lahore, and the village mulla found that no one was interested in his Qur'ān classes. Popular support for traditional education dried up, and the government was unable to fill the gap. By 1882, seven old and respected educational systems had been replaced by one failing system.

LEITNER'S EXPERIENCE WAS NOT UNIQUE. WHAT LIFTS LEITNER'S BOOK above the level of a particularly entertaining documentation of colonial administrative incompetence is his analysis of the earlier educational systems and the process by which they were undermined and replaced with a dysfunctional modern system. Although there were some features peculiar to India – the caste system, for example, led to universities producing engineers unwilling to work with machinery and doctors unwilling to touch patients – the general pattern was duplicated to one degree or another across the Islamic world and, I suspect, in other areas that came under the influence of European colonial administrations. In the period from 1757, when the Battle of Plassy put a large Islamic population under British control, through the years following World War I, when the British and French occupied the remaining Ottoman territories in the Arab parts of the Middle East and the Soviet Union consolidated its control over Central Asia, virtually all of the Islamic world came under direct or indirect European control, resulting in the supplanting of traditional education by systems modeled on Western systems. Even in areas that were not occupied by the Europeans, such as Iran and the central Ottoman lands prior to World War I, governments desperate to protect themselves against superior European military technology began establishing European-style schools or adding European elements to existing schools. Iran, which managed to maintain a precarious

independence through deft exploitation of the jealousies of the Great Powers, established a polytechnic university in 1851.[4] Egypt and Ottoman Turkey had begun educational reforms even earlier. In countries that were actually occupied by Europeans, colonial administrators withdrew support from the traditional systems in favor of modern, usually mediocre systems intended to produce clerks and technicians for the colonial administration. Although the details varied in different countries, several factors came together to destroy or marginalize the traditional educational systems.

Withdrawal of traditional sources of support. With European domination came change in political and economic structures and elites. Education in most of the Islamic world had been a matter of charity and an auxiliary activity of religious institutions. Elementary education was typically conducted by poor clerics. More advanced religious education was performed in *madrasas*, institutions typically endowed by wealthy individuals as acts of conspicuous piety. To the extent that there was secular education, such as the aristocratic Persian system in India, it was an activity commissioned by aristocrats or occasionally by the state, as in the palace schools of the Ottoman Empire. This system of support collapsed during the colonial era, even in states that were not formally annexed by one of the European powers. The old elites that had provided the endowments supporting traditional education were supplanted or co-opted, and in either case they no longer provided new endowments for *madrasas*. The large landholdings belonging to Islamic charitable endowments mostly did not survive the colonial period, being broken up by the state or simply passing unnoticed into the hands of individuals, a sort of colonial fencing of the commons. In 1963 in Iran, the program to break up the landholdings of the great Shi'ite religious institutions in the name of land reform triggered a near revolution, which slowed but did not stop the process. Deprived of their traditional sources of support and isolated from the mainstream of elite society, the traditional educational systems withered.

It was true that the European administrators saw education as a proper function of the state, but the resources they allotted did not begin to fill the needs, nor did they usually think it necessary to provide a European

[4] Mottahedeh, *Mantle*, is largely about the tensions between the *madrasa* system and the modern educational system; in particular, see pp. 60–68 on the educational reformer 'Īsā Ṣādiq.

quality of education for the masses – just sufficient education to train such workers as were needed for the middle ranks of the colonial society. Often, missionary schools provided the best available education – in some places they still do – but they could not come close to filling the demand. And, as Leitner also noted, because the state saw itself as the proper social institution to provide education, wealthy individuals, for the most part, no longer saw the need to support it voluntarily. The result was typically a weak state educational system, unable to meet constantly growing demand for places or to produce high-quality graduates, supplemented by a small number of elite schools, usually founded by missionaries, to which the elites sent their own children. To the extent that the traditional schools survived, it was only in the social classes most isolated from the modern colonial society.

Superior opportunities for graduates of the new schools. Demand also dwindled for the traditional education. Students dreaming of a prestigious job in the colonial administration needed to know the language of the imperial power, which often remained important even after states regained independence. Persian, once the key to a position in the Mogul administration, was still a viable literary language in India in the first third of the twentieth century, but it was dead even in Pakistan by 1950, replaced by English and Urdu. Prestigious and well-paying professions like engineering and medicine were open only to the graduates of the new schools. Students interested in law went to modern law schools, not *madrasas*. In Iran, the process was so sudden that the legal profession in Iran in the middle of the twentieth century was dominated by men who had begun their education in the *madrasas* of Qom and completed them at Tehran University or European law schools. The tradition of Islamic learning was kept alive by the small number of students still attracted by religion, but the days were over in which a good *madrasa* education was the gateway to a respected career as a cleric or judge. The traditional schools were not just starved of money; they were also starved of talent.

"WHAT WENT WRONG?"

But ideas also mattered, not just institutions and their social bases of support. An Islamic world that had once been powerful and successful was now weak and poor. Its rise to power obviously had to do with Islam. It was painfully clear that something had gone very wrong in the Muslim

world and that what had gone wrong had something to do with Islam. It was more difficult to determine what this something was. There were four possibilities. First, Islam as such was incompatible with modernity and needed to be discarded, at least as the practical basis of the actions of the community. Second, Islam could be the basis of a successful society if it were modernized and made compatible with modern conditions. Third, Muslims needed to restore Islam to the pure form of the early centuries, thereby recreating the conditions for its original success. Fourth, things could stay as they were, which not surprisingly was usually the option preferred by the Islamic clergy. Thus, the traditional educational institutions were also being battered from three sides by intellectual rivals who criticized the foundations of the intellectual world that the Islamic clergy had constructed over the centuries.

Opposition from modernists. The suspicion with which colonial administrators viewed the Islamic clergy, their schools, their scholastic system of thought, and even the religion of Islam itself is scarcely surprising. Traditional Islam was a world largely closed to Europeans, who also saw the Muslims, with some justice, as being especially prone to disloyalty to the colonial state. British administrators in India tended to believe that Muslims had been mainly responsible for the bloody revolt in 1857, which the British called the Indian Mutiny and which nationalist historians now call the War of Independence. Although the evidence is not entirely clear for the Indian Mutiny, it certainly is true that Muslims fought long and bloody wars of resistance in many places, sometimes led and almost always encouraged by clerics. As far as many colonial administrators were concerned, the Islamic religious establishment and the masses who followed them should be modernized into harmlessness as quickly as possible.

Administrators were not motivated only by political concerns; they genuinely believed, with good reason, that the old educational system needed to be modernized. Ptolemaic astronomy, Galenic medicine, and Aristotelian physics were still taught in the *madrasas*.[5] The *madrasas* almost never taught the modern European languages that were required

[5] Leitner, *Indigenous Education,* pp. 74, 76–78, which lists such books as Chaghmīnī's manual of astronomy, Ptolemy's *Almagest,* ʿĀmilī's *Khulāṣat al-Ḥisāb*, "Summary of Arithmetic" on arithmetic, and Ibn Sīnā's *Canon of Medicine* and its commentaries as works studied at Deoband or the older *madrasas.* The textbooks of natural philosophy and metaphysics also all predated serious intellectual contact with modern Europe.

for good jobs. Few of those involved with educational issues in the colonial-era states, even in places like Iran and Turkey that were not occupied, doubted that major reforms were needed. The question was how.

One of the most interesting expressions of this debate took place in British India in the 1820s and 1830s and is known as the Anglicist-Orientalist controversy.[6] The British had first come to India as traders in the seventeenth century at a time when the wealth and power of the Mogul Empire dwarfed that of any contemporary European state. It is clear from their writings that they viewed the Moguls with some awe. By the second half of the eighteenth century, with British power firmly established, Englishmen in India still did not necessarily see themselves as inherently superior to the Indians. The British not uncommonly married into Indian families of appropriate social status. After 1757, the British East India Company ruled a large part of northeastern India as a corporate contractor to the Mogul emperor, a situation that nominally continued until the Indian Mutiny a century later. Men like Warren Hastings, the dominant political figure in British India at that time, saw it as natural that the British should behave as the heirs of the old Mogul state, patronizing the traditional arts, scholarship, and institutions, and even managing Hindu religious festivals. He professionalized the British Indian civil service, requiring officials to know Persian, the traditional language of administration; developing law codes based on the older Hindu and Muslim legal systems;[7] and generally behaving like a proper Indian ruler. In return, the Indians initially treated the British as they did any other new foreign rulers, attempting to civilize them and expecting the British to learn to behave in a proper Indian manner. A Parsi poet in Bombay spent years writing a three-volume epic poem in Persian doggerel called the *George-Nameh*,which recounted the British conquest of India. The British authorities in Calcutta printed it, and although he received a polite letter from the young Queen Victoria, he never received the generous

[6] The key documents can be found in Lynn Zastoupil and Martin Moir, *The Great Indian Education Debate: Documents Relating to the Orientalist-Anglicist Controversy, 1781–1843* (London Studies on South Asia 18; Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1999).

[7] For a critique of this enterprise of legal reform in India, see Hallaq, *Sharī'a,* pp. 371–95. The two following chapters of his book deal with similar legal issues in the colonial and modern Middle East.

reward that he doubtless expected. It was an unsettling sign of change in the wind.

India House, the administrative headquarters of the British East India Company was dominated for forty years by James Mill and his son John Stuart Mill, both disciples of Jeremy Bentham, the founder of the Utilitarian school of philosophy. The Utilitarians were interested in efficiency, science, and modernity. James Mill saw Indian culture as obsolete and barbarous, and wrote a history of India that to a modern reader is stunning in its narrowness and bigotry.[8] The chapters on Islamic and Hindu culture denounce every aspect of Indian civilization in the harshest of terms. Mill was most certainly not interested in inheriting the cultural responsibilities of the old Persianate Mogul Empire. More to our point, neither he nor his more famous son were interested in supporting traditional education in India. Their views – and James Mill's *History of British India* – were incorporated into the curriculum of the East India Company's training school in Haileybury, Hertfordshire, where they shaped the views of two generations of British administrators in India.[9]

The Utilitarians found unlikely allies in evangelical Christian groups that sought to evangelize India and were horrified at the thought of the British Indian government managing "pagan" festivals while refusing to allow missionaries into the country. They, too, saw traditional culture as an obstacle to modernization, which they thought would eliminate superstition and thus open the way for the Christianization of India. William Wilberforce, better known as an antislavery crusader, considered the opening of India to missionaries a more important goal and went so far as to pay the debts Jeremy Bentham had incurred by his experimental "panopticon" prison.[10] These two groups formed the core of the "Anglicists," those advocating support of English-medium education to

[8] James Mill, *The History of British India*, 6 vols. (London: Baldwick and Craddock, 1829).

[9] Lynn Zastoupil, *John Stuart Mill and India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), and Martin I. Moir, Douglas M. Peers, and Lynn Zastoupil, eds., *J. S. Mill's encounter with India* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999). For Mill's papers relating to India, see John Stuart Mill, *Writings on India,* ed. John M. Robson, Martin Moir, and Zawahir Moir (Collected works of John Stuart Mill 30; London: Routledge, 1990), particularly pp. 141–8 on education.

[10] Wilberforce's efforts to open India to evangelization recur repeatedly in his biography; Robert Isaac and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce*, vol. 2 (London: John Murray, 1839), pp. 24–28, 170–72, 392ff.

the exclusion of vernacular traditional institutions. They were effectively joined by large numbers of middle-class Indian families, particularly Hindus, who saw modern English education as the path to success for their children.

The Anglicists were opposed by the "Orientalists," the old disciples of Warren Hastings, who insisted that India could only be successfully governed in Indian terms and that any attempt to impose British culture on the Indians would endanger the British position there. On an ethical level, they questioned whether the British had any right to impose their culture on peoples who clearly had no interest in accepting it. British Indian law should be based on older Indian legal systems, not on Jeremy Bentham's ideal code of rational utility. More generally, they saw Indian culture as valuable in its own right, with arts, literatures, and cultural ways that should be preserved. The "old India hands," familiar with the dangers posed by religious conflict in India, tended to side with the Orientalists.

Time and the tides of European thought were with the Anglicists. The old Orientalists were retiring, replaced by young Anglicists trained at Haileybury. The British were becoming more confident in their cultural superiority. Respectable Englishmen no longer married respectable Indian girls, nor, after the memsahibs arrived in India, did they any longer keep Indian mistresses in little houses behind their bungalows. In 1835, Thomas Macaulay, later a famous writer and historian but then a young official spending a miserable four years in India, wrote a "Minute on Indian Education," in which he summarized with devastating clarity the case for English education:

I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. . . . The question now before us is simply whether, when it is in our power to teach this language [English, in colleges], we shall teach languages in which, by universal confession, there are no books on any subject which deserve to be compared to our own, whether, when we can teach European science, we shall teach systems which, by universal confession, wherever they differ from those of Europe differ for the worse, and whether, when we can patronize sound philosophy and true history, we shall countenance, at the public expense, medical doctrines which would

disgrace an English farrier, astronomy which would move laughter in girls at an English boarding school, history abounding with kings thirty feet high and reigns thirty thousand years long, and geography made of seas of treacle and seas of butter.[11]

The Anglicists won. Persian was abolished as the official language of administration, English was made the language of higher education, missionaries were allowed into India, and – just as the old India hands had predicted – fears of forcible Christianization prompted a disastrous revolt two decades later.

Yet it was not just colonial administrators who supported the modernization of education at the expense of the traditional system; many thoughtful Muslims did too. By the second half of the nineteenth century, there were individuals in many parts of the Islamic world familiar with Western thought and often with Western languages. Some were political figures anxious to modernize Islamic armies and states to protect their independence from European encroachments – reforming statesmen like the Ottoman sultan Mahmut III and the Iranian prime minister Amīr Kabīr. More interesting for us are religious scholars who sought to protect Islam from the challenges of Christianity and secularism by reforming its intellectual structures and demonstrating that these were compatible with the highest forms of Western thought and science. Usually they argued in one way or another that the astronomy amusing to English schoolgirls was not integral to Islamic thought but merely a particular cultural expression of Islam representing a corruption of its true fundamentals. Often they argued that various doctrines of modern science or commonplaces of modern European thought were implicitly present in the Qur'ān and the teaching of the Prophet. Islam would be seen to be compatible with modern science – as much as or more so than Christianity – if only it could be modernized and cleansed of the accretions of forty generations of scholastic speculations. Not unnaturally, such reformers usually fell into conflict with the traditional clergy, whose obdurate medievalism they saw as the chief factor preventing this reform from taking hold. Sufism also roused their ire because they saw

[11] Zaspoutil and Moir, *Debate,* pp. 165–6; for the full document, see pp. 162–72. There is a good deal more in the same vein. On Macaulay in India, see John Clive, *Macaulay: The Shaping of the Historian* (New York: Vintage, 1975), pp. 289–478.

it as a mass of superstitious practices with little warrant in the original texts of Islam – and certainly the Sufism of wandering dervishes could not be displayed in respectable European company.[12]

Opposition from Islamic anti-modernists. The traditional scholastic system of Islamic thought also came under attack from antimodernist reformers drawing the opposite conclusion: If Islam was strong before and weak now, Muslims must return to the Islam of the earliest Muslims and abandon the accretions of recent centuries. There was great weight to their argument – that what the Messenger of God said ought to be done, and doing what he did not do is suspect. With the rise of mass literacy in the Islamic world and the publication of the Qur'ān and hadith in the major Islamic and European languages, the basic Islamic texts have become available to ordinary Muslims of middling education. The Salafīs' argument that these books should be the direct source of authority is convincing, particularly because the great texts of Islamic law are not accessible in the same way. A plain text in the Qur'ān or hadith is clear to a modern reader; the subtle contextualizing of that same text in the light of the nuances of other texts, their relative authority, and the debates of dozens of generations of scholars is not clear. Like the Protestants of Reformation Europe, modern Salafis and modern educated Muslims of every sort can read for themselves and create their own paths in ignorance of or indifference to the subtle dialectical speculations of the medieval scholars. Much the same is true of their attitude toward Sufism. The warm and diverse spirituality of Sufism is rooted only indirectly in the foundational Islamic texts. The consensus of many generations of scholars that Sufism represents the inner dimension of Islam carries little weight in the face of arguments that the Qur'ān and hadith do not directly command Sufi practices. The prevalence of modern technical education works in favor of the Salafīs, as it has for fundamentalists in Christianity and other religious traditions. People trained to apply practical rules to the solution of technical problems find it easy to transfer that approach to the solution of religious problems, and nothing in their education equips them to deal with, or even notice, the subtle ambiguities of bodies of religious literature.

[12] Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis: The Defence, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World* (Richmond: Curzon, 1999).

Thus, in Islamic contexts it is the Salafīs, the Islamic variety of fundamentalists, whose arguments usually set the agenda. This tendency was powerfully reinforced by the accident that the fabulously wealthy Kingdom of Saudi Arabia had for its state religion a puritanical reform movement within the strictest and most literalist of the legal schools, the Wahhābī branch of the Ḥanbalī legal school, thus giving generous funding to a particularly rigorous form of literalism. Other factors have played roles as well. For example, in most Islamic states, the clerical establishment is closely bound to the government, or at least visibly co-opted by it. Thus, when nationalist movements failed to deliver on their promises in the newly independent states in the Islamic world, Islamic movements arose as political alternatives. These movements typically reflected a Salafī literalism suspicious of the clerical tradition. Only in Iran did the clergy lead in politico-religious revolution, but there the organized clergy typically had kept their distance from the government and had major scholarly centers in Iraq outside the Iranian government's reach.

THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES THUS WERE A LONG period of retreat for the traditional clergy and their scholastic rationalism. Much of their financial and social support was lost with the collapse of older social and political orders. Secularists saw them as a barrier to modernization, while committed Muslims, both those who wished to bring Islam into harmony with modern Western norms and those who wished to restore the purity of early medieval Islam, criticized the clergy for their failure to respond successfully to the challenges of modernism. Indeed, the traditional clergy had found it difficult to respond to modernity with the same success with which they had faced the challenges of empire a thousand years earlier. The reasons for this, and the particular issues they face, are discussed in Chapter 10.

10

A Chaos of Certitudes: The Future of Islamic Reason

The informed observer looking at the situation of the Islamic world at the beginning of the twenty-first century is inevitably struck by the depths of disagreements about the nature and future course of Islam and the vehement certainty with which positions are held. My interest here is particularly with individuals and groups who are actively concerned with Islam and its future, those who are in one sense or another intellectually engaged with Islam and are convinced that the solutions to the problems facing Islam are also the solutions to the problems facing Islamic societies. In other words, they hold that Islam – or at least, Islam correctly understood and correctly practiced – is the solution to the problems of Islamic society.

Such a formulation takes in a very wide range of opinion – revolutionary Iran; Taliban Afghanistan; proponents of Islamic legal, political, social, and economic systems of many sorts; and Islamic modernists. The answer also can be negative, as with those who see Islam as currently practiced or Islam and religion in general as obstacles to development. It does not include all shades of opinion, as there are political groups in the Islamic world that are secular in orientation and for whom Islam is simply a feature of their culture – for example, the Arab Baathists and many of the Palestinian nationalist groups. Still, most thoughtful people in the Islamic world are probably convinced that Islam in one way or another is central to the political, economic, and social futures of their countries. It is easy enough to understand why they should think so. The Islamic religion was the direct cause of the rise of Islamic societies, so it is natural for Muslims to look to Islam for explanations and solutions when things go wrong.

That said, the observer cannot fail to sense that something has changed. In the Middle Ages, the Islamic acceptance of institutionalized disagreement took place in the context of a general consensus about the structure and functioning of Islamic society. In the contemporary Islamic world, the range of disagreement is far broader, and there is not even agreement about the extent to which disagreement should be tolerated. I take Pakistan as my usual example, because in many ways it is an extreme case in which the phenomena I am discussing can be clearly seen. There are strong, or at least loud, voices opposing the toleration of even the degree of disagreement institutionalized by the consensus of the learned in premodern times – recognition of other *madhhabs* and de facto acceptance of Shi'ism, for example. Awareness and tolerance of this institutionalized diversity is also slipping away in more subtle ways. Beyond these issues is one even larger: the legitimacy of culture, Islamic or otherwise, not derived from the norms of universal Islam.

Let us consider some concrete examples. Pakistani Islamiyat textbooks based on the government Islamic studies curriculum typically do not mention the existence of the four legal schools or the complex and tentative way in which Islamic law is actually deduced. Instead, they portray a legal system that sprang full-grown and uniform from the brows of the Companions of the Prophet. To students taught from such textbooks, disagreement about matters of Islamic law can appear only to be motivated by perversity. Likewise, the Islamiyat books are generally legalistic and Sunni in orientation and have little to say about the other traditions of Islam: ignoring Shi'ism and the great issues of early Islam that gave rise to it and ignoring even Sufism, the dominant spiritual tradition in Pakistan.[1] Such curricula and textbooks would be comical

[1] "Islamiyat" is the term used in Pakistan for the required Islamic studies courses in schools and colleges. Local publishers produce cram books based on the official curriculum. These books shamelessly plagiarize each other and are riddled with errors of fact, interpretation, and omission. An example of this dismal genre is S. M. Dogar, comp. and ed., *Towards Islamyat for C.S.S. Banking and Finance Service Commission, Public Service Commission, and Other Competitive Exams* (Lahore: Dogar [ca. 2000]). This particular book is intended for candidates seeking to enter the civil service elite, which makes its failings more serious, though in fairness to the hack responsible for the book, he was only following the official syllabus. The treatment of other religions is even worse; the author is under the impression that Roman Catholics consider the Virgin Mary to be a member of the Trinity (p. 45) and that Christians are divided into three sects: Orientalists, Roman Catholics, and Protestants (p. 46).

were it not for the fact that when students trained by them confront Muslims of other varieties, they almost inevitably view such people as willfully perverting the true Islam.

A more general example is the effort to adopt Islamic law as the basic law of the state. This is not, as one might suppose, the restoration of a situation that existed during the Middle Ages. An early form of Islamic law prevailed, of course, under the Prophet and during the reigns of the first four caliphs, but Islamic law in its fully developed form emerged only in the eighth and ninth centuries. Islamic law almost never bound the state and was never the only law of the state for a variety of good reasons. Few rulers were willing to deliver the conduct of the legal system completely into the hands of the clergy, nor were the clergy willing to relinquish their legal authority to rulers of very uncertain piety. The bulk of Islamic law was concerned with religious practices that had nothing to do with the state, and most of the rest was law governing voluntary contracts between individuals, such as sales and marriages. Many areas of law of close concern to the state were barely dealt with in Islamic law, notably criminal law and taxation. In each area of the Islamic world, there was also customary law, usually in several different forms and often predating Islam. Whatever religious scholars may have wished, important areas of life such as taxation and landlord-tenant relations were generally governed by customary law, not Islamic law. Finally, the enforcement of one legal school by the state would do violence to the consciences of clergy and ordinary believers who followed another school.

There were religious courts of varying degrees of authority, and a pious ruler, like any other conscientious believer, would attempt to act in accordance with Islamic norms, if only to bolster his usually very uncertain legitimacy. Even a ruler whose conscience was not much troubled by Islam – probably the majority – would try not to offend the sensibilities of the pious unnecessarily. Nonetheless, the state followed its own necessities and enforced its own laws. As a result, attempts to convert Islamic law into the law of the state were rare and generally not very successful or long lasting –for example, the British attempt to administer a legal system for Muslims based on Ḥanafī law in Bengal in the eighteenth century, a system that is an ancestor of the legal system of modern Pakistan. In both British Bengal and Pakistan, well-intentioned attempts to base the law of the state on Islamic law ran afoul of disagreements about the content of

Islamic law and the tendency of state legal systems to evolve according to their own inner logic. This happened even in Ottoman Turkey, probably the most successful example of the use of Islamic law as the basis of a complete legal system.

The greatest source of disagreement in the Islamic world is culture not directly derived from the Islam of the old books. I am not talking here about Western and global culture, but about the diverse local cultures of the Islamic lands. The classic example is Iran, where two distinct cultural traditions have coexisted for fourteen centuries: an Islamic culture, whose focus is religious and universalist, and an Iranian culture embodied in the Persian language, Persian poetry, and the nationalist traditions of the Iranian monarchy. These two traditions are very different and have always coexisted in a tension that is more often fruitful than destructive. Analogous situations exist in all Islamic countries, where the local culture may express itself in ways that have nothing to do with Islam – the kite-flying holiday of Basant in Lahore, for example, whose origins are probably Hindu but which is now a purely secular holiday. The local culture may also take a religious form, resulting in local Islamic cultural features, such as the colorful Sufi shrine culture of Punjab and Sindh or the strict segregation of women practiced by the tribal peoples of Afghanistan, the North-West Frontier Province, and Balochistan.

I will return to these topics, but for the moment I remark only that attempts to use Islam as a tool to revitalize Islamic society have made these underlying issues objects of greater controversy.

DISAGREEMENT IN THE CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC WORLD

During the past two centuries, the old ways of handling disagreement among Muslims broke down. Old quarrels reemerged with new vehemence, and disagreements of new sorts arose. I will offer some explanations for this fact and then close by suggesting some directions from which a new resolution might come. The reader will understand and, I hope, forgive me for simplifying and nearly caricaturing the positions I am discussing. In trying to bring out certain underlying common themes of contemporary Islamic thought, I inevitably must neglect the complexities of the various positions and debates.

The breakdown of traditional education. As we saw in Chapter 9, colonialism, modernization, and secularism have done great damage to the Islamic educational system. Modern states, colonial and otherwise, have withdrawn the traditional sources of support for Islamic education. Talented students who once might have become clergy go to modern schools and universities, seeking more lucrative careers. Traditions of learning have been broken in many places, as *madrasas* and other centers of learning have closed or gone through bad times. In some countries, Islamic education has been co-opted by other forces in society, as in Indonesia, where well-funded government "Islamic institutes" were founded to train government religious officials who know official ideology far better than they know Arabic.[2] As far as I can tell, only Iran, Iraq, India, Egypt, and Turkey have managed to preserve vigorous and continuous traditions of higher level Islamic education and scholarship.

The role of the educated laity. More people in the Islamic world are literate than ever before in history, and the major Islamic source texts are available in inexpensive printed editions in all the major Islamic and European languages. The traditionalism and dialectical subtlety of the medieval Islamic scholars and many modern clerics do not answer the questions that an engineer or doctor might bring to Islam. Increasingly, Muslims with modern educations are reexamining the Islamic sources for themselves, bringing fresh questions and answers and much practical energy to the material but also bringing a naiveté about the nature and interpretation of the primary Islamic texts.

Ease of communications. Muslims of every school and sect now live as a single community, so that Malaysia and Nigeria are now in closer contact than Multan and Shiraz were two hundred years ago. It is not surprising that Muslims accustomed to thinking of the practices of their own community as the Islamic norm should be shocked by other Islamic communities that behave very differently. The resulting conflicts are played out wherever Muslims of diverse backgrounds are thrust together, whether in the great cities of the Islamic world, swollen with migrants from the countryside, or in the mosques of Western cities and university towns.

[2] For an analysis of the cooption of Islam by the Indonesian government, see Linda S. Walbridge, "Indonesia: The Islamic Potential," *Dialogue* (London, England), June 1998, pp. 4–5.

The rise of neo-Ḥanbalism. A rigorous and literalist Islam deriving from the Ḥanbalī tradition and its Wahhābī offshoot has become increasingly influential. This movement, commonly called "Salafī," "of the pious forefathers," is characterized by a literal interpretation of Islamic texts and a degree of intolerance both toward other Islamic legal schools and toward cultural traits, whether Islamic or Western, not based on Islamic tradition. From the beginning, the Ḥanbalīs generally preferred to follow the letter of the text rather than reason in deriving law. Although the Ḥanbalīs in the past were the smallest of the *madhhabs,* they are becoming increasingly influential. Partly this results from the historical accident that Saudi Arabia is predominantly Ḥanbalī, and the Saudis, both the government and individuals, have generously supported Islamic causes around the world, thus spreading the influence of Ḥanbalī thought.

There is another reason, however, for Ḥanbalī influence in the modern world. As literalists, the Ḥanbalīs can offer the simple and very convincing argument that something ought to be done or not done because there is a Qur'ānic verse or a hadith that commands or forbids it. The argument that the Qur'ān and the hadith are the only legitimate sources of Islamic practice is almost as compelling – that something not commanded by the Qur'ān or hadith ought not to be done. Most Muslim scholars throughout the centuries have rejected these arguments, holding that individual texts must be understood within a much larger textual, intellectual, and social context. However, the arguments against the Hanbali position are not simple ones and can only be understood on the basis of the complex intellectual heritage of medieval Islam. And so, the Hanbali argument tends to prevail in popular debate.

THE GREAT ISSUES

I have been discussing the historical and sociological factors creating tension within the Islamic world, but there are also genuine intellectual issues that will need to be addressed, issues not easily solved given the nature and history of the Islamic intellectual synthesis. I will define these issues briefly in turn and then return to the question of the role that Islamic rationalism might play in the future of Islam in the modern world.

Doubt, uncertainty, and disagreement. Christian intellectual historians have occasionally observed that medieval interpreters of the Bible were more open to alternative interpretations and alternative methodologies of interpretation than modern Christians are. Both conservative Protestant and secular "scientific" biblical interpretation would have struck a medieval theologian as narrow and naïve. An analogous situation exists with Islamic law, where contemporary Muslims project a degree of certitude onto their understandings of Islamic law that medieval legal scholars would have found ludicrous (and often wrong in specifics). There is something about modern societies that leads its people to project the certitudes of their technical manuals and bureaucratic systems onto the complex and contradictory histories of their religious traditions. Medieval Muslim scholars knew that even in their times, certainty about the subtleties of religious belief and law was not attainable – only good-faith opinion.

The situation has become very much worse in the last century. First, the range of possible opinions is greater. Muslims of every variety are now in contact with each other and also with ideas from outside Islam. Half a millennium ago, a Ḥanafī jurist needed only to consider the range of Ḥanafī opinion, a school of thought whose legitimacy was long established by consensus, although if he was clever and adventurous, he might have played with ideas from other schools. Now, the legitimacy of his school can be challenged; other notions of Islamic orthodoxy are in play; educated laymen and governments are experimenting with making legal decisions on their own; and Western ideas about law, society, and religion are likely to challenge his notions. On the other hand, Muslims themselves have become more willing to question the legitimacy of each other's views, so that our poor Ḥanafī might be challenged both by Salafī neo-fundamentalists denying the legitimacy of any but the strictest form of law and by modernists and secularists who see his tradition as medieval, outdated, and obscurantist. And now all of these disputes are also played out on the Internet, where intellectual exchanges that might once have been worked out among specialists over many decades are debated within days or hours by enthusiastic lay Muslims.

Fewer are now willing to acknowledge a range of possible legitimate opinion. As in the Roman Catholic Church of the fifteenth century, the

old tradition of unity is straining to hold Muslims together in a single community.

The enforcement of Islamic law. Modern Islamist thought generally has taken as a truism the notion that the problems of the Islamic world need to be dealt with by a return to true Islamic principles. Because Islam is a religion of law, Islamist groups have demanded the application and enforcement of Islamic law, usually in place of secular legal systems. On coming to power, regimes owing allegiance to an Islamic ideology have attempted to apply Islamic law. This has proven more difficult than its proponents have expected. Criminal law, the obvious starting point, is poorly developed in classical Islamic legal thought. Moreover, local or tribal customs are commonly confused with Islamic law, so practices like honor killings have sometimes been presented as the application of Islamic law. Attempts to Islamize legal systems have often been done hastily and opportunistically, such as with the Islamization program in Pakistan in the 1980s. Finally, judges and lawyers, usually amateurs at best in Islamic law, have not been skillful in applying Islamic law under modern conditions. I once asked a Pakistani judge, a man with an excellent British legal education, how he handled Sharīʿa cases. He told me that he had various collections of hadith (in English translation) and that he would look through them until he found something that applied. None of the actual attempts to Islamize legal systems have been particularly successful, and some have been indefensible. In Pakistan, for example, the Hudood Laws, the Islamized criminal laws hastily implemented during the regime of General Zia-ul-Haq, have had the unintended result that women who file complaints of rape are sometimes prosecuted for adultery if they cannot produce enough corroborating eyewitnesses. The result has been that outsiders have come to see the Sharīʿa as a backward and repressive legal system.

Leaving aside poor implementation, there are several underlying difficulties associated with using Islamic law as the legal system of a modern state. First, Islamic law was formulated by applying the practice of Muḥammad's community to conditions in the eighth- and ninth-century Middle East. Although it continued to develop into early modern times, it has not changed to reflect conditions in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Second, as we have seen, it is uneven as a legal system since it largely dealt with two areas – religious obligations and contracts, the

latter including family law. Areas of direct concern to the state, such as criminal law and taxation, continued to be handled by the state, so that their treatment in Islamic law is rudimentary. It is no accident that the most successful instance of modern application of Islamic law has been in banking, the so-called "Islamic economics," because in medieval times, Islamic law was the legal system governing relations among merchants, and thus it had a highly developed system of contract law.

But more fundamental is the question of whose law is to be applied. In premodern times, Islamic law was essentially a voluntary legal system, much like the systems of accepted practices and professional ethics that govern the dealings of businesses within particular industries. Merchants agreed to accept the jurisdiction of a particular legal school when they went to a legal scholar to have a contract drafted or a dispute mediated. And, of course, there were four major Sunni systems of law, along with the legal systems of the various other Islamic sects. Moreover, there is the problem of the legal rights of non-Muslims. Are they to be governed by their own legal systems or by an Islamic legal system whose authority they do not recognize? And what about the problem of legislation? Traditional Islamic law did not recognize human legislation as a source of law, but it is difficult to conceive of a modern legal system that does not involve new legislation. One can scarcely imagine deducing all the complexities of modern law – commercial and environmental regulation, to take two examples – from the materials of the Qur'ān, hadith, and medieval legal consensus.

Any Islamization of the law of the state would have to take account of these difficulties, problems for which there is no obvious solution in traditional Islamic legal thought.

Pluralism and toleration. Closely related is the problem of pluralism. Earlier Islamic societies dealt fairly well with the question of pluralism, usually through some variety of what in Ottoman contexts is called the *millet* system. Two assumptions made this possible, both problematic in modern – or, for that matter, in modern Islamist – contexts. First, religious and ethnic communities had the right to live according to their own laws and customs. Jews and Christians should be allowed to live according to Jewish or Christian laws, with their internal disputes being settled by Jewish or Christian leaders. Shi'ites in a Sunni society should be able to live by Shi'ite law, more or less independent of the Sunni

authorities. Tribes should be allowed to live according to tribal custom, and so on. Second, the ultimate authority was a Muslim ruling class to which each of these communities was collectively responsible through its leaders.

Neither of these assumptions holds under modern conditions. The modern state assumes that all of its subjects are citizens subject to the same laws, an assumption that Islamist political thought implicitly shares, so non-Muslims and Muslim minorities should be governed by the Islamic laws of the majority. Thus in Iran, Christian women are required to obey dress and behavior codes based on a particular understanding of Islamic law, one not shared even by all Iranian Muslim women. In Pakistan, Christians and Hindus are subject to draconian laws prohibiting blasphemy against the Qur'ān and the Prophet Muḥammad. Where accommodations are made, such as allowing alcohol for Jews and Christians but not for Muslims, social and legal problems immediately result. In Pakistan, for example, some Christians make a living by buying their legal allotment of alcohol and immediate reselling it to Muslims. The moral effects are unwholesome for both communities.

Second, the notion that the ruling class is to be made up only of Muslims is scarcely acceptable under modern conditions. It often seems natural to Muslims that the leadership of a predominately Muslim country should be restricted to Muslims. Muslims often assume, for example, that the president of the United States must by law be a Christian – an assumption, it is only fair to say, that is shared by many American Christians. Nonetheless, no matter how realistic such restrictions are in practice, they are deeply offensive to minorities.

Finally, there are fundamental issues of reciprocity. Muslims often cite the protections guaranteed to non-Muslim monotheists as evidence of Islamic tolerance of other religions – which they certainly were, under medieval conditions. However, the notion that religious rights are to be granted by the sufferance of an Islamic majority is not likely to be acceptable to minorities in the modern world. Non-Muslims resent the Islamic law that a male Muslim may marry a Christian or Jewish woman but a Muslim woman cannot marry a non-Muslim man, and there are other similar asymmetries. In practice, attempts at mutual understanding between Muslims and other religions often founder over issues of reciprocity. Muslims rightly insist that they should have full civil rights

in non-Muslim countries, which few question, but when the discussion turns to whether Christian groups have the right to evangelize or build churches in Muslim countries, it is frequently difficult for Muslims to see the parallel.

In short, Muslims have not developed ways of dealing intellectually, socially, or politically with religious diversity in the modern world.

The legitimacy of custom and local practice. Like any other great religious community, the Islamic world contains innumerable local traditions associated with religion. I am not talking about distinct sects like Shiʿism but about the innumerable local variations in customs associated with religion that vary by country, town, valley, ethnic group, tribe, class, neighborhood, or family. Some customs are simply variant ways of expressing a universal Islamic ritual or value, such as the special foods that each Islamic community associates with the Ramaḍān fast or the particular ways in which circumcisions are celebrated. Some predate Islam, such as the veneration of the shrines of the Patriarchs in the Holy Land. Others are quite modern, such as the television serials that are now firmly associated with Ramaḍān in the Arab world. Some represent a greater strictness than the Islam of the old books would require, such as the Afghan restrictions on women and the intolerance of divorce among the Lebanese Shiʿites. Many represent laxity, such as the not-uncommon assumption that strict veiling is less important for an unmarried girl than for a married woman or a woman who has been on pilgrimage. A great many are associated with Sufism and its local expressions, the extraordinarily diverse rituals associated with the shrines of saints in almost every Islamic country being the most conspicuous example. Such rituals often include music and dance and many other practices that are surely not commanded by the Sharīʿa. Above all, these complexes of customs are different in each place.

Nowadays, the legitimacy of such local customs is under attack from three directions. First, Muslims from all over the world have been thrown together, and what are normal Islamic practices for people who have lived with them for generations may seem to be bizarre and un-Islamic aberrations to those from elsewhere. This conflict plays out wherever Muslims from different countries are brought together, such as in the mosques of America. Second, from a modern, secular point of view, such practices often appear primitive and superstitious, which they sometimes are.

Third, the neo-fundamentalist movements deeply distrust local practices on the ground that they have no warrant in the Qur'ān or hadith, which is also very often true. On the other hand, much of the cultural richness of Islam is bound up in the local practices – music to take the most obvious example, or plain religious fun.

How much latitude for local diversity will be allowed as Islam comes to terms with modern condition? The Protestant Reformation destroyed much of the cultural richness of the old local medieval piety with its veneration of relics and local saints, but Protestantism, with its austere reformed churches, did not go on to produce much in the way of great religious art. The cost of this "purification" was enormous: in blood, in culture, and in lost works of art. Muslims have already seen the desecration of shrines by neo-fundamentalists in places like Iraq, Algeria, and Pakistan. Obviously, modern conditions will drive Muslims toward a more uniform international Islam, but what will be the balance between the local and the universal? It is a question that Muslims have barely begun to ask themselves, much less answer.

Changing the law. Islam has a sophisticated legal system that came to maturity a thousand years ago. As issues were settled, they fell under the heading of *ijmā'*, consensus, the doctrine that the community of Muḥammad could never agree on an error. After the community of scholars had come to consensus on an issue, the matter was closed and as firmly established as if the ruling had come from the mouth of the Prophet himself. This approach allowed Muslim legal scholars to settle new issues, but it also prevented them from revisiting old ones, so for most of the last millennium, Muslim legal scholars have been engaged in dealing with fine points of settled law rather than in developing new law. Above all, there is no mechanism in Islamic law for new legislation. Yet there are innumerable areas in Islamic law where – in the view of an outsider, at least – change would seem to be needed to accommodate modern conditions. These are of varying sorts, posing various degrees of legal difficulty.

Perhaps the simplest issues are those where well-established Islamic law allows or tolerates but does not command something incompatible with modern conditions or sensibilities, slavery and polygamy being obvious examples. These can be forbidden without doing great violence to the integrity of Islamic law. After all, no Muslim was ever required to

own a slave or take four wives, and even in the classical period of Islamic law these practices were tolerated as social necessities rather than positive goods.

More difficult are cases where Islamic law is in direct conflict with contemporary sensibilities or practical needs. Examples include the prohibition of giving or taking interest, a fundamental feature of modern financial systems, or the restrictions on the rights of women and minorities. In the former case, a whole discipline of Islamic economics has developed to allow participation in modern economic life while observing the letter of the medieval law.

Most difficult are the cases of legal norms that unquestionably have their bases in the Qur'ān and the instructions of the Prophet. An example might be the *ḥajj* pilgrimage, held each year in a specific ten-day period, sometimes in the middle of summer. In the nineteenth century, perhaps seventy thousand pilgrims went in a good year; now there are three million annually, and the number increases every year, even though they are restricted by the Saudi government. Mass deaths from fire and stampede have become routine. The obvious solution would be to allow the obligation of *ḥajj* to be fulfilled by pilgrimage at any time of the year, but it is very difficult to know how this would be justified under Islamic law. For Salafīs, the list of such non-negotiable difficulties in Islamic law is longer, because they are likely to reject some of the practical compromises developed in the Middle Ages.

So how are adjustments to be made? There have been several approaches. Many Muslims simply ignore the issues, observing such aspects of the law as are relevant to their conditions and ignoring the rest, but that is hardly an intellectual solution. Others, such as the Taliban of Afghanistan and, to a lesser extent, the Wahhābīs of Saudi Arabia, cling to the letter of the law as they understand it, at the cost of modernity when necessary. By contrast, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has often invoked the principle of practical necessity to get around legal difficulties. Others – the Islamic economists and, perhaps we should add, the couturiers of Cairo, Karachi, and Istanbul – have argued that the resources of traditional Islamic law can be adapted perfectly well to modern conditions and have produced mortgages, bank accounts, and women's high fashion compatible with Islamic legal standards. Then

there are both modernists and fundamentalists who argue that the complexities of medieval Islamic legal thought should be discarded outright. The modern Turkish Republic and, in practice, many other Islamic states have followed the usual medieval practice of restricting Islamic law to private life to one degree or another. Still others advocate "reopening the gate of *ijtihād*," reverting to the situation in the first centuries of Islamic history and allowing legal scholars to revisit closed legal issues. The fact that those advocating such a reopening are commonly advocating some idiosyncratic personal interpretation or government ideology should, however, give reformers pause.

THUS, COMING TO THE END OF OUR STORY, WE SEE REASON – NOW reason in its protean Western form – playing an ambiguous role in the Islamic community. On the one hand, the *'ulamā'*, the clergy, the traditional guardians of scholastic reason, have been marginalized by advocates of other conceptions of reason. On the other hand, the modernists have rejected the scholastic conception of reason, with its narrow focus on the exposition of revealed texts. Instead, the modernists appeal to a scientific or utilitarian conception of reason in which religion and revelation, like everything else, are to be judged on the basis of verifiability and practical utility. On the other side, the new fundamentalists demand consistency in the systematic imitation of the Islamic law of the Muslim community of Medina in the seventh century. Although Muslim legal scholars considered this approach as early as the eighth century and found it wanting, it has a powerful appeal in an age of mass literacy and technical education. The resultant fundamentalism has its analogues in the other great religious traditions, Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism in particular.

All of these approaches have obvious difficulties, so none has been wholly successful. In a sense, part of the difficulty is that the rationalism – or, at least, the concern for consistency – of the modern world sits uneasily with the delicate compromises with inconsistency and disagreement found in the medieval Islamic legal system and the larger medieval Islamic religious synthesis.

As a non-Muslim, it is not my place to say which of these positions is right or wrong or what Muslims ought to do to restore the unity of their

community. However, I close by suggesting two quite different sources that I think are likely to be needed to resolve these issues.

First, the Islamic learned tradition cannot be disregarded. It is easy to be impatient with traditional Islamic scholarship. It is old, narrow, often hidebound, and slow to deal with current issues. Many of the issues it has debated strike even sympathetic Muslims as rather silly. In fact, both Muslim modernists and many so-called fundamentalist groups have rejected the learned tradition. In Egypt, for example, both secularists and the revolutionary Islamic parties are suspicious of the traditionalist clergy of al-Azhar University. However, I do not think the Islamic learned tradition can be lightly discarded. The medieval clergy had a profound understanding of how Islamic law and teaching could be extracted from the materials available to them. They understood the limitations of their own reasoning, and they knew the Islamic tradition intimately. They taught a responsible humility before the sources of their tradition. Most of all, they understood the necessity and limitations of interpretation in deriving Islamic law and teaching.

Fundamentalists and modernists are, it seems to me, united against the traditional clergy and the medieval Islamic learned tradition in a willingness to interpret texts naively in a way that imposes idiosyncratic interpretations on them. Disagreements arise whose basis is no more than the limited understanding of a single reader of the Qur'ān and the hadith. Such interpretations can even be cynical, as in Indonesia, where students in government Islamic colleges under the Suharto regime were taught to do "ijtihad" – by which was explicitly meant finding Islamic justifications for government policies. Without the Islamic learned tradition, the Qur'ān and the hadith will become nothing more than a screen on which Muslims of varying temperaments will project their own preconceptions, personal proclivities, and prejudices.

Second, I think the Muslims living in the Americas are likely to play a key role in the renewal of the Islamic consensus. Though comparatively small in numbers, they are quickly evolving into a vigorous and successful community. As a minority in an alien cultural setting, they have had to ask themselves new questions about the meaning and nature of Islam. As a minority of very diverse origins, they do not have the luxury of preserving the divisions of the societies they came from. Mosques, whose congregations might come from a score of countries across the Islamic

world, have to face issues of diversity, cultural difference, modernism, unity, and the role of women, and to do so while trying to win acceptance from a larger non-Muslim society that usually has not been very sympathetic. Clergy have had to learn to play new roles and to deal with new problems. Muslim communities in American or European cities are microcosms of the Islamic world in a larger international society. I suspect that the lessons they are learning will prove invaluable to the Islamic lands of the Old World.

Selected Bibliography

The bibliography contains mainly material that might be of interest to a general reader with a preference for works in English, a language that my readers presumably know. All works cited in the notes are also included. For the convenience of readers who might wish to read further in particular areas, the bibliography is divided by topics arranged roughly in the order in which they appear in the book.

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