Chapter 4

Islam: Theological Hostility and the Problem of Difference

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4.1 The Theoretical Problem: Theological Hostility and Epistemological Difference

4.1.1 History and the Critical Study of Tradition.

In the Introduction to his paper, "Judaism: The Battle for Survival, the Struggle for Compassion," Alon Goshen-Gottstein discusses the complementary roles of the historian of religion and the theologian in the critical study of religious thought and practice. In his view, the task of the historian of religion is to provide a descriptive analysis of religion, whereas the task of the theologian is to construct (or reconstruct) religion as a system of thought. Often, however, the task of the historian of religion may replicate that of the theologian. As Alon states, the theologian's "success lies in his ability to recast the various historical data [of the religious tradition] into new structures of understanding, through which a vision of religion will emerge that will be faithful to tradition's history, which provides a fresh articulation and vision of tradition."[1] However, as Steven Wasserstrom has demonstrated about the works of Mircea Eliade, Gershom Scholem, and Henry Corbin, the historian of religion may also be involved in a reconstructive enterprise with important theological implications.[2] The historical analysis of a religious tradition often chal-

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[1]Alon Goshen-Gottstein, "Judaism: The Battle for Survival, the Struggle for Compassion," working draft of a paper for the project, *Religion, Society, and the Other: Hostility, Hospitality, and the Hope of Human Flourishing*, p. 1.

[2]See Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

lenges the theological and moral ideals of the tradition by juxtaposing such ideals against the realities of the tradition as it is practiced and understood through time. Furthermore, since every work of history necessarily examines the past from the perspective of the present, all historical projects, including those of religious history, are interpretive and thus reconstructive in nature. A work of religious history either reconfirms tradition by memorializing it or helps to redefine tradition by critically examining the relationship between theory and practice. This dialogue with the past helps create new theological and moral perspectives, by which a religious tradition responds to cultural, political, or epistemological challenges. No tradition is static and every tradition is open to multiple histories. To paraphrase Hans-Georg Gadamer, a tradition—whether religious or otherwise—is always in a process of transformation.[3] Like the "Transformer" robots made by Japanese toymakers, a religious tradition may take on a different form in different contexts. Its overall structure remains the same, but the contours of interpretation may change according to the exigencies of time, space, and culture.

Unfortunately, this constructive view of the relationship between theology and history, which seems self-evident to comparative theologians and historians of religion, has been far from universally accepted outside of the academy. Histories of theology may be written for each religious tradition, but when history helps create new theologies, they are often resisted. Part of the problem is that the tradition-as-process perspective described above has often been construed as a Trojan horse for historical or genealogical critiques of religion. Such critiques are seen as antithetical to both religion and tradition because they challenge the reification of "authentic" tradition as primordial or unchanging (Tradition with a capital "T") and because they regard much of religion, including theology, as a human construct. In the study of Islam, these perspectives may be exemplified by the "sectarian milieu" critique of the Qur'an inspired by the work of John Wansborough[4] or by critical works on early Islamic history written from Marxist or Weberian perspectives.[5] Some studies, such as those of Wansborough and Crone and Cook, have been used polemically to deny the historicity of the Qur'an and hence the legitimacy of Islam as an independent religion.[6] In other cases, radical Muslim modernists have used historical revisionism to create process theologies that have rightly been criticized for denuding Islam of either its tradition or its social meaning.[7]

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[3]Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Elevation of the Historicity of Understanding to the Status of a Hermeneutic Principle," in *Truth and Method,* Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall trans. (New York, 1994), pp. 265–307.

[4]See John Wansborough, *The Sectarian Milieu* (Oxford: 1978). This work suggests that most of the text of the Qur'an is not a product of the seventh century CE as Muslims believe, but that it was written in the Caliphal period, under the influence of religious polemics among Muslims, Christians, and Jews.

[5]For a Marxist approach to Islamic history that removes consideration of religious motives, see Mahmood Ibrahim, *Merchant Capital and Islam* (Austin, Texas: 1990). For a Weberian study of the same period, see Hamid Dabashi, *Authority in Islam: from the Rise of Muhammad to the Establishment of the Umayyads* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: 1989).

[6]See Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: the Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: 1977). This work produced a firestorm of controversy when it first appeared, because it denied the authenticity of the historical tradition of Islam and seemed to suggest that Islam was a product of traditions that first developed in Samaritan Judaism.

[7]See, for example, Muhammad Mahmud Taha, *The Second Message of Islam,* Abdullahi Ahmad

The historical and genealogical perspectives have themselves been criticized by Western defenders of tradition such as Alasdair MacIntyre, who sees them as fostering a philosophically incoherent perspectivism that undermines any common foundation for the virtues.[8] However, as MacIntyre's own career demonstrates, it is possible to be a critical historian or a philosopher of religion without being a positivist, and it is equally possible to acknowledge the insights of genealogists such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault without accepting the full implications of their epistemologies. As MacIntyre reminds us, the genealogical perspective is not as self-critical as it appears to be and its epistemology is subject to the same critiques that its practitioners have applied to others.[9] If the world-wide religious revival of the past fifty years has proved anything, it is that God still exists, despite the efforts of both historical positivists and Nietzscheans to kill him. Even today, at the start of the twenty-first century, most adherents of the so-called Abrahamic faiths would agree with the sentiment once expressed by a bumper sticker sold by the Campus Crusade for Christ: "'God is dead': Nietzsche. 'Nietzsche is dead': God."

What critical studies of religion do most effectively is not question the existence of God or the legitimacy of a religious tradition, but question people's understandings of God and the structures of power that mediate how people think about God and others. Epistemologically, historical and genealogical critiques of religion challenge notions of ultimate truth by demonstrating, first, the wide variety of truth-claims held by human beings, and second, how notions of the truth have been mediated politically and socially through time. By embracing relativistic or pluralistic notions of truth, they contest the inalterability of religious laws and the primordial nature of tradition, thus posing a challenge to religious tradition that may at times be as significant as the threat of rival theologies. This is particularly a problem for Islam and Christianity, where creedal agreement as to the nature of the truth is a precondition for both salvation and religious identity. The fundamentalist revival in both religions reveals a crisis of epistemological dissonance: previous regimes of power and authority no longer dominate religious discourse, and the spatial and conceptual juxtaposition of numerous alternatives to traditionally held world-views provide moral and theological challenges that neither Islam nor Christianity has yet been able to meet adequately. This is especially acute for Islam, for unlike in Christianity, where both liberals and fundamentalists have largely accepted the premises of liberal society and modernism, most Muslims have turned away from active philosophical engagement with modernity and have instead sought refuge in tradition and in questions of morality and political ethics.

Na'îm Trans. and Ed. (Syracuse, New York: 1987). Taha takes the concept of the created Qur'an to its outer limits by suggesting that all Qur'anic verses revealed at Medina be rejected, because their relevance is limited both historically and culturally. This would have the effect of removing the textual basis for most of Islamic law.

[8]This is a major thesis of Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition.* (Indiana: Notre Dame, 1990).

[9]For a more nuanced view of MacIntyre's critique of the genealogical perspective, see the discussion in Ibid, pp. 32–57.

4.1.2   Epistemological Otherness and Religious Authenticity.

It is at this point that the epistemological crisis of contemporary Islam bears most directly on the subject of "Hostility, Hospitality, and the Hope of Human Flourishing." Recently, two corollaries of the historical and genealogical critiques of religious tradition — the acceptance of religious and cultural pluralism and the critique of unitary notions of morality—were cited by a Saudi al-Qaeda activist as the theological and ethical consequences of liberal democracy. In an essay composed shortly before his death, Yusuf al-Ayyeri (who was killed in a gun battle with Saudi security forces in June, 2003) portrays democracy as a grave ideological threat to Islam. According to al-Ayyeri, this is because democracy "seductively" leads Muslims to believe that they can shape their own destinies and that by using their collective reasoning, they can alter the laws that govern them. This reliance on individual and collective reasoning, he asserts, will lead believers to accept moral relativism and cultural difference, ignore the laws promulgated by God for humankind, undermine the *Shari'ah* as the codification of God's will, and "make Muslims love this world, forget the next world, and abandon jihad."[10] The gendered tone of al-Ayyeri's essay is unmistakable: Eve, in the guise of a feminized Western democracy, seduces the Islamic Adam into accepting the forbidden fruits of personal autonomy and free will. According to al-Ayyeri's pessimistic moral calculus, theological and moral relativism are the inevitable consequences of individualism, and individualism is the ideological mask worn by egoism, the quintessential sin in Islam.

Although al-Ayyeri was an extremist, the issues he raises are not very different from the questions posed by less radical Muslim thinkers. For many Muslims, the entire problematic of "Religion and the Other: Hostility, Hospitality, and the Hope of Human Flourishing," is framed from the standpoint of Western liberalism. Most Muslims never consider that hospitality in a religious context means something more than inviting non-Muslim guests to one's home and treating them in a civil manner. If by "hospitality" one means etiquette, then Islam, which long ago assimilated Arab traditions of hospitality and sociability, is one of the most hospitable of religions. Responding to the current lack of hospitality between Muslims and non-Muslims in many parts of the world, Muslims would most likely point out that the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad are full of exhortations that call on believers to practice hospitality. The hostility between Israelis and Palestinians, or for that matter, between Iraqis and American troops, are due, they would say, to the effects of occupation and imperialist or neo-colonialist domination, not to the teachings of Islam.

If the question were posed from the standpoint of xenophobia, many Muslims would assert that "true" or "authentic" Islam has solved the problem of xenophobia by uniting humanity in a single brotherhood, the Islamic *Ummah*. According to Muslim idealists, who include a wide range of believers from political Islamists to ordinary Muslims who are active in mosques and Islamic centers, the fears and prejudices that have divided human beings throughout history can be ultimately overcome by the conversion of everyone to Islam. What, after all, could be more hospitable than to welcome all

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[10]Amir Taheri, "Al-Qaeda's Agenda for Iraq," *New York Post Online Edition,* September 4, 2003.

nations into the great tent of God's love and justice? Christian fundamentalists would probably assert the same. For such idealists, the few cultural differences that might remain between people after conversion to Islam would be overcome through the systematic application of *tawhid* (oneness) to all aspects of life.[11] Practically speaking, this would involve subsuming all human relations under the Islamic legal category of *mu'amalat*, the jurisprudence of public acts. The concept of *tawhid*, which was formerly understood only as the theological notion of divine unity, has become in the hands of modern Muslim ideologues an alternative epistemology in which divine unity is replicated by Islamized versions of everything from politics, to economics, to the "Islamization of knowledge."[12]

To partisans of the "Tawhidic" perspective, who dominate Islamic discourse today, all reconstructions of Islamic theology and history that seek to transcend creedal boundaries are, by their very nature, inauthentic. According to this view, Muslim contributions to the present "Religion and the Other" project would lack authenticity because the project seeks to transcend mere religious tolerance and asks fundamental questions of religious boundary maintenance, such as why theological differences must produce hostility or how hospitality and human flourishing might be promoted in a pluralistic and multi-religious world. Even more, the project seems to suggest a covert political agenda, in which religious understanding is attained through a de facto world theology where epistemological and theological difference is the norm rather than the exception. Here the problem is acute for every exoteric Muslim, because the concept of *tawhid* has historically militated against pluralistic world-views. As a theology, *tawhid* rules out any religious perspective that cannot be construed in some way as monotheis-

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[11]In *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq* (1962), usually translated as "Milestones" or "Signposts." the Muslim Brotherhood activist Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) condemns all non-Muslim societies as beyond the pale of Islam, "not because they believe in other deities besides God or because they worship anyone other than God, but because their way of life is not based on submission to God alone. Although they believe in the unity of God, still they have relegated the legislative attribute of God to others and submit to this authority, and from this authority they derive their systems, their traditions, and customs, their laws, their values and standards, and almost every practice of life." Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Damascus, no date), pp. 82-83. The South Asian Islamic activist Abu al-Ala' Mawdudi (d. 1979), understood the concept of *tawhid* to include even the denial of free will: "Man in this kingdom is by birth, a subject. That is, it has not been given to him to choose to be or not to be a subject...nor is it possible for him, being born a subject and a natural part of this kingdom, to swerve from the path of obedience followed by other creations. Similarly he does not have the right to choose a way of life for himself or assume whatever duties he likes." Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism* (Oxford, 1996), p. 58.

[12]The Iraqi-born legal specialist Taha Jabir al-'Alwani defines the "Islamic paradigm of knowledge" as "concerned with identifying and erecting a *tawhid*-based system of knowledge, a *tawhidi* episteme." See Idem, "The Islamization of Knowledge: Yesterday and Today" (Herndon, Virginia and London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1995), p. 14. Dr. 'Alwani, who received his degree in the Sources of Islamic Jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*) at al-Azhar University in 1973, was for ten years professor of Islamic law at Muhammad ibn Sa'ud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, the premier educational institution of Wahhabism. He was a founder in 1981 of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and is a founding member of the Council of the Muslim World League in Mecca. Since 1988, he has been president of the Fiqh Council of North America, which he also helped create. The Islamization of Knowledge movement is popularly identified with the late Dr. Ismail Farouqi of Temple University. However, the most intellectually sophisticated presentation of this theory can be found in Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: an Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur Malaysia: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995).

tic. Medieval Islamic states actively suppressed local forms of dualism and polytheism, and non-theistic belief systems, such as Buddhism, were virtually beyond discussion. Even the Islamic juridical notion of religious toleration, expressed through the concept of "Religions of the Book," cannot accurately be understood as implying pluralism in the modern, liberal sense of the term. Although monotheists of other religions, such as Jews and Christians, often coexisted peacefully with Muslims, from the standpoint of Islamic law all such coexistence had to take place either within the boundaries of an Islamic state or in an international context where hostility was the norm. The reason for this was as much epistemological as it was political: Only through the divinely bestowed laws of the Shari'ah could truth and justice be assured for all human beings. Seen in this light, the Islamic utopias envisioned by integrist organizations such as Hamas and Hizbollah are not so different from the political theories of mainstream scholars of the pre-modern period. For both medieval and modern Muslim thinkers, the only "real" civilization is Islamic civilization and the only "real" justice is Islamic justice.

4.1.3 Theology, Morality, and Difference.

As anhistorical religion, Islam has always had a problem with difference, and hostility toward non-Muslims has usually been accompanied by hostility against Muslim dissidents. Throughout most of Islamic history, meaningful debates about theology or epistemology were discouraged, whether inside or outside of the creedal boundaries of Islam. Adoption of epistemologies deemed alien to Islam, such as those of Hellenistic philosophy, brought charges of *bid'ah* (unwarranted innovation of tradition) or *zandaqah* (heresy), which could lead to imprisonment or worse. For the Muslim free thinker, heresy was even more dangerous than apostasy (*riddah*), because the apostate could always repent and return to Islam, whereas the heretic had no such recourse. For Muslim jurists and theologians, it was not fear of the other as an individual that was seen as a threat, but fear of the other's ideas and values. Alien epistemologies posed the danger of ideological infection, which, it was feared, sowed doubt in the minds of Muslims, compromised belief in *tawhid*, and threatened the Muslim Ummah with social and religious discord (*fitnah*). Cultural xenophobia was less of a problem in Islam than epistemological hostility or "ideophobia," a fear of alien concepts and world-views. This attitude continues to exist today, not only in the doctrines of al-Qaeda and the Taliban, but also in the beliefs of many Muslims who have been influenced by Wahhabism, Salafism, and other purist ideologies. Today's Muslims, beset as they are by ideological approaches to religion and post-colonial fears of Western imperialism, seldom display the confident attitude of the Abbasid-era scholar Ibn Qutayba (d, 889), who stated, "The ways to God are many and the doors to the good are wide," and wrote in *'Uyun al-Akhbar* (The Sources of Knowledge):

> Knowledge is the stray camel of the believer; it benefits one regardless from where one takes it. It will not lessen the truth if you hear it from pagans, nor can those who harbor hatred derive any advice from it. Shabby clothes do no injustice to a beautiful woman, nor do shells to pearls, nor does gold's origin from

dust. Whoever neglects to take the good from the place where it
is found misses an opportunity, and opportunities are as fleeting
as the clouds...Ibn 'Abbas (the cousin of the Prophet Muhammad)
said: "Take wisdom from whomever you hear it, for the fool may
utter a wise saying and a target may be hit by a beginner."[13]

Ibn Qutayba lived at a time when the Abbasid Caliphate dominated much
of the known world, and its intellectuals assumed that Islamic civilization
was on the cutting-edge of historical progress. At that time, foreign episte-
mologies posed little danger, but only a century later, the North African jurist
Muhammad ibn Abi Zayd al-Qayrawani (d. 998), who was strongly opposed
to the Abbasids and their project of translating Greek philosophical works
into Arabic, concocted a myth that blamed the Byzantine emperor for the
influence of Greek philosophy on Islamic thought. According to this story,
the ruler of Byzantium was afraid that, if his own people took up the study
of philosophy, they would abandon Christianity. Therefore, he collected all
of the Greek philosophical works in his empire and locked them up in a se-
cret building. When the vizier of the Abbasid Caliph heard about these books,
he asked the emperor if he could have them. The emperor was delighted to
comply with this request. He informed the Orthodox bishops that the works
of Greek philosophy, which were a threat to Christianity, could now be sent
to Baghdad, where they would undermine the religion of Islam.[14] Unfortu-
nately, it is Ibn Abi Zayd, and not Ibn Qutayba, whose opinions are dominant
in today's internal climate of ideophobia and theological hostility in Islam.

In Muslim culture, theological correctness is related to morality in a way
that can only be compared to the culture of Catholicism during the Inqui-
sition. For many, if not most of today's Muslims, bad theology leads to bad
morals, especially when the offenders are Western liberals or long-time his-
torical antagonists such as Jews and Hindus. This attitude promotes inter-
religious hostility by compounding epistemological hostility with the fear of
moral pollution. The conflation of theology and morality, which largely died
out in Christianity (except in fundamentalism) during the Enlightenment,
has been reinforced in Islam by the spread of anti-Enlightenment and nar-
rowly scriptural doctrines of religious and moral perfectionism in the colonial
and post-colonial eras. Islamic integrists such as Sayyid Qutb (d., 1966) and
Abu al-Ala Mawdudi (d. 1979) have ascribed the political and social failures
of secular regimes in the Muslim world to a new form of spiritual and moral
infidelity (*jahiliyyah*) caused by the adoption of "un-Islamic" values and epis-
temologies. Qutb's view of *jahiliyyah* echoes the earlier ideas of Muhammad
ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1791), the founder of the Wahhabi sect of Arabia. In
his influential book *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq* (Signs on the Way), he asserts, "Any so-
ciety that is not Muslim is *jahiliyyah*. . . as is any society in which something
other than God alone is worshipped. . . Thus, we must include in this category
all the societies that now exist on earth."[15] Qutb's concept of *jahiliyyah* re-
mains central to the epistemological perspective of the Muslim Brotherhood,

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[13]Vincent J. Cornell, "Religion and Philosophy," in *World Eras, Volume 2: The Rise and Spread
of Islam, 622-1500,* Susan L. Douglass, Ed. (Michigan: Farmington Hills, 2002) p. 368.

[14]Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in
Baghdad and Early 'Abbasid Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th Centuries)* (London and New York: 1998)
pp. 156–157.

[15]Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and Pharaoh* (Berkeley: 1993) p. 47.

as well as to those of its successors, including Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Tunisia's Islamic Tendency, Algeria's FIS, and Morocco's Justice and Virtue. Al-Qaeda and its sister organizations from the Arab world to Indonesia also base their ideology on Qutb's concept of *jahiliyyah.*

Among many Sunni Muslims not affiliated with these organizations, the concept of ideological *jahiliyyah* has led to a widespread distrust of Western systems of thought, particularly with regard to the humanities and social sciences, which are seen as sources of epistemological infection.[16] Even in the United States, few Muslim students major in the humanities or social sciences, nor do many major in the theoretical sciences. Consequently, the intellectual tools that are provided by these disciplines are acquired inadequately, if at all. The result has been the creation of a self-righteous and politically active cadre of applied technologists—engineers, doctors, and computer scientists—who view religion as a mathematical problem in which theology and virtue must balance on either side of a purified Islamic identity, but who also view the world as completely malleable to the human will. No doctrine of Islamic integrism is less justifiable from a Qur'anic perspective than the idea that human beings can make the world perfect through political or social action. Even if all of the world were Muslim, a perfectly just society would still not exist. It is hard to imagine a doctrine more religiously misguided and philosophically confused than this contradictory attempt to mix (a) scientific empiricism with regard to the physical world, (b) totalitarian perfectionism with regard to the sociopolitical world, and (c) fundamentalist traditionalism with regard to the historical past. In the sixteenth century, a Moroccan Sufi named Ridwan ibn 'Abdallah al-Januwi (d. 1583) suffered discrimination from the scholars of Fez because his father was a converted Christian and his mother was a converted Jew. Commenting on the contradictory values of his own time, he said, "Soon you will see, when the dust clears, whether a horse or an ass is beneath you!"[17] Today's alternative is more lethal; it is a bomb, not an ass, on which many Muslims may be sitting.

4.1.4 Critical History and Theology.

In order to overcome the epistemological crisis of contemporary Islam, Muslim intellectuals must look critically at the history of Islamic thought and formulate a theology and moral philosophy that has its roots in the classical intellectual tradition of Islam rather than in a utopian golden age or in a modern ideological construct such as the "Islamization of knowledge." Whether such utopias refer back to the time of the Prophet and his companions, or to nostalgia for past imperial glory under a Pan-Islamic Caliphate, both alternatives focus more on politics and social control than on spirituality. Neither fundamentalism nor perfectionism provides an adequate response to the theo-

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[16]In more than fifteen years of teaching university-level Islamic Studies in the United States, I have been told several times by Muslim students that their parents strongly discouraged them from taking courses in philosophy and literary criticism, because of the potential effects of these disciplines on their creedal (*'aqidah*) adherence to Islam. They were also warned away from Islamic Studies courses, partly out of fear of being identified as Islamic activists, but also out of fear of what one local imam in Durham, North Carolina termed "academic Islam."

[17]Muhammad ibn Yusuf as-Sijilmasi, *Tuhfat al-ikhwan wa mawahib al-imtinan fi manaqib Sidi Ridwan ibn 'Abdallah al-Januwi* (Rabat: Bibliothèque Générale, ms. 114K), p. 86.

logical and moral challenges of pluralism and globalization. It is ironic that a system of thought that has been so resistant to foreign epistemologies is now so much in need of the "archaeology of knowledge" advocated by genealogists such as Michel Foucault.[18] Muslims must learn to be more intellectually open about their own doctrinal differences and about the memories that they make of their past before they can be theologically hospitable with believers in other religions. Especially now, in the midst of the culture war between Islam and the West inaugurated by the events of September 11, 2001, Muslims need to reopen the question of what Mohammed Arkoun has termed the "unthought" and the "unthinkable" in Islamic discourse.[19]

The history of *la pensée Islamique* is nothing if not a history of Foucauldian "regimes of knowledge," their "places," and their "archives." Yet, the Muslim theologian or historian who adopts such a critical-theoretical approach risks rejection by many, if not a majority, of his co-religionists. Throughout Islamic history, the actual diversity of theological, juridical, and philosophical views was repeatedly contradicted by persistent, if unrealistic, attempts to create a unifying orthodoxy. This move toward orthodoxy began with the jurist Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i (d. 820), who systematized Islamic legal reasoning by limiting both the scriptural sources of knowledge and the forms of logic that were used to approach them. It was continued in the attempt by certain Abbasid Caliphs (ca. 832-847) to abolish traditionalism and impose by force an unworkable form of Mu'tazili rationalism. It came closest to succeeding in the centuries following the Seljuq vizier Nizam al-Mulk's (d. 1092) attempt to institute Shafi'i-style hemeneutics and Ash'ari theology in state-sponsored religious colleges.[20] Although some scholars maintain that the concept of orthodoxy is inappropriate in Islam, the use of the Persian term *niku i'tiqad* ("pure belief") to describe the type of Sunni Islam advocated by Nizam al-Mulk leaves little doubt about what was intended.[21]

Over the past half-century, another attempt to create an Islamic orthodoxy has been under way, this time directed by Wahhabi purists and Salafi integrists such as the Muslim Brothers, who in the 1960s formed an alliance of convenience under the rubric of the Muslim World League of Saudi Arabia.[22] The institutional sites of this movement are Islamic centers throughout the world, particularly in regions that either are new to Islam, or have just

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[18]See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language,* translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: 1972).

[19]For Arkoun's critique of what he calls the "*memoire-tradition*" of Islam, see "Comment Étudier la Pensée Islamique?" in Mohammed Arkoun, *Pour une Critique de la Raison Islamique* (Paris, 1984), pp. 7–40. Khaled Abou El Fadl has recently criticized Arkoun's "rethinking" of the structure of Islamic reason for "using the Islamic tradition as a text upon which to continue a debate about Western epistemology." Idem, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women.* (Oxford, 2001), p. 133 n. 8.

[20]See George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh, 1981), esp. pp. 80–148.

[21]See Omid Safi, "Power and the Politics of Knowledge: Negotiating Political Ideology and Religious Orthodoxy in Saljuq Iran" (Duke University, Ph.D. dissertation, 2000) pp. 7–11.

[22]The first constituent council of the Muslim World League, which met in December 1962, was headed by Muhammad ibn Ibrahim ibn Al al-Shaykh, a direct lineal descendant of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of the Wahhabi movement, and included Said Ramadan, the son-in-law of Hasan al-Banna', founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. See Hamid Algar, *Wahabbism: A Critical Essay* (Oneonta, New York: 2002), 49.

returned to Islam, such as Europe, the United States, and Central Asia. The libraries, bookstores, and classrooms of these institutions are remarkably uniform in the materials they disseminate and in the version of Islam that they teach. In the United States, the work of Islamic centers and Islamic schools is abetted by organizations such as the Islamic Society of North America and the Muslim Students' Association, which promote similar theological, epistemological and political agendas, and claim to speak for Islam as a whole. Using a combination of peer pressure, modern marketing techniques, and the creation of authoritarian bodies such as the Fiqh Council of North America, they have largely succeeded in marginalizing Muslim academics and representatives of the historical tradition of Islam who do not agree with them. These dissidents include not only liberal or "progressive" Muslim academics but also those who self-consciously represent the older intellectual traditions of Islam, including Sufis and those who seek to revive and reform, rather than to replace, the Islam of the historical legal schools.[23] Using petrodollars, the institutional support of the Muslim World League, and now the mass media, modern Salafis, Wahhabis, and like-minded reformists have succeeded in making Islam more doctrinally homogeneous, and hence more orthodox, than ever before.[24]

A non-Muslim scholar, who does not have a personal stake in the form that Islam will take in the coming century, might assert that the contemporary attempt to create an integrist Islamic orthodoxy is a normal part of the development of Islam as a religious tradition.[25] As Alasdair MacIntyre observes, "A tradition of inquiry characteristically bears within itself an always open to revision history of itself in which the past is characterized and recharacterized in terms of developing evaluations of the relationship of the various parts of that past to the achievements of the present."[26] In this sense, the Salafi and Wahhabi rejection of medieval Islamic institutions and the attempt to recuperate a lost sense of unity by rationalizing away past "accretions" are a normal part of the dialectic between the past and the present. As MacIntyre further observes, "Knowledge is possessed only in and through participation

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[23] *The American Muslim,* a widely distributed magazine published by the Muslim American Society in Falls Church, Virginia, carries a regular *fatwa* (juridical advice) column by Sheikh Muhammad al-Hanooti. The September 2003 issue contains a question (p. 38) by a woman who has been approached by "a good Muslim man" for marriage. Unfortunately, the man happens to be a Sufi, and the woman does "not want to end up with someone who does something wrong against Islam." Hanooti's reply clearly illustrates the marginalization of both Sufism and historical Islamic tradition mentioned above: "I do not know what sort of Sufi he is, but, in general, I advise you to marry a person who has good knowledge of Islam, and one who is not merely following culture and tradition. In general, I would caution you against marrying a Sufi, for a great many of them do not have a good knowledge of Islam and are tilted toward lives of inconvenience." By counseling the woman to not marry a Sufi, Hanooti is asserting, in effect, that Sufis are heretics.

[24] The same tendency can be found in Shi'ite Islam as well, where the dominance of the religious establishment (*al-hawzah*) has been reinforced through the influence of Ayatollah Khomeini's ideology of "governance of the jurist" (*wilayat al-faqih*).

[25] This was a common point of view in apologetic works on Islamism written before September 11, 2001, such as John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat, Myth or Reality?* (Oxford: 1992). See, for example, the chapter entitled, "Islamic Organizations: Soldiers of God," where the Islamist critique of traditional "stagnation" is accepted without questioning its assumptions (pp. 119–187).

[26] MacIntyre, *Versions of Moral Inquiry,* p. 150.

in a history of dialectical encounters."[27] Modern integrist reformism is, on this view, only the most recent of such encounters. However, when such dialectic is based on an epistemological rupture between an idealized time of origins and a newly de-legitimized intellectual tradition that dominated Islamic discourse for centuries, this can only be construed as a tacit admission by Muslims that Islam, as a system of thought, has been a failure. It is neither fair to Islam nor historically justifiable to assert that the majority of Islamic intellectual history has been worthless, or that the soul of Islam can be recuperated by political and social means alone.

From the point of view of philosophical logic, the rejection of the historical traditions of Islamic thought by Sunni integrist intellectuals constitutes a massive example of the fallacy of the excluded middle. To all intents and purposes, there are no epistemological "middle ages" for integrist Islam. According to the Salafi version of authenticity, there is only the era of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions and the current attempt to reconstitute that utopian period through the reestablishment of the Shari'ah. With the exception of the Hanbali traditions of law and theology, the intervening 1200 years of Islamic intellectual history was a theological and moral dark age of unwarranted innovation. While there is much discussion of past Islamic glory by contemporary Sunni ideologues, it is seldom mentioned that the glory of Islamic civilization was built on foundations that have largely been rejected by present-day reformers. Such a position is both logically and historically untenable. One cannot ignore the fact that many of the traditions rejected by contemporary Salafis developed from the same roots that nurtured Salafism itself. How else can one explain how the same early ascetics cited by Wahhabis to promote Salafi values can also be cited by Sufis as forerunners of their own tradition? Such paradoxes are proof that Islam is not as simple as it is made to seem. It is not sufficient to take refuge from the problematic of the past in a fundamentalist revival of the "myth of the eternal return."[28]

In fact, Muslims have resorted to this myth throughout their history, starting as far back as the earliest intra-Islamic doctrinal conflicts in the seventh century CE. However, the "eternal return" to the Way of Muhammad was traditionally accomplished as much through the inculcation of inner moral and spiritual values as it was through outward action. The Prophet Muhammad was a Messenger of God, not a social engineer. Social engineers start on the outside, by first creating political and social systems, and then move inside, toward the individual; God starts on the inside, by first changing the individual, and then leaving it to individuals to reform society by applying their new consciousness to the social world.[29] Today's attempt to engineer Islamic society socially in the context of modern nation states has very little in common with the pre-modern history of Islamic reform. The current debate over Islam's *telos* is no longer a conversation or even an argument, but instead has

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[27]Ibid, p. 202.

[28]See Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or, Cosmos and History* (Princeton, 1974). Although Eliade championed the perspective of "traditional" man, this book is still a useful comparative study of the mythemes that are employed by Islamic revivalists.

[29]Contemporary Muslims would do well to heed the warnings against "utopian social engineering" in Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies: Volume One: the Spell of Plato* (London: 2003 reprint of 1945 original). See especially Chapter 9, "Aestheticism, Perfectionism, Utopianism."

become a shouting match among ideologues jockeying for exclusive power. Intellectual arguments may be silenced by political means, but they are never laid to rest. True arguments depend for their existence on shared assumptions, which are hard to find at the extremes of Islamic discourse. If the majority of Islamic history is subject to deniability, there is no real tradition to talk about. The concept of warranted assertibility, by means of which competing ideas are judged as rational arguments, means little if everyone has the warrant to assert whatever political power allows them to assert, whether it makes sense or not.

According to MacIntyre, such chaotic emotivism, which is characteristic of contemporary Sunni thought, is quintessentially modern and thus would be antithetical to Islamic tradition, even to tradition as conceived by the Salafis. In MacIntyre's view of philosophical modernity, Salafi and neo-Hanbali integrism would be just as emotivist, just as modern, and hence just as radically different from historical Islamic tradition as its main opponent, Islamic liberalism.[30] In the ongoing debate about who speaks for Islam, the integrist voice is no more authentic than that of the modernist, the Sufi, or the "progressive" legal traditionalist. What is most significant about this debate is that the competing versions of Islam are epistemologically so different from each other as to constitute separate systems of warrantability. When Muslims were first instructed by the Qur'an to say to unbelievers, "To you your religion and to me mine" (109:6), no one imagined that Muslims might one day be compelled to utter this phrase to each other. This hostility within is as significant for the future of Islam as the hostility directed toward non-Muslims without.

Today, authentic intellectual traditionalism in the Islamic world exists primarily among Shi'ite scholars and Sufis. Cultural traditionalism, in which local customs are cast as religious virtues, is found primarily in the rural areas of the Islamic world, and is mixed with Salafi or Wahhabi ideology in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. As for the rest of Sunni Islam, the historical tradition of Islamic thought is a forgotten memory, and the great thinkers of the Islamic past are merely names that one learns in secondary school. Since Sunni thought has already severed itself from most of its roots, the most honest way to confront the theological and moral challenges of the present is to meet them head-on, and not to hide behind the veil of a supposedly "pure" time of origins that is itself a modern ideological construction. The deeper questions of "Islam and the other" must be answered by a new Islamic theology of difference, one that truly engages in the kind of dialectic by which historical traditions develop and evolve; a dialectic that legitimately draws from the past yet transcends the past by taking full account of the possibilities of the present. Only in such a way can Islam share with other religious traditions in a common vision of human flourishing.

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[30]See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Indiana: Notre Dame, 1984) pp. 6–22.

4.2 "For Each of You We Have Made a Law and a Way of Life": Outlines of a Qur'anic Theology of Hospitality

4.2.1 Finding Interpretive Space.

The dialectical process by which a tradition develops through time requires a hermeneutical space in which critical theology and the critical history of theology can operate. The Wahhabi and Salafi regimes of power that dominate contemporary Sunni discourse limit such space by rejecting foreign epistemologies and by branding all models of reform that do not fit their political agendas as unwarranted innovation. This is the same whether these "unwarranted" methods seek a neo-traditionalist revival of the juridical, philosophical, or Sufi approaches of the past, or whether they employ the tools of critical theory to come up with new solutions. The Salafi response to the problem of making Islam relevant in an increasingly pluralistic, globalized, and empirical world is to proclaim that "true Islam is simple" and to reduce religion to a calculus of ritual obligations, external symbols of group identity (such as modern "Islamic" dress), and social mores that are designed to promote political activism and creedal exclusivism. The consequence in Sunni Islam has been a pervasive anti-intellectualism that when combined with the tendencies described above, has turned Islamic integrism, if not the majority of Sunni Islam, into more of a sectarian cult than a world religion.

Before modern times, few Muslim scholars of repute would dare to assert, "Islam is simple." Islam, as it was lived and interpreted, was as simple or complex as it needed to be, and the level at which it was approached conceptually depended on what circumstances required. The institution of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), traditionally the most important intellectual discipline in Islam, was premised on the need to apply the Shari'ah in a multiplicity of different contexts and developed a sophisticated logic, derived largely from Aristotle, for interpreting the Law in different situations. The complexity of Islam in practice was acknowledged further through the establishment of Islamic jurisprudence in several methodological schools, which differed in their approach to textual sources, yet recognized each other's right to exist. The juridical hermeneutical method, known as *ta'wil*, was the subject of treatises within each school and could operate on different conceptual levels.[31]

An example of the hermeneutical space that could be created through *ta'wil* can be found in Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's (d. 1111) *Faysal al-tafriqa bayna al-Islam wa al-zandaqa* (The Decisive Criterion for Distinguishing Islam from Heresy). This work was written to counteract the tendency of partisan Muslim scholars to condemn their opponents as unbelievers or heretics. Although contemporary neo-Hanbali and Salafi activists have often criticized Ghazali for departing from the Sunnah, his writings were so influential in setting the standards of Sunni orthodoxy that he is popularly known as "The Authority on Islam" (*Hujjat al-Islam*). Ghazali belonged to the Ash'ari school

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[31]An important work in this genre is Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn al-'Arabi al-Ma'afiri (d. 1149), *Qanun al-Ta'wil* (The Rules of Hermeneutics), Edited by Muhammad al-Slimani (Beirut: 1990). This jurist from Seville in Muslim Spain, who belonged to the Maliki legal tradition, but used Shafi'i methodology, was not related to the famous Sufi Ibn 'Arabi, discussed below.

of theology, which taught that one could not call oneself a Muslim unless one could rationally justify why one believed the way one did. According to Ghazali, all phenomena, including the statements of God in the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad in the Sunnah, can be understood, and thus interpreted, on five different levels: (1) ontologically-existentially (*dhati*), (2) experientially (*hissi*), (3) conceptually (*khayali*), (4) intellectually (*'aqli*), and (5) metaphorically (*shabahi* or *majazi*).[32] These five levels constitute for Muslims the boundaries of interpretive space: "Everyone who interprets a statement of the Lawgiver in accordance with one of the preceding levels has deemed such statements to be true... It is [thus] improper to brand as an unbeliever anyone who engages in such hermeneutics, as long as he observes the rules of hermeneutics (*qanun al-ta'wil*)."[33]

The rules of hermeneutics assume that the theologian will at times be compelled to acknowledge "the logical impossibility of the apparent meaning (*zahir*) of a [sacred] text."[34] Once this becomes the case, hermeneutical space is opened for a variety of alternative explanations. All that is required to render an interpretation valid is to proceed through the five hermeneutical levels systematically, thus establishing a logical warrant for the interpretive method that one chooses to employ. One should also establish a proper philosophical warrant (*burhan*) for each assertion by adhering as closely as possible to the original text and by not allowing doctrinal or political prejudices to cloud one's judgment.[35] Although Ghazali allows for differences of opinion, he does not assume that all interpretations are of equal value. Some conclusions may be misguided or even completely wrong, but wrong interpretations must be disproved dialectically. They do not constitute heresy and should not be suppressed. An interpretation is heretical only if it denies the truth of a sacred text on all five levels of interpretation. According to the epistemological standard held by Ghazali, the hermeneutics of sacred texts constitute informed speculation (*zann*) and not truth (*haqq*). Thus, no one may claim an exclusive right of interpretation and no single interpretation of a text is definitive. Ghazali's hermeneutical method fulfills an important need in Islamic discourse by allowing dissident theologians the "right to be wrong." Thusly, it preserves alternative voices that help move the dialectical process of interpretation forward.

4.2.2   Sufi Hermeneutics and Religious Hospitality.

The warrant to interpret sacred texts on more than one level of meaning is necessary if Muslim theologians are to engage constructively with theologians of other religions in a common quest for religious understanding. An advantage of the critical historical method of Islamic hermeneutics is that it enables the modern theologian to reexamine the vast sweep of Islamic intellectual history, to reassess its successes and failures, and to resurrect inter-

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[32] Sherman A. Jackson, *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam: Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's* Faysal al-Tafriqa bayna al-Islam wa al-Zandaqa (Oxford: 2002), I have altered Jackson's translation of terms slightly to better fit the present discussion. Ghazali's full discussion of the terms noted above is on pp. 94–100.

[33] Ibid., p. 50.

[34] Ibid., p. 104.

[35] Ibid.

pretive voices that had been silenced in the past. Today, these silenced voices include most of the intellectual tradition of medieval Islam: philosophers, systematic theologians such as Ghazali, most jurisprudential scholars working within the Sunni schools of law, and Sufis. Although it would be a mistake to consider all Sufis "liberal" or "open-minded," Sufi theologians were more inclined than their exoteric counterparts to view Islam from a wider, more universalistic perspective and to deal meaningfully with religious difference. In part, this was because they understood the concept of theology in its etymological sense as the "science of the nature of God," and followed their inquiries wherever those inquiries took them. Some of the most important Sufi writings on religious difference came from the theological school of the Spanish mystic Muhyi' al-Din Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240), whose followers were often criticized for not adhering closely enough to the creedal boundaries established by Muslim jurists.[36] An example of why this is so can be found in *al-Insan al-Kamil* (The Perfect Man) by the Iraqi Sufi 'Abd al-Karim al-Jili (d. 1428). Jili, who was one of the most important of Ibn 'Arabi's successors, ends an extended discussion on the origins of religious differences with the following statement:

> Ten sects are the sources for all the religious differences (which are too numerous to count), and all differences revolve around these ten. They are: Polytheists, Naturalists, Philosophers, Dualists, Magians, Materialists, "Barhamites," Jews, Christians, and Muslims. For every one of these sects God has created people whose destiny is Heaven and people whose destiny is the Fire. Have you not seen how the polytheists of past ages who lived in regions not reached by the prophet of that time are divided into those who do good, whom God rewards, and those who do evil, whom God recompenses with fire? Each of these sects worships God as God desires to be worshipped, for He created them for Himself, not for themselves. Thus, they exist just as they were fashioned. [God] may He be glorified and exalted, manifests His names and attributes to these sects by means of His essence and all of the sects worship Him [in their own way].[37]

At first glance, this passage seems to deny the importance of religious difference, and appears to promote a medieval version of the "transcendent unity of religions" thesis. However, on a more careful reading, one finds that it is a legitimate, if somewhat unconventional, interpretation of the following Qur'anic verses:

> For each one of you we have made a Law (*shir'ah*) and a way of life (*minhaj*). If God had wished, He would have made you into a single community. Instead, He has done this so that He may try you with what He has given you. So strive against each other in good works, for to God is the return for all of you and He will inform you about that wherein you differ (5:48).

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[36]These polemics are detailed in Alexander D. Knysh's excellent study, *Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: the Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany, New York: 1999).

[37]'Abd al-Karim al-Jili, *al-Insan al-kamil fi ma'rifat al-awakhir wa al-awa'il* (Cairo: 1981), vol. 2 p. 122.

If your Lord had willed it, everyone on earth would have believed. Would you then force people to become believers? (10:99)

Although Jili's exegesis of these verses was unconventional when compared to those of exoteric scholars, it was fully valid according to the rules of hermeneutics discussed above. First, Jili did not engage in the hermeneutical slight of hand ascribed to Sufis by their opponents, but took the word of God at its literal meaning. By accepting the apparent meaning (*zahir*) of these verses, he was able to interpret them (in Ghazali's terms) conceptually and intellectually, without having to resort to metaphor. Then he took a third Qur'anic verse, "God does whatever He wishes" (2:253), and applied this theological truism to the fact of religious diversity. From here, the conclusions that Jili draws in the text of *al-Isan al-Kamil*—that religious diversity is God's will, and that all human beings practice religion as God intended them to do—follow logically as a valid interpretation of the sacred text. Finally, Jili also provides a Qur'anically justifiable explanation for another famous verse: "There is no compulsion in religion; the way of guidance is clearly distinguished from error. But he who rejects false objects of worship and believes in God has grasped a firm handhold (*al-'urwah al-wuthqa*) that will never break. God is All-Seeing, All-Knowing" (2:256). For Jili, religions are not of equal value; Islam is quintessentially the religion of God. However, other religions should be respected and their followers should not be forced into Islam, because all religions, including those that are in error, exist by God's will. One may infer from this conclusion that the modern preoccupation with *da'wa*—actively "calling" people to the religion of Islam—is not a primary duty for Muslims, at least when compared with the other requirements of the faith.

Contemporary Muslims should carefully consider Jili's conclusions and the Qur'anic verses that support them. In the modern age, the chief religious problem for Islamic theology is not the proliferation of local religions, but the competition of rival world religions, each of which has a history longer than that of Islam and has developed sophisticated means of defense and interpretation. If God had truly intended to save the world through the message of Christ alone, then why would He have allowed the theological challenge of Islam? If Islam resolved all of the contradictions of Christian theology, then why is Christianity still the largest religion? Part of the answer to these questions, Jili would assert, lies in the recognition that each religious tradition contains a portion of universal truth, to which people respond in their own way. Theological hostility can never be transformed into theological hospitality until this fact is recognized. In a recent unpublished paper, Martin Lings, commenting on Mark XII, 30 ("Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all they strength."), notes that Muslim and Christian religious authorities are much too ready to risk "with all thy mind" for the sake of "with all thy soul and with all thy strength."[38]

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[38]Martin Lings, "With All Thy Mind," unpublished paper disseminated at the second "Building Bridges" seminar hosted by His Highness the Emir of the State of Qatar and Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, Doha, Qatar, 7–9 April, 2003.

4.2.3 The Creative Command of God.

The subject of religious difference in the Qur'an involves two separate types of divine command, which entail two different kinds of human obligations. Each command involves a different way of approaching the inter-religious other. The first command conceives of the other in a universal sense, as a fellow descendant of Adam, the first human being. In this perspective, human beings share natural duties and responsibilities that result from the covenant contracted between God and humanity before the creation of Adam. The second type of divine command applies more specifically and narrowly to the Muslim believer. This constitutes the level of individual and collective obligations, and includes the Qur'anic verses of difference and discrimination, which separate Muslims from believers in other religious traditions. It is on this level that the most problematical Qur'anic verses are found, which discuss the relations between the historical Muslim Ummah and other religious communities, the theological relationship between Islam and other historical religions, and the rules of social interaction, including the rules of war.

Ibn 'Arabi calls the first divine command the Creative Command (*al-amr al-takwini*).[39] This command is "creative" because it regards all of creation, including humanity, as a product of divine mercy. The Qur'anic verses that best convey this command are: "My mercy encompasses everything" (7:156); and "His only command when he desires a thing is to say to it 'Be!' and it is" (36:82). This is because the act of creation, the bestowal of existence upon nonexistence, is both the most powerful and the most merciful act that God performs. The Creative Command is thus prior to all other types of divine command because it expresses most completely the theological and ontological oneness that is the Qur'an's basic message. Under the auspices of this command, the most important duty of the human being is to recognize that insofar as she is human and created, she has one God, one origin, one ancestor (Adam), one race, and shares with all other human beings the same nature, dignity, and religion. This religion is Islam, in the universal Qur'anic sense of recognizing and submitting to the consequences of one's ontological dependence on God. This understanding also expresses what moral philosopher John Rawls might have called the Islamic "Original Position," because it is built on the fundamental relationship between self and other that is the basis of all natural duties, whether between the individual and God or between oneself and other human beings.[40] This "Original Position" is epitomized in the Qur'an by a verse that expresses humanity's assent to their ontological dependence on their Creator: "When thy Lord drew forth their descendants from the children of Adam, He made them testify concerning themselves [saying]: 'Am I not your Lord?' They replied, 'Yes, we do so testify'" (7:172).

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[39]William C. Chittick calls this the "engendering command," because it results from the manifestation of the divine name *al-Rahman* (The Engendering). The source for this idea is Ibn Arabi's *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyyah* (The Meccan Revelations). See William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany, New York: 1994) p. 142.

[40]See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: 1999) pp. 10–19. This covenantal assent is, of course, not a secular social contract, as in Rawls' version of the Original Position. However, equality of subservience before God, in the Qur'anic sense, does impart a basic equality of human beings in the sense that they all share the same qualities, whether these qualities are defined positively or negatively.

The normal human condition is to see God from the starting point of the world. To see God from a worldly perspective is to see God as the Lord and Creator of everything. This is the attitude expressed in the Islamic Original Position when the human being responds to God's query, "Am I not your Lord?" with "Yes, I do so testify." This event is interpreted by Muslim exegetes as having taken place before the earthly creation of the human being, when all of Adam's future descendants were summoned to acknowledge God's Lordship and His role in their creation. The fact that this covenant was contracted before humans were on earth implies that human beings have a pre-eternal side to their nature, and thus have the ability to rise imaginatively above their earthly condition and view the world of creation as if from a distance or a height.[41] The higher one goes, the more the world appears as a whole, and differences that appear significant on the ground begin to disappear with the change in perspective. From such a vantage point, all of the world, including all people and all of their different beliefs, are part of the same reflection of God, whose "face" will abide forever (55:27), because "He is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward" (57:3). This view of the world, in which self and other are seen as part of the same whole, is an important aspect of the Creative Command, and gives rise to the natural duties that result from the Original Position: "Oh humankind! Keep your duty to your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and created its mate from it and from whom issued forth many men and women. So revere (*attaqu*) the God by whom you demand rights from one another and revere the rights of kinship" (4:1). The duty to revere God by fulfilling the promise of the pre-eternal covenant implies reverence for the rights of kinship (*al-arham*, literally, "the wombs"). In the context of the Creative Command, this duty would apply to genealogical kinship, but it would also include the greater kinship of the human species, since all of humankind, as the children of Eve, were born "from the same womb."

Compare tension between creation and revelation in Jewish tradition in section 2.1.1.

To return to the terminology used by Rawls, the "initial contractual situation" of humanity's covenant with God is the starting-point from which all concepts of right devolve, including the rights that people demand from each other. The fact that such rights are both mutual and reciprocal is also part of the Original Position and is a consequence of the shared ontology of humanity. This ontology includes a transcendent aspect, which constitutes the spiritual potential of each human being. The Qur'an says that God breathed His spirit into Adam (38:72), and "[God] created the heavens and the earth with truth and right (*bi-l-haqq*), and fashioned [Adam] in the best of forms" (64:3). Thus, human beings, who are composed of both divine spirit and matter, have a natural duty to respect the rights of both self and other, because both self and other share the same combination of material being and spirit. This duty pertains irrespectively of whether the other is one's biological kin or belongs to another race or religion. To objectify the other means to forget that all human beings are made up of the same combination of spirit and clay. This is the mistake that led Satan, in the form of Iblis, to disrespect Adam by saying, "I am better than [Adam]. You created me from fire, whereas you created him from clay" (7:12).

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[41]This could be a possible metaphorical interpretation of Qur'an, 7:46, "And on the Heights are men who know all of them by their signs."

According to Rawls, a conception of right "is a set of principles, general in form and universal in application, that is to be publicly recognized as a final court of appeal for organizing the conflicting claims of moral persons."[42] In Islam, this conception of right is a corollary of the Original Position. As the Qur'an reminds us, not only was Adam created with rights, but the entire cosmological universe ("the heavens and the earth") was similarly created with *haqq*, an Arabic term that can mean "right," "truth," or "justice." This term expresses the most general and universal application of the Qur'anic conception of right. The duty of mutual respect is similarly general and universal, and the right of human dignity cannot be claimed exclusively by Muslims. Thus, the tendency of some exoteric Muslims to deny moral personhood to the non-Muslim or dissenting other is a breach of God's Creative Command.

Another basic right that is derived from the Original Position is the right to life: "Do not take a human life, which God has made sacred, other than as a right; this He has enjoined upon you so that you might think rationally" (6:151). Another still is the right of free choice, without which the standards by which human beings are judged by God would be meaningless: "Had God willed, they would not have attributed partners to Him; We have not made you their keeper, nor are you responsible for them" (6:107); "The truth is from your Lord. So whosoever wishes shall believe, and whosoever wishes shall disbelieve" (18:29). It would make a mockery of the God-given rights of dignity, life, and free choice for Muslims to restrict the political and social rights of confessional minorities or to assign collective guilt to a group of people because of their religion, ethnicity, or system of government. All three of these rights—the right to life, the right to freedom, and the right to dignity—recall a second natural duty that arises from the Qur'anic Original Position. This is the duty of mercy (*rahmah*), which is prior to all duties in Islam except the acknowledgement of humanity's ontological dependence on God. God says, "My mercy encompasses everything" (7:156), and every *Surah* of the Qur'an except one begins with the formula: "By the name of God, the Beneficent (*al-Rahman*), the Merciful (*al-Rahim*)."[43]

For Jewish view on compassion, see section 2.2.1.

It is often forgotten by contemporary Muslims, especially those who wish to introduce the Islamic Shari'ah into modern legal systems, that the duty of mercy applies to each and every obligation that God enjoins upon human beings. What this means in practice is that when the performance of an obligation calls for severity, it is the duty of Muslims to temper that severity with mercy in any way possible.

4.2.4 The Command of Obligation.

The divine command that is most clearly understood by Muslims is not the Creative Command, but the Command of Obligation (*al-amr al-taklifi*).[44] This command forms the basis of the Shari'ah and is divided by the juridical

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[42]Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 117.

[43]In *Fusus al-hikam* (The Ring-Settings of Wisdom) Ibn 'Arabi calls this type of mercy the "Mercy of the Gratuitous Gift" (*rahmat al-imtinan*.) It is a mercy which God bestows on things simply because they exist. For Ibn 'Arabi, all existence is ultimately good, since it comes from God. Evil is nonexistence (*'adam*). See Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley: 1983) p. 121.

[44]Chittick calls this the "prescriptive command." See Idem, *Imaginal Worlds,* p. 142.

tradition of Islam into injunctions covering acts of worship (*'ibadat*) and interpersonal behavior (*mu'amalat*), including business transactions, criminal justice, and the laws of nations. The Arabic term, *taklif*, is a legal and moral concept that refers to the responsibility of individuals to carry out their obligations. Thus, the Command of Obligation imposes specific obligations on Muslims, either individually or collectively. It is a matter of debate whether such obligations should be obeyed simply because they come from God or because they are intrinsically good. Muslim liberals, following the teachings of Muhammad 'Abduh, who was Mufti of Egypt from 1899 until his death in 1905, assert that all divine statements, including divine commands, are subject to empirical verifiability, and serve a necessary function that can be proven rationally. Extreme literalists, such as the partisans of the Islamic Liberation Party (*Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami*), consider it sacrilegious to put God's commands to such a test and assert that Muslims should obey them unquestioningly, simply because they come from God. What is perhaps most significant is that neither side presently discusses this question in the context of a systematic moral philosophy. While the classical juridical tradition of Islam dealt with questions of moral choice on a pragmatic case-by-case basis, it was primarily philosophers and Sufis who attempted to assess the Islamic concept of obligation within the context of more universal conceptions of right and justice.[45] The marginalization of philosophical and Sufi methods in contemporary Islam, and the resulting lack of debate on the wider philosophical issues surrounding the concept of obligation, have become, I believe, major contributing factors to the rise of extremism in the Islamic world.

The natural duty that governs the moral obligations of Muslims under the Command of Obligation is justice. An alternative reading of the verse, "[God] created the heavens and the earth with truth and right (*bi-l-haqq*)," is "God created the heavens and the earth with justice." Justice is a secondary meaning of the Arabic term, *haqq* and is enjoined on human beings as a natural duty in a number of Qur'anic verses: "Verily, God commands justice and kindness" (16:90); "Make peace between them with justice, and act equitably" (49:9). The Arabic term for justice in these verses, *'adl*, corresponds closely to the Aristotelian notion of justice, which carries the connotation of "fairness" or "equity."[46] For Rawls, all obligations arise from the principle of fairness, because the concept of fairness "holds that a person is under an obligation to do his part as specified by the rules of the institution whenever he has voluntarily accepted the benefits of the scheme."[47] In Islam, "voluntary acceptance of the scheme" is entailed in the Islamic Original Position as a consequence of the pre-eternal covenant discussed above. Justice is thus a natural duty in Islam because human beings are "born into" justice from before their creation; the concept is, in effect "hard-wired" into the physical and social worlds that all humans occupy.[48] All three concepts that are included in the notion of justice in Islam also appear as Divine Names. God is thus characterized as The

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[45]This is not to say that Muslim jurists did not discuss such questions. However, those who did so most successfully, such as Ghazali, Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), or even 'Abduh, combined their juridical backgrounds with studies of Sufism or philosophy.

[46]Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?* (Indiana: Notre Dame, 1988). See especially the chapter entitled, "Aristotle on Justice," pp. 103-123.

[47]Rawls, *Theory of Justice,* p. 301.

[48]Ibid., p. 302. The fact that the Arabic term, *'adl,* connotes justice, fairness, and equity alike removes Rawls' problem of drawing a lexical distinction between justice and fairness. In Islam,

Truth (*al-Haqq*), Justice (*al-'Adl*), and The Fair or Equitable (*al-Muqsit*). This is particularly significant because for Ibn 'Arabi and his school, the essential qualities of existence are imparted as manifestations (*tajalliyyat*) of the Divine Names.

A common problem with applying justice to specific obligations in Islam is that justice is most commonly understood as a moral duty, whereas a Command of Obligation is understood as a legal requirement. Because the exact relationship between duties and obligations has not been philosophically defined in modern Islamic discourse, there is a tendency to fall into a confusion of priorities in the attempt to apply one or the other. Ibn 'Arabi was one of the few Muslim thinkers to address the problem of duty versus obligation systematically and prioritized their requirements in light of the two types of divine command. The natural duty of mercy is exercised through what Ibn 'Arabi called the "Mercy of Obligation" (*rahmat al-wujub*).[49] Unlike the ontological "Mercy of the Gratuitous Gift" (*rahmat al-imtinan*), which extends over creation by virtue of the act of creation itself, the Mercy of Obligation refers to the mercy that is required in individual human actions, according to God's statement: "Your Lord has prescribed mercy for Himself" (6:12).[50] Ibn 'Arabi relates the concept of mercy to the divine names *al-Rahman* and *al-Rahim*, with the Mercy of the Gratuitous Gift corresponding to *al-Rahman* and the Mercy of Obligation to *al-Rahim*. However, since all human obligations ultimately flow from the act of creation, any act of mercy bestowed by one human being upon another constitutes a gift for both the receiver and the giver. For the receiver, the gift of mercy compensates for the severity of justice. However, for the giver, even the duty to act mercifully is a gift from God, because:

> God exercises mercy as a gratuitous act under the name *al-Rahman*, while he obligates Himself (to requite with mercy) under the name *al-Rahim*. Obligation is part of the Gratuitous Gift, and so *al-Rahim* is contained within *al-Rahman*. "God has written upon Himself mercy" in such a way that mercy of this kind may be extended to His servants in reward for the good acts done by them individually — those good works which are mentioned in the Qur'an. This kind of mercy is an obligation upon God with which He has bound Himself toward those servants, and the latter rightfully merit this kind of mercy by their good works.[51]

To summarize: the natural duty of mercy is part of the Islamic Original Position by virtue of the Creative Command, which corresponds to the divine name *al-Rahman*. Similarly, the exercise of mercy by human actors is made obligatory through the Command of Obligation by virtue of the divine name *al-Rahim*. Just as human mercy (*rahmah*) is implicit in the idea of mercy as a universal principle (*al-Rahim*), so the obligation to act mercifully on all possible occasions is a necessary consequence of the idea of mercy as a natural

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one cannot say that justice is qualitatively different from fairness, because etymologically they are the same thing.

[49]Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, pp. 121–122.

[50]This passage could also be translated literally as: "Your Lord has written mercy upon His own Spirit."

[51]Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, p. 122. This discussion is found in *Fusus al-Hikam*.

duty. However, most people are not aware of the logical priority of natural duties that arise from the Creative Command. Mired as they are in a world of difference and subjectivity, they interpret the Command of Obligation in an exclusive sense, and overlook the logical priority of both the Creative Command and the natural duties that derive from it:

> The divine effusion is vast, because [God] is vast in bestowal. There is no shortcoming on His part. But you have nothing of Him except what your essence accepts. Hence, your own essence keeps the Vast away from you and places you in the midst of constraint. The measure in which His governance occurs within you is your "Lord." It is He that you serve and He alone that you recognize. This is the mark within which He will transmute Himself to you on the day of resurrection, by unveiling Himself. In this world, this mark is unseen for most people. Every human being knows it from himself, but he does not know that it is what he knows.[52]

The Muslim who views the world from a narrow exoteric perspective can only perceive God through his or her personal experience. How God is to be conceived and what His commands entail are questions whose answers are constrained by the limits of one's own sense of self. The interpretations that the believer gives to the commands of God in the Qur'an may be justifiable in a limited sense, but are likely to lead to injustice if they are applied universally and uncritically. This is because normal human understanding reflects one's own worldview more than it reflects an understanding of God. In a commentary on the famous tradition, "He who knows himself, knows his Lord," Ibn 'Arabi explains: "You are the one who becomes manifest to yourself, and this gives you nothing of [God]...You do not know other than yourself."[53]

Even for the jurist who considers a scriptural obligation to be prior to a moral duty, each obligation must be assessed as to whether the divine command that produced it is general or specific, and if specific, what was the historical context of its revelation?[54] An example of this problem of priorities can be found in *Surat al-Tawba* (Repentance), in which some of the most apparently hostile verses concerning Muslim and non-Muslim relations appear. How is a Muslim to respond when the Qur'an commands: "Fight against such of those who have been given the Scripture as believe not in Allah or the Last Day, and forbid not that which Allah has forbidden by His messenger, and follow not the religion of truth, until they pay the tribute (*jizyah*) readily, being brought low" (9:29)? It is helpful to know that this discourse was revealed at a time when polytheists and Jews in Arabia had broken their treaties with the Muslims and banded together against the Prophet in what proved to be the final assault on Medina. However, as late as the mid-twentieth century the Muslim Brotherhood activist Sayyid Qutb, who was fully aware of the historical background of this verse, interpreted it as a general command to compel non-Muslim minorities to pay the *jizyah*-tax. Even more, he defined the *jizyah*, not as an exemption from military service as Muslim apologists

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[52]Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds,* p. 152. This passage is from *Futuhat* (IV 62.23).

[53]Ibid., p. 163. The passage comes from *Futuhat* (IV 421.34).

[54]Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* (Cambridge: 1991) pp. 139-148.

have often done, but as a protection tax and token of public humiliation that temporarily exempted Jews and Christians from persecution by the Islamic state.[55]

Christian theologians studying the question of usury refer to a "double standard" in the biblical Book of Deuteronomy, which objectifies the non-Jewish other by imposing discriminatory rules and practices on him.[56] In the same vein, *Surat al-Tawba* can be seen as displaying an Islamic version of this double standard, in which the *jizyah* tax levied on Jews and Christians replicates the *tarbit* that Jews took from Gentiles. Jewish and Christian fundamentalists might reply that this "double standard" is only a problem from the standpoint of secular notions of equality and citizenship, and that the idea of "sameness before the law" is a humanistic ideal that does not correspond to scriptural notions of justice. For such individuals, the Law of God always trumps the laws of men. The critical theologian cannot dismiss this objection out of hand, but must take it seriously. It is not enough to simply ignore a problematical text from sacred scripture, wishing that it would go away. For the most part, this has been the strategy of Muslim apologists, who for years kept repeating the mantra, "Islam means peace," until they themselves believed it, only to be rudely awakened from their reveries in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Such contradictions will not be resolved until a new theology is formulated that can deal authentically with difference and the problem of religious hostility in new and creative ways.

4.2.5 Building a Bridge to Hospitality and Human Flourishing.

The first step toward a new theology of hospitality is for Muslims to remember that ultimately, everything happens because God wills it to happen. This includes human diversity, which the Qur'an mentions as having been created for the purpose of reflection and learning:

> Among [God's] signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the differences of your languages and colors. Herein indeed, are portents for those with knowledge (33:22).

> Oh humankind! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes so that you may come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you, in the sight of God, is the most God-conscious of you. Verily, God is the Knowing and the Aware (49:13).

Included in this diversity are differences in human ideas, worldviews, and religions, all of which are allowed to exist because of God's Creative Command. But the acceptance of plural perspectives on the Absolute does not mean that all religions are ultimately the same, or even that some religions

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[55]See the discussion in Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* (In the Shade of the Qur'an) (Beirut: 1980) pp. 1220–1250. A less severe perspective, which represents the views of Pakistan's Jamaat-i Islami, can be found in Abdur Rahman I. Doi, *Non-Muslims under Shari'ah (Islamic Law)* (Lahore: 1981).

[56]Benjamin Nelson, *The Idea of Usury* (Chicago: 1969) pp. 3–28.

might not be more effective ways to knowledge of God than others. By the same token, prioritizing the natural duty of mercy by acknowledging the dignity of Buddhists and Christians or accepting the divine origins of Judaism and Hinduism does not mean that Muslims cannot oppose the actions of the Israeli government in Palestine or that they should accept the destruction of the Babri mosque. One or more of these actions may still be seen as evil, because they contradict universal principles of social justice that are embodied in the Qur'an as well as in other scriptures. The point is that evil actions should be opposed in and of themselves and that they should not be seen as inescapable consequences of alternative religious perspectives. No religion that God allows to exist is bad per se, and no one has the right to exclude a believer in another religion from the brotherhood of the Islamic Original Position. Individual Christians and Hindus can do bad things, but so can Muslims. Saying that "the Jews" are enemies of Islam or that American foreign policy is driven by "Crusader" intentions is a moral and theological error of profound proportions. This error is caused on the moral level by ignorance of the relationship between the Creative Command and the Command of Obligation, and on the theological level by ignoring the full meaning of the human being as vicegerent (*khalifah*) of God on earth.

Acceptance of religious difference and disagreement does not mean abandoning one's belief in the theological superiority of Islam, nor does it mean going against God's will. In fact, the situation is quite the opposite. The Creative Command, without which no religious differences can exist, explicitly acknowledges the theological permissibility of religious pluralism in the following Qur'anic passage: "For each one of you we have made a Law and a way of life. If God had willed, He would have made you into a single community" (5:48). In the context of this verse, "Law" (*shir'ah*) is a synonym for religion, because it refers to the duties and obligations that provide a framework for the moral life. In pre-modern Islam, the subject of "the Law before Islam" constituted what we today would call the history of religions.[57] Furthermore, the verse goes on to say: "Strive against each other in good works, for to God is the return for all of you and He will inform you about that wherein you differ." Even a literal interpretation of this statement would suggest that the only inter-religious competition that counts in the sight of God is competition in good works, such that Muslims would compete with Jews, Christians, and others in the alleviation of human suffering. This is very different from the belief, expressed by contemporary Palestinian extremists that strapping on a bomb belt and blowing up a bus of Israeli school children will earn the martyr a reward in heaven because the children are potential Israeli soldiers.

All acts, whether they are performed by Muslims or others, must be judged by weighing the requirements of the Command of Obligation against the natural duties of the Creative Command. Every sane individual is a morally responsible (*mukallaf*) person who carries out her obligations in the context of the religion or moral standard (*shir'ah*) that she accepts by virtue either of choice or of birth. The Qur'anic verse, "He it is who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth so that it may prevail over all religion, even if those who assign partners to God disapprove" (9:33), is usually inter-

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[57]This subject is discussed in detail in A. Kevin Reinhardt, *Before Revelation: the Boundaries of Muslim Moral Thought* (Albany, New York: 1995).

preted by Muslims as a general obligation to proselytize and as an assurance of the ultimate victory of Islam. However, without interpreting this scriptural expression of the Command of Obligation in the wider context of the moral priority of the Creative Command, how is one to resolve its apparent disagreement with the previously quoted Qur'an (5:48), which seems to defer the resolution of religious difference until the Day of Resurrection? Which verse is theologically more fundamental? How is one to understand the fact that Islam has not prevailed over all other religions after fourteen centuries? If all one perceives is the Command of Obligation, is it logically permissible to assert, as the Wahhabis and Salafis do, that Islam has not prevailed because Muslims have not been "Islamic" enough? This preoccupation with obligation and the lack of a moral philosophy that takes account of the concept of natural duty has prevented Muslims from viewing the divine will in a wider perspective. This error of shortsightedness, coupled with an obsession with victory, has plunged the world into its present religious crisis and threatens in the end to deprive Islam of both its spirituality and its morality.

Ibn 'Arabi reminds us, despite the objections of those who have sought to silence his voice, that all human beings "assign partners to God" in one way or another, and that on this view, believers in all religions are equally far from the "religion of the truth" that will prevail at the end of time. The will of God is not one-dimensional, nor are history or human nature. Limiting the interpretation of God's word to a single dimension was theologically untenable for medieval Islamic scholars, and it is even more untenable today, when human knowledge has better tools for analyzing and reflecting on the meaning of revelation. Five centuries ago, the Sufi and jurist Ahmad Zarruq of Fez (d. 1493) wrote: "He who practices Sufism without the Law is a heretic; he who practices the Law without Sufism is a reprobate; but he who combines the Law and Sufism has attained the truth."[58] What Zarruq meant by this was that the practice of scriptural hermeneutics demands a multi-dimensional perspective, in which individual obligations are viewed in the context of the creativity of God's will, and in which the outer word of the Law is interpreted in light of its inner spirit.

This understanding of multi-dimensionality is an important aspect of the human being's cosmically assigned role as vicegerent (*khalifah*) of God on earth, a role that has been stressed often enough by Islamic integrists, but primarily in terms of dominion rather than of knowledge. In the passages of *Surat al-Baqarah* where this vicegerency is discussed in the Qur'an (2:30-39), what makes the human being rise above the "bloodshed and mischief" that the angels fear he will create is God's gift to Adam of "all of the names" (*al-asma'a kullaha*) and "words" (*kalimat*). In Qur'anic semiotics, the names symbolize the essences of things, whereas the words symbolize the actualization of the essences. As such, the names correspond to God's Creative Command, which brings things into being, and the words correspond to God's Command of Obligation, through which the divine will is made manifest. Whether one accepts Ibn 'Arabi's framework for interpreting the divine will or not, it is clear from this verse that what makes Adam special is that he can uniquely bridge the gap between the angelic and terrestrial worlds, and that

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[58]Abu al-'Abbas Ahmad Zarruq, *Qawa'id al-Tasawwuf* (Principles of Sufism), Edited by Muhammad Zuhri al-Najjar and 'Ali Ma'bid Farghali (Beirut: 1992) p. 8.

the keys to his bridge-building are to be found in the transcendent intelligence and understanding ("names" and "words") that God imparts to him.

As a unique combination of spirit and matter, and as vicegerent of God, the human being is by his very nature a *pontifex*, a builder of bridges between conceptual worlds. Beneath the differences that obtain between religious doctrines, sacred laws, and worldviews, all human beings share the same transcendental nature; all have access to the "words" that allow them to communicate with each other across religious divides. Because the human being is a *pontifex* it is illogical to assume that religious misunderstanding is normal or that religious differences cannot be bridged. If believers in different religions cannot come to an understanding, it means that one or both of them are lacking in spiritual insight, or one or both are in fundamental error. Among the rights bestowed upon us by God, the right *not* to understand each other is nowhere to be found. The Qur'an warns Muslims about this: "Be not of those who ascribe partners to God (*mushrikun*), who split up their religion and become schismatics, each sect exulting in its doctrines" (33:31-32).

Ibn 'Arabi was but one of those who showed how Muslims themselves can ascribe partners to God, by calling not on God Himself but on their personal Lord, through the narrow vision of their own egos. This mistake, which ultimately is the cause of all of the theological hostility and evil that the human being can create in the name of religion, is due to the *pontifex/khalifah* losing sight of the point of his own existence. With this error, he mistakes the contingent for the absolute, the false for the real, the secondary for the fundamental, the outer for the inner, and the particular for the universal. This mistake is the essence of the theological sin of *shirk*, a term usually defined as "assigning partners to God," but which literally means, "sharing." It consists, in other words, of letting contingent ideas, concepts, and prejudices share in God's will and sovereignty, and as such, is the greatest impediment to theological hospitality and the hope of human flourishing. As the Qur'an affirms: "God does not forgive your *shirk*, but he forgives all else, as He wills" (4:48).