CONTROVERSIES IN CONTEMPORARY ISLAM

Oliver Leaman

ROUTLEDGE

Controversies in Contemporary Islam

"Leaman has written a highly readable and informative work that assumes at the outset what many introductory textbooks only raise in passing: that traditions take shape and evolve as a result of difference and debate, that religious identity owes as much to what believers have rejected as to what they came to assert. A very useful addition to the literature."

Jeffrey T. Kenney, *DePauw University, USA*

"This fascinating work raises a series of challenging questions about the Islamic world and the Islamic faith and provides answers that are always provocative and insightful. Leaman's analysis of aspects of Islam that are controversial for both Muslims and non-Muslims in both popular and scholarly discussions is marked by engaged and lucid debate; in every aspect, from belief in God to the value of yoga, no pretense is made that there are any easy answers. Readers will be rewarded with thought-provoking material for further discussion and consideration."

Andrew Rippin, *University of Victoria, Canada*

This book helps to deepen our understanding of the varieties of contemporary Islam and the issues that are of most concern to Muslims today. Oliver Leaman explores some of the controversies and debates that exist within Islam and between Islam and other religions. He considers how the religion can be defined by looking at the contrast between competing sets of beliefs, and arguments amongst Muslims themselves over the nature of the faith. Areas covered include: Qur'anic interpretation, gender, finance, education and nationalism. Examples are taken from a range of contexts and illustrate the diversity of approaches to Islam that exists today.

Oliver Leaman is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Kentucky, USA. His books for Routledge include *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia* (edited, 2005) and *Islam: The Key Concepts* (with Kecia Ali, 2007).

This page intentionally left blank

Controversies in Contemporary Islam

Oliver Leaman

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 2014
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Leaman, Oliver, 1950-
Controversies in contemporary Islam / Oliver Leaman.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Islam–21st century. I. Title.
BP161.3.L368 2013
297.09'051–dc23
2013015805

ISBN: 978-0-415-67612-0 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-415-67613-7 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-89023-4 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo
by Taylor & Francis Books

Contents

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my editor at Routledge with whom I have worked for many years, Lesley Riddle, for her constant support and encouragement for the project. Katherine Ong on Lesley's retirement took over and ably saw the book through its final stages. Sarah Douglas and her colleagues at Routledge who worked on the proofreading of the text did a lot to help it achieve its final form.

As usual, I must also thank the many students with whom I have worked and discussed these and similar issues, and colleagues at conferences for their comments and advice. The publisher sent me three readers' reports on an earlier version of the text and these were really helpful. I do not know who they are but if they are reading this, I am very grateful. Despite all this assistance, any errors are of course to be laid at my door.

I completed the final version of the book when I was a William Paton Visiting Fellow in Global Philosophy of Religion at the University of Birmingham and I am happy to acknowledge the William Paton Trust and the John Hick Centre for Philosophy of Religion for their support. The earlier version was finished while I was the guest of the Süleyman Demirel University in Isparta, and I am grateful to both institutions for hosting me.

This page intentionally left blank

Introduction

Technical details

In this book I have done a number of things that need to be explained at the beginning. Although there are extensive quotations from the Qur'an, there is little direct quotation from the reported sayings of the Prophet and those close to him, the *hadith* literature. This is not because I do not think the *ahadith* are an important source of information, because of course they are, nor does it mean that I do not think they can be assessed in terms of their authenticity. I am sure they can, and the *ahadith* are a vital source of information on both early Islam and on how to interpret the Qur'an. On the other hand, because the *ahadith* are so controversial and difficult to pin down exactly, and because of arguments about their authenticity I felt it was better to refer to them when useful but not explicitly use them in most places of the book. I have sometimes used and quoted particular *ahadith*, but not as much as I might have done, and I hope readers will not take this to be a sign of my lack of trust in them.

Although there are many references to the Qur'an, and to the *aya*s and *sura*s of the Book, I am aware that one of the things I criticize in this book is producing such passages in order to make points that perhaps would not be so obvious were those passages to be put in some sort of context. One of the delights of Qur'anic hermeneutics, different ways of understanding the Qur'an, is that the interpreters have some theory of when particular verses were revealed, where and why, and in that way they construct a narrative that has a structure and a meaning which helps construct a certain sort of meaning for the scriptural text. I do some of that in the book, but not enough, since of course I am looking at a variety of different ways of approaching the text and contrasting and comparing them with each other. All that survives such treatment are thin slivers of context, although I hope that enough is provided here to bring out the nature of the debates and disputes and make them appear to be plausible. Similarly when I produce such passages I hope this is not done in much the way that a magician produces a rabbit of a hat, but has a genuine connection with a certain context which I shall not always have the opportunity to describe. One of the features of commentary is that for some writers on Islam one passage is enough and together with some *ahadith* helps to constitute

some sort of argument, and I have sometimes done that also, but really such an approach is problematic. One needs a theory behind each passage and it is only in terms of such a theory that comments on it can be at all useful, in much the same way that a word by itself has little meaning unless it is placed within a sentence, and in the right way.

There is a glossary of some of the main foreign terms at the back, but I have tended to explain the terms several times as the book develops, this is repetitious but on the other hand means that readers to do not have to read it from start to finish, or consult the glossary all the time. Terms which are in the text closely linked with the English translation do not necessarily appear in the glossary. There is then some repetition, but I have long realized that it is a mistake to think that readers necessarily read the whole book, nor that they start at the beginning and end at the end.

I have omitted diacritical letters and macrons, but included *hamza* and *'ayn*. *Ta marbuta* has been omitted, so I have *shari'a* not *shari'ah*.

I have tended to omit capitalization except for proper names and I have avoided using the various honorific expressions generally added to the names of God, the Prophet, prophets and messengers, the Companions and the family of the Prophet. Within quotations I have generally kept them, so that readers can get a flavor of the original style. Translations are unless otherwise indicated by me, although I have used other translations often to help me with mine, particularly of the Qur'an.

Dates are given in this form: hijri/CE

Stylistic details

This book very much represents something of a failure on my part, since it was naively my original intention to discuss every controversial issue in contemporary Islam, and explore their roots in the past. I have come nowhere near this, which is in itself an interesting discovery, but disappointing nonetheless. I felt that to discuss everything would be to be so superficial as to be not worthwhile, and so it is better for there to be less with more detail. Unless one gets some detail it is difficult to see what the controversy is all about, of course, and what different lines can be taken on it. I hope what remains is useful and will provide some scope for discussion and debate about Islam. A more accurate title for this book would be "Some controversies in contemporary Islam" but I do think something of the flavor of the debate that exists over a limited number of such controversies can be experienced by reading the book, and that this will be relevant to readers. The book could of course quite easily have limited itself to just one controversy, since there is such extended and sophisticated discussion about each of these issues both within and without the Islamic community.

What I have omitted from the book are the use of a whole range of expressions for concepts that are so ubiquitous today in discussions of Islam that they have become largely meaningless. I hope their absence will not cause too

many feelings of loss among readers. So please do not look for discussions of globalization or modernity, for instance.

Readers who know the material well will be horrified at the lack of depth to many of the discussions, and readers who do not should be aware that the author is merely touching the surface of what are prolonged and very sophisticated debates. The whole basis to the book is the idea that religions are not as they often represent themselves based on certain commonly accepted principles which define the religion. On the contrary, they are based on the arguments and disagreements which rage throughout the religion and which represent very much the parameters of what people believe. Of course there are creeds, and Islam is no exception here, but they represent not so much the end of the discussion but merely the starting point, since there are a variety of different creeds depending on the particular orientation of each party to the debate. What I am doing here is discussing some of the central issues which arise when interpreting Islam, and indeed a variety of approaches to understanding what such an interpretive project involves. There is no possibility of being exhaustive in such an inquiry and as in all complex religions the variety of controversy is immense and enlightening.

1 Islam and leadership of the community

When great leaders leave the scene, there is often a lively debate about who should succeed them. There was a dispute right after the death of the Prophet about who should succeed him as the leader of the Muslim community. Abu Bakr, his father-in-law (one of several), was nominated although ʻAli, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law were actually more direct family members. According to some historical sources, when the news of Abu Bakr's nomination spread in Arabia, the uncle of the prophet al-ʻAbbas ibn ʻAbdul-Mutalib and Abu Sufyan ibn Harb, went to ʻAli and offered their allegiance and military support if he were to revolt against Abu Bakr's nomination. According to many Shiʻi accounts, he refused to do so due to the need for unity. ʻAli did become caliph eventually, the fourth caliph, but his successor and son Husayn was killed at the battle of Karbala and from that time on the family of the Prophet was largely excluded from power, although some local rulers have claimed a link with the family. It is perhaps surprising that Islam should prioritize family in this way, since it sees itself as a universal faith and the Qur'an is critical of tribalism. Why should the family of the Prophet be regarded as so significant, if the Prophet himself was just a man, albeit a highly significant messenger and for some thinkers the perfect man? There are a variety of responses to this question, and throughout this book the issue will be examined from a variety of perspectives. There is no doubt that the personhood of the Prophet is regarded as extremely important by most Muslims, since although the message he delivered came entirely from God and not from him, God chose him to be the messenger, his last messenger, and presumably he was not chosen at random.

This controversy has had powerful consequences in the Islamic world, frequently splitting it into hostile communities, and leading to protracted debates about where legitimate authority lies. For the Sunnis it is to be found in some mechanism often depending on the views of the majority of the scholars, or some other institution prepared and able to select a leader. For the Shiʻa, literally the *shiʻat* ʻAli or party of ʻAli, it has to be someone closely linked in some specific way with the family of the Prophet.

In 10/632 the Prophet is said by the Shiʻa to have summoned the community to Ghadr Khumm, a pool, and announced that ʻAli was to be the new

leader. This was on the occasion of his last pilgrimage to Mecca and he initiated the rules of carrying out the rituals of walking around the Ka'ba, wearing the *ihram* (a simple white robe) and the words that are said on the occasion. The issue is not so much the status of 'Ali but more the status of the *ahl al-bayt*, the family of the Prophet (literally, of the house). There are only two references to the family in the Qur'an and one seems to be much wider than the family of the Prophet, but refers to the community of Muslims as a whole (11.73) but 33.33 seems to refer to the Prophet's own family, and this is often taken to refer to Fatima, his daughter, 'Ali, his cousin and son-in-law and their children, Hasan and Husayn. There are *ahadith* that make this attribution clear, but of course there are also disputes about both the interpretation of those *ahadith* and their veracity, and we shall examine these to a degree in due course.

The line of Muhammad through 'Ali and Husayn became extinct in 259/873 when the last Shi'a imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, who had no brothers disappeared within days of inheriting the title at the age of four. Many Shi'a did not accept that he had died, instead holding that he was hidden and would return. There was a limit to waiting for this to happen, though, and after several centuries spiritual power was said to have passed to the *'ulama*, a group of thinkers who elected a supreme imam. Their imams are believed to be incorrigible interpreters of law and tradition. Sunnis and Shi'as agree on the core fundamentals of Islam – the Five Pillars – and generally although not always recognize each other as Muslims. The Shi'a add to the Five Pillars a reference to the family of the Prophet and there are differences in ritual and prayer, and of course law, but also a good deal of agreement. In 1959 Mahmud Shaltut, Head of the School of Theology at al Azhar University in Cairo, the most august seat of learning of Sunni Islam (but it is worth noting originally founded by the Shi'a Fatimid dynasty in 358/969), issued a *fatwa* (ruling) recognizing the legitimacy of the Jafari school of law to which most Shi'as belong. The Jafari School is named after its founder Imam Ja'far Sidiq who was a direct descendent through two different lines of the Sunni caliph Abu Bakr. There are two main types of Shi'a or Jafari jurisprudence, the much more influential Usuli which places a good deal of emphasis on *ijtihad*, the individual reasoning process of the legal authority, and Akhbari, which does the reverse. There are other Shi'a schools, such as the Zaydi in Yemen, and the Isma'ili.

However, there remain significant differences between the two forms of Islam and these are what tend to be emphasized. Many Sunnis would contend that the Shi'a seem to take the fundamentals of Islam very much for granted, shunting them into the background and dwelling excessively on the martyrdoms of 'Ali and Husayn. This is best illustrated at 'Ashura when each evening over a period of ten days the Shi'a commemorate the battle of Karbala and in some communities a wailing imam whips the congregation up into a frenzy of tears and chest beating which sometimes results in self-mutilation and injury. It is alleged that instead of missionary work to non-Muslims, the Shi'a harbor a deep-seated disdain toward Sunni Islam and prefer to devote their attention to winning over other Muslims to their group. On the birthday of the Mahdi, the person who is due to return and

end history, the Shi'a often weep to demonstrate their hopes for his appearance while they acknowledge the poor state of the world without him. The concept of the Mahdi also exists in Sunni theology but has a far less leading role, and little in the way of ceremonies are connected to him.

On a practical daily level, Shi'a have a different call to prayer, they perform *wudu'* (ablution) and *salat* (prayer) differently including sometimes placing the forehead onto a piece of hardened clay from Karbala, not directly onto the prayer mat when prostrating. They also tend to combine prayers, sometimes worshipping three times a day instead of five. The Shi'a also have some different *ahadith* and prefer those narrated by 'Ali and Fatima to those related by other companions of the Prophet. Because of her opposition to 'Ali, those narrated by 'A'isha, the Prophet's youngest wife, are the least favored. She is not counted by them as part of his family. Shi'a Islam in some of its forms also permits *mut'a* – fixed-term temporary marriage – which is banned by the Sunnis. They claim that *mut'a* was originally permitted at the time of the Prophet. Again, reliance on different historical accounts supports alternative interpretations of what should be done by Muslims.

The Prophet's farewell speech

It is the events at Ghadr Khumm which really figure at the heart of the controversy. The Prophet is said to have given a sermon during which he exhorted them to treat one another well and mentioned the rules of what was commanded and what was forbidden. Finally he referred to the significance of the Qur'an as a source of guidance in the future. He then transmitted the last passage from God to be revealed which made the Qur'an complete:

> This day the disbelievers despair of prevailing against your religion, so fear them not, but fear me. This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed my favor to you, and it has been my pleasure to choose Islam for you as your religion.
>
> (5.3)

The question is, does this give a special priority to his family and in particular 'Ali? The implication is that certain people were chosen by God to continue the movement and refine it, and perhaps the family of the Prophet are indicated, once we take this together with other things that were done and said on that day. It is important for the Shi'a that 5.3 was revealed not on the Day of 'Arafa but at Ghadr Khumm, immediately after the Prophet had declared 'Ali as *mawla*, his friend. The verses of their *ahadith* that speak of the declaration also add that the Prophet had made it before a gathering of a huge number of pilgrims. Having finished the campaign in the Yemen, the troop of 300 horses that the Prophet had sent out in Ramadan was now approaching Mecca from the south. 'Ali had ridden on ahead of his men, eager to meet the Prophet as soon as possible and to join him on the pilgrimage (and also perhaps to seal the

succession?), which he now had done. Among the state's fifth of the spoils there was enough linen to clothe the whole army, but 'Ali had decided that it should be handed over to the Prophet untouched. This led, not surprisingly, to hostility to 'Ali and complaints were made to the Prophet.

The Prophet is supposed to have replied: "Am I not nearer to the believers than their own selves?" and he suggested that 'Ali is the nearest to the Muslims after him. At Ghadr Khumm, he gathered all the people together, and we are told by the Shi'a taking 'Ali by the hand he repeated these words, to which he added the prayer: "O God, be the friend of him who is his friend, and the foe of him who is his foe"; and the negative comments against 'Ali were silenced. This is linked with an *aya* which reads:

> O Messenger! Make known what has been revealed to you from your Lord, for if you do not, you will not have conveyed his message. God will protect you from mankind. God does not guide those who do not believe. (5.67)

which the Prophet was directed to reveal at this point, according to Shi'a accounts. This seems to suggest that 'Ali might be indicated here, given what came later, but if you read a couple of verses before this verse 5.67 this is not so clear. These verses speak of the People of the Book, of the Torah and of the Gospel. Verse 68 reads in part: "Say: 'O People of the Book, you have nothing unless you observe the Torah and the Gospel and that which was revealed to you from your Lord'." It continues to make critical remarks about the hostility of those who do not believe. There does not seem then to be so obvious a link between any of these verses and 'Ali or the family of the prophet. It seems to refer to the People of the Book, calling on them to be faithful at least to their original revelations.

There are many *ahadith* about this incident at Ghadr Khumm, and they either embroider the event with very direct evidence of the Prophet's positive comments on 'Ali or seek to downplay them, depending on the allegiance of the sources of information. "'Ali is the *mawla* of whom I am the *mawla*. O God! Have friendship towards those who have friendship for 'Ali, and have enmity towards those who have enmity for 'Ali." In Arabic the word *mawla* has a wide range of meanings. Here it is used in the sense of a friend and a loved one and what the above saying of the Prophet means is that anyone who holds the Prophet dear holds 'Ali dear as well. Hence, whoever loves the Prophet should also love 'Ali. However, the report is not even remotely related to the question of the caliphate or imamate, from the Sunni point of view. This was perhaps a time when 'Ali was under attack by some Muslims and the Prophet felt the need to make his close relationship with him explicit. Yet the Shi'a surely have a point in arguing that if the Prophet's cousin is referred to in this positive way then he is being at the very least promoted as a potential successor for an authority role.

It might, as was suggested earlier, be thought strange for Islam to stress the nature of a particular family, in a religion where everyone is a servant of God.

But families are important in the Qur'an. Prophetic history begins, according to the Qur'an, with Adam, who is called *safwat Allah* (the elect of God). He was followed by Noah (Nuh), who was sent as a messenger by God to his people who rebelled against God's message, and were thus destroyed by the flood. Then came Abraham (Ibrahim), the father of the rest of the prophets. With his son Ishmael (Isma'il) he built the Ka'ba, the first house for the worship of the one God. Ishmael was also a prophet, and the ancestor of the prophets who are exclusive to Islam such as Shu'ayb, Salih, Hud, and finally Muhammad, the last prophet. Isaac (Ishaq), Abraham's second son, was also a prophet and the father of prophets. Among his descendants were the family of 'Imran, the father of Moses, and Jesus, as well as other earlier prophets who were sent by God to the Children of Israel. The Qur'an declares that God has elected Adam, Noah, the family of Abraham and the family of 'Imran. It further states that they were "descended one from the other" (3.34). All the prophets and their families are therefore of one physical and spiritual lineage. They and their households are the elect of God, purified and honored and placed in a higher position than the rest of humanity.

The people of the House of the Prophet Muhammad (the *ahl al-bayt*) were likewise chosen by God and purified from all evil and sin, according to the Shi'a. On the other hand, it is worth pointing out that the families of earlier prophets are not referred to in this complimentary way in the Qur'an. The justification for this distinction could be that the Prophet is of course the seal of the prophets, so he has a special significance, and his family might also. So the family of the Prophet is said to be chosen by God and purified from all evil and sin. Yet because Muhammad was the last prophet sent to guide humanity to God, his descendants could not assume his prophetic role. Their mission was to be the imams, or guides, of the Muslim community, and to preserve the message given to Muhammad by God for the world. Like many of the earlier prophets, the imams had to endure rejection and opposition by their people and even in some cases martyrdom. The family were subjected to especially difficult circumstances and so needed to be special themselves, and hence the significance of the character of the family in Shi'a theology.

The *kisa'* incident

In both Sunni and Shi'i Muslim tradition, one important event symbolizes the status of the *ahl al-bayt* and the human as well as spiritual dimensions of their relation to the Prophet. This is the tradition or episode of *al-kisa'* (the mantle, or cloak) which the Prophet spread over himself and Fatima his daughter, 'Ali, and their two sons Hasan and Husayn. This tradition has taken a number of different forms, each stressing one or another aspect of the excellences of the family of the Prophet and his love for them. Ahmad b. Hanbal relates on the authority of Umm Salama, the Prophet's wife, that Muhammad said to Fatima one day:

> "Bring me your husband and two sons." When they had all come together he spread over them a cloak, and laying his hand over them, he said: "O God,

> these are the people of the House of Muhammad! Let therefore your prayers and blessings descend upon Muhammad and the people of the House of Muhammad; for you are worthy of all praise and glory." Umm Salama continued: "I then lifted the mantle to enter in with them, but he pulled it away from my hand saying, 'You too shall come to a good end'."

The point which this version of the *kisa'* tradition emphasizes is that the *ahl al-bayt* are only five: Muhammad, 'Ali, Fatima, and their two sons Hasan and Husayn. Umm Salama, one of the most highly venerated of the Prophet's wives, was denied this special status. On the other hand, Sunni interpreters of this passage suggest that there was no need for the Prophet to include his wives or wife since they were automatically considered to be part of his family. In another version of the *kisa'* tradition when the Prophet covered the relevant family members with the cloak God then sent down the verse: "Surely God wishes to remove all abomination from you, O People of the House, and purify you with a thorough purification" (33.33). This version of the tradition provides the meaning of the *kisa'* event. The mantle is a symbol of divine mercy and blessing covering the Prophet and his holy family. It is, moreover, a source of consolation and serenity in the face of the great sufferings and martyrdom which the Prophet's family had to endure after him. The *kisa'* finally sets apart the "holy five" from the rest of the faithful, and distinguishes them from the rest of the Prophet's family. From a less sympathetic point of view, though, this passage can be taken to be merely a reference instead to the wives of the Prophet, which is certainly the context of the earlier *ayat* (verses) in the Qur'an.

The event of the *kisa'* provides the occasion for the revelation of the verse of purification just cited, according to the Shi'a. Before the sectarian conflicts which split the Muslim community set in, classical tradition was almost unanimous in interpreting this verse as referring to the Prophet, his daughter Fatima, often called al-Zahra' or the radiant by the Shi'a, her husband and cousin, 'Ali, and their two sons Hasan and Husayn. In still another version of the *kisa'* tradition, the continuity of the Prophet's family with those of earlier prophets is clearly indicated. The close friendship between the Prophet and what came to be considered the holy family, a relationship which went far beyond the bond of blood relation, may be seen in the incident of the *mubahala*, or prayer ordeal, with which the Prophet challenged the Christians of Najran to a competition in which the different sides would each pray and the truth would as a consequence emerge. In the *mubahala* verse of the Qur'an, God orders the Prophet and his opponents to "Call together our sons and your sons, our women and your women, and ourselves and yourselves" (3.61). In the view of some Qur'an commentators and *muhadithun*, the Prophet's sons are Hasan and Husayn, "his women" refers to Fatima, and "his self" refers, apart from himself, to 'Ali. When the people of Najran saw them, they recognized their high status with God, and as a result they declined the *mubahala* and opted instead for peace. The presence of his family was felt to be especially efficacious, thus indicating their special significance.

Tradition asserts that the Prophet sensed the hostility which his community was to show to the People of his House after him. Love for the Prophet's family is insisted on by God in the Qur'an: "Say, 'I ask nothing from you save love of next of kin'" (42.23). Shi'a commentators have generally agreed that "the next of kin" here intended are the *ahl al-bayt*, the House of the Prophet, and often add a "my" in front of them. On the other hand, it could just refer to love among relations, a far more neutral idea. The People of the House of the Prophet Muhammad have been for the Shi'a pious an example of generosity, steadfastness in the face of hardship, and a source of solace in time of trials and afflictions. After days of fasting and prayers for the health of the two sick children Hasan and Husayn, the family fed the few morsels of dry bread and dates for which 'Ali had labored so hard to the needy. They were constantly visited by those in need, and they supplied them with the food they needed so vitally for their own children. Stories like this abound in Shi'a literature and they emphasize the extraordinary virtue of the family of the Prophet, interpreted in this way, and support the idea that they should have a special status.

Early Shi'a tradition shows a tension in the relationship of the Prophet with the community and in the relationship of the latter to the holy family. Much of the literature reflecting this tension was most likely the product of a later age, but projected back to the time of the Prophet and his Companions. Here love for the Prophet's family is not simply recommended as a pious act, but is presented as a challenge, and there are consequences in not acting appropriately here. It is on love for the *ahl al-bayt* that rewards and punishments on the day of judgment are predicated. Thus we are told that the Prophet promises his intercession to those who honor his descendants, provide them with whatever assistance they require, and those who love them with their heart and profess this love with their tongues. In fact, the relationship with believers and the family of the Prophet often becomes part of the creed establishing who is a believer, for the Shi'a. The *ahl al-bayt* share with the prophets and many of their descendants a high status and divine favor, but not the office of prophethood. They share, moreover, with the Prophet Muhammad the prerogative of intercession. This is expressed in hagiographical language, a language common to both Sunni and Shi'i traditions.

The Qur'an tells us that Adam received certain words of God which earned him God's forgiveness and mercy (2.37) when God turned towards him. Suyuti reports that Ibn 'Abbas, the traditionalist and authority on the Qur'an, asked the Prophet about the words which Adam received. The Prophet answered that Adam had asked God to intercede on behalf of Muhammad, 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husayn. In another highly dramatic version of this tradition, Adam is taught the words as the only means by which God would accept his repentance and forgive him. 'Ali, we are told, asked the Prophet about this verse. The Prophet told him that when Adam and his wife were expelled from Paradise, Adam wept bitterly over his sin for a hundred years. Finally, Gabriel came to him and on God's behalf chided him for his behavior, since he had been shown so many favors by God despite his eventual punishment. As part of

the litany of repentance that Adam is supposed to produce is a prayer for forgiveness for the sake of Muhammad and his family.

Islamic tradition has preserved numerous anecdotes depicting the love which the Prophet showed Hasan and Husayn. They were both born in Medinah, and thus knew the Prophet only as children. It is therefore with the intimacy and love of a grandfather that the early life of the two imams is characterized. There are many stories of how he favored them and spoke of them with not only personal fondness but referring to their significant role in religion. In particular, they are said to be sure of a place in paradise after their death, along with those who love them, while those who hate them will go to hell. There are all sorts of stories of how he played with them and incorporated them in his life, even in prayer.

The friends (*awliya'*) of God, like the prophets, are favored with miracles. These are not miracles proper (*mu'jizat*), but rather *karamat* (divine favors). There are many reports of incidents of divine favor by means of which the Prophet wished to inform the community of the special status with which God had favored the two imams. They were included in the references to 'Ali as his friend, and as appropriate objects of love for those who wished to avoid the fire of hell. Muslim hagiographical piety extended this unity and intimacy between the Prophet and his two grandchildren.

The special status of the Imam Husayn in Shi'a piety and devotion has in large measure been due to what is regarded as his great sacrifice of family, wealth, and life itself in the way of God. He has for a long time been a symbol of how to cope with disaster and suffering. Husayn's martyrdom – his courage, steadfastness, dignity, and devotion in times of great crisis – have inspired Muslims ever since who respect his role here. His martyrdom became a source of strength and endurance for Muslims in times of suffering, persecution and oppression. He is taken by the Shi'a to be a representative of everyone who has stood before oppressive rulers, reproaching wrongdoers and encouraging the oppressed to persist in their struggle for freedom and dignity. Divine wisdom in creation can be best discerned, according to the Qur'an, in the order of nature, and in the human individual and his society. Muslim hagiography has recorded the dramatic effect the death of Husayn had on nature. When he was killed, all sorts of remarkable physical events occurred to mark the significance of the event. The memory of the martyred imam has been kept alive and nourished by the tears of the faithful who vicariously share in the tragedy of the Imam Husayn and his loved ones and friends.

Here again, tradition has extended the grief displayed by the pious for the tragedy of Karbala to the cosmic order. The redness of sunset is evidence of the heavens crying for the death of Husayn, on some accounts. There is an existential and all-inclusive unity between the Prophet and his daughter Fatima, her husband, 'Ali, and their two sons. This unity makes it impossible to discuss one without discussing all the others. Finally, Shi'i tradition has always insisted on the great merit the faithful earn in making pilgrimage (*ziyara*) to the tomb of the Imam Husayn and the tombs of the men who were martyred with him.

Even today such pilgrimage is often dangerous and difficult, but in carrying it out the Shi'a participate to a degree in what they see as the tragic life of the major martyrs. The spiritual unity of the *ahl al-bayt*, symbolized by the *kisa'*, is in turn a symbol of the unity of all Muslims, although this may seem paradoxical given the restrictive nature of the family concerned. It is for the sake of this unity in faith and commitment (*islam*) to God and the truth that the Imam Husayn sacrificed his life. He refused a partisan Islam when he refused to legitimize Umayyad rule. Because he refused humiliation, wrongdoing and deviation from the ideals of Islamic leadership as exemplified by the Prophet and his own father 'Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, the Imam Husayn drew once and for all the distinction between a true *khalifa* (caliph or representative) of the apostle of God and the kings of this world. But above all, the Imam Husayn and his fellow martyrs accepted God's bargain with the people of faith to exchange their lives and wealth for the eternal bliss of paradise. This represents a challenge and is no less relevant to the Muslim community today than it was 1,400 years ago.

Islam and the sects issue

There are a number of *ahadith* where the Prophet refers to the future divisions in Islam, compares them to those of other religions, and gives some indication of how to assess the varieties of Islam on offer.

> The Beloved Messenger of God, peace and blessings of God be eternally upon him, said, "The Jews split into 71 groups; 1 group will enter Paradise and 70 will enter Hell. The Christians split into 72 groups; 1 group will enter Paradise and 71 will enter Hell. By Him in whose power is the life of Muhammad, without doubt, my *umma* will be divided into 73 groups. Only one will enter Paradise and 72 will enter Hell". When asked about which group will be on the right path, the beloved messenger of God replied, "The main body (*jama'at*) of the Muslims".

There are many different versions of this *hadith*, and they are all similar in the number of sects they mention for the different religions and the idea that the largest group of Muslims represents the correct position. This is obviously a problem for the Shi'a, and not surprisingly they do not accept it as authentic.

Further reading

Halm 1987, Haykal 1976, Hodgson 1962, Lings 2006, Moojan 1985, Muhajarani 1996.

2 Islam and the Qur'an

Every book on Islam tends to start with a section on the importance of the Qur'an. The Qur'an is the basis of Islam and at its heart, we are constantly told. Those who write about religion often use the idea of the heart of the religion, something very basic that lies at its core. This seems entirely reasonable, and for religions with a book, a distinction which Islam itself makes, the obvious place to start is the Book. In recent years there has been a remarkable flowering of Qur'anic commentary and accounts of the Book, together with new translations into a variety of languages, not to say encyclopedias and online guides to the Book and Islam. Some of this enthusiasm is based on rather unhealthy motives. The attacks of 9/11 on the United States made the Qur'an appear much more relevant to modern society since the attackers were themselves motivated by their religion, or so they said. It was felt by some that understanding the Qur'an would provide some route into the minds of the attackers and those still to come, and perhaps provide a path to countering their aggressive designs on Western society. The positing of Muslims as dangerous or at the very least suspicious, and the attempt to define the world as split up into different groups who face each other nervously have all helped create an interest in the Qur'an. The positing of Muslims and non-Muslims as each other's Other has created a good deal of interest into what precisely it is that Muslims believe, and how it is based in the Book, and of course on other sources.

The Qur'an itself talks about the concept of *kitab* (book). This term may well refer to a special kind of knowledge that is revealed to a prophet in the form of a coherent collection of texts, with links between the separate revelations and a general theme. The prophet receives such revelations in his language so he can communicate with a specific community at a particular time and place, which means that they can be written down in a physical book. The Torah and the Injil, which God revealed to prophets Moses and Jesus, respectively, are two examples of divine books. The Qur'an, which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, is another. So the Qur'an refers to the verses that the Prophet received from God which eventually took the form of 114 distinct *sura*s (chapters). The longest chapter has 286 *aya*s (verses but literally signs) whereas the shortest three chapters consist of three verses each. The term *Qur'an*

is derived from the Arabic word *qara'a* (recite). Indeed, the first word of the Qur'an to be revealed we are often told was *iqra'* or "read." The name of this particular divine Book, Qur'an, is derived from the fact that it was read to the Prophet by the archangel Gabriel (Jibril). Later on it was recited to its audiences, at first they heard it and when later it was written down they could read it also.

There are eight references in the Qur'an to *suhuf*, pages, and sometimes these refer to earlier revelations as in the pages representing revelations made to earlier prophets (20.133, 53.36, 87.18), sometimes the Qur'an is meant, once in the expression "honored pages" (80.13) and another in "purified pages" (98.2). In its seventh appearance, the term is used in a verse that pokes fun at the disbelievers for behaving as if each would like to have divine open pages sent to them in order to believe in the revelation that has come from God (74.52). In the eighth and last verse in which *suhuf* is found, it is used to mean the pages of the record of every human being that will be examined on the day of resurrection (81.10). Each *mushaf* or compilation of pages represents a particular *qira'a* (recitation or reading) of the Qur'an. A reading is a way of writing or pronouncing the Qur'anic text. There are often taken to be seven readings of the Qur'an that are considered authoritative. This is an issue which often arises in languages where vowels are sometimes not represented directly. In early written versions of the Qur'an diacritics (*i'jam*) and vowels (*tashkil*) are absent so there is scope for debate about the precise reading of some passages where a different addition of vowels could change the meaning of the text. All *mushaf*s have the same organization of chapters and the verses within each chapter. So every *mushaf* starts with the chapter of *al-fatiha* (opening) and ends with the chapter of *an-nas* (people). However, chapters and verses are not listed in the *mushaf* in the chronological order of their revelation. For instance, it is widely thought that the first verses of the Qur'an that were revealed to the Prophet are from chapter 96 in the *mushaf*. The differences between those *mushaf*s are minimal, and they are generally taken to be records of the one and same Qur'an, with very slight and minor variations. There are some radical approaches that argue that there was an original text that is quite different from what exists today.

Religion and tradition

Although Muslims will often say that Islam is based on the Qur'an, and Jews that Judaism is based on the Torah, and Christians on the Gospels, this is not really the case. What has evolved as the three Abrahamic religions, so called, has very little to do with the books on which they are each ostensibly based. For example, Muslims do not wear the clothes they wear because of any direct instruction to that effect to be found in the Qur'an, however defined. Women in some Muslim communities live secluded lives limited to their homes, but not because of anything instructing them to do so in the Qur'an. There is nothing in the New Testament saying that priests ought to be celibate, or even men. One of the intriguing aspects of the ways in which Islam is often

characterized is as traditional, yet the Qur'an is really quite a radical text. It calls on its hearers and readers to put trust in God and not in their fathers and tribes:

> And when it is said to them: "Come to what God has revealed and to the messenger," they say: "Enough for us is what we received from our fathers." What! Even though their fathers had no knowledge whatsoever, and no guidance?
>
> (5.104)

Although it seeks to reproduce the monotheism of Abraham and earlier and later prophets, it calls on its adherents to be suspicious of tradition which comes from outside of the monotheist system. Many people are attracted to it today precisely because of the seriousness with which it takes its religious commitments and the contrast with their original faith groups, when they have one. There is nothing so modern as tradition where religion is concerned, and established religions do often embed themselves in a range of social custom and behavior that have nothing directly to do with the religion itself.

The language of the Qur'an

For many Muslims the Qur'an is a partially closed book since they do not know Arabic and have to rely on those whom they regard as authorities to explain it to them. Even if they do know Arabic the Arabic of the Qur'an is quite different from the Arabic of today. The Book is not always organized in the most perspicuous or obvious of ways as far as the modern reader is concerned. The manner in which it runs from the longest to the shortest chapters or *sura*s is sometimes found to be perplexing, and the way in which the actual reception of the Qur'an by the Prophet is jumbled up in this order can cause confusion, or so it is claimed. Yet while this is often said it should not be overemphasized. The Qur'an has a far greater organic unity than either the Torah or the Gospels, and is usually much more beautiful in style than either. If one reads it expecting it to resemble either then one will be disappointed since as is obvious it has an entirely different narrative structure.

It is worth noting that Biblical Hebrew and New Testament Greek are languages with radically less poetic scope than the Arabic of the Qur'an. Hebrew is a highly descriptive language, and much of the Five Books of Moses describe the laws and regulations that apply to the Israelites, and their history and experiences throughout their travels. Similarly with the New Testament, the fact that we refer to New Testament Greek brings out the huge contrast with the sorts of Greek in which the great Greek works of literature were written. The Arabic of the Qur'an is a hugely expressive language, by contrast, and indeed this was a point of competition between the different Arab tribes in the period of the *jahaliyya*, or so we are told. That is not to say that there are not some remarkably fine passages in the Jewish and Christian bibles, but the Qur'an is replete with such passages, and it is precisely its absence of narrative

that lends itself to the comparison here. Since there is less pedestrian description, there is more scope for stylistic elaboration, and the language is available for that form of expression. This may seem a strange point to make, since surely our view of a language is subjective, but there is scope for believing that the Arabic of the Qur'an is just much more developed and flexible as a language than the older languages of the earlier religious works. It is hardly surprising that this is the case since the later language was able to develop out of earlier languages, and presumably as languages do this they have the ability to become far more sophisticated.

A powerful argument in favor of the divine origins of the Qur'an rests on its incomparable superiority to any merely human writing. The Arabic language became what it has become through the Qur'an, although modern Arabic, even modern Standard Arabic, is quite distant from the Qur'an in many ways. Defenders of the miraculousness of the Qur'an often take parts of the Book and marvel at their style, and compare them with other ways of saying the same sort of thing, and the conclusion that is inevitably reached is that the others are not as good. This is a strange form of proof since it is rather like going to the standard meter in Paris, the paradigm of all the metric measurements in the world, and asking how it compared in length with other meter lengths. The standard is the standard and so is the best, and every other meter is only a meter by reference to it. The Qur'an and its language has that role as far as Arabic is concerned, and although it is certainly possible to find sentences which resemble the Qur'an, or which even seem to be better than it, when they are finally compared it is difficult not to acknowledge that they fall short or are at best equivalent. Whether this is a proof of the miraculousness of the Book is an entirely different matter, of course, since we know how languages develop and it is not difficult to appreciate how at certain periods a text appears which represents perfection. In English one thinks of Shakespeare and Eliot perhaps, in German of Goethe and Heine, and so on, it is not that nothing good has been written after these writers, or that nothing as good has appeared, but what we call "good" is good with reference to these writers. And of course there is nothing miraculous about them, despite the nature of their writing before which we may feel considerable awe. What they do is create a style and a tradition of literary expression, just as the Qur'an has done.

The Qur'an strenuously denies that it is poetry, but of course in many places it is, and very fine poetry at that. It did not want to be called poetry because of the danger of being regarded as only poetry. It did not wish to be confused with the poetry tradition of Arabia which was at the time of its revelation apparently well developed and highly respected. After all, to be poetry would be to be just one more literary or aural text, and the Qur'an sees itself very differently. Poetry also implies a less than exact description of the way things are, since the poet often embroiders and elaborates. The Qur'an, by contrast, is based on the truth and describes only the truth. Poetry can however be true and highly accurate in its description of reality and to call a text poetic is not to disparage or question its veracity, it is merely to characterize its style in a

certain way. So the Qur'an is both (often) poetry and can be understood to be a standard literary text with respect to Arabic texts coming after it, both of which claims may appear to call into doubt its religious pretensions. But they do not, since a text can be both poetic and true, and it can exist as the source of a whole literary tradition and also still be true, and divinely true at that.

Ways of interpreting the Qur'an

How should one approach the Qur'an? This is one of the most protracted controversies in Islam, and this is hardly surprising. Religions based on a book have to decide how they are going to regard that book. This important decision should not have its importance inflated, though. Although religions based on a book will all say something respectful about the book, in fact those religions have a character which has far more to do with other things than just the book. In any case, basing religion on a book tells us nothing, since the book itself is available for a multiplicity of interpretations, one at least of which has to be accepted by the believer. For Muslims it is not just the Qur'an that is significant but also the traditions and sayings that have grown up around the personhood of the Prophet, for Sunnis, and also the imams, for the Shi'a. Then there is law, the form of Islamic law to which one adheres, and there are different schools of law within both the Sunni and Shi'i traditions, different practices for prayer and the celebration of holidays, and all these differences are familiar to us from a wide variety of religions. It is these differences that we are going to concentrate on here, and there is a danger given that this is a book which focuses on differences that it is going to focus on them too much. It is going to elevate such differences, insofar as they exist, into something much more major than in fact is the case. This is a danger and needs to be resisted, on par with the danger of seeing religion as really something very unified with few if any significant disputes. It will be argued here though that the arguments which have existed in the past and which persist in Islam, like those in any religion, are highly revealing of the nature of the religion, and as such are very much worth studying if we are to understand Islam.

It is not difficult to sum up the argument which has for a long time been applied to the Qur'an. When the latter is interpreted the best way by far is to pay attention to its links with the Jewish and Christian bibles, since these actually form the background to the Book and the audience which it was addressing. A good source of information on how to interpret the Qur'an is not then to be found in the *mufassirun* (commentators) and the *mutakallimun* (theologians), the commentators and theologians who are the traditional people to explain the text. By contrast, we are told, we should see the audience of the Qur'an to be the People of the Book, and so the bibles of the Jews and Christians are its essential backdrop. In recent times Angelika Neuwirth has produced what sets out to be a scientific approach to understanding the Book, and one of the best representatives of this general approach is Gabriel Said

Reynolds. The latter considers a variety of examples dealing with the devil, Adam, Abraham, Jonah, Mary, Haman, and of course the Prophet, and what he does in each case is produce a Qur'anic passage which he says is puzzling. Then he considers the traditional Muslim commentators' views of the passage and those appear to him to be unsatisfactory. Finally he refers to what he calls the Bible, and by this he means not just the Jewish and Christian bibles, but also the wealth of commentatorial and less canonical literature that exists within the Jewish and Christian traditions. He goes on to show that this context makes far better sense of the text than the Muslim commentators. The conclusion is that the implied original audience of the Qur'an are the People of the Book, and this vaguely biblical context is the one we should have in mind when reading the Book itself.

This is a tempting line to take, and reinforces the idea that the Qur'an is a derivative work, an approach which is often taken by its detractors. But when this view is examined in detail problems appear. Take for instance the reference in Qur'an 11.71 to the laughter of Sarah, who is not directly named, just before she hears that she will have a child. At least in the Qur'an it comes before, although Reynolds argues this is connected to the desire to make the passage rhyme in a certain way. What is the basis of this text? According to Reynolds, it is the Jewish Bible and its reference to Sarah laughing when she is given the news, and then there is the lexical link in Hebrew, but not in Arabic, between the word for laughter and the name Isaac (Ishaq). Now, there are some differences between the passage in the Bible and in the Qur'an. For example, in the Qur'an there is the implication that the messengers did not eat, while in the Bible they did eat. This is not a problem for the thesis, though, since there is an account in the wider Jewish literature in accordance with which the messengers did not eat, and since they might well have been angels, could not have eaten. So here is the argument. The reference to laughter in 11.71 is to a Jewish source in accordance with which Abram is visited by messengers from God who tell him and Sarah they are going to have a child, and her laughter is a reference to her reaction in the Jewish Bible. But Christian sources are not ignored here either, since Sarah is compared with Mary and her perfection, linked to a degree with her virginity, and this is brought out in the Qur'an by the reference not only to Isaac but to Jacob also which hints at those who are to follow on later, and according to Reynolds makes a certain kind of rhyme possible also.

The approach to the text here is implausible. For one thing, appealing to the need to establish a certain rhyme really will not work, since it is not that difficult to form rhymes in a whole variety of ways while simultaneously incorporating the appropriate order in time at the same time. It is not as though the composer of the text is strictly limited in the lexical resources which are available within the *sura*, since the *sura* could have been otherwise designed had there been felt to be a need to do so. So the argument from rhyme is weak. Were the composer of the Book to have made free and easy with the content just to ensure a smoother literary structure, this would be rather shocking in

what is after all a primary religious text. It may have been done, but we need to have some evidence and none is presented here.

The argument from resemblances between the Qur'anic text to Jewish and Christian sources is also questionable, since those sources are immense, and it is not difficult to find somewhere at least in those sources a reference which will fit in with whatever one wants to find. When talking about Sarah laughing, for instance, Reynolds brings in Josephus and the Targum, which may indeed have been part of the local Jewish culture at the time of the Prophet, but it seems unlikely that his audience would have been aware of this vast variety of views in a wide range of texts. The whole method is difficult to accept though since even if the audience was in tune with this vast variety of interpretations and commentaries and historical accounts, these do not constitute a fixed corpus of accepted Jewish explanations of the Bible, but constitute a variety of views, and the fact that the Qur'an is in line with at least some of these views would not strike much of an accord with those who do not accept them even within the tradition in which they exist. They would be accepted in the sense of containing valuable material worth considering, but not in the sense of a fixed set of truths that must be accepted by anyone in the religion. Reynolds seems to think that the Jewish literature consists of a body of agreement, whereas on the whole the reverse is the case, it is made up of arguments, speculations, assumptions, and so on that put forward a variety of explanations of the text. Not all of them can be true. Reynolds is right in thinking that a Jewish audience might have been familiar with what was being spoken about in the Qur'an by virtue of such a resemblance, but they could also have rejected the line that the Qur'an took on it since they might object to its reflection on a particular approach in the Jewish literature. If all that is needed to establish a connection is the fact that something is mentioned in both places that is similar, this sets the standard far too low.

The major problem is that the literature in connection with both bibles is so vast and diverse that if one is looking for something to relate to a passage in the Qur'an it is almost too easy. There will always be something, and usually more than one thing, that fits in. It follows that one can go to any Qur'anic passage and find something in the wider biblical literature that corresponds to it, but it does not follow that there is a link. There could be, but the existence of this sort of correspondence shows very little. There are two arguments presented by Neuwirth and Reynolds, one weaker and one stronger. The former weaker argument is that what is shown is that there was a basis in the local culture for a range of issues which arise in the Qur'an to resonate with the local populations, and we can accept that is true. The Qur'an even points to this truth on a number of occasions. The stronger argument is that we can use this background to explain what takes place in the Book and to resolve problems in identifying characters and themes. By contrast, traditional *tafsir* is regarded as wandering all over the place and makes no real effort to establish the historical background for what is said in the Qur'an. But it is certainly the case that the bibles are one subtext, yet surely one among many others, and

the fact that there is something in the background literature hardly establishes anything at all except that there is something in the background literature that might have been expected to have been in someone's mind while they were listening to the Qur'an, or of course might not (Leaman 2010). The assumption these approaches to the Qur'an make is that the original listeners were extraordinarily sophisticated, and had available to them a vast compendium of religious literature. They make huge intellectual demands on the very diverse audience addressed by the Prophet during his time.

The point of religion according to many Islamic philosophers is to be able to address everyone, not just those with a particular intellectual background and level of education. This is a point constantly made by the Islamic philosophers in the Peripatetic tradition such as al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd. Philosophy and religion express the same truth, since there is only one truth, but they present it in different ways. The philosopher has the time, capacity, and commitment to understand the truth in a way that brings out its full rational status and connections with everything else. Many people in the community do not have either the time, inclination nor even perhaps the ability to understand the rational basis of what they believe, and for them religion is the essential and only route to the truth. The point of religion is to express the truth in ways that resonate with the widest possible constituency, and the Qur'an was regarded by the philosophers as being particularly well-designed in this direction. It speaks to people in a variety of ways, each of which is appropriate to a particular audience, and in this way manages to communicate in the widest possible way the divine message. The most lucid representative of this tradition was Ibn Rushd (Leaman 1997c). Surely this is a far more plausible identification of the audience that the Qur'an has in mind than the super-sophisticated scholars identified by Reynolds.

It is often the case that impressive results can be derived from faulty premises, and although we might be dubious about the approaches of both the scientific approach to religious texts, and those of the traditional commentators, no doubt they both manage to produce very revealing comments on the texts they consider. In particular, we cannot downplay the immense effort that the latter put into understanding the language of the Qur'an, which is surely extremely valuable despite the distance in time and often space which existed between their efforts and the delivery of the text itself, however that is seen. It is surprising that Reynolds finds little of interest in his extensive work in this area. These words of caution at this approach to the Qur'an are designed to suggest that there are problems in thinking we have found a final solution to how to crack the problem, as though theological investigation were like emulating Sherlock Holmes.

The *hadith* literature

Traditional commentary is often interested in *asbab al-nuzul*, the attempt to construct a time line of the revelations given to the Prophet, and these provide

the context at least in terms of place and time for those revelations, not only when they occurred but also where, in Mecca or Medina, and then in Mecca again. Since the order of the *sura*s is not chronological, there is a lot of scope for creativity here. It is on the basis of this level of historical obscurity that commentators make so much hay out of such little straw. Despite what critics of Islam say the efforts of the traditional Muslim commentators are impressive here, they often manage to provide a plausible narrative. In terms of that narrative they suggest that we can find a context for the Qur'an which is both local and limited in time, and then can be generalized to be relevant beyond that location. The sources available to them are not immense. There are the stories about the life of the Prophet, and these are obviously questionable and often oriented differently depending on whether the author has Sunni or Shi'a sympathies. There is the Tradition literature, the *hadith* (pl. *ahadith*) which recount what the Prophet is reported to have said, who he said it to and how the saying proceeded along a long line of listeners and consequent reporters. An enormous number of *ahadith* appeared to justify or condemn virtually anything that someone wanted to justify or condemn, and some are obviously very weak and lacking in authenticity. It does not follow that they all are and from very early on the Islamic world took very seriously the issue of how to assess their reliability by constructing a science of assessing their plausibility. The test is not so much the content of the saying but the chain of authorities on which it rests. Both are relevant of course, but it is the chain that makes the saying look likely as a saying of the Prophet rather than just something he might have said or could have said. Other important early Muslim figures also have sayings attributed to them which may be used in theological discourse.

Sunni and Shi'i *muhaddithun*, experts on the *hadith* literature, naturally are often at odds with each other. The wife of the Prophet, 'A'isha, is a source of a good many *hadith* for the Sunni but her antipathy toward 'Ali and his followers rule those out for the Shi'a and they look very much to 'Ali himself and of course the sayings of the imams for their subject matter. Both communities have major collectors who are approved, and those who are not, but who are nonetheless sometimes consulted. Islam was in its early years very much an aural and oral culture, with little if anything written down, and the reliability of what was passed down can often be challenged. Even the Prophet is often described as illiterate, an important part of the proof that he could not have written the Qur'an himself, and there is much debate about how long it was before the Qur'an was written down and how reliable that codification actually was. In fact, the Shi'a tend to imply that the original Qur'an was rather different from the text that we ended up with, presumably with the more enthusiastic references to 'Ali removed. For the sake of inter-Muslim harmony they do not make a fuss about this, and yet it is hardly a minor point. Tabataba'i refers to many *ahadith* which describe 'Ali compiling the Qur'an after the death of the Prophet, to such an extent that he only left his house to pray. The official version that has come down to us is credited to the second caliph, 'Uthman, and the assumption is that it deliberately excludes references to

'Ali and the imams in order to downgrade their claims to leadership of the community.

An original Qur'an?

The idea of an original Qur'an which has now disappeared seems far-fetched. Where is the evidence for the existence of such an original version of the Book? Yet the point is not so much that it exists in material form but rather that it remains with the family of the Prophet and the hidden imam and will reappear at the end of days. Such an idea fits in well with the basic distinction in Shi'ism between exoteric and esoteric approaches to the Book. The former are available to everyone just by reading and reflecting on the text while the latter comes through instruction by the right sort of teachers and is perhaps only appropriate for certain people. The full hidden meaning of the Book is reserved for the Prophet and was passed onto his family, but parts of it can be known through the imams and the writings of 'Ali. The idea of there being two ways of approaching the text, one open and one hidden, is important in Qur'anic commentary and exists in many different forms for many of the varieties of Islam, certainly not just the Shi'a.

This kind of approach fits in nicely with a certain way of understanding religion. According to this there are a variety of religious believers and followers. Some are skilled intellectually and very interested in exploring in detail the nature and basis of their faith. Others, perhaps the majority, are concerned with a range of other aspects of their lives and have neither the time, the inclination nor perhaps the ability to deal with the complex interpretative issues involved in their or any religion. The Qur'an addresses both kinds of reader and hearer, and indeed refers to seven kinds of reading that are valid, which is often taken to be a reference to the acceptability of a range of approaches not only to how to actually sound the text but also to what it means. It would be difficult for a religion to flourish which did not seek to address a broad range of potential believers, and the Qur'an certainly does this. There is a tendency for religious authorities to prioritize certain readings, perhaps because they think this lends stability to the religion, and to denounce others as heretical and dangerous. There certainly are dangers in broadcasting widely the existence of controversies about the meaning of the Book since this might make believers uncertain in their adherence to Islam and to its central text. Muslims can only learn here from the fate of modern Christianity and Judaism which in many countries has become so diverse in its understanding of the leading principles of the religion that the religion itself often seems hesitant and apologetic about its main beliefs. This is often seen as having resulted in a decline in worship and allegiance to the Church and the synagogue, and an increasingly secular trend in many erstwhile Christian and Jewish societies.

What is often seen to have undermined Christianity was the historicization of Jesus. Scholars started to look at the fundamentals of the stories to be found in the Gospels and challenged them as historical events. An attempt to

rationalize the Gospels by reinterpreting much of the material to be how it seemed to people at the time, as opposed to how we should understand it now, did result in a program of purification of the text from a rational point of view but also made it less compelling to many believers. The strong emphasis by many Protestants on the significance of belief despite all the evidence that goes against it is indeed impressive, and the allegorization of much of Christianity is heroic in its desire to do away with what are regarded as the extravagant features of a religion that needs to be brought back to its basic principles. For many Christians this has not left enough for them to make part of their regular religious life and they have drifted away either to other religions or often to no religion at all. But turning theology into anthropology is not just the preserve of Christianity, it has occurred also in Islam. A number of thinkers such as Hasan Hanafi and Nasr Abu Zayd have argued that we should understand the text of the Qur'an as something which needs to be constantly reexamined and reinterpreted. The individual reader has to adapt the text to his or her own outlook and take it in the direction that makes sense at a particular time, and this inevitably means that the interpretation of the text will change from time to time.

This search for a new hermeneutics of the Qur'an has taken many different directions, and there have been a number of scholarly reappraisals of *tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis) and *usul al-fiqh* (jurisprudence). Often along with this strategy goes a suspicion of the *hadith* literature, and an attempt at distinguishing between what is in the Qur'an and is only relevant to local conditions at the time of the revelation, and what has broader relevance. So for example Fazlur Rahman and Farid Esack argue that some of the Qur'an does not extend far beyond its own context, and we can establish that context with a study of the *asbab al-nuzul*, the conditions under which the particular revelations emerged. A difficulty with this approach, though, is that if one does not respect the *hadith* literature, or at least some of it, it is difficult to establish a plausible account of the *asbab al-nuzul*. One is then restricted to constructing a *sira* or history that seems as arbitrary as many of the *ahadith* themselves. It often seems that the leading principle of Qur'anic interpretation becomes some form of liberalism, although of course it could be absolutely anything instead, and although one can only admire the theological imagination that seeks to make that plausible, it seems very far from the truth.

This looks very much like a theological dispute between the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites from the early years of Islamic theology (Leaman 2009: 106–7) over whether the Qur'an was created or not. According to the latter it was uncreated and has always existed. This is often taken to be a suggestion that its interpretation is fixed also, but actually this does not follow. The eternal and stable character of the text says nothing about its interpretation. On the contrary, the more fixed the text the easier it is to discuss it, since the discussion then at least focuses on the text itself and not on what might have been in the text had we known more about when and how it was created. It is not as though having the text ends our problems, since the issue then is how to read it, how

to link different parts of it to other parts, and why we might reject alternative ways of doing it. It is sometimes said that the Mu'tazilites are rationalists and the Ash'arites traditionalists, but this is a difficult distinction to make in this context, since both groups stress the significance of reason and respect what had already become the tradition of Islam.

A comment that many make in examining the ways in which Qur'an commentary has changed in modern times is that "it is likely that the Qur'an will be the key to the future evolution of the Muslim peoples, just as it was the key to the triumph of the open and essentially tolerant Islamic culture of the eighth to eleventh centuries" (Campanini 2011: 2). As Campanini points out, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw thinkers like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad 'Abduh, and Rashid Rida who tried to develop a new way of looking at the Qur'an, one which largely ignored the old ways of doing and establish a new approach to Islam. This is very different from thinkers like Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, Tahir Ibn 'Ashur, and Mahmud Shaltut who emphasized the importance of discussing the Qur'an in terms of itself, as though modern methods of examining texts have no application to the Book. A wide range of later thinkers such as Muhammad Ahmad Khalafallah, 'A'isha Bint 'Abd al-Rahman, Muhammad Arkoun, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Hasan Hanafi, Malik Bennabi, Muhammad Talbi, Muhammad Mujtahid Shabestari, Muhammad Mahmud Taha, Fazlur Rahman, Muhammad Abdel Haleem, and Muhammad Shahrur do not see trying to understanding the context of the Book as standing in the way of appreciating its holy and special nature. On the other hand, they take up the issue of defending the Book and its structure from claims by orientalists that it is a muddled and wrongly admired text. 'Ala al-Din al-Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb are major representatives of what is often called a radical approach that sees the Qur'an as the first and last word in telling us how to organize the state and everything in it, including our ordinary lives. Some thinkers see the Qur'an as a deeply political work and Mahmud Taleqani and Murtada Mutahhari, and Farid Esack, defend its revolutionary tendencies, and Amina Wadud argues that the current tendency to give women a lower role than men in the Islamic world has no basis in the Qur'an. Accounts of these thinkers and their arguments can be found in Campanini (2011).

Tradition and interpretation

When one comes across this wide range of critical approaches to the Book one is bound to wonder whether anything goes, which is very much the state of play in the other Abrahamic religions. It has to be said that there is no great difference between the theological disputes in the three religions, although of course the details are often marked by the specificities of the different faiths. They all have to decide how they are going to accommodate modernism, if at all, and even if they decide not to they are obliged to do and say something in reaction to modernism. Some of the Islamic theological movements that are called conservative or traditional, such as Salafism, the sort of approach based

on Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia and the countries and institutions which it supports, are very far from being conservative. *Salaf*, which refers to the ancestors, sees itself as looking to the past and conserving the institutions and lifestyle of the past, but the reverse is the case. For one thing, Islam like other religions is constantly in a state of development, so even at the time of the Prophet and his Companions change was a constant fact. The direction of prayer, the *qibla*, changed from Jerusalem to Mecca. Parts of the Qur'an seem to contradict other parts, thus leading to the device of *naskh* or abrogation. In particular, the development of the *hadith*, whose importance cannot be overemphasized, incorporated dynamism into the very heart of Islam. When Ibn al-Wahhab criticized local customs in Arabia on the basis of their incongruence with the past he was indeed trying to get back to a former golden age (Leaman 2009: 181), but that is a very modern thing to do. Nostalgia works when one is trying to find something familiar and comforting in times of change and disruption, and it is always misleading. What we think of as familiar and comforting are in fact experiences that exist within the flux of change, where we manage to alight on something that for the moment seems stable, but in fact really is not. What the Wahhabis were doing was to criticize current society and seek to undermine the existing order, something that the earlier Ibn Taymiyya fell foul of when for having similar views he was tortured and threatened with death. Seeking to go back when there is no back to return to is a deeply radical move, and was understood as such by the existing authorities.

There are other forces in Islamic theology who operate at a more popular level. The thinkers involved here are the Turkish opponents of the secular state, Said Nursi, Fethullah Gülen and Harun Yahya, the Egyptian Yusuf al-Qaradawi, and many others, and they often have disparate views on issues that they consider, and yet there is plenty they have in common. The main target of all these thinkers is secularism, which they see as a powerful force menacing religion in general, and Islam in particular. Secularism is the thesis that the ultimate explanation for anything is nothing to do with God. While it is obviously opposed to religion it takes on many of the characteristics of a religion. It is for example something one comes to believe in, it provides a systematic explanation of everything and no evidence would establish that it is false. Secularism became a huge political issue in Turkey, since the republican government went through a long period of modeling itself on what it took to be French laicism, which involved a profound hostility to Islam as the religion of the majority of the population. Islam continued to be tolerated but was discouraged. Until quite recently it was illegal for religious clothing such as headscarves to be worn by women on government property, including universities and ministries. Religion was seen as the province of the provinces, appropriate perhaps for the ignorant peasants living in the back of beyond but not really the sort of thing that a sophisticated urban dweller would be likely to practice. Secularism was cool, associated with European or at least Western sophistication and very much the prerogative of the political and economic elite. It was seen as the appropriate system of belief for modernity and progress.

Religion was experienced as the old-fashioned beliefs of a declining proportion of the population.

But that is not how it actually played out, in Turkey at least. For one thing, Turkey in the twentieth century saw a population exchange with Europe which largely expelled Christians and imported Muslims from the Balkans, so that the proportion of Muslims in the country steadily increased. This occurred throughout the Middle East as a whole, the establishment of the State of Israel leading to a similarly less heterogenous Arab world, with the expulsion of its Jewish population and the steady decline of Christians and other religions also. It also became fashionable even among the educated elite to be religious, and often when the intellectual elite gathered together it was not to drink whiskey but to discuss religion and pray. Religious groups of one kind or another flourished, sometimes in direct opposition to secular governments in the Arab world in the form of the Muslim Brothers and allied organizations, and in Turkey as part of organizations such as the Nurcu movement based on the writings of Said Nursi, or the Gülen organization, which encouraged the study of the works of Gülen in small but linked groups throughout Turkey and the Turkish speaking communities throughout the world. In the Arab world secularism and socialism were taken to have failed, for one thing they had certainly not brought wealth and prosperity to the non-oil countries. In addition those countries had been humiliated constantly when in armed conflict with the small Jewish state. The success of the latter was often (and wrongly) attributed to its cohesion due to religion, whereas in fact it is ethnicity that provides the social glue for Israel and its determination to remain a predominantly Jewish state. Although Turkey did not have the same antagonism toward Israel, at least initially, it also underwent frequent economic and political crises. Religion became a plausible alternative as an organizing principle for the state, one that had not been tried for a long time in Turkey since at least the end of the caliphate. Islam became a source of unity and coherence in a society that saw itself as very much in between a Western type country and something much more Eastern in nature.

The miraculousness of the Qur'an: a Turkish approach

There has throughout Islamic culture been a protracted debate about the Qur'an and its claims on its audience for acceptance. Many religions have a central text which is taken to embody the principles of the religion, but Islam makes an unusual point about the Qur'an. It is not only divinely revealed, it not only presents the basic principles behind the creation of this world and our journey to the next world, but it is also written in such a wonderful way that in a sense it is itself miraculous. But in what sense? The Qur'an is sometimes called the only direct miracle of Islam, in that its style and meaning are taken to be incomparable. Human beings could not have composed it, despite what the enemies of Islam often suggest, since its structure and content are far beyond anything that human beings could compose. So the style of the Book turns out

to be one of the proofs of the Book itself, a very neat argument and one that is not made by any other religion. Other religions are certainly complimentary about the style of their major texts, but do not ascribe to them miraculous stylistic properties. The notion of the miraculousness or inimitability of the Qur'an has at various times been explained and defended by such diverse Islamic thinkers as the Ash'arites al-Baqillani and al-Jurjani, and the Mu'tazilites al-Jahiz and 'Abd al-Jabbar. It remains today very much a core belief for many Muslims. For Nursi it was al-Jurjani who was of particular significance, and the general tenor of Nursi's approach is very much established by al-Jurjani and he follows the classical argument quite closely.

Said Nursi's commentary of the Qur'an is part of a long history of explaining what is meant by the miraculous nature of the Qur'an, and it agrees on certain issues. One is that more is meant by miraculous than just doing things which are unexpected or unusual or difficult to explain. There has to be a connection with prophecy. On this point the Ash'arites and the Mu'tazilites tend to disagree. The former distinguish between *mu'jizat* and *karamat*, between the miracles that only prophets can produce, and the sorts of remarkable and supernatural events that worthy and pious individuals can bring about. The Mu'tazilites only accept the existence of miracles. That is, the miraculous event or thing has to point to and talk about something that is prophetic, it has to be much more than a trick. This makes it look as though miraculousness when it is manifested in a text is a matter of the meaning of a sentence or a book, and so the remarkable message that is present in a text is evidence of its miraculousness. The wonderful meaning is then something that points to the truth in a way that is unprecedented, perhaps, or very exciting or unexpected.

Then there is the opposite view, and this is that the miraculous nature of the Book is not based on its meaning but on its style, its *balagha*. Not that there is anything questionable about the content either, of course, but it is not there that the miraculousness of the Book lies. It is written so beautifully and indeed perfectly that the hearer and reader is entitled to think that this could not be a human creation. This is an important thought, since many of the enemies of Islam did claim precisely that the Qur'an is a human creation, in just the same way that many other central religious texts are human creations. Islam in its present form arose a long time after many other religions, so its claim for acceptance has to base itself on something more, perhaps, than just the fact that it is grounded in a true revelation. An appropriate argument for Islam is that it produces a miraculous text. This fits in nicely also with the idea of the Prophet transmitting the final revelation, the most perfect version of the truth. Since the Prophet himself was *ummi*, often taken to be illiterate, this is proof that the Book could not have been written by him, and even if one doubts that *ummi* means illiterate, it still seems unlikely that someone with the background of the Prophet could have created such a text all by himself. These are all plausible arguments for the idea that it is in the style of the Qur'an that its inimitability and evidence for its divine origins reside.

Finally, and surely more plausibly, is the view that it is neither the form nor the content of the Book that represents its miraculousness, but rather the combination of the two. That is, the message itself is wonderful and also points to new and previously unappreciated truths in a prophetic sort of way, and the way in which the message is delivered is beautiful and beyond human compare. Here there is a difficulty in that of course the Qur'an is written in a human language, Arabic, and was designed originally to be understood by the Arabs, and all human language is limited by its profane origins. It is a traditional religious problem that God is beyond human language and yet has to be described through it.

Let us look in detail at his analysis of a part of an *aya*, *wa-la in massathum nafhatun min adhabi rabbika* (21.46), i.e. "if a light wind from their Lord's punishment touches them." This could be translated as "if but a breath of the wrath of your Lord touches them." According to Nursi, this verse gives an idea of God's punishment by describing just a little part of it so that people take it as a hint about the whole. This passage stresses the restraint of God's action, and matches it with literary restraint. In the phrase there is a conditional, and talking in hypothetical terms is much lighter than saying something definite and categorical. The term *massathum* is used for slight contact or touching. More dramatic terms could have been used but these would have been too strong and would have described God's punishment in such a way as to ignore his gentleness. The term *nafhatun* refers to a light wind rather than a storm or anything more dramatic, and is precisely chosen to lighten the mood. The term *min*, or from, involves the idea of something being taken from something bigger, and so reduces the force of the whole phrase. The terms *adhabi rabbika*, namely "your Lord's punishment," makes use of the name *rab* for Lord rather than one of the other names of God that emphasize his power, thus reducing the notion of the force that goes along with the punishment.

One might see the world itself as like a book, with the *ayat* as like natural events that all point in a certain direction, but in order to get us to see the world in this way one needs a highly effective language to work with us. Hence the significance of eloquence. It is the means of plumbing the depths of the human soul, of orienting us in the right direction and bringing to our consciousness what lies just beyond it. Once we get it, it is difficult to see how it was not obvious to us all the time, but that is what seeing the world in a particular way is like. To get us to see the world from a particular and novel point of view is difficult and requires the help of eloquence. That eloquence is further required to help us continue to see the world in that way, but at this stage we have the meanings to work with also, and so perhaps we could resolve the longstanding argument in Islamic theology over the respective significance of eloquence and meaning in miraculousness in this way. Eloquence is a mark of the miraculousness of the Qur'an in the way it brings the unbeliever to understand the basic truths that the Qur'an embodies. Those basic truths when combined with eloquence are a mark of the miraculousness of the Qur'an in the way in which it maintains the believer on the straight path throughout his

or her life. Finally, for the believers who are so firmly on the path that the basic truths of Islam are ever-present to them, it is those truths themselves that represent for them a wonderful insight into the deeper structure of reality. Those truths transform their view of the nature of everything. So the different views of the classical *mutakallimun* can be seen more as different emphases on distinct aspects of the miraculousness phenomenon rather than arguments with each other. Nursi's lack of concern with resolving the precise links between the different aspects of *i'jaz* may then be seen as fitting in neatly with the classical discussion and not really taking away from the value of his observations.

The whole notion of the *tahaddi* or challenge that the Qur'an sets the unbelievers, that they produce something like it or better than it (2.24), is very much framed in the language of the time. Nursi suggests that if at the time someone had come up with an alternative that looked at all plausible, we should know about it. It would have defeated the Qur'an and the small Muslim community would have been beaten in their competition with the much larger group of unbelievers. Yet there is no such report, and we can only conclude from that that at the time nothing come up to challenge the Qur'an, at least nothing satisfactory, and so the challenge still stands. It includes phenomena such as an account of the arrangement of the special letters, *huruf al-muqatta'a*. These can be combined in 504 different ways, apparently, and yet they only appear in one way, something it is very difficult to believe a human author could accomplish. This is actually a reformulation of an eminent argument in the *kalam*, that from *takhsis*, particularization, often ascribed to al-Juwayni. This works from the dependence of the contingent (the Book) on an agent (God), where the agent must possess the will and intelligence to choose one contingent over others. Of course, the more ways in which the world could be, the more a particular choice points to the existence of a creator, with a free will and a purpose in creating in a particular way.

This is certainly the nub of the miraculousness argument as defended by al-Jurjani, the idea that the *nazm* or linguistic form of the Qur'an takes us away from the old debate between the defenders of eloquence and the advocates of meaning to an objective means of resolving the issue by concentrating on formal aspects of the presentation of language. It is rather similar to the way in which the philosophers like al-Farabi saw their reliance on logic as a way of assessing the essence of language and getting behind its apparent structure. Al-Jurjani tried to place this way of approaching the text on a new and more scientific basis, so that we come to see how remarkable the structure is from a formal point of view. Then we are entitled to make certain judgments about its authorship and authority. This is a particular example of the argument from design. It starts by referring to an example of design and then working back from that example to the idea of a designer. The more objective the arguments for the existence of design, the more strength there is in the notion of a designer. The point of al-Jurjani's theory of the style of the Qur'an is that its nature is dependent on factors that are entirely objective, such as the economy of expression, the variety of ways of illustrating the same point, the compelling

nature of the prose, and so on. In particular, there is the argument that Nursi is particularly attracted to, that every term used in a phrase is perfect as it is and could not be satisfactorily replaced by any other word.

This is just the same sort of argument as those that argue from the state of nature to a creator, since such arguments also often suggest that nature has to possess precisely the features it does in order to operate properly. That is, there must be just so much rain, so much sun, so much heat and cold, and so on, and there are more modern forms of the argument that work from a scientific explanation of the start of creation that makes it dependent on a unique set of circumstances, a singularity that it is highly unlikely could have just come about through chance. So the world is as it is because of a precise combination of facts, just as the Qur'an is as it is because of a precise combination of phrases, and the very special nature of each point to the existence and authority of a divine creator. The forces of secularism and atheism take the position by contrast that the world just came about through an arbitrary set of causes, and the Qur'an is a human work, like the other major religious texts.

Design and the miraculousness argument

Design arguments share a problem and that is that they are a good deal less objective than they initially look. For one thing, one can always disagree with the wonderful design that others see in both nature and a text. Right now I am watching a bee flying into a flower, and indeed my garden is full of bees collecting nectar from the plants, and as we know this leads to the production of honey, an increase in the bee population, the fertilization of plants and so on, and thus often is seen as a remarkable feat of design. It could also be seen as just something that has come about through the evolution of species in the natural world, something without any design attached to it at all. Very much the same could be said about the Qur'an, that what seems to some to be wonderful and perfect comes out very differently for others. For example, when we examined the *aya* in *sura* 21.46 Nursi claimed that the words chosen get the balance between mercy and punishment just right. Yet had the terms for punishment in the *aya* been stronger, would he not have said that God wanted to emphasize punishment over mercy, and vice versa? He could have argued that in that context it was appropriate to do so, and God got it just right of course in how he expressed himself. There are passages in the Qur'an which do emphasize one or the other, after all, so the balance which exists here is not inevitable. It might be argued that it is important in the Book for the balance to be of a certain kind here, and the balance elsewhere to be otherwise to construct the perfect Book that is the Qur'an. It is difficult to know what to make of that claim, though. Is the Qur'an read all at once, so that each verse can be set off against the rest of the Book? Well, sometimes it is, but not usually. Even if it is read all at once, it is not easy to bear in mind a nuance in one verse that is supposed to resonate with a nuance in a different verse. One of the characteristics of a fine piece of writing is the impression that everything is just right,

everything is in its place and the language is entirely appropriate. The finer the writing, the less exchangeable are any of the terms or forms used in it. This is something that Nursi captures well in his accounts of the style of the Qur'an and his careful analysis of particular passages in the Book. What it is important to understand about these judgments concerning style is that they are aesthetic judgments. They can be argued for, and they can also be argued against. That would seem to many to be a rather weak basis for a proof that something was created by God.

Further reading

Abdel Haleem 1996, 'Ali 1999, Campanini 2007, 2011, Cook 2000, Leaman 2009, 2010, Lewis 2002, Neuwirth 2010, Nursi 2005, 2006, Reynolds 2010, Sonn 2006, Wild 2006a.

3 Islam and God

The Qur'an

Proofs of the existence of God are frequently to be found in Islam, starting with the Qur'an itself. The Qur'an sees itself as a rational and not a poetic work, although the language is often remarkably beautiful, inviting its readers or hearers to think, reflect and ponder. The most significant of these of course is that there is a God who created the world, and we can come to accept this by looking at that world in the right sort of way. The argument here is not demanding, and invites us to look at nature and then consider how it came about, and the answer is that God made it. We can call these arguments informal, and they have proved very popular in the modern Islamic world. What they bring out quite nicely though is that for most Muslims questioning the existence of God is regarded as wildly implausible, since it is so obvious that he exists.

There has arisen a sort of popular Islam which seeks to oppose the secularism of the modern world by producing evocative but weak arguments in favor of the existence of God. While these arguments hark back to the Qur'an, they really do not represent it adequately. Their arguments tend to be rhetorical in the sense that they work from Qur'anic passages and *ahadith* to build up a religious picture of the world, and then compare that with a materialist interpretation of the same state of affairs, which is invariably thinner by contrast, and invite the reader to choose.

There are some definite arguments in the Qur'an for the existence of God and in particular for the existence of just one God. At 21.22 we are told that if there were more than one God, the heavens and earth would be confused, presumably because the different gods would all be doing different and uncoordinated things. It is not obvious why the different deities could not work together. It might even be said that our experience of the world provides more evidence of such variety of governing forces than the reverse. 6.75–8 provides an account of Abraham's thinking when he watches the planets and thinks they are variously in charge of the world, revising his beliefs all the time as their lights wax and wane. Even the sun proves to be insufficient, and Abraham concludes that the cause of the world cannot be in it, it cannot be something that is associated with other physical things but must be some unique being that

is behind everything that happens. This leads him to monotheism, and the particular type of monotheism put forward in the Qur'an. Despite the beauty of the passage in which this argument is found, the argument itself is not particularly strong. Once philosophers got working on these issues they tried to present more rigorous approaches to the topic.

Philosophical arguments for the existence of God

The most common is some version of the cosmological argument, which all basically stipulate that the existence of the world can be traced back to an ultimate cause, and this series of events cannot proceed indefinitely and must stop at a "first cause," God the creator. Another argument is broadly called ontological, and argues that since we can conceive of a God that is in our minds and is the greatest being that can be conceived of, either it exists only in thought or also in reality, but since the latter is a superior existence or possibility to the former, this "greatest being" must exist in thought and in reality as well as in thought. Then there are arguments broadly from design, which fit in nicely with the Qur'an, where we observe all the wonderful complexity and harmony of creation and conclude that a supremely powerful, kind, and wise creator is behind it all. Finally there are proofs which are based on personal spiritual experience. Some arguments combine a variety of these features.

A problem that the early philosophers had was that while the theological vocabulary of Islam was well developed right from the start, the philosophical vocabulary was not. This had to be created as texts were translated and translators struggled to find Arabic equivalents for the language they were translating out of. One of the most energetic sources of proofs for the existence of God is Ibn Sina (Avicenna) who created a rich ontological vocabulary based very much on the pioneering work of al-Farabi. He discusses two kinds of existence to distinguish between the divine and the mortal, between the necessary and the merely possible, and something which is possible requires something else to bring it into actual existence. If it is only possible then something must happen to move it from just being possible to being actual. Not everything can be possible in the sense of depending on something else to bring it into existence. If everything could, there would be an infinite regress, there has to be something that is more than possible, but actually necessary, to be at the basis of the whole series of existing things and get them moved from possibility to actuality. Whatever it is that makes the possible actual, it itself requires something to bring it into existence, and so we continue until we reach the ultimate cause, the one thing that brings everything into existence and does not itself require anything to bring it into existence, a being which necessitates its own existence and does not require a cause. In any case, if we think of a being with necessary existence we cannot think of it as not existing, since if we could think of it as not existing it cannot be the concept of something necessarily existing.

These fairly brief remarks by Ibn Sina have been built on a great deal in Islamic philosophy, and Tusi distinguishes between three sorts of argument that can

be derived from Ibn Sina's remarks in the *Metaphysics* section of his *al-Shifa*, and these are the *kalam* cosmological argument, the proof from motion that derives from Aristotle's *Physics*, and an ontological argument. The last argument has the highest status and Ibn Sina himself calls it the *burhan al-siddiqin*, the proof of the veracious. Mulla Sadra develops the argument into what he calls the way of the veracious (*sabil al-siddiqin*). What he means by *siddiq* is not the same as Ibn Sina and the gap in meaning is a good illustration of the difference in their philosophical method. For Mulla Sadra, the *siddiq* is one who possesses inner religious experience that is achieved through grace and spiritual exercise. In the exegesis of 57.19 on the phrase "those who believe in God and His messengers are the veracious ones and witness before their Lord," he argues that the *siddiq* is characterized by witnessing the truth through inner revelation. It is not just a matter of coming to grasp a theoretical argument but also involves personal feelings and insights. This is more than just an intellectual achievement. It represents the result of inner mystical revelation (*kashf*) and the overcoming of the body and its influence on us, all aspects of having been on a serious and successful Sufi path.

Ibn Sina's argument was insufficient in part because Mulla Sadra disapproved of his prioritizing essence over existence. There was a protracted dispute in Islamic philosophy as to whether existence or essence is the basic ontological concept. Some thinkers argued that we should start by looking at the things which actually exist, and work from there to discuss the concepts we can form of them and of other things also, such as things we can only imagine. Others took the opposite line, and started with concepts, some of which encompass existing things and some which deal with objects in a wider sense. One can see advantages and disadvantages in both approaches. Mulla Sadra saw Ibn Sina as avoiding the concrete reality of being and remaining stuck in the realm of ideas. Existence is a concrete reality that is simple and unique. There is no distinction among its individuals essentially except in terms of degrees of perfection and imperfection and intensity and weakness. Journey III of the *Four Journeys* begins with a discussion of the ways of proving the existence of God. Having noted previous cosmological and ontological proofs, Mulla Sadra expresses his own "method of the veracious" (*manhaj al-siddiqin*). This is based on the reality of existence (*haqiqat al-wujud*), which is simple (*amran basitan*), and so without an essence or a constituent property or a means of being defined. It is identical to the necessary, requiring the most complete perfection that is infinitely intense, because every other degree of existence, which is weaker in intensity, is below the level of the pure reality of existence.

Apart from the necessary being, everything else is lacking since it is deprived, to a degree, of perfection. Its existence is limited.

The argument goes like this:

1 There is existence.
2 Existence in its purest form is a perfection and cannot be refined further as an idea.

3 God is perfection and by definition is also an actualized perfection.
4 Existence is a reality.
5 That reality is graded in intensity in a scale of perfection, so most examples of it are not completely simple.
6 The continuum of existence must have a limit point, a point of greatest intensity and of greatest existence.
7 That extreme point is equivalent to God, who then must exist.

Thus the proof begins with the concept and reality of existence and of God and ends with it. Given Mulla Sadra's enthusiasm for the role of existence, this is entirely appropriate. It seems to be a type of ontological proof, and so tautological. Even Mulla Sadra is not that happy with it, and he argues that the reality of existence is so rich that it eludes human ability to confine it to discourse through description. It is not surprising then that he calls it a *manhaj al-siddiqin* or way to the truth and not strictly speaking a demonstrative proof. This is well understood in contemporary Islamic theology, and Tabataba'i suggests that Mulla Sadra does not provide a demonstration because in effect all proofs for the existence of God begin with his effects and deduce his existence as the cause of those effects. This is because existence is an a priori intuition that all sound intellects possess and, within that intuition, the existence of a Necessary Being is logically necessary in the sense that it is something we cannot deny. Proofs for the existence of God, therefore, are not attempts at producing demonstrations that convince but are mere reminders to what we already know through experience. They merely confirm what information we already possess. This brings out nicely the ways in which many leading Muslim thinkers do not take seriously the prospect of atheism.

Some arguments from contingency

In Islamic theology two types of argument proved to be very popular, the argument from particularization (*takhsis*) and through tipping the scales (*tarjih*). Al-Juwayni produces a good example of the former, when he argues that since the world could have been created at any time at all, the fact that it was created at a particular time and in a particular way demonstrates that someone must have made the decision to create it thus. This form of argument is based no doubt on Ibn Sina's notion of contingency, whereby something is always needed to bring the possibly existent into actual existence. This cause must eventually be linked with a necessary existent, something that can bring the line of causes and effects to an end. Ibn Sina himself would not have accepted that the proof shows that the world was created in time, something for which he was attacked later on by al-Ghazali. For Ibn Sina the world could not be created in time since that would presuppose an infinite regress of causes of creation. Al-Ghazali rejected this in favor of the view that since any moment of time before the existence of the world is indistinguishable from any other, there must be an agent who tips the scales (*tarjih*) in favor of a particular time

and creates the world then (Leaman 2001: 55–77, Leaman 2009: 24–6). A variation of this theme can be found in Ibn al-'Arabi who uses the Qur'anic notion of the *barzakh* (25.53) or limit to explain how things can be composed of two different sorts of entities which would normally be expected to be incompatible, or destroy each other. Yet they coexist within a particular event, the creation of something, and that can only be possible if someone brings that about, and in that specific way, and that creator is ultimately God. Were it not for God there could be no explanation for how such incompatible things could get together and result in something else.

Ibn Rushd follows what he takes to be Aristotle's approach to the proof for the existence of God, arguing that there must be a first cause to avoid the existence of an infinite regress of causes. Apart from it, every other cause is also an effect in a long and complex series. There must be something at the source of the series to start it off without itself being in the series.

The *kalam* cosmological argument

One form of the cosmological argument has recently been revived in the Anglo-American philosophical sphere by William Lane Craig and called the *kalam* cosmological argument (nicely described in Meister 2009: 76–83). The crucial starting point of the argument is that the world is finite and so requires a cause.

1 Everything that has a beginning of its existence has a cause of its existence.
2 The universe has a beginning of its existence.

Therefore:

3 The universe has a cause of some kind of its existence.
4 If the universe has a cause of its existence then that cause is either God or something impersonal.
5 The cause of the universe is not impersonal

Therefore:

6 The cause of the universe is a God who exists.

What makes the title of this argument very appropriate is the fact that it does accurately represent the ways in which many of the philosophers in the Islamic world challenged strenuously the Aristotelian thesis that the world has no beginning and so is infinite, which was then the main cosmological view of philosophy. The modern argument is particularly interested in theories of the creation of the universe such as Big Bang which do indeed suggest that the universe had a start at some point, which of course also fits in nicely with the theistic principle embedded in most understandings of the Qur'an. The argument is valid as it stands but the question is whether the premises are true.

One aspect of the argument that has been much examined is the idea that the world has to have a beginning and cannot go into the past forever. We tend to think that an infinite series going back into the past is inconceivable. In any case, there are theories which we accept today such as the second law of thermodynamics according to which energy decreases over time, and so things must have started at some point for them to reach the present level with which we are familiar. In any case, the increasing popularity of the Big Bang theory of the creation of the universe does suggest a start at some point, and this also fits in nicely with the *kalam* cosmological argument. But the important issue is whether we have to posit a personal creator as at the source of such a creation. The idea of the original event occurring all by itself seems mysterious, and solving it with God causing the world to come into existence fits in nicely with Islam. What caused God to do this, though? Nothing, he did it freely and of his own accord, and not in a way that was determined by anything prior to him. Then of course we have an example of an uncaused cause, which is what the argument suggests we cannot have, but perhaps this only works for God, given his uniqueness. This seems to beg the question, though, or at the very least explains the creation of the world by asking us to believe something that is difficult to understand.

Arguments from design

The teleological/design argument has also been used by a number of classical Muslim thinkers who see it as following the various scriptural passages that point to a purpose that God has in creating the world (21.16). Not only is there a purpose but it can be observed when looking at the world in the right sort of way.

Probably the earliest version of it goes back to al-Kindi who suggested that the orderly and wonderful phenomena of nature could not be purposeless and accidental. Al-Baqillani expressed the argument thus: the world must have a maker and a fashioner (*muhdith wa musawwir*) just as writing must have a writer, a picture must have a painter, and a building a builder. This sort of argument is frequently referred to in both Islamic philosophy and theology. In his short *Decisive Treatise*, Ibn Rushd begins his demonstration of the lawfulness of doing philosophy, for those who are capable of it, by defining philosophy as the discovery of the meaning of the world in terms of how it is organized and who set it in motion. In his *Kashf* he refers to the order of creation as providing evidence of the existence of a creator. It is the order of creation that establishes the need for a creator and so rules out the suggestion it could have come about through natural processes alone. The argument is that the organization of the world is evidence of the existence of a creator who decided it should take that shape, and it is not possible for the world to have come about in any other way. His differences from the theologians are that they tend to argue from the principle that the nature of existence is constructed by someone outside nature, while Ibn Rushd goes further and argues that the more one

understands the structure of the natural world, the more certain one can be that it originates with a creator. The philosopher then understands the nature not only of the world but also its links with God better than the theologian who really only establishes a link between the world and a creator, without really understanding the nature of that link, since they do not really understand much about the nature of the order that persists naturally.

He has a point in that the Ash'arites were so concerned to emphasize the power of God over everything that happens that they reinterpret the organization of nature as just what God does, since they regard it as the result of divine action. God does not have to create the world in a particular way, for our benefit for example, or for his. On the contrary, God could have created it in any way he wanted to so for them it is just the fact of creation that points to a creator, as al-Baqillani suggests. Yet Ibn Rushd suggests with some justification that noting the organization of creation, its apparent providence, works as an argument both for the public at large and for those who are able, through their understanding of science, to appreciate the finer details of the nature of creation, i.e. natural science. That is why the pursuit of philosophy is lawful in Islam on his view, it helps us elucidate the nature of the world that logically leads to the idea and explanation of the role of the creation. In fact, he goes further and suggests that philosophy must be used by those capable of employing it since it provides the only clear and certain route to the truth concerning its subject matter.

The divine attributes and the unity of God

The early theologians in Islam were interested in a number of issues relating to God, in particular the reconciliation of the rather anthropomorphic language sometimes used in the Qur'an and the insistence in Islam on the unity of God and his distinctness from anything material. Yet the Book refers to God sitting on a throne and so on, and this gives rise to the familiar problems in reconciling physical imagery with a non-physical subject. The God of Islam is taken to be perfectly and only one and this is repeated several times a day in the prayers, in the phrase "there is no God except God and Muhammad is his messenger." Although the Arabic term *Allah* has no plurals, the term which it comes from, *al-ilah*, does, referring to deities, and in pre-Islamic Arabia there were many religions that believed in gods, and also some that believed in just one God. In pre-Islamic Mecca the Ka'ba site was the home of both the gods and God himself, as we are told in the Qur'an, and the main and obvious difference between them seems to have been that God was not represented physically while the gods were. The gods were presumably not difficult to describe since they were physically there in front of their worshippers, or their representatives were, but God himself is more mysterious, since he is immaterial. Muslims are constantly warned not to try to define him, but rather to concentrate on understanding him through concentrating on his effects.

One of the approved paths to thinking about God is meditation on his names, of which there are often taken to be 99, although this number is not actually

mentioned in the Qur'an, and there are other calculations also. There is a passage at 59.22–4 which mentions around 15 names but some argue that a careful analysis of the Qur'an will yield 99 and yet more names (7.180, 17.110, 20.8). The theology before the time of the Prophet is not easy to describe from what we know now, but perhaps it was taken to be God himself who rules and organizes everything (10.31, 39.38), while the lesser gods did the lighter lifting. Even when polluted by polytheism the Ka'ba was regarded as significant by the Qur'an, and the attack with an elephant of the Ethiopian king Abraha, a Christian ruler, was defeated by divine intervention through flying insects (105.1–2). *Sura*s 105 and 106 speak with some respect of the ceremonies that surrounded the structure, even though they were not at all monotheistic, perhaps recalling the time of the origins of the building at the time of Abraham and Ishmael. This location is taken to be originally used for the purest forms of worship that the Prophet was sent to re-establish. The Qur'an fiercely rejects the idea that the gods are required to act as mediators between humanity and God himself (10.18), an idea which comes to be classified as *shirk* or idolatry, quite appropriately, and to interfere with the transcendence of the one God. On the other hand, there are some fairly approving references in the Qur'an to lesser beings, which may be believed in provided that they are regarded firmly as God's creatures and not independent of him or indeed as providing independent channels to him.

Perhaps one of the innovations that Islam makes is to identify God with the God of Judaism and Christianity, and so linked with Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. This is the God of the Quraysh, Muhammad's tribe and the controllers of the lucrative Mecca pilgrimage business. But the trouble here is that the divine attributes can only really be linked through human understanding and so are limited compared to the perfect way in which they are exemplified in the deity himself. It also means that we might think we know what God is like, and then we think we know who he is, and yet the nature of God is far beyond our understanding. This is nicely captured by the suggestion by many theologians that we just have to accept what we read in the Qur'an without really understanding what it means, *bi la kayfa*, as the Arabic goes. So we are famously told that God sits on a throne, but we have no idea how he could do this, since he has no body. We just have to believe it without understanding what it really means or how it could be done.

The most concise definition of God in Islam is given in the four verses of *sura Ikhlas* which is Chapter 112 of the Qur'an: "Say: 'He is God, one and only. God, the eternal, absolute. He begets not, nor is He begotten. And there is none like Him'" (112.1–4). This is often recited during important ceremonies or at crucial life stages, and it is a particularly fine piece of linguistic expression, economical and yet at the same time suggestive. The principle of *tawhid*, the unity of God, is difficult to make clear since so much of our lives and experience is diverse and out of harmony with the notion of complete unity. The Qur'an accordingly goes into a lot of detail on what divine unity means in various places, and why it is so important. The theme is that this original belief in one God had been corrupted over time until at the time of the Prophet many gods were worshipped in Arabia, and the Arabs in particular tended

to associate the one God with other deities. The final message of the Qur'an is designed to replace this new set of beliefs and practices with a revived monotheism. The aim is to get humanity back to where it was in the past and provide the last in the long series of revelations.

We are told: "No vision can grasp Him but his grasp is over all vision: He is above all comprehension, yet is acquainted with all things" (6.103). This is the familiar problem with describing a being in terms we can understand while not allowing those terms to limit him in our conception in unacceptable ways. If we say that we cannot describe him then it looks as though we cannot talk about him, nor his properties, and then it is difficult to know what it means to use the name, or to say that he is one. Yet the Qur'an tells us a lot about God, for instance that he is constantly just: "God is never unjust in the least degree" (4.40), never gets things wrong or forgets: "My Lord never errs or forgets" (20.52), and God has power over all things (2.106; 2.109; 2.284; 3.29; 16.77; and 35.1). "God is the doer of all that He intends" (85.16) expresses this nicely. So we have some ideas about God here which makes him a bit like us, in the sense that like us he knows things and can do things he wants to do, but unlike us he never makes mistakes and there is nothing he cannot do, and this looks like a difference of degree, not kind. Ibn Taymiyya (*al-'Aqida al-wasitiyya*) argues that what we should believe is that we can appropriately predicate of God what he has predicated of himself or what the Prophet has predicated of him, without changing it in any way (*tahrif*), or draining it of content (*ta'til*) or saying anything about its modality (*takyif*) or imagining it on the pattern of anything else (*tamthil*). It is not correct to liken his properties to the attributes of his creatures. "There is nothing like him, though he is hearing and seeing" (42.11). There is absolutely nothing like him, either in his essence or in his attributes or in his acts. The interesting question is how it is possible to understand this.

God's names

We are told:

> And to God belong the most beautiful names, so call on Him by them. And keep apart from those who practice deviation [*ilhad*] concerning his names. They will be recompensed for what they do.
>
> (7.180)

A plausible meaning of *ilhad* is to incline, to turn aside. It is used in this and other contexts to denote inclining toward some falsehood. This includes giving him inappropriate names, to deny (*ta'til*) or distort their meanings (*tahrif*, *ta'wil*), or claim they have no meaning (*tafwid*), to consider them to be like human attributes (*tajsim*, *tamthil*, *tashbih*), to name idols or other beings with the names of God or their derivatives from the beautiful names, such as al-'Uzza from al-'Aziz, al-Manat from al-Mannan, and so on.

One way of exploring the unity idea is by criticizing alternatives such as the idea that there could be other deities in existence along with the one God: "If there were, in the heavens and the earth, other gods besides God, there would have been confusion in both!" (21.22). This is the argument that a multiplicity of gods would bring about disharmony in the running of the world. We shall return to it on a number of occasions. It might be said as an objection that our experience of the world is more in line with the existence of many gods, since for many people there is confusion in the heavens and the earth. Terrible things happen for no apparent reason, prayer often seems to have no effect on our future during this world, and the idea that the world is controlled by arbitrary divine forces who are often in conflict with each other seems quite plausible. We could then provide some account of how the gods disagree with each other, pick favorites and have affairs amongst themselves and others which impinge on our lives, rather like the gods in the Greek myths, and use that as the background to explain the activities of the heavens and the earth with which we are familiar.

The Qur'an has no patience with such a view. If there were more than one God, they would have taken away what they created, disagreed among themselves about what to create, leading to confusion (23.91). It is not clear why this is so, since there need not be a survival of the fittest rule among the gods. The more powerful gods could have coexisted with the weaker, that is what happens with the Greek gods. The idea is that what one god did another god could undo, and that is true, and they did according to the myths. Homer in his account of the Trojan campaign and the return of Odysseus to his home afterwards speaks of the ways in which the different gods supported different individuals, right from the start of the conflict which was started by Paris engaging the support of one deity at the expense of hostility from others. The Greek fleet was only allowed to set off when a particularly gruesome sacrifice was made to a god, that of the commander's daughter, and it was the role of the soothsayers to divine the wishes of the gods and try to find ways of assuaging them and bringing them on side. One of the delights of Homer is that he makes this sequence of events very plausible, not in the sense that we necessarily believe that they happened like that, but that they could have, and we can imagine different powerful deities supporting different people and seeing them as playing out a role in their disputes with other gods. In fact, our experience is often of things happening which could accord with this, disasters suddenly occur for no apparent reason, successes also. Perhaps there is some drama going on in heaven which has an effect on this world and is inexplicable to us but needs to be addressed by the carrying out of religious rituals such as sacrifices to particular divine beings whom we hope will support our cause.

The Qur'an rules out such a possibility: "Say: 'Who is it that sustains you from the sky and from the earth? Or who is it that has power over hearing and sight? And who is it that brings the living out from the dead and the dead from the living? And who is it that rules and regulates all affairs?' They will soon say, 'God'. Say, 'Will you not then show piety?'" (10.31). A similar example is repeated in *Sura* Zukhruf: "If you ask them who created them, they will

certainly say, 'God': how then are they deluded?" (43.87). The pagan Meccans knew that God was their creator but they were not Muslims because they also worshipped other gods besides God. God categorized them as *kuffar* (disbelievers) and *mushrikun* (idol worshippers and those who associate partners with God) (12.106).

So the argument is that the other candidates for divinity are powerless and there is no point in praying to them. They can do nothing on our behalf.

The two names which are frequently applied to God are *al-rahman* and *al-rahim*, the compassionate, the merciful, and these might be taken to be his outstanding characteristics that control many of the others. At one stage it is likely that the Arabs found the use of the name *al-rahman* confusing, wondering how it connected up with their conception of Allah, since we find in the Qur'an at 17.110 "Pray to Allah or pray to *al-Rahman*, whichever you call upon, to him belong the beautiful names." Muslims frequently invoke the name of God in a formula before initiating action or just in reacting to news and greeting others. Every *sura* except one (9) starts with the phrase: "In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate."

Some argued that the divine attributes were themselves created by God, so as not to interfere with divine unity, while others that they really coexisted with him. If the Qur'an was created by him then he was its author, while others in what turned out to be the more popular view took the line that it was eternal. This led to a protracted debate on whether God controlled everything in the world, or whether there was some scope for human freedom. The debate also discussed whether God was obliged to do what is good and right, and act in our interests, or whether whatever he does is by definition good and right. No independent principles of morality can be regarded as governing his actions, since this would be to detract from his perfection and omnipotence, the Ash'arites argued. Their view prevailed, as did their suggestion that really God controls everything that happens in the world and the only reason it does not seem to be thus is because we appear to acquire (*kasb*) what he does. This interpretation fits in nicely with the stress in the earlier verses of the Qur'an of divine *rububiyya* (sovereignty) and absolute rule. Divine knowledge extends to every leaf that falls (6.59) and the conception of every woman (35.11). One of the constant themes of the Qur'an is the significance of the afterlife and our punishment and/or reward there, and God's role in distinguishing between who deserve to go where. A range of attributes is mentioned which mean that we must both fear God and hope for his forgiveness, expect to be tested by him and also hope to receive his mercy. As we shall see, there are a variety of ways of interpreting these principles also.

Further reading

Corbin 1993, Craig 1979, 1993, Davidson 1968, 1987, Genequand 1984, al-Ghazali 1997, Leaman 2001, 2009, Mayer 2001, Meister 2009, Morewedge 1979, Mulla Sadra 1981.

4 Islamic design, civilization and the city

What makes a building Islamic?

The most obvious building to consider under this heading is the mosque, a building with a religious function. Muslims can pray almost anywhere of course but the mosque is a building especially built for that purpose, and a variety of designs of such buildings have been tried over the years. Different cultures favor different types of mosques, and often allegiance to a region of the world is indicated by the sort of mosque that is constructed. The Ottoman Empire had a wonderful architect, Sinan, who designed and supervised the construction of many mosques and similar buildings, and it is very difficult to get away from the influence of someone like that. In recent decades there has been a plethora of mosque construction in Turkey, during a period when religion became fashionable again and when it became cool to pray and be seen to be attached to a place of worship. The styles of most of these mosques has been pedestrian at best, many of them seek to follow some of the general patterns of Turkish mosques, sometimes looking back to the Seljuk period, sometimes to Sinan himself, and sometimes to a more Arab character, often depending on who the patron of the building is and the doctrinal allegiance of the local community.

There is always a tension in aesthetics between forging a new path and respecting the past, a tension which becomes even more interesting in the design of religious buildings, since precisely the same tension exists in religion, and especially in Islam. Although people often link Islam with tradition, its version of the monotheistic idea was quite revolutionary. When the Prophet came to deliver the last message it was revolutionary again in going against many of the beliefs and customs of the local Arabs who received the original message. On the other hand, the ways in which art and architecture developed in the early Islamic world owed a great deal to existing techniques and styles, hardly surprising given that most of the artists and craftsmen themselves were not in fact Muslims. Once certain styles developed it was easy to see them as specifically Islamic and traditional, and difficult to get away from in new buildings. So in Turkey when Vedat Dalokay designed a new type of mosque for Kocatepe which sought to move away from the sorts of principles that had

been well established by Sinan and his school, it did not proceed but was changed into something much more familiar (Bozdoğan and Akcan 2012). The idea that architects have to follow fixed and transcendental values that Turkish mosques seek to emulate often results in pastiche. A problem with those buildings is that they seek to answer the question, what makes a building Islamic or what makes a building Turkish, and so they look to the past for an answer to such a question. Only the past would have an answer since both Islam and Turkishness come from the past.

Here we need to distinguish between two Turkish words *medeniyet* and *uygarlık*. They both can mean civilized, but the former points more to a city and a culture, while the latter to a form of being Turkish, being part of what was originally a tribe. They reflect the same sort of tension we noted originally dealing with the nature of religion and art, and is a part of what is meant by civilization itself. In recent architectural designs in Muslim majority countries a sort of nostalgia for the past, a past which of course never really existed, has come to dominate design even for nonreligious buildings, where a kind of exoticism has come to the fore, as though orientalism has come to be seen as an accurate account of what the East ought to be, rather than a crude form of objectification by those ignorant of its real character. On the other hand, it is worth trying to define a style which is not merely a copy of what goes on elsewhere, as though the best that could be done is to imitate the achievements and ideas of those from outside of the region. Some exciting new buildings succeed because they make very few concessions to the past, and demand to be assessed in their own terms. These buildings reject the nostalgia that so often pervades issues of how to build today in ways that respect the past without being dominated by it.

What makes a city Islamic?

Before we can make progress in trying to understand what makes a building Islamic, we need to examine the context within which that building operates, in most cases now the city. The obvious first issue that arises with respect to the Islamic city, and the most prominent, is whether there is an essence to the Islamic city. Is there something which they all have to have and which differentiates them from other kinds of city? There are many problems with this approach, especially as there is such a huge variety of cities that can be called Islamic. Old and existing cities tended to maintain the structure of the city that the new rulers found when, as in the early years of expansion, they captured it. Within the first century of Islam such a wide variety of different countries were occupied and gradually transformed in religious terms that it is very difficult to extract something they all had in common. The sorts of cities in Persia, for instance, were very different from those in North Africa, so the arrival of Islam did not totally transform those cities and make them into something similar to each other, apart from the building of some specifically Islamic institutions such as mosques and madrasas. This brings us to another issue of some significance

and that is the expression "the Islamic city," which suggests a contrast with the non-Islamic city. Here we are invited to accept the existence of a very real contrast with the modern city and its earlier predecessors, since today there are Muslims everywhere and virtually no city is without at least some Islamic institutions. This is a real difference from the past, when Muslims were largely restricted to certain parts of the world, those areas which they dominated, and were rare and exotic creatures elsewhere. It raises an interesting aesthetic issue, which is how different Islamic architecture in the city ought to be from what is around it, and how similar it ought to be to what is taken to be original Islamic cities such as those in the Arab peninsula.

Religion and the city

An intriguing question about the potential Islamic city, which is taken here to mean a city with a substantial Muslim presence, is how far faith structures the city. We should see a city not just as empty space which has things in it, but as an environment which produces and reproduces social relationships, including attitudes to the past and future. The buildings and shape of the city reflect those who live in it, their ideas and aspirations, and the legal structure within which they live and work. Some of this will be based on local custom and some of it on religion, in the case here Islam. So for example O'Meara (2007) argues in his analysis of Fez that the positioning, height and rationale for the walls in the city derive from Islam, local custom and the need to protect the rules of privacy and modesty within that cultural environment. Hakim (1986) makes a similar point, arguing that Maliki thought played a crucial role in the design of Tunis. On the other hand, Faroqhi (1987) and Marcus (1989) do not detect much of what are taken to be features of the traditional Islamic city in the cities they studied, and all the generalizations about the separation of people into distinct quarters, a diminished public role for women, special arrangements in the construction of houses to preserve their modesty are not found in at least some Islamic cities.

One of the relevant factors is whether in a climate like that of the Maghreb walls would (also) be helpful in protecting inhabitants from the sun and keeping them relatively protected from the cold at night. It is certainly true that one should not treat architecture as though it were only a matter of dealing with nature, since it is far more than that, and yet there are ways in which buildings fit their natural environments which has little if anything to do with culture, but much to do with the facts of nature. After the defeat of the Iraqis in 1993 they left Kuwait and returning Kuwaitis were often in two minds about how to build or rebuild their houses. Some were in favor of modern buildings which went along with traditional architectural styles, while others wanted to import modern architecture which made no references at all to the region in which it found itself. Presumably both would be equally good or bad at fitting in with the local environment. In a country with cheap sources of power issues like how much it would cost to cool a house built in a particular way are not that relevant. This is also a significant feature that has no direct religious roots

either. It is worth pointing out that religious buildings often have a political rather than a religious function. Wolper points out that dervish lodges and madrasas were used in Turkish cities to oppose the existing Seljuk organization of urban space. Some rulers supported the building of Sufi lodges to project their power at a distance and engage and energize supporters in strategic locations.

Islamic cities and tradition

There are accounts of Islamic city design that emphasize the religious need to fit in with the local environment. The Qur'an makes it clear that we are obliged to look after nature responsibly, and that means not exploiting the environment or treating it as though it were there entirely for our purposes. This approach seeks to develop the idea of an objective aesthetic of design, whereby certain principles of design are mandated from heaven, as it were. They embody the appropriate way in which things should be built given our nature as living in a world created by God where we have divinely-specified aims and natures. An important school of Muslim thinkers like Seyyed Hossein Nasr and René Guénon, and their followers, argue interestingly in this way. For them the Islamic city should be an environment in which people care for each other, take responsibility for the state of common spaces, and build in a "traditional" manner since that embodies deep metaphysical truths in the design. In very much the same way the Prince of Wales argues in Britain that tradition is more than just a style based on the past, but rather is a style based on some basic and eternal truth which needs to be replicated constantly into the future. He has even created a college in London, the Prince's School of Traditional Arts, to encourage craftsmen and women to display and develop their traditional crafts. Many of these are Muslim and the theory on which this approach is based is that behind all these traditional styles there is a profound and perhaps common truth, albeit they have each developed in different directions along the way. More relevant to our purposes here, the Prince of Wales thinks that architecture needs to be holistic. That generally means for him classical or neoclassical, since in that style is embodied the traditional values of elegance, control and harmony on which society ought to be based. By contrast, modern or postmodern architectural design is negative and ugly in its approach and represents social forces that we ought to try to discourage rather than foster. This remains a popular view, especially within Islam, that something very different is required of the Islamic city as compared with other cities.

The principles of design should reflect a unique lifestyle, one that is aligned with our real nature as human beings created by God. God told us how to live in the Qur'an, and those instructions constitute principles from which the planning of the city should follow, and indeed has followed at least for periods of the past. Not only cities but individual buildings and their design should reflect these transcendental principles of how things ought to be. Those principles were after all established by God, and anything that deviates from them does not deserve a place in any building that can be called Islamic. This was

precisely the point that Cansever, a more "traditional" Turkish architect, made in opposing the original design of the Kocatepe mosque. There was nothing wrong with the design insofar as it is the design of a building in general, but it would not do for an Islamic building.

Janet Abu-Lughod makes a bold claim, which could be taken to be a challenge. She argues that "The Middle Eastern city is not all of one piece; it is not simply a special 'urban type' which differs from western cities by virtue of its unique Islamic heritage or by virtue of the particular culture in which it grows" (Lapidus 1969: 180). But why not? If Islam is a significant religion, which it is, then being a Muslim makes a difference to people's lives, and presumably not only to the spiritual aspects of those lives but to their material conditions also. One of the claims that Muslims often make to differentiate their religion from others is to say that it is not just a system of belief but affects the whole of life. This is actually not much of a principle of differentiation from other religions since virtually all of them say something similar. Few religions if any produce a set of principles in which one is supposed to believe and then says that behavior can take any form whatsoever. So if Muslims are going to live different lives from non-Muslims, it would seem to follow that this would change the urban landscape accordingly. There have been many attempts to distinguish between the Islamic city and the Western city, and these fall into the familiar orientalist patterns of trying to lean on an essence which distinguishes the East and the West. Muslims visiting the West for the first time will often be shocked by the lifestyles of the inhabitants but impressed by their material wealth. If they come from a wealthy background, they may well note the highly developed culture that pervades much of the West yet with little agreement on fundamental lifestyles. Non-Muslims visiting the Islamic world will often be shocked by the poverty, either material or intellectual, and disorganization which they perceive to exist there but are impressed by the high levels of religiosity among many of the inhabitants, and the relaxed way in which religion pervades everyday life. Visiting cities emphasizes these points, cities act to amplify the characteristics of a country. Abu-Lughod broadens the point to stress not necessarily Islam but perhaps instead the local culture, and we might add in general some combination of the two. It would be entirely reasonable to think that religion and culture must make a difference, since if they do not, one is tempted to say, what is the point of them? We note differences between cities and we quite reasonably conclude that there is some reason for that difference, and the reason is to be found, it is often assumed, in some difference perhaps between the inhabitants, a cultural or religious difference, or something of that nature.

How unique is the Islamic city?

Abdulaziz Saqqaf pursues this point and suggests:

> The Islamic city requires social cohesion and compulsory cooperation among its inhabitants. Residents have an obligation, in concrete economic

> and social terms, towards their neighbors in a radius encompassing as a minimum, 40 houses. Therefore, neighborly cooperation, and full knowledge of the members of the neighborhood is necessary … The togetherness of Islamic city inhabitants compares markedly with the loneliness of modern city people.
>
> (Saqqaf 1987: 43)

He goes on to construct a list of important aspects of life in the Islamic city which makes it pleasant, beautiful, clean and also private, which one might think would rather get in the way of knowing the neighbors. In the same volume Cyrus Mechkat argues (in a section called "The Eastern traditional city has nothing in common with the Western town") that "The city invested by Islam reflects the religious purpose to permanently maintain and safeguard its values. The industrial town is the product of an enterprising society … Within the two urban entities, human relationships differ fundamentally" (Saqqaf 1987: 27). The idea is that in the West everything changes and there is a premium on invention and enterprise, while the reverse is the case in the Islamic city. Western cities may well be wealthier as a result than Islamic cities, but the latter are better at fostering traditional values. However, one of the distinctive features of Islam perhaps is that its leading figure, the Prophet Muhammad, was himself a trader initially and came from a thoroughly commercial background, as did his first wife. Much of the opposition to him from his own community may well have been motivated by their concerns that a new form of worship would interfere with their monopolization of the pilgrimage trade to Mecca. It is perhaps not coincidental that Islam very quickly came to institutionalize that trade as part of its core beliefs, and presumably that form of commercial life as a consequence continued to the mutual profit of all involved. There are a number of significant direct references to commerce in the Qur'an, and it seems likely that the sort of urban life that is being described is not taken to be that distinct from the past arrangements.

It is stated in the Qur'an: "Those who, when they spend, are not extravagant and not niggardly, but there is a happy mean between them" (25.67). Islam sees itself very much as a religion in the middle, between the asceticism of Christianity and the materialism of Judaism. Muslims are to divert resources to charity, *zakat*, and pray of course, but they are certainly encouraged to play a committed commercial role also. The Qur'an links businessmen, and in particular those who travel for the purpose of trade, alongside the *mujahidun* (73.20). Islam does not oppose activities aimed at promoting business and industry. This is to be done with great sensitivity to the ethical rules specified by the Qur'an and the *sunna* of the prophet. The emphasis on moderation might be thought to suggest that people should not live in huge houses, or tiny houses, but in medium-sized houses, but suppose that you have a lot of children or an extended family, or a lot of money which you would like to spend on a large house? Is there anything wrong with that, if you have also given money to charity and taken care of your other financial obligations? Is there anything

wrong with building huge structures that project the success of the institution behind it, as often takes place? Some of the most magnificent buildings in the Islamic world are enormous, and it is their scale that we often admire as much as their other features.

It is difficult to argue that relationships in the Islamic city and elsewhere would be very different from each other. Muslims are also in competition with each other, and no doubt with non-Muslims also, and have to deal with financial success and failure. That is not to say that the Islamic economic system is the same as other economic systems, but the suggestion that the Islamic city progresses through everyone loving everyone else and helping each other is far from the picture we get in the Qur'an and the rest of the exegetical literature. It certainly bears no resemblance to anything that has ever existed in the past or present.

The significance of size

One of the problems of Islamic cities today is that they have become so large it is difficult for the old habits of neighborliness to flourish or even survive. Initially people come into the cities from the countryside and often live close to others from the same region or tribe or clan, yet in a big city individuals will often have to travel long distances to work, and many family members may need to work also to keep up with the cost of living. A premium on space may make people come closer to each other than they would really like, and this may encourage distance rather than the reverse. As some succeed in the city they leave their former neighborhoods and establish new relationships with similar families, violating the ideal of closeness to a specific group of people with whom one remains in close contact for much of the time. In particular, success means that neighbors are no longer required in practical terms, and may then well be discarded. Like many other religions Islam praises hospitality, high moral standards, fraternity and other social requirements, and yet in practice many Muslim societies are bereft of these virtues. *Al-amr bi'l ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*, promoting the good and opposing the wrong, is excellent as a general principle of behavior (see 3.110, 3.104, 7.157 and 9.71), but within Islamic communities it has often been lacking in practice. Rape, violence, theft, fraud and so on are surely just as common within Islamic groups as elsewhere, and this is worth bearing in mind when radical distinctions are drawn between Islamic and other kinds of cities. Some cultures are much better at concealing things, keeping them within the range of the community and private, while other cultures perhaps amplify social and moral problems in such a way as to give an entirely unrepresentative picture of that society. As commentators on the Islamic city have often pointed out, the demand for privacy is often significant, especially when women are concerned. That often means that crimes and cruelty that take place in private never see the light of day. Religion sets us the challenge to behave better, but so far there is not a lot of evidence that the challenge has really been taken up.

People living in a society and genuinely trying to base their lives on the directions of God and his Messenger would produce a harmonious and prosperous polity and city. After all, religion comes from God, who knows what sorts of creatures we are since he has created us, and he instructs us to live in certain ways that are in accordance with what he knows is best for us. If we do so we flourish, if we fail to do so we suffer. A society in which people really are interested in regulating their lives in accordance with God's will is going to be well prepared for life in a city that will not only produce wealth but also distribute it in a reasonable and just manner. This really is a theme of the Qur'an, and the fact that most Muslim societies, if not all of them, do not live up to their ideal is perhaps an indication that they are not really Muslim societies. People do not really think about what God wishes them to do before acting, and so give charity grudgingly and unwillingly, and seek to hold onto as much of their earnings as they possibly can, perhaps by concealing them from the tax authorities. People do not always treat their employees with respect or even pay them their due, if they can get away with it, and working and living conditions are often grim and exploitative. The fact that on the whole there is mass emigration from Islamic-majority countries to the rest of the world suggests that the situation in those countries is far from ideal. It is not just that they are often poor, although they are, but also that the ways in which people live and treat each other are lacking in the sort of respect that all religions regard as significant. This is very much one of the themes of the recent unrest in the Arab world, and suggests that although countries often call themselves Muslim, they are not experienced as being so by many of their inhabitants if Islam is to be more than just formally interpreted in terms of rituals and prayers. In that case, the nature of the Islamic city will sadly be far from the standards that Islam sets itself as a religion with direct implications for how people live. The formal requirement of preserving privacy is significant but surely not as significant as many of the unpleasant features that often characterize cities with majority Muslim population.

The past and the present

It might be said that an Islamic city is really only Islamic if it is run in accordance with Islamic law. After all, if the Muslims in the city come under some other sort of legal jurisdiction, they can hardly be said to be able to live really Muslim lives. But then we have another problem, which is the appropriate school of law for the location, and how that law is applied. The trouble with much of the application of *shari'a* law is that it does not proceed on the basis of case law, of considering earlier cases and what happened in the past, but through the fiat of the judge and the texts he thinks appropriate to use in adjudicating the case. The issue here is not the validity of such law, but how it is carried out, and the advantage of case law is that even if judges deviate from it, one can observe such deviation and control it, to a degree, and most importantly it provides a perspicuous grasp of the law, its interpretation and

application. There is no reason why *shari'a* law should not be developed within this hermeneutic framework, but as a matter of work in general it does not.

It might be wondered what the relevance of law and the city is, but the connection between these two institutions is deep and longstanding. The city contains the major institutions of law such as courts and the lawyers, normally, and is the place to go to settle legal disputes even if they occur in the countryside. Parts of the countryside may escape the power of the city and the state, and rebellions and lawlessness may flourish there. Outside the city the writ of authority is often weakened, and the traveler is responsible for his own welfare and protection, hence the strong customs of hospitality in the countryside which perhaps are constructed on the idea that were these not to exist, then life there would be very difficult indeed. One of the points that Ibn Khaldun made is that over time the city declines due to a love of luxury and a disinclination to cooperate within the group, and then the city is overcome by a new group who come from the countryside and who have relations with each other of solidarity which allows them to act as one body and take power. Whatever we think of the specifics of this idea there is certainly something in the idea that over time the links between people in the city, both in the past and today, weaken since cities are so big and the ways in which we can spend our time are so diverse and individual. The city authorities provide security and there are structures to preserve the law and the trappings of civilization. In the countryside, by contrast, this is all the responsibility of the group, and they have to organize things since otherwise there will be no organization. Necessarily people have to work together if anything is to be done and so people grow up expecting that cooperation and the close links they have with others to exist as part of the normal run of things. Such groups then acquire the ability to act together in ways that the city has lost, since cooperation is no longer really required in an urban setting for social life to flourish.

It is worth noting that although Ibn Khaldun was thinking of Islamic cities when he wrote his great history of civilizations, there is nothing in his account of cities which is particularly limited to Islam. One might think that within the city the Islamic community would act together because after all they are Muslims and worship one God in the same way, and appreciate the principle of *tawhid* or unity which underlies the universe. This is something which many books and articles on the principles of Islamic urban planning start off by saying, as though this really gives us a clue as to what should happen in the city. Just because one sees God as the creator of the universe and everything in it does not really have direct implications for urban planning. You may appreciate this fact and yet still not wish to work together with your neighbor. You may for example not think that your neighbor is a good person or a good Muslim, and as we have already argued, there is no reason to think that free enterprise and Islam are incompatible. That means that one has to accept a degree of conflict within the city, since different skills at commerce will result in differing levels of income. There will be winners and losers even in a city consisting entirely of Muslims, and as Ibn Khaldun points out, this may well

lead to a decline in social cohesion. An unsuccessful businessperson may just shrug her shoulders and say when her shop goes out of business that she nonetheless feels strong bonds of attachment to the person who takes over her space and her business, since we are all created by one God, but she may not. The unsuccessful tend to resent the successful, and the latter fear the former, whatever their common religious background may be. Of course, if there are religious differences here then that is often amplified by commercial success and failure, and this all contributes to the city breaking down into disparate and independent units, within which a degree of *'asabiyya* survives, but does not extend far beyond the boundaries of the local neighborhood. One difference between the modern and earlier cities is that the groups that take over the city are likelier now to come from areas of the city where disadvantaged communities act in solidarity to achieve their political ends, as opposed to those coming in from the countryside. There are today just so many fewer people living in the countryside and so many more people living in the city, albeit often on the periphery and living very peripheral lives. The principle of *tawhid* which underlies the universe does not often seem to do much to bring Muslims together in the city. In many small American towns, for instance, there are several mosques catering for the Muslim inhabitants. One is frequented by those of Arab origin, one by those coming from the Indian subcontinent and one by black Muslims. In big European cities mosques often are distinguished as the Turkish mosque, the Somali, the Egyptian and so on, which suggests that the principle of *tawhid*, significant though it is as a principle of Islam, is often not taken closely to heart in the everyday lives of many Muslims. This again suggests that the idea that the Islamic city either today or in the past would be very different from cities in other cultures and religions is far-fetched.

The Islamic city and the state

In his book *al-Madina al-fadila* al-Farabi outlines the principles of the perfect Islamic city, and although in many places he also talks about the ideal Islamic state it is worth noticing that the city seems to be the focus of his attention, and that of Muslim thinkers in general. Cities are the perfect places for *da'wa* of course, since that is where people live in a way that relatively easy access to them is afforded, and also they have a status that elevates them over the countryside. Cities are centers of education and authority, law and power, and there is often a status involved in living in a city. The city in Islamic culture has always had a crucial status (Abu-Lughod 1987). Ibn Khaldun points out that the city often represents a particular crystallization of social forces that defines a culture. Cities are important for him precisely because they establish a culture, and only a city is wealthy enough and sedate enough, in his terms, to allow for superfluous activities which are embodied in material objects like ceramics, lavish architecture and public works in general. Yet cities and the cultures they embody are merely temporary repositories of culture since they bear within themselves the seeds of their own destruction. In a sense the bigger they are,

the harder they fall, since they give rise to envy externally and corruption and softness internally, two forces that inevitably work in tandem to bring a city down.

Islam rapidly embedded itself in cities, the cities of Medina and Mecca. It is worth noting that the dating of the Islamic calendar starts with the year that Medina, the *Madina al-munawara* or the Enlightened City and previously Yathrib, offered shelter to the nascent Muslim community. It could have been regarded as having started earlier when the revelations commenced, for instance, or later when the community moved onto Mecca, but the initial emigration to Medina represented the first time the community lived in a city, and so was defined as a politically significant group. This brings out something of the significance of cities at the time, and it remains true today that it is only when events take place in cities that they are noticed and regarded as significant. In warfare it is usually the capture of cities, or their destruction, which brings the war to an end. Any amount of countryside can be under the control of the enemy and yet it is the fall of the city that marks a significant change in regime.

This emphasis on cities certainly did not stop with the two holy cities, but has continued ever since in the individual characters of the major Islamic cities, and not only those in the Arab and Persian world. Cairo, Beirut, Istanbul, Isfahan, Kuala Lumpur, Sarajevo and so on are all major cities with fascinating histories and dramatic changes of fortune, and these cities have often served as symbols of the contemporary state of Islamic culture. There is nothing like the destruction of a city, its rebirth, its prosperity or decline, to symbolize the culture as a whole. This is not the place to compare the Islamic city with those elsewhere, but it is worth just mentioning that cities outside of the Islamic world rarely take on such a large symbolic meaning. London is not Britain in the way that the Islamic city is often taken to represent its country. There is a reason for this, of course, and it rests on the extreme forces of centralization and authority that tended to operate in many Islamic countries, whether under colonial or independent government (Morony 2005). This should not be overemphasized, though, since in the past as today the links between the city and the countryside are significant. People enter the city from the countryside and often they live in the city in communities which hark back to the countryside, even if they move to a city in a different country. The rate of urbanization is high right now, and accelerating, but it has been high also during the past, and really there is only a reverse of this process due to natural disasters or warfare that results in the destruction of cities. So we have here yet another important point of similarity between earlier and modern Islamic cities, the fact that they grow larger and gradually take over the adjacent countryside.

The Islamic city and style

Another point of comparison lies in architecture. Those who see the Islamic city as relatively stable in style until at least colonialism ignore those cities

which were part of the Ottoman Empire and which quickly imported Turkish models of how buildings should look, and what sorts of sites were worth marking with special buildings. In many cases the styles involved were just as alien to the local forms of architecture as were those which came to be imported from Europe. Of course, the Ottomans were Muslims, and if one thinks that there is a common Islamic style which runs throughout the Islamic world then those Ottoman buildings would not interrupt what was already present in the parts of the Islamic world that they controlled. This is a difficult argument to make plausible since Ottoman style just is so different from much Maghrebi architecture, for example, and clearly was used to refer back to the center of the Empire. It disrupts the continuation over many centuries of what in many cities was a uniform style that must have produced very beautiful cities, since the individual buildings are attractive and en masse they would have been breathtaking, given the complex yet synchronized urban pattern that they would have constituted. But the influence of the West came to really disrupt the unity of the Islamic city, since the rush to import European forms of design imposed something quite alien to what had existed before. In many cases this resulted in a new and an old city, so the unity of the traditional buildings was not destroyed, yet once the status of living in the old city diminished, the upkeep of those buildings often suffered. Many were neglected and had to be pulled down, and were not replaced either as they had been nor in a modern way that was pleasing. In a sense the new city became the city, yet this is a process that is not exactly new either, in that cities were constantly changing what they regarded as their core and ultimate seat of authority. One of architectural features of the Arab Spring worth noting is that it took place largely along the wide boulevards of the modern Arab city, modeled as they were on Haussmann's ambitions for Paris, and Tahrir Square itself is a very Western environment. In the past new regimes would often change the center of authority in the city in order to undermine the old regime and promote the new state of affairs, sometimes using particular religious groups such as Sufis or '*ulama*' to disseminate their message and oppose the previous line. A geographical change often accompanied an ideological change, and we generally refer to parts of cities in terms of prominent buildings in this way (the White House, the Kremlin, Whitehall, etc.) where a building represents an institution which in turn represents a government and the power that backs it up.

This is just as much true today as in the past. Although colonialism and its legacy are often blamed for the difficulties that Islamic cities have had in more recent times, it is worth pointing out that for a very long time many of these cities were sites of major conflict, often between different Muslim invaders, and were destroyed and reconstructed several times before they reached their present form. The idea of a golden age in which the city reigned supreme in peace, the very name of Baghdad, the *madinat al-salam*, is more of an evocative poetic ideal than reality. The present-day difficulties and uncertainties that pervade many Islamic cities are no more than a continuation of a trend that has existed since these cities were created, and as Ibn Khaldun points out is not something that

should surprise us. In political and economic life change happens all the time, and new actors come on the stage while those previously in power find themselves gradually losing their grip on authority. Today as in the past it is often the city that forms the dramatic backdrop for such events.

The Islamic city as dystopia

Much modern Arabic literature portrays the city by contrast in a very negative light, and the village quite the opposite. The earlier period of optimism has given way to a dystopia, almost to a reflection of the Orientalist take on the Islamic city, as Byron put it: "Here is the East in its pristine confusion" (*The Road to Oxiana*). This may be very much a reflection of trends in the West to be skeptical of the enlightenment and modernization project of which the city is such an outstanding example. The city now often represents a site of alienation, an environment in which the individual is crushed and exploited. Although no doubt this was often the case in the past also, this attitude to the city is far more current today than in the past. It is probably a problem not so much in the city but in the society in which the city figures. Unemployment, poor working conditions, substandard housing and the familiar ills of urban life occur in many Islamic cities today, and again no doubt always did, but the social acceptability of such problems has radically declined recently, and so the city is experienced in a much more negative way. Whether a more Islamic city will resolve the problems of existing Islamic cities is doubtful, since these problems have nothing at all to do with religion, and everything to do with longstanding social and economic problems. According to Burdett and Sujdic cities make up only 2 percent of the world's land surface but already are inhabited by 53 percent of its population. This is expected to reach 75 percent in 2050. We should not regard this as a negative fact, since for most people leaving the countryside for the city is immensely positive in terms of living standards and no doubt culture also. But the challenges this poses, especially for those who see the city as only flourishing if a general orientation toward religion pertains, is obvious.

It has been argued throughout that there are more similarities than dissimilarities between the Islamic city in the past and today. There is one important difference which is worth mentioning, and that is that today none of the major Islamic cities are what one would call international cities like New York, London, Singapore, Hong Kong or Tokyo. They are no longer centers of commerce, industry, science and culture as they were in the past. Some of the Gulf cities are trying to take on this sort of role but surely despite the money they have for building art museums, huge hotels, tourist resorts, they are just always going to be too small and culturally dependent on others for this to be feasible. They are never going to be centers of innovation and creativity. Yet in the past the major Islamic cities were just that, centers of innovation and creativity, repositories of the world's knowledge and replete with academic and technical expertise. Again, there seems to be nothing religious about this, it is

not that Islam originally encouraged the development of science and technology, and it is not that Islam now stifles it. In that case perhaps what we have identified as a difference between the present and the past should really be regarded as a similarity, in that it is not the "Islam" in the Islamic city which changes anything, the explanation lies elsewhere. Nostalgia for the past not only has a damaging effect on architecture and urban design but also betrays a lack of confidence in the ability of religion to flourish in the modern world.

Further reading

Abu-Lughod 1987, Bozdoğan and Akcan 2012, Brown 1973, Burdett and Sujdic 2011, Çelik 1999, Elsheshtawy 2008, Es 2011, al-Farabi 1985, Faroqhi 1987, Guénon 2009, Kahera 2002, Lapidus 1969, 1973, Lassner 1970, Marcus 1989, Maussen 2009, Metcalf 1996, Morony 2005, Nasr 1996, O'Meara 2007, Piacentini 1994, Rajih 1999, Roose 2001, Saqqaf 1987, Wolper 2003.

5 Islam and nationalism

It is an intriguing question whether there can be a national Islam. Students of religion tend to divide into two groups. One group looks at the religion and wonders what the implications of its main claims are and how these are taken up by its followers. The other criticizes this approach for reifying the religion, and looks instead at the practices of the believers themselves. This is where the notion of a national Islam looks plausible, since on the latter view it is a matter of studying what Muslims in a particular region actually do. There are huge differences between the practices of different Muslims, so it might look more sensible to investigate those ways of behaving as opposed to the official list of beliefs from which they emerge. This issue is of more than just theoretical interest since many leaders of the Muslim community call on their members to work within the area in which they find themselves and create an American Islam, or a European Islam, for instance. The point here, and it is an important point, is that many Muslims in these areas are citizens, or will become citizens, and they need to address the issue of how they are going to live in their new countries and societies. Ideally they ought to act as ordinary citizens and participate widely in all areas of local life, since only in this way will they be real members of the polity and effective in expressing their wishes and encouraging support for their views. They should not look back to where they came from, if they originated elsewhere, and if they are local converts they should not look to an idealized foreign lifestyle as their model to be followed. They need to start the hard and protracted policy of negotiating an identity whereby Muslims maintain their approach to how to be a Muslim while becoming full and active members of the societies of which they are now members.

Here there is a contrast between the universalism of Islam and the particularism of being a member of a particular country or group. Islam encourages its followers to disregard the differences between people and this might be taken to mean that Muslims cannot be nationalists. It is an interesting historical fact that Arab nationalism often had as its pioneers members of the Christian minority in the Middle East, a group which has become even smaller ironically due perhaps to the results of the growth of Arab nationalism. There always exists a tension between the universality of religion and the duties we owe to the state in which we live, and to the valuing of its symbols and inhabitants. The pioneer of

Turkish nationalism, Kemal Atatürk, was often regarded as being hostile toward Islam, and many non-religious political regimes in the Middle East saw themselves as opponents of religiosity, although rarely as opponents of religion as such. Similarly, the creators of Zionism were also largely little concerned with the Jewish religion, seeing in nationalism a way for the Jews to become ordinary people with their own state, a state which would define them by contrast with their religion, which had forever dogged them through their long hard period of exile in the gentile world. It has to be said that nationalism has in many ways triumphed in the Middle East, since the states which the colonial powers largely established, and which have usually very little nothing natural about them otherwise, have survived and even flourished by managing to create and project a sense of national identity. During the Iran-Iraq war two groups of largely Sh'i soldiers fought for their countries against each other, despite the calls from the Iran theological hierarchy for Shi'i solidarity. In fact, the enemies of Iran often portrayed it as the traditional Persian enemy, against which the Arab countries ought to show steadfastness, and on the whole they did regardless of their doctrinal affinity with the enemy.

Religious problems with nationalism

Enemies of nationalism in the Islamic world often point to its origins among minorities and imply it is part of a process of divide and rule, and imposing imperialism by linking up with European countries. Nationalism has certainly been very important in Europe, in both positive and negative ways, and the ways in which modern countries have been defined generally reflect boundaries set during the period of European and American domination. The colonial powers set the boundaries between their respective territories, and when they left the region this resulted in all sorts of artificial divisions surviving and having to be incorporated, sometimes only temporarily, into the continuing legal and political structures. Over time some of these arrangements broke down and have had to be rearranged, often resulting in a good deal of bloodshed and disruption. It is not difficult to see the temptation of arguing that nationalism is very divisive and dangerous and foreign to the mission of Islam, which is to present a universal system of belief to the whole world and unite everyone in common worship of the one God. There are many passages in the Qur'an which call on the Muslims to act in solidarity with each other and resist artificial distinctions which have nothing to do with faith.

Zionism is a perfect example of what is wrong with nationalism, in the view of many Muslims. When the Jews were prepared to live as a subservient minority in the Islamic world they were largely tolerated and allowed to exist without a great deal of interference, apart from the occasional massacre or expulsion from certain areas. When they wanted to have their own country, in which they would be a majority and set the rules, this upset the status quo and led to their exclusion from virtually the whole of the Arab world at least. By setting up a state in the heart of the Middle East, a state moreover which has

remained very successful economically and militarily, they suggested that nationalism was a positive factor in how people should organize themselves, and that the Muslims should copy them if they want to overcome them. In fact, after several defeats at the hands of the Israelis some started to argue in a different way that it was not the fact that Israel is a nation state that contributed to its success but the fact that it is a Jewish (i.e. religious) state, and the Arab countries ought to emulate that by transforming themselves into a more faith-based system. A problem with this view is that Israel is very far from being a religious state in the sense that most people in it are religious. It is in fact on the whole a very secular state and the emphasis on Judaism is not on the religion but on ethnicity, the very factor that Islam sets out to diminish in significance given the universality of its message.

A problem with nationalism from the point of view of many is that it diminishes the force of what should bind people together on the basis of something far more significant, their humanity perhaps, or their membership of a political or religious group. This is particularly the case for religion, since one wants to say that nothing can be more important than our relationship with God, and everything else is insignificant compared with that. Our religion not only affects this life but also the rest of eternity. Our behavior in this life affects everything else to come, and it is difficult to think of anything more important than that. In any case, if there is a God then clearly our relationship with him, our creator and the source of the universe, should be something that we think about deeply and he is someone to whom we should attach a good deal of significance. Our relationship with God should perhaps be the most important relationship in our lives since it is the relationship which makes every other sort of relationship possible. It is even more important than life and death since the whole meaning of life and death is encompassed by our relationship with God.

Being serious about religion

Does this not suggest though that being religious is being part of something that has to be all-encompassing? There are a lot of things that are important in our lives, and religion is certainly one of them, but for most people it is not necessarily the most important nor what distinguishes them most from others. That is one of the problems with hating people because of their religion or ethnicity, the assumption is that it defines them in some important way, and in many cases it does not. Perhaps it should, and in the minds of those who have a simple view of what being in a religion involves, it does. They would expect their followers to all vote in the same way, give money to the same causes, dress similarly and so on, and these are important indications of their allegiance to the religion. Allegiance to a nation seems to interfere with this, since it sets up a competing object of sovereignty, and although the nation and the religion may be in line, they may not. In the 1960s when John F. Kennedy was running for President of the United States the concern was expressed that as a Catholic he would take his orders from the Pope, and so could not be an

American leader. Today Muslims are suspected of taking their orders in the interests of some Islamic organization to which they are attached as though this would take priority over other concerns, and this is not an unreasonable concern to have if a politician has dual loyalties. However, we all have dual and usually more loyalties in the sense that we all today have complicated identities which means that we exist within a network of relationships that make us both similar to others and distinct from them. There is nothing especially new about this phenomenon either. Although we often think that this is very different from the past, it probably was the case that such social and ideological complexity has always existed, especially in the Islamic world, because there are and were regional, political, familial, tribal and other commitments that people had and which no doubt heavily influenced their thinking and acting.

The problem with being totally committed to religion is that it seems to leave room for nothing else to enter one's life, and so however noble the cause, the individual ends up appearing one-dimensional. The problem with being totally committed to some local allegiance is the same, it is to be unbalanced and to allow more parochial concerns rule one's life. Here a useful *aya* to quote is the one on moderation (2.143), which calls on the community to be moderate. It is appropriate to be committed to both religion and other things by keeping a balance between them. This might seem wrong since there are plenty of other *aya*s calling on us to devote ourselves and our lives to Islam. The issue here though is who is doing the devoting. Does Islam call on its adherents to completely wipe out their personalities by a process like the Sufi annihilation of the self (*fana'*) and only take on a religious character? Certainly not, Muslims are supposed to get married, to eat and drink, earn their living and so on, and all these activities involve taking on the same sort of character as most people engaged in those activities. That does not mean it has to be totally the same but much of it should resemble those of others, whether Muslim or otherwise, since otherwise the agent has to be conceived of as having no character at all, or a character which is incompatible with operating with others in general.

A Balkan Islam?

In general terms, it is often argued that there is something very distinct about the situation of the Balkans. It is worth pointing out that many areas of the world think there is something very distinctive about their approach to Islam. In fact, in the English language the adjective Balkan represents a fractured political situation based on fratricidal hatred and longstanding ethnic and religious disputes. It stands also for a very complex division of territory along ethnic lines that is impossible to resolve, so variegated is the division. The Balkans have long stood for the exception in European politics, a highly fragmented cultural region and the source of much wider conflicts. The Balkans was for a long time the border between the Islamic world, particularly the Ottoman Empire, and the Christian West, but in fact, apart from the run-up to

World War I, the Balkans really have not been significant for the last nine centuries in European political life, and it will be argued here that we should see the area not as the exception but as the norm as far as modern Europe is concerned. By looking at some of the theoretical issues that arise within the intellectual life of Balkan Islam, we shall see that the Balkans, instead of being an unusual and extreme form of quasi-European society, now represent the European norm. Balkan Islam is not distinct in any significant way from other forms of Islam, and there is not a distinct Balkan Islamic identity.

According to those suspicious of Islam, the Balkans were Islamicized by conquest and force, with the subsequent combination of economic inducements and cultural pressure. According to others, it was a very gradual process, in which Christians largely chose to embrace Islam, there was no or little compulsion and Christians and Jews could live and prosper quite easily under the authority of the Ottoman Empire. Another claim is also sometimes made, which is that Balkan Islam is marked by its contact with Sufism (Schwartz 2005 presents a very naive view on this topic) and also tends to be quite secular as compared with the normal Sunni varieties of Islam. These ideas compare neatly with current issues in the growth of Islam in Europe. Muslims are trying to dominate the societies in which they are living, argue some commentators, because they find it impossible to live as a minority in a state where Islam does not rule. Where they cannot dominate, since they are still too small in size, they seek to dominate at least the area in which they live (the Paris suburbs, for instance) and oblige local residents to adhere to their interpretation of Islamic law. On the other hand, it is also argued that Islam is just one religion among many others in Europe, and that European Muslims, like other European religious groups, are quite happy to coexist with other systems of belief and legislation. There is also the view that Islam in Europe is not in any case a monolith and many Muslims, especially converts, belong to groups that are Sufi or something similar, and do not seek to concern themselves directly in politics.

Europe and religion

There are many critical references in the Islamic world to the few but significant statements that have been made by European politicians on the "Christian" nature of Europe. This is seen as standing in the way of the expansion of the European Union to include countries with Muslim majorities, or significant Muslim populations. It is firmly believed in Turkey, for example, that the protracted problems and delays over membership are connected to the fact that the overwhelming proportion of Turks are Muslim. Yet it is at the same time very clear to almost everyone that Europe, however defined, is far from Christian. Europeans are increasingly secular and there are often references to Europe as a post-Christian society. Here we need to make the distinction, a familiar one from Balkan discussions, between religion and national identity, and between religion as a system of belief and religion as a culture. Many Europeans are part of a vaguely Christian culture that includes celebration of

Christmas and Easter; they may occasionally attend church and tick the Christian column if the question is asked on the census. This is far from a committed relationship to a set of religious doctrines and principles. It is like having a language. It is interesting that one of the first issues that arose in the former Yugoslavia was the differentiation of the region into what were regarded as the main linguistic groups, so that suddenly a common language, albeit not a common script, was interpreted as not common at all, but the shackling together of different languages. When countries break up into their constituent parts, there is a tendency for the parts to emphasize their distinctness, though such distinctness is often more apparent than real. Even when the borders remain the same, a revolution often changes the language, in the recent Islamic Revolution in Iran there is no doubt that Persian changed to incorporate far more Arabic words, which are seen as being more "Islamic" than the language that existed in the time of the Shah. The breaking up of Yugoslavia into different countries created a new industry of reforming the various languages of many of the countries so that they looked different from each other. So, for example, the many Arabic and Turkish words that came into what is now known as Bosniak were also present in Croatia and Serbia, and suddenly became a source of embarrassment.

What would a European Islam be?

This suggests that there is nothing surprising about Muslims taking on the character of the cultures and regions in which they live. How that will precisely work out is something that has to be negotiated. It would be useful to look at the issue of whether there could be, or should be, a European Islam in order to address this issue. The very diverse influences that have existed for so long, and continue to exist today, may prevent the development of a grand theoretical narrative here. On the other hand, such a diversity of approach may better represent the possibility of an Islamic theology that is genuinely European than many of the existing apparent alternatives.

Language is also important in defining who is covered by particular labels, and who is excluded. The use of a national label usefully weakens the notion that nationality is linked with religion, and in this way presents a country as more "European." But even within religious groups there have in parts of the Balkans been demands to maintain ethnic differences between different kinds of people. So those who regard themselves as of Turkish origin often like that to be acknowledged in the way they are described, as opposed to being labeled just as Muslims or Albanians and so on. This might be described as one of the great failures of religion. Although the major faiths argue that their followers should regard themselves as members of just one community, the community established by the religion, this often does not work out well. The policy of creating one Balkan Muslim nation lacks political plausibility as a consequence. Those who regard themselves as Muslims first and everything else second would see such a state as an excellent idea, and there is a certain amount of

advocacy of it in the literature put out by the Muslim Brothers and their allies. But in the Islamic world as a whole, competing local interests often far outweigh the sense of unity that should ideally link those sharing a common faith. The theoretical arguments in favor of such unity requires a revolution in the thought of Muslims, and we appear to be some way away from that. Many of the Balkan thinkers who stress the European or Ottoman nature of Balkan Islam compound the problem. One of the features of European civilization that disgusted Hasan al-Banna, the intellectual founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, was the division of the Middle East into individual countries, something that imperialism had brought about in the Islamic world, but something, he argued, that should be vigorously resisted. The end of the caliphate represented the end of Muslim unity, and the restoration of the caliphate would reverse the process. As an ideal, what he recommends here has a lot going for it, and yet it has to be said that the Islamic world is no less divided than any other area, and it is not entirely obvious that this is solely due to the forces of imperialism. There is certainly such a thing as an Arab culture, yet Arabs also distinguish between each other in various, often quite radical, ways, and exactly the same is true of the Balkans. The Arab world is only today a small part of the Islamic world, of course. Many of the cultural influences that have come from outside the region seem more intent on gaining supporters for their particular brand of Islam, or even country, than on forging unity between the different Muslim groups. The Wahhabis disapprove of aspects of the local Hanafi prayer rituals and seek to revise them to make them closer to what takes place in parts of the Arab world such as Saudi Arabia. Mosques that follow the Arabian model are encouraged rather than those indigenous to the region. There is no reason, of course, why those providing money and resources should not prioritize what they see as important, but the idea of a basic notion of Muslim unity is challenged by the plethora of competing ideas here.

A significant feature of Balkan Islam is that, for several decades after World War II, it was either persecuted or at the very least discouraged, and a result is that many Muslims are either unenthusiastic about their religion, or confused about what it involves. So they need to be educated. This rather patronizing view could have gone in a different direction and suggested that here was a group of people who had in the main held onto their Islamic heritage despite the difficulties it brought them, and now they needed to be supported in celebrating it in an open and free manner. Again, it is worth pointing to the parallels with Muslims in Europe as a whole. They are often seen as dupes of foreign influence, and certainly some European Muslims have by their behavior done their best to encourage such a suspicion. Yet surely it is a characteristic of religion, Islam included, for the local conditions in which a religion exists to affect the way in which that religion develops. Muslims in Europe become European Muslims, and that means they find various ways to be Muslim, in just the same way that Muslims everywhere find their own routes to their religion. Immigrants tend to go to mosques based on their own culture and original community, but as later generations become more integrated this often stops

being the case and mosques include Muslims from a wide variety of backgrounds, wearing the local clothes and no longer those of the original homeland. This fact gets in the way of those who see religion as taking just one form and so those who vary from it are seen by some as falling into the category of *kufr* (heresy) or at the very least *bid'a* (innovation). Clearly religions cannot tolerate everything, but they can tolerate a good deal of variety and accept it all as part of the religion, or at least as linked with the religion. In Sunni Islam, the four *madhahib* or schools have traditionally all been accepted as valid, and whereas Sunni and Shi'a often disagree about history, *hadith* and law, they usually regard each other at least as Muslims. This is not necessarily a motive for harmony, though, since some Sunnis think that the Shi'a are particularly dangerous because they appear to be Muslims and they are not.

There is nothing specifically European about this; it is not as though the life of Muslims in Europe is very different from their life elsewhere as far as tolerance of differences in being Muslim are concerned. Throughout the Islamic majority world these differences exist and are dealt with in various ways, as they are in Europe. The Ottoman Empire was not a particularly tolerant environment, despite what modern apologists say, but it did not like ethnic or religious controversy within its borders, and so was prepared to put up with a variety of religions and forms of Islam provided that this did not interfere with civil life. It might seem strange that a global religion like Islam is not entirely global in the sense that it is not the same everywhere, but it has often been pointed out that the global is in fact glocal – it is capable of being linked with the local and naturalized in a variety of environments. These environments are all different, and so the global idea also becomes differentiated. That is why the slogan "Islam is the answer" is both true and meaningless. It is true since Islam (if Muslims are right) represents the word of God, but it is meaningless since people differ on what that actually means. "Islam is the answer" is generally translatable as "Vote for me" by those declaring the slogan, which raises another apparently controversial issue: the compatibility between Islam and democracy. Muslims are a large and rapidly growing segment of the electorate in many countries. In purely political terms then democracy can only be in their interests. Even when they are a minority, democracy allows them to influence government by their electoral presence, and the rapid growth of ministers and members of parliament in Europe who are Muslims reflects this. Here again the situation in the Balkans is not untypical of Europe as a whole.

Liberal democracy and religion

Political theory often suggests that liberal democracy is incompatible with religion, since the latter is based on revelation and the former on public participation in some way. If the people want something that revelation goes against, how can it be allowed to happen? This is a reasonable point, and it is worth remembering that John Locke in his political thought disapproved of allowing Roman Catholics to vote in England, since they would just do what the Pope

told them to do, and not genuinely participate in the political process. Will Muslims just do what their religious leaders tell them to do and so not really be part of the political process? It is quite possible that any group that thinks highly of its leadership will take seriously what its leaders tell them to do, especially if those leaders represent God in some way. This is particularly marked on some interpretations of the *vilayet-e faqih* doctrine in Shi'ism, and here we need to note that the line of authority does rest directly on the last hidden imam and his relationship with his representatives on earth. This doctrine can be taken in a number of ways, though, and some Shi'i think it implies that the clergy should avoid political leadership, since politics should wait for the reappearance of the imam, and not seek to predetermine his wishes by acting on his behalf when he is not around to express his views. Even in Sunni Islam, the idea that particular religious leaders, the *'ulama'* perhaps, the Shaykh of al-Azhar University, or thinkers whose views are admired and thought to represent Islam, speak for God in some way has clear political ramifications.

When democracies establish who has the right to vote, they do not restrict this right on grounds of intelligence or political knowledge. Anyone may vote for any candidate for any reason, and many vote for people they like the look of, or who wear nice clothes, or just at random for someone on a long list of names. There is then no reason why people should not vote for those who share their religious views, and against those who do not. In fact, however, the experience of the Balkans is that the electorate is often fractured along a variety of lines that are not only delineated by religion. In times of crisis there is a tendency for religion as a source of identity to play a huge role in politics, but when wars are over and decisions need to be made on taxes and schools systems, and on which politicians are likely to be less corrupt than others, religion often falls into the background. This is where many in the Balkans who defend a more strident role for Islam in the state go awry. It is one thing to advocate that people dress more modestly in public, for instance, and another to think that those who believe that people should dress more modestly in public are any better than anyone else at managing the economy, or the school system, or the state of the water supply.

The role of multiculturalism

Another area where the Balkans are indicative of Europe as a whole is that of multiculturalism. By the second decade of the twenty-first century this doctrine has been attacked for the first time from the top of European politics, in Britain and in Germany. Government leaders have announced that, in their view, multiculturalism has not worked. It is not entirely clear what they are attacking, but it is probably the idea that people of different backgrounds and nationalities come and live in the more prosperous parts of Europe, and over time they gradually become assimilated and generally fit into the local ways of doing things. Although there are many different religious and ethnic groups moving into Europe, there can be no doubt that the finger of suspicion is being pointed at

Muslims here, especially given their perceived penchant for determined resistance to what they perceive as hostile behavior. When minorities are very small, they are really unable to mount much of an opposition to the local government, despite their wishes, and nor does their political weight have any significant impact. As they grow larger, however, they become more important and effective, and establish a presence that others may find intimidating and ultimately foreign. They may dress differently, speak different languages and eat different food, and many European cities have taken on the appearance of the Indian subcontinent, or the Middle East, as a consequence. It used to be impossible to challenge this change without being labeled a racist, but now it has become more respectable, since it does seem that some minorities, especially some Muslim groups, have no interest in participating in the culture of the countries in which they are now living but wish to change it radically, and are prepared to be violent in realizing this aim.

It is a principle of liberal democracy that one of the justifications of restricting a certain freedom is if it interferes with other freedoms. It is also a principle that personal behavior should be unhindered by the state provided that it does not harm others. The issue is what constitutes harm as opposed to offense, which is acceptable. The law in France against the *niqab* argues that this not only offends many French people, but also harms the growth of a common culture in which different people can genuinely communicate and interact with each other. It is not easy to communicate with someone whose face cannot be seen, it might be said. There are no laws against such clothing in the United States or the United Kingdom, where it is generally accepted that people can normally dress in whatever way they wish. If they want to go around in black with their face covered up, or if they want to have purple hair in a Mohican style, or a bone through their nose, that is up to the individual. This brings out the fact that there are at least two kinds of multiculturalism: one that takes it to be an assimilative process with a specific end, and another that sees it as involving more the cohesion of different communities who nonetheless are free to maintain their distinctiveness. One of the interesting features of discussions of multiculturalism in the Balkans is that the more enthusiastic they are about Islam, the more they tend to favor the former sort of multiculturalism in the Balkans, while opposing it elsewhere. This may work well as a political strategy, but as a philosophical position it is clearly inherently unsatisfactory. What is worth pointing out again is that the existence of this lively discussion in the Balkans is yet again merely an indication of the fact that there is nothing different about the Balkans at all. The region represents the sorts of issues that are being discussed throughout Europe, and indeed in other parts of the world also.

Balkan identity, Turkish and/or European?

One of the themes of many Islamic Balkan thinkers is a very positive attitude to Turkey and the Ottomans, who were after all those who introduced Islam into

the region in the first place. They emphasize the multicultural nature of Ottoman society, the fact that each religious group had the ability to conduct and control its own affairs, within limits, and that a society was created that managed to contain a variety of different religions and nationalities living and working together in apparent harmony. The nature of this culture depends very much on the point of view of those observing it since, for some, the power of the Ottoman state made conversion to Islam very tempting – always a good career move if one wanted to work for the government. An authority that is in power for hundreds of years is obviously going to be effective in gaining the allegiance of many in the population to its leading ideas and principles, in just the same way that today the secular pull of European statecraft undoubtedly discourages too much religious enthusiasm among those who seek political success. It is not obvious that the Ottoman Empire should be taken to be a good example of multiculturalism. Even after the Tanzimat reforms, when non-Muslims could work for the state, one wonders what relations were really like between the different communities. Here again the perspective of the commentator is crucial. For those hostile to the Ottomans, it was a case of a sullen and downtrodden Christian population surviving under the heel of the oppressive colonizers. For the Neo-Ottomans, however, there was genuine freedom and rich cultural interaction, and the implication is that Islam in Europe is nothing to fear since the experience of life under the Ottomans was quite positive even for non-Muslims. For those hostile to the idea of the growing influence of Muslim in Europe, which they call Eurabia, the domination of non-Muslims by Muslims and the eventual lower status of the former as *dhimmi*s (protected minorities), is something to be strenuously resisted.

This debate takes place in many different forms in the Balkans and really precedes the general European debate, but now they are part and parcel of the same issue. The place to view the debate from without, or perhaps not quite from without, is of course Turkey itself. When one visits cities in Turkey, the guidebook often refers to the rich cultural and religious life of the place, with its mosques, churches and synagogues. But the synagogues are certainly not flourishing in Turkey, the Christian population is thoroughly cowed and a tiny minority, and the mosque is entirely dominant, especially now that the series of secular governments that followed one another from the start of modern Turkey has come to an end. More is required to establish multiculturalism than some buildings from the past. A few non-Muslims may create a richer appearance of religious variety, but it is only appearance. Negative views of religious minorities abound in Turkey, the world capital of the conspiracy theory, a cultural export that has been widely accepted among all religious and national communities in the Balkans also. This has brought politics closer to magic, with imagined demons and a Manichean struggle between good and evil, light and darkness, where the enemy is totally evil and your own side is entirely virtuous. This is hardly the atmosphere in which any form of multiculturalism is likely to thrive and enrich the nature of our personal and social life.

Islamic political philosophy and nationalism

It is worth remembering that political philosophy in the Peripatetic or *mashsha'i* tradition is not at all sympathetic to democracy and certainly not to any principle of equality. On the contrary, Ibn Rushd and Ibn Khaldun emphasize throughout their work the significance of the basic divisions that exist in society and the state and also the necessity to maintain and, if at all possible, strengthen those divisions. They hardly mention religion directly, but one can easily see how religion can be incorporated into a highly stratified system of social life. For Ibn Rushd, the point of these divisions is to produce a society in which those who carry out the various functions of the state are the very best people for the task. The state should be led by someone who both understands the practical ways of controlling the state and also has a grip on the metaphysical truths that underlie the whole of reality itself – insofar as human beings can have such knowledge. Ibn Khaldun talks about how the nature of the state changes as the existing elites grow old, tired and complacent and are replaced by more dynamic groups from communities with greater *'asabiyya* or solidarity. This process infuses new energy and ideas into the government of the state, and maintains its strength in its competition with other states. What is worth noting about all these theories is how dependent they are on making divisions between people, either based on their character and intelligence, or on how a particular community manages to project a form of association that serves it well in its confrontation with competing groups. Both writers are entirely realistic about the narratives that leaders are allowed, and indeed encouraged, to broadcast to the public in order to increase their level of support, where the truth of such stories is really not a relevant feature at all, except insofar as something untrue might be more speedily discovered to be such.

This sort of strategy can be observed in much Balkan political rhetoric, where different audiences are addressed in different ways, depending on the context and the aim of the enterprise. There is nothing wrong with this, of course, and it is something we always do in order to ensure that what we say is expressed in such a way as to resonate with a particular audience. Hierarchies remain viable when the state is able to address different levels of society in different ways without their noticing the differences. That is why Ibn Rushd, basing himself here on Plato, argued that it is acceptable to tell people stories about how they got to be doing what they are doing now in such a way as to show it is inevitable that they should live like that, and that it is the very best way for them to live. The idea that the Balkans are a very special place with very special people living in them fits into this pattern, since, if it is very special and different, one should not be surprised at the dramatic and rather cruel things that sometimes happen there. Believing in the uniqueness of one's background prepares people for unusual events, trains them not to be surprised by them and encourages them to cope with them. Ibn Rushd argued that this is no problem, since it is a matter of approaching the truth in different ways, traveling on different roads to get to the same destination. Some routes are appropriate to some people,

others to others, and provided that they all lead to the same place, the truth, there is no problem in routing them differently. One should expect different people to act in different ways, and it would in fact be surprising if this were not to be the case.

But do the roads all go to the same place? Are they all versions of the same truth? There is nothing wrong with saying that local conditions make particular forms of religion more amenable to the population than would be the case if those conditions were different, but there is something worrying in the notion of Euro-Islam, or a Balkan approach to Islam. There is ultimately a problem from a religious point of view with a country that refuses to accept and practice the principles and rules of religion, since it means that the citizens are just going constantly wrong. This will harm them not only in this life but eternally. One could just say that is their business and walk away, but religions that are serious about converting nonbelievers, like Christianity and Islam, really cannot do that and feel good about it. There will be a necessity to present these people with a story that is going to be meaningful to them and bring them to the side of the truth, and save them. This is very much the approach of classical Islamic philosophy, and also theology, and one can easily see the logic behind this position. The idea that there is a type of Islam that is more laissez-faire, more laid back, a sort of Islam Lite, in fact, Euro-Islam, does not do justice at all to the nature of Islam as a universal faith.

We are often told of the rather deviant forms of Islam that exist in Kosovo as though this establishes a unique form of Islam, and elsewhere of the links between Islam in Bosnia and the Bogomils, a heterodox group of Christians who lived in that part of the world a long time ago. This is sometimes emphasized to suggest a distinct approach to the religion that exists in the region. According to some, the Balkans were full of heretics from a variety of religions for a long time, and the implication is that, even when it became Islamicized, an independent local spirit in religion continued (Markowitz 2010: 62). This is all part of the familiar claim in the Balkans that the Balkans are very different from everywhere else, either in a positive or negative way, and so Islam in the Balkans must also be very different. There are indeed differences based on the local cultural context in the performance of religion, and no one would argue with that; it is the idea that there is something essentially different about Islam in different contexts that is dubious. The *furu'* (branches) may differ, but the *usul* or principles will surely remain the same, if we are talking about the same religion. If we are talking in the language of classical Islamic philosophy about different routes to the same truth, we must eventually get to the same truth or place, not to different places or truths. There may be differences in the ways in which Islam is practiced in different places, but that does not establish that there is a different kind of Islam.

It follows that there is nothing especially distinct about Islam in the Balkans. This is certainly not to disparage the many able thinkers who have come from the Balkans, but rather locates them where they deserve to be placed, at the heart of Islam and Europe and not on the periphery at all. The notion of

the Balkans as on the periphery of Europe, of the Ottoman Empire, of Islam itself, is highly questionable, particularly now, when it is very difficult to distinguish between the center and the periphery of cultures and religions. Of course, it is exciting to see oneself as on the border, neither one thing nor the other, and there is a rather adolescent thrill in feeling that one is misunderstood on all sides by everyone. This is a temptation which should be avoided when trying to locate a nationality within a religion.

Further reading

Bougarel 2005, Bougarel, Helms and Duijzings 2007, Karić 2002, Karčić 1999, Malcolm 1996, Markowitz 2010, Schwartz 2005, Todorova 1997, 2004.

6 Islam and equality

Islam and patriarchy

Many religions take a patriarchal attitude to the comparative roles of men and women. It is often argued that Islam has a very different attitude to sex as compared with many forms of Christianity, in that there is generally taken to be nothing at all wrong with it, but it needs nonetheless to be controlled, and one way of controlling it is through control of women. So there are a number of practices in the Islamic world that tend to diminish the role of women and elevate the role of men, and a basis for these can be found in the Qur'an and especially in the *hadith* literature, which bristle with critical remarks on women. On the other hand, in recent years there has emerged an interesting discussion about whether it is appropriate to criticize the role of women in many Islamic communities, since is this not a form of cultural colonialism, and who is anyone to denigrate different ways of doing things from what may be regarded as the norm? Are things so ideal in non-Muslim society for women and should not religious groups be allowed to arrange their own affairs in whatever way they wish? In fact, since women seem to have a difficult time everywhere, the identification of the Muslim world as being especially bad for women is perhaps problematic.

The Muslim woman has often been portrayed as submissive, oppressed and backward, and in need of protection. The very expression "the Muslim woman" or "Muslim women" is of course suspect, implying as it does that all or most such women share some general quality. Mass media and educational systems have played a major role in the construction of this representation. It is this discourse which Edward Said calls "Orientalism." The Orient is a linguistic, discursive creation, rather than a place to which one can travel or in which one can live. The Orient of Orientalism serves a dual function. It affirms the concept of the superiority of the West, and defines the West's normality by regulating the abnormal, forbidden, and dangerous to the Orient. The implication is that the Orient has to become more like the Occident if it is to progress. This is actually a commonplace of the image of the "Third World woman." This image is based on the assumption of the Western woman as secular, liberated and in control of her life, in contrast to the makeup of the Third World woman. Yet not all women in the West are in fact secular and

liberated, whatever either of those terms mean, just as not all women in Islamic societies are particularly driven by religion to behave in certain ways. Many feminists write about Muslim women being powerless and oppressed, about their needs and problems. They may ignore their choices, freedom or power of action, and these can be considerable. Western feminists increasingly used images of Third World women as objects in defining themselves as the real object of their studies. In some feminist theory, Asian, and particularly Muslim, women, have often been depicted as powerless individuals who need to be guided by Western feminism in order to become politically mature. In some ways the point of this discourse is not so much to reflect on the lives of Muslim women but on the researchers themselves and their own issues with who they want to be and what obstacles they see as lying in their paths, and they do this by defining themselves with respect to the Other, those in the developing world.

Muslim feminism has its roots in the early reformers of the nineteenth/twentieth centuries such as Sayyid Jamal-ad-Din Afghani, Muhammad 'Abduh, Rashid Rida and Qasim Amin who tried to breathe new life into the theology and politics of Islam. They were intent on showing that Islam had the capacity to revive within the boundaries of Islam itself, and it was not necessary to be secular to be aligned with science and technology. At the time they were writing Islam seemed to be in trouble, the predominantly Islamic countries were either colonized or in decline and religion seemed to be in retreat before the forces of science and European culture. In more recent times several secular feminist scholars (e.g. Fatima Mernissi, Aziza Al-Hibri), who earlier criticized Islam, took a more nuanced view of Islam, and religion as a whole, and looked with new interest at its possibilities of advancing the rights and interests of women within the context of an Islamic community and society. This may well represent a more religious turn in cultural thought in the Islamic world in general. It could also be that the traditional ways in which religion and gender equality have been antagonistic to each other is coming into question as more subtle notions of both develop.

Muslim feminists suggest, like many commentators, that the Qur'an has two sorts of verses. One addresses the practical aspects of the Muslim's everyday life in the Arabian society of the past. Other verses concern morality and are normative. Unlike the former group of verses whose interpretation must change to reflect the present conditions of any society, the latter do not depend on time. But even in normative verses (especially in the *sura* "Women") one can find patriarchal ideas. Muslim feminists are quite frank in arguing that if you believe that God is just and the Qur'an is God's word, it is not possible to consider that any verse could legitimize gender inequality. They argue that Islam introduces many powerful female figures who played important roles in the religion and in the Prophet's life, something that many of his successors did not favor. Often they fought back by emphasizing the role of certain *ahadith*, by interpreting the Qur'an in a patriarchal manner and by using Islamic law to enforce a patronizing attitude to women.

As an ideology and political and social movement feminism generally has been connected to secularism. It is not surprising that many secular feminists found

Islam to be a major cause for concern. Yet women have increased in their significance in the Islamic world and this sets up some possibilities of change and development, and a new way of looking at how the religion regards women. A large modern middle-class of women has formed in urban centers. Women have been elected as members of parliament and even heads of state in at least a few Islamic majority countries. The increasing participation of women in the paid economy has contributed to attention to the inequalities between genders, both at work and at home. Knowledge about feminism and struggles in other countries become well known worldwide.

The interesting question is whether any theoretically feminist reinterpretation of Islam is possible. Muslim feminists such as Amina Wadud use the Qur'an to argue in favor of women's rights and against the patriarchal system. She talks about a "gender *jihad*" – the battle for gender equality – and says that Islam actually aims to overcome the patriarchal system, not strengthen it. She claims that the Qur'an provides convincing arguments to support her views. What about the patriarchal historical context in which the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad? The feminists argue that the ethical principle of equality in the Qur'an annuls particular patriarchal rules, such as the right of a man to have four wives. Who determines, and according to what criteria, where and how these universal ethical principles of the Qur'an are to be applied? This is a problem of textual interpretation. It is interesting to see the device of *naskh* (abrogation), using some Qur'anic passages to overrule others, being used by feminists as well as by the traditional Islamic scholars. A feminist approach to Islam is a form of modern reformist Islam, which takes Islam as the starting point and argues that the values of equality must be in the religion if it is worth supporting. Ultimately, it is also about the prerogative of interpretation, a privilege that is extended to new authorities and radical departures from previous consensuses as a way of challenging the ways in which things have often been done up to now.

When Amina Wadud became the first woman to lead Friday prayers in New York in 2005, there were outraged protests from many Muslims. They were shocked at this development, finding in it no resonance at all with their experiences of Islam and needlessly replacing what they saw as traditional values and practices. A significant problem here is that the radicals are seen to ignore the approaches of classical scholars, representing as they do a tradition of Islamic theology stretching back over more than one thousand years, and in particular the ways in which many of the first commentators have a secure grasp of the grammar of the Qur'an. For a new approach to be seen as more than just shocking it needs to root itself firmly within the language and the methodology of Qur'anic hermeneutics and struggle with alternative interpretations in ways which come out as more than just arbitrary. The biggest error of reformist thinkers is to perceive political Islam as traditionalist. That very same political Islam is in fact breaking with classical scholarship and tradition because it believes that the modern age demands radical new approaches. The Salafiyya was itself a reform movement that breaks radically with Muslim tradition.

Ultimately, Islamizing the secular is the task that many feminists within the Islamic world see as their aim, finding a role for Islam and feminism in a joint effort at bringing about a better society and more virtuous culture. Walking the tightrope between rejecting the main features of Islam and the leading principles of gender equality is the difficult task they have set themselves.

Equality, gender and the Qur'an

In the first verse of the chapter entitled "Women" the Qur'an suggests that the first man, Adam, and the first woman, Eve, came from the same source of life.

> O humanity! Be conscious of your sustainer, who has created you out of one living entity, and out of it created its mate, and out of the two spread abroad a multitude of men and women. And remain conscious of God, in whose name you make demands on each other, and of these ties of kinship. God is ever watchful over you!
>
> (4.1)

The Arabic term translated as "one living entity" is *nafs*, which might in this context mean Adam, but in fact means soul, so perhaps both Adam and Eve are seen as coming from a single soul, not one from the other. If so, that would mean in a basic sense that they are the same.

The Qur'an is quite clear on the absolute moral and spiritual equality of men and women. God judges human beings only by the criteria of faith and acts of piety, and gender is irrelevant. For example:

> It is certainly the case that for all men and women who have surrendered themselves to God, and all believing men and believing women, and all truly devout men and truly devout women, and all men and women who are true to their word, and all men and women who are patient in adversity, and all men and women who are humble, and all men and women who give charity, and all men and women who fast, and all men and women who are modest, and all men and women who remember God unceasingly: for them has God organized forgiveness of sins and a significant reward.
>
> (33.35)

> Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you, whether male or female. You are members, one of another.
>
> (3.195)

Men have no right to take the money that women earn:

> To men is allotted what they earn, and to women what they earn.
>
> (4. 32)

The Qur'an says that women have souls in exactly the same way as men and will enter paradise if they believe and do good works:

> Enter into Paradise, you and your wives, with delight.
>
> (43.70)

> Whoever does what is right, and believes, whether male or female, we will help him or her to a happy life.
>
> (16.97)

The diversity of men and women and the different sorts of groupings this leads to is valuable, and the sole criterion of value is righteousness and our approach to God, *taqwa*.

> O humanity! We created you male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Surely the most honored of you in the sight of God is the most righteous. And God has complete knowledge and is fully aware.
>
> (49.13)

This is where the apologetic line on women starts to operate, by saying this is in fact evidence of the liberation of women. In early Islam we are told by the apologists that women owned property in their own right, rather than being property of men, they kept their original names after marriage, and had full rights to decide when to marry and when to divorce. There are few *ahadith* about the right of women to serve as leaders in society, but this is not because they did not, quite the reverse we are told, it is because in the early years of Islam they served in all such positions and so it was hardly worth noticing. The issue of whether they were entitled to do so did not even arise until after the time of the first four caliphs when pre-Islamic cultural practices began to be reasserted.

Yet the position in much of the Islamic world today is not in accord with such apparently egalitarian principles, and it seems unlikely that it was in the past. Women are often restricted in their freedom of action. They are forced into marriages against their will, and divorced in a similar way with few rights to redress or the property which the Qur'an itself guarantees. There is violence against women and they are systematically excluded from the public sphere. In much of the Muslim majority world, for example, women are largely invisible in the public sphere. In the evening men gather to drink coffee and chat with each other, and women are nowhere to be seen, even as workers in such establishments. Yet it does not say in the Qur'an that men are superior to women intellectually, spiritually, morally or in any other way, nor that men are in authority over women, that men are the inevitable leaders of society, that men are in charge of the family and can insist on obedience from women, that women should not work outside the home; or that their participation in society should

be limited to a domestic role. These social and domestic arrangements have arisen due to custom rather than Islam, or so those committed to gender equality would argue.

Yet it has to be admitted that there are passages which might be seen to give rise to the sorts of discrimination which are now commonplace in some communities. We are told that men are responsible for supporting and maintaining the family:

> Men shall take care of women with the capacities which God has bestowed more abundantly on the former than on the latter.
>
> (4.34)

This suggests that men have more of something than women, and they should use this to support women, and it is difficult not to interpret this as a defense of the traditional male role as the person responsible for the economic welfare of this family, including the women in it.

That does not mean that men are given license to exploit women:

> O you who believe! It is not lawful for you to become heirs to your wives against their will; and neither shall you keep them under constraint with a view to taking away anything of what you may have given them, unless it be that they have become guilty, in an obvious manner, of immoral conduct. And consort with your wives in a pleasant way; for if you dislike them, it may well be that you dislike something that God might yet make a source of much benefit.
>
> (4.19)

Of course, women are exclusively designed to produce children, something which may be hinted at here:

> And among his signs is that he has created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and he has put love and mercy between you. Surely in this there are signs for those who reflect.
>
> (30.21)

Perhaps one of the topics to think about here is the greater vulnerability of women due to their potential pregnancies.

The Qur'an emphasizes the essential unity of men and women in the delightful example of a shared garment, providing clear guidance on how men and women are linked. Addressing men and describing their wives it goes: "They are your garment and you are a garment for them" (2.187). Before the advent of Islam, we are told by the apologists that women were often treated worse than animals. People in the region practiced slavery and women were treated like chattels. Pagan Arabs valued male children far more than girls and

used to bury their newborn daughters alive. These were all practices banned by Islam, although it has to be said that in many cultures even today girls are discriminated against at birth and even murdered. The grim state of behavior toward women in the *jahaliyya* is often used as an argument for how relatively progressive Islam was in its treatment of women, although whether that remains so today is a topic of much controversy.

The Prophet and the treatment of women

If we look at the example that the Prophet Muhammad produced we get some grasp of how women are to be treated. He advocated kindness toward all women. He went beyond preaching and through his personal behavior he outlined the protection and respect women deserve. He approved of his followers marrying widows. Through his marriage to his first wife, who was a widowed businesswoman for whom he had worked and who was much older than him, he showed, according to the *sira* or history of the Prophet, a great deal of respect and care, and this characterized his approach to women in general. On the other hand, we might wonder whether even his behavior represents a good role model today.

The Qur'an states:

> And we have enjoined on a person to be good to his parents. In travail upon travail did his mother bear him and in two years was his weaning. Show gratitude to me and to your parents.
>
> (31.14)

The laws of inheritance in the Qur'an are explicit. One third of one's estate may be given to whomever one likes, but the other two thirds must follow the rules spelled out in the Book. The rules on inheritance are an exception to the general flexibility in Islamic law because where money is concerned the weaknesses of human beings would lead more than in other areas to injustice. The general purpose is to take account of the greater responsibility of men to support the family and the greater vulnerability of women to unjust treatment by men. Women need to be looked after, so in some circumstances men inherit more than women in order to meet their obligations to look after them. In other circumstances women inherit more than men. In all cases women have exclusive charge and ownership over their own income and wealth, which is one reason why women keep their maiden names after marriage. They maintain their personal identity and their social and financial independence, which could after all need to be maintained through subsequent divorce. Unless they initiate the sort of divorce procedure called *khula* (asking for divorce without cause), women are allowed to keep the *mahr*, a gift of money or other property (alimony fixed at the time of the Islamic religious ceremony) that the husband is required to give or promise to give as a gift to the bride at the time of marriage and is recorded in the Muslim marriage

contract. Valid reasons for divorce that would not require a woman to give up the *mahr* would include abuse or inability or unwillingness of the husband to meet his financial and emotional responsibilities. After a divorce, the Qur'an demands the just care of women when they are most vulnerable.

> And the divorced women shall undergo, without remarrying, a waiting-period of three months for it is not lawful for them to conceal what God may have created in their wombs, if they believe in God and the last day. And during this period their husbands are fully entitled to take them back, if they desire reconciliation; but, in accordance with justice, the rights of the wives are equal to the rights of those over them, although men have precedence over them. And God is almighty, wise.
>
> (2.228)

At 65.6 women who are being divorced have to be looked after and especially any children that are subsequently born provided for by their former husbands.

A man seems to be worth two women as witnesses: "And call upon two of your men to act as witnesses; and if two men are not available, then a man and two women from among you as are acceptable to you as witnesses" (2.282). Critics also point to the lack of equal protection for victims of rape in Muslim countries that follow the *shari'a*. They allege that it is impossible to prove rape. For purposes of this discussion, it is important to note that the *shari'a* makes a distinction between adultery and rape and applies different rules. As the Qur'an clearly states, the proof that adultery has occurred requires four eyewitnesses to the act, which must have been committed by a man and a woman not validly married to one another, and the act must have been willfully committed by consenting adults. Proof can also be determined by a confession. But this confession must be voluntary, and based on legal counsel; it must be repeated on four separate occasions, and made by a person who is sane. Furthermore, those who bring a charge of adultery against an individual must provide four eyewitnesses. Otherwise, the accuser is then accorded a sentence for defamation (which means flogging or a prison sentence), and his or her testimony is excluded in all future court cases. Thus it is clear that the required testimony of four male witnesses having seen the actual penetration applies to illicit sexual relations, not to rape. The requirements for proof of rape are less stringent. Rape charges can be brought and a case proven based on the sole testimony of the victim, providing that circumstantial evidence supports the allegations. It is these strict criteria of proof which leads to the frequent observation that where injustice against women does occur, it is not because of Islamic law. It happens either due to misinterpretation of the intricacies of the *shari'a* laws governing these matters, or cultural traditions; or due to corruption and blatant disregard of the law, or indeed some combination of these phenomena.

Although polygamy seems to have been a common practice in the past, the Qur'an sets an upper limit and so perhaps discourages polygamy except in exceptional circumstances. The general rule is that the husband must be able to

treat his wives with perfect equality in material things as well as in affection, which is a most difficult obligation to fulfill.

> And if you have reason to fear that you might not act equitably towards orphan girls, then marry women who are lawful to you – two, or three, or four: but if you have reason to fear that you might not be able to treat them with equal fairness, then one or those whom you rightfully possess. This will make it more likely that you will not deviate from the right course.
>
> (4.3)

God reminds men who may contemplate polygamy about the risk that they will not be able to meet the requirement of equal treatment of each of their wives:

> And it will not be within your power to treat your wives with equal fairness, however much you may desire it; and so, do not allow yourselves to incline towards one to the exclusion of the other, leaving her in a state, as it were, of having and not having a husband. But if you put things to rights and are conscious of him, then surely God is totally forgiving and compassionate.
>
> (4.129)

Polygamy is sometimes considered to be an act of charity. The only place in the Qur'an where polygamy is even mentioned is 4.3, which perhaps refers to an emergency situation after the Battle of Badr when there were many female orphans, but even in this circumstance exercising the right to marry the widows who were presumably then in serious need of support was limited.

Slavery

The other exception is marriage to a prisoner of war, "a captive that one's right hand possesses," i.e. someone who is rightfully owned (4.3) which is another word often used for a slave. Slavery was universal throughout human history and is sometimes said to have posed a major problem for the application of Islamic law, which imposed numerous penalties designed to eliminate it entirely over time. This sort of argument suggests that Islam really does not approve of slavery and seeks through its stringent restrictions on it to do away with it, or so the apologists argue. It is difficult to form such a conclusion from examination of the major Islamic texts including the Qur'an from at least the early period of Islam, however, and like many other religions Islam had nothing critical to say about slavery.

Women captured in a battle who become slaves ought to be married if one wants to have sexual relations with them. Addressing men the Qur'an forbids them from "all married women [other than those whom you rightfully possess]: this is God's ordinance, binding upon you. But lawful to you are all beyond these, for you to seek out, offering them some of your possessions, taking them

in honest wedlock, and not in fornication" (4.24). The words "whom your right hands possess" (*ma malakat aymanukum*), could mean slaves, and the implication is that one can more or less do what one likes with them or it could mean slaves that have been married by the owner who wishes to have sexual relations with them. After all, there is a general prohibition of sexual relations with any woman other than one's lawful wife.

In Islam and Christianity slavery is mentioned as a perfectly natural and acceptable institution, one that like everything else had to be regulated, but there is no suggestion that there is anything wrong with it. It is often argued that Christianity had within itself the resources to oppose slavery and indeed the start of the eighteenth century which saw the end of slavery as a legal institution in Britain and its empire was inspired, at least in terms of rhetoric, by the principles of Christianity as then interpreted by the reformers. It is worth noting how crucial the slave trade was to Britain and to particular cities in Britain like Bristol and Liverpool, so the ending of the trade was a serious blow to the livelihoods of many people. Despite this many Christians felt that slavery was incompatible with the idea of Jesus being sent to redeem the world and those living in it. In fact, much earlier on slavery came under the disapproving eye of the Catholic Church who saw those in the colonized countries as future believers and Christians, not slaves, and as such people who have rights and interests which need to be protected. Even Jews were not enslaved, although they and of course others were often persecuted and exploited. The end of slavery did not mean an end of hard and dangerous slave-like working and living conditions, of course, but the official status of being enslaved became illegal. This is nowhere better illustrated than by the American Civil War which formally brought slavery to an end in the United States, and indeed linked this with the preservation of the country as the United States.

For very long periods the Islamic rulers in various parts of the world received slaves as parts of the tribute or *jizya* paid by non-Muslims, and those captured in wars were often, if not killed, enslaved. This of course encouraged the growth of the Islamic community since they were generally obliged to convert to Islam, which did not necessarily free them. Even today there are countries where slavery persists, and one often sees in London and New York slaves accompanying their masters and mistresses from the Middle East. Sometimes they escape and are allowed to stay in the country, and attempts are made to prosecute their employers/owners. There is evidence that in countries like Sudan, which have a long tradition of slavery, the practice continues. I do remember when traveling in Darfur in the late 1970s coming to a market town and being told by a small girl not to go near the men on camels, since they took people away and turned them into slaves. I thought at the time that this was a folk memory from the past, but now it seems to be a longstanding practice in the country, where of course for many centuries those coming from the Islamic north tended to raid the south and carry away the population as chattels.

Defenders of Islam's position on slavery like Mawdudi and Gülen argue that the Western record in slavery is far worse than the Islamic, that Islam does not

regard slavery as something that applies to all those who descend from slaves and that slaves could rise to high positions in the Islamic world. Gülen points out that emancipation of a slave was the legally required expiation for some lapses in religious duties, for example, the breaking of an oath or the breaking of a fast, representing as it does a good deed to balance or wipe out a sin. The Qur'an commands that he who has killed a believer by mistake must set free a believing slave and pay the blood-money to the family of the slain (4.92). A killing damages both society and the victim's family. The blood-money is a partial compensation to the family of the victim. Similarly, the emancipation of a slave recompenses the community, although it is worth noting that the slave to be freed has to be a believer. The argument is given that the *hadith* produce some very encouraging expressions on the need to treat slaves properly, and that the experience that slaves often had of living with Muslim owners encouraged them to embrace Islam since it was so positive. This is far from many of the historical accounts that are available to us, and certainly is not true of those who are today held as slaves in the Islamic world, who seem to experience a very negative form of existence if their accounts are to be given credence. Of course, those who escape in Europe and the United States find it very much in their interests to magnify their extreme living conditions, since it is on the basis of this that their claim to stay in the country and liberation depends, but the fact that courts have to be convinced of this and that evidence needs to be presented suggests that not all these sorry stories are malicious and false.

Modesty

Modesty is required in attire, demeanor, attitude and behavior. Both men and women must dress modestly, but after puberty women require that more of their body be covered in public. Both men and women are required to show modesty in their behavior.

> Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity. This will be most conducive to their purity. God is certainly aware of all that they do.
>
> (24.30)

> And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what appears by itself; that they should draw veils [*khumur*] over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, and their sons.
>
> (24.31)

Like men, women are asked to behave with dignity and self-respect. Women are told to display their beauty only to their husbands and close relatives in order to preserve the purity and sanctity of these relationships and of society at large.

> O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters, as well as all believing women, that they should draw over themselves some of their outer garments: this will be more conducive to their being recognized and not annoyed. God is very forgiving, a dispenser of grace.
>
> (33.59)

Women often see their clothing as an act of obedience to God. On the other hand, one wonders why women not wearing this sort of clothing need fear unwanted attention. Perhaps scantily clad women are said to be asking for it, usually a colloquial English expression, but this is hardly a worthy doctrine to enshrine in law. Sometimes it is said that appropriate clothing serves to distinguish Muslim women from the rest, and this is a problem also. Surely Islam would not expect non-Muslim women to be assaulted by Muslim men. The evidence from many countries is that protective clothing does not protect, in the sense that when men feel like violating women their clothes are irrelevant. In the events of the Arab Spring women who were appropriately dressed from the point of view of the pious came in for just as much, if not more, harassment than did others, according to many reports.

While most Muslim scholars interpret the Qur'an and *hadith* as in favor of the head covering, some Muslim scholars have stated that covering the hair for a woman is not mandatory. For example, Muhammad Asad suggests in his footnote 75 to 33.59 that the reference to "should draw upon themselves some of their outer garments [*min jalabibihinna*]" (plural *jalabib*; singular *jilbab*) is obviously time specific and limited to its context. It refers directly to the wives and daughters of the Prophet and is written in terms of deliberate vagueness about what women should do when in public. He argues this shows that the verse was not meant to be an injunction (*hukm*) in the general, timeless sense of this term but, rather, a moral guideline to be observed against the ever-changing background of time and social environment. This finding is reinforced by the concluding reference to God's forgiveness and grace. This is a possible interpretation, although not one which has become much followed today.

The toothbrush issue

Pickthall's translation of the crucial *sura* dealing with the issue of beating wives is as follows:

> Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath men the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded. As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Lo! Allah is ever High Exalted, Great.
>
> (4.34)

This is one of the most discussed verses in the Qur'an and seems to advocate wife beating. The verse lays out the first condition, that if your wife is disloyal and disobedient the first thing the husband should do is to warn her. Then if the wife does not take heed or stop what she is doing and still purposely does it, the husband should stop sleeping with his wife. Finally, if the wife does not take heed and stop what wrong she is doing, then the husband can beat the wife. The Arabic word used for "beat" here comes from the root *daraba*. This word has the meanings of hitting, rapping, banging, percussion, knocking, tapping, ringing. The correct definition of this word is "tap," according to some commentators. Certainly there are *ahadith* which support this interpretation, but it is a forced meaning, and *daraba* can mean far more than that. From the *ahadith* there are many references also to the Prophet urging his followers not to beat a wife like a slave. This is not a very helpful saying to quote since it does involve the idea of beating a slave being unproblematic. There are many *ahadith* in which the Prophet criticizes violence to wives, and this has led to some arguing that the beating is not a physical action. It is a symbolic beating, which should not be carried out in anger and result in violence. Instead of using fists or a stick, it is sometimes suggested that only a toothbrush or even a handkerchief can be used.

There is also the passage which among many others seems to go in an entirely different direction:

> O you who believe! You are forbidden to inherit women against their will. Nor should you treat them with harshness, that you may take away part of the dower you have given them, except where they have been guilty of open lewdness; on the contrary live with them on a footing of kindness and equity. If you take a dislike to them it may be that you dislike a thing, and God brings about through it a great deal of good.
>
> (4.19)

One wonders whether women are allowed to tap their husbands lightly with some small implement, if the latter misbehave, and the answer that is generally given is a definite no. After all, men are said to be a degree superior to women, whatever that means, and there seems to be here a very clear attitude of dependency of women on men, whatever the real state of affairs may be. On the other hand, there is no problem with women wishing to divorce their husbands, although there are difficulties generally in her initiating the process, unlike the situation for men (4.128).

It is difficult to argue, although some have, that the Qur'an does not advocate traditional patriarchy. Asma Barlas suggests that the Qur'an does not refer to God as a man, but it does, and indeed the anthropomorphic nature of the language became a source of argument for a very long time. According to Barlas, it addresses men and refers to their position in contemporary Arab culture, which was and is a leading position, but it designates women and men as each other's "guides" *(awliya')* and establishes love and mutuality (*sukun*) as the

basis of marriage. The Qur'an teaches that God created humans from a single self (*nafs*); as we have seen, there is no mention that God created the *nafs* of the man before that of the woman. So the Qur'an does not advocate modern forms of patriarchy because it does not associate sex with gender. While the Qur'an recognizes biological differences, it does not transform these differences into any gender symbolism. For instance, the Qur'an also does not link women and men to a specific division of roles. There is not a single verse, we are told, that suggests that men's gender roles are a function of their biology, or that biological differences between men and women make them unequal.

Now it is true that the Qur'an treats women and men differently, but this does not mean that it establishes them as being unequal. We are not told that men and women are opposites, nor that women are like defective men or that the two sexes are incompatible, incommensurable, or unequal, in the style of modern misogyny. How plausible is this? It is certainly true that differences in themselves do not necessarily imply the existence of inequality. It is also true that the Qur'an does not tie its different treatment of women and men to any claims about biological superiority or inferiority. On the other hand, when men are said to be a degree superior to women, or stronger, then we are being told something about the natural relationships between men and women, and the concept of the family in the Qur'an is clearly patriarchal.

Homosexuality

The Qur'an is generally taken to condemn homosexual acts and in particular sodomy (*liwat*). There are references to the people of Lot (Luṭ), at 7.81–2; 11.77–83; 15.61; 21.74; 22.43; 26.165; 27.55; and 29.29. At 26.165–73 the destruction of the people of Lot is often linked to their sexual practices, although there is no explicit reference in the Qur'an to precisely what those were. Punishment for such practices, apart from divine wrath, are referred to at 4.16, and both parties are blamed equally, something less common in much of the legal and other literature that followed. Within the Hanafi tradition often no physical punishment is suggested, because adultery, apostasy and murder are not involved. For the Hanbalis, by contrast, the hail of stones that destroyed the people of Lot are an indication of the severity of the punishment that is appropriate for this behavior. The Maliki school insists on stoning, while the Shafi'i often distinguish between the active and the passive partner with regard to punishment. Shi'i Islam is very severe in its treatment of homosexuality and punishes both partners, even where no actual penetration takes place. However, no specific punishment is recommended, and the legal opinions tend to range from beating to stoning to death. As with any kind of illicit sexual relationship, though, evidence is not easy to come by, and there is a debate as to whether the passive and the active partner should be punished equally. This ambiguity is reflected in the *ahadith* of the Prophet, some of which make a distinction between the partners in a homosexual act, and many of which seem to permit homoerotic feelings, as long as those feelings are not translated into

action. There are also many *ahadith* which are totally uncompromising in their opposition to *liwat*. There certainly seems to have been a strong distinction made between the role of the *ubna* or passive partner and the sodomizer, with the former being disgraced by their passivity. Stories abound of men being punished by being sodomized, for example, and the serious consequences this has for them and for the status of those associated with them. This form of punishment is often used in Muslim countries to prisoners in order to humiliate them, but of course this is not limited to Muslim countries.

There is much homoerotic literature and history in Islamic culture. Friendship between men and boys is often given a significant role, and the feelings between the partners are described in often sexual ways. It is easy to assume that this is evidence of widespread homosexuality in Islamic culture during this period, yet such a conclusion would be rash. There is a tendency in such literature to use various forbidden motifs – such as homosexuality and wine – to illustrate the wider social and political order through parody and satire. Greek motifs in particular became widely employed in Arabic and Persian, and in Islamic literature they may have been used to allude in a negative way to the prevailing social order rather than as a description of common activities of the time.

El-Rouayheb argues that these forms of cultural expression do not imply the prevalence or acceptability of homosexuality, because that notion in its modern sense, or in the meaning it has in non-Islamic cultures, did not exist in the period he considers in depth, 1500–1800 CE. However, the possibility for exploitation of young boys within educational institutions was much discussed in Arabic literature during the pre-modern period, and teachers were advised to take precautions against temptation as a result of too close relations with handsome beardless boys. The lax attitude that some Sufis took toward legal rules encouraged, it was sometimes said, sexual advances toward young boys who were pupils or junior members of an order. The unorthodox behavior of those regarded as saints validated a variety of sexual attitudes and actions that would otherwise have been condemned, and the immature and relatively powerless were frequently the victims of this license.

El-Roueyheb suggests that in the Arab world of the early Ottoman Empire there was a radical disconnect between the portrayal in literature of young men as objects of desire and the actual treatment of them as sexual partners. Such treatment would have been illegal and in any case would have brought social stigma. Modernity has led to more questioning of the prevalent poetic and mystical idioms that center on the beauty of young men. Much of the literature from this period describes levels of power, because the objects of passion often come from minority groups such as Christians or slaves and servants. The 2007 movie *The Kite Runner*, based on a novel of the same name, is set in Afghanistan, where the Sunni Pashtuns have relatively high status. In one scene a Pashtun man rapes a Hazara (Shi'i) boy, bringing out again how sodomy is as much about differences of power and status as about sex. In recent years the greater influence of Salafi views has also led to a greater disinclination to

use imagery that could be taken to describe forbidden relationships, even obliquely, and also threatens those who explicitly represent homosexual acts in an Islamic cultural context. The celebration of beauty as personified in humanity and the view of its divine origins are features of Sufism and are suspected from a religious point of view by those who favor a stricter and more literal version of Islam. Traditional raunchy literature such as *The Arabian Nights* have been expurgated to remove stories with homosexual aspects, and poetry that celebrated the beauty of young men and seemed to countenance love for them by older men, however chaste this was supposed to be, is not acceptable in much of the Islamic world today given the new climate of modesty that prevails.

Homosexuality is often regarded as a feature of Western decadence and something that does not and should not exist in Muslim communities, and if it does, then it is merely a reflection of the unwelcome spread of corrupt ideas from without. There has been concern in the Islamic world also with the literature dealing with love for young boys, and writers such as Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328 CE) and his disciple Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziya (1350 CE) criticized *nazar* or gazing, the subject of much of the literature describing the way in which the poet contemplated the object of his affection. In fact, the topic of who it was permissible to gaze at became a controversial issue in Islamic theology, a permissive line being taken by 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi (d. 1731 CE), who seemed to allow gazing at anyone, man or woman, provided one was able to distinguish between appreciating the aesthetic form of the object contemplated from its actual matter. Gazing at an actual person was likely to lead to lust and sin, he accepted, but held that this could be separated from the act of contemplation of the form of the person alone. Here he represents the spirit of the literature dealing with young boys in pre-modern Islamic literature. This took itself not to be describing homosexuality and thus desires likely to lead to illegitimate actions, but aesthetic attitudes celebrating beauty wherever it was to be found.

In a speech at Columbia University (September 2007) President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran said there were no homosexuals in Iran. Although the audience laughed, he did represent accurately a common belief in the Islamic world, one not shared, of course, by those in the region who are homosexual. In recent years a discussion has arisen as to the possibility of reconciling Islam with homosexuality, in just the same way that the other monotheistic faiths have developed strategies for a more inclusive policy toward homosexuals. As in other religions, many Muslims insist on a rigid ban on the practice, although as we have seen there is some scope within Islamic tradition to accept the feelings if not the actions associated with homosexuality. Advocates for homosexuals in the Islamic world argue that the resources exist in Islamic thought to provide space for homosexuality within the *umma*, but it is unlikely that this issue will come to the forefront of discussion in Islam as it has in Judaism and Christianity for some time to come. Despite this, some use the references in the Qur'an to the divine nature of the diversity in the world (49.13) as the basis of an argument that diversity in sexual relationships might also be acceptable. It has to be said

though that many countries that regard themselves as Islamic have strict penalties for homosexual behavior, including execution, and there is no indication yet of a general acceptance of homosexuality in Muslim communities.

Further reading

Abu-Lughod 1998, Afkhami 1995, Afshar 1998, Afshari 1994, Ahmed 1992, Barlas 2002, Engineer 1994, 1995, Göle 1996, Haddad, Smith and Moore 2006, Hassan 1996, Mernissi 1987, Moghissi 1999, el-Rouayheb 2005, Schmidtke 1999, Stowasser 1994, Wadud 1999, Yamani 1996.

7 Islamic economics

The concept of an Islamic economics is much debated and rightly so since it is a very significant and practical aspect of Islam itself. If the many references in the Qur'an to the desire to create a different and better form of society are to have a meaning, they will have economic implications. In fact, the idea of Islamic finance has gained a lot of respect in the banking crises that started in the twenty-first century, the implication being that it is more solidly based and less speculative than ordinary finance. There is also a negative type of argument according to which Islam has prevented some communities from flourishing economically since Islam is apparently so restrictive on what can be done with money and how property can be passed down to the next generation.

Islamic banks have had their problems in twenty-first century monetary crises, and there is no shortage of scandals and controversies about them. On the other hand, there is no evidence at all that Islam has impeded trade and enterprise. Some of the most dynamic and successful economies and businesses are run by Muslims, and often religious Muslims also, and Muslim societies have experienced in the past and also today great economic growth and prosperity. So much of the Islamic population lives in poverty because they live in countries that are poor, not because they are Islamic. What is interesting about the debate on the nature of Islamic economics is whether there really is such a thing and how distinct it is from ordinary economics.

What are the main criteria of what is called Islamic economics? We are often told it is based on the principles of justice, equality and the desire to increase wealth throughout the region, emphasizing honesty and fairness in mutual action. The familiar claim is made that Islam is more than just a system of beliefs, but also involves a whole way of life, as though this were unique about Islam. One of the distinctive features of Islam perhaps is that its leading figure, the Prophet Muhammad, was himself a trader initially and came from a thoroughly commercial background, as did his first wife Khadija who was older than him and of much sounder financial standing. In fact, the subject of several Islamic miniatures is Khadija hiring Muhammad, presumably representing the context within which they first met. Much of the opposition to him from his own community, and there was much of this, may well have been based on their concern that a new form of worship would interfere with their control of

the pilgrimage trade to Mecca. Long before the Prophet and his message came about, Mecca and its Ka'ba stone were the basis of a longstanding ritual during which Arabs from all over the peninsula came to worship there, in their different ways, and Islam very quickly came to institutionalize that trade as part of its core beliefs. It is presumably the commercial life of the city and the region that was bolstered by Islam, or at least continued in much the way it had taken place in the past. There are a number of fairly general references to commerce in the Qur'an, and on the basis of these a wide range of commentary has been developed in the familiar ways that religions based on law develop rules and regulations.

Islamic law or *shari'a* is critical of interest on money, often taken to be a translation of *riba*, speculation, *maysir*, and its link with uncertainty or *ghara*. In modern times banks are also supposed to be more than just commercial institutions, but also are directed to concern themselves with social responsibility. Certainly many consumers of banking in the Islamic world say they are keen on using Islamic banks, but their motivation is unclear, since many of the qualities they associate with such banks have nothing to do with religion, but relate rather to service and reliability. The assumption is that Islamic banks will be better than other banks, in much the way that Muslims are better than other people. All such banks have an advisory board that ensures their compliance with *shari'a*. It has been argued that since they are paid to carry out their task, they are often keen to like what they see, and pocket their fees accordingly. Since the rules about what makes a bank an Islamic bank are indeterminate, there is a lot of scope for individual decision on the issue, as there is in all application of law. In any case, all banks have to exist in a market that includes a variety of banking systems, and this presumably would limit how distinctive they could be, a point well worth making. Islamic banks have to be regulated often by banking systems that are not Islamic, and even in countries that call themselves Islamic there may be other banks available, which limits the distinctiveness of the Islamic banks with respect to what they can offer their customers. If what they offer is inferior to the ordinary banks, they may well lose accounts. There is evidence though that for some account holders this is not the case, due to the existence of what might be called the piety premium, as we shall see when considering Islamic bonds. On the other hand, the vast majority of funds of Muslim individuals and countries today are in interest-bearing accounts.

Islamic economics and a way of life

Wasteful spending on unnecessary things through special price offers is against the teachings of Islam if one takes seriously its advocacy of moderation both in spending and saving. It is difficult to know where the mean is though between the extremes of miserliness and extravagance, but that is a problem about trying to discover the mean of anything. Does that mean that Muslims should not use price to encourage consumers to buy their products, though? Price discounts

offered by retailers that could benefit consumers in terms of saving money on items on sale are encouraged. The Qur'an encourages consumers and producers to be neither extravagant nor mean, but urges them to strike a balance between these extremes (25.67). So there is nothing wrong in getting a bargain, nor in representing one's products in that way, provided they really are a bargain. It is difficult to know what that means objectively, though, since it is not always clear what counts as a good deal from either the point of view of the consumer or the producer. If someone is happy to pay me for a product and that enables me to make a big profit, does it matter if I would also be happy with a smaller profit, although perhaps a bit less happy? In many markets people often argue over the price, eventually agreeing on a figure, but that might not represent the just balance, since it may be that one party to the transaction is desperate to get the item, and the supplier is not so keen to sell it. Islam sees itself very much as a religion in the middle, between the asceticism of Christianity and the materialism of Judaism. Muslims are to divert resources to charity, *zakat*, and pray of course, but they are certainly encouraged to play a committed commercial role also. Yet this moderation is very difficult to define. For example, it is possible to buy very large cars and also quite small ones, and one wonders what the moderate choice is here. Presumably it is a car which is neither big nor small, but suppose one has a large family? Suppose also that the car is one's only luxury. It does not necessarily mean they are extravagant in the whole of their life, just in this one aspect which for them is important. And why should it not, since we all differ in our enthusiasms and it is appropriate to allocate our spending to take that into account, albeit within the bounds of what is reasonable.

There are many *ahadith* which recommend practical behavior, so one would expect Islamic bankers to spend most of the working day banking and not praying. The Qur'an links businessmen, and in particular those who travel for the purpose of trade, alongside those who fight for God (73.20). In other places, the equipment used to promote trade is commended (35.12). It should be understood from these passages that Islam does not oppose activities aimed at promoting business and industry. This is to be done with sensitivity to the ethical rules specified by the Qur'an and the *sunna* of the Prophet. Accordingly, the annual *hajj* certainly serves to encourage international trade and business (22.27–8 and 2.198). There is nothing wrong with promoting sales or enhancing one's business by selling during conferences, times of pilgrimage, or trade fairs, as that will not compromise purity of intention and justice. Recent developments in Mecca have come in for a lot of criticism for their commercialism, and the wealth of Saudi Arabia together with the income brought in by the huge numbers now attending the *hajj* have clearly had an effect on the city. It has gone from being a rather sleepy and small place to a considerable international city. While we may regret the aesthetic losses this can mean, the emphasis on commerce is surely acceptable so long as the money, or some of it, goes to the right ends. Criticism of the size of the new buildings has been based on the Qur'anic call for moderation, but then what is moderate when it comes to buildings that are required to cater for large numbers of people?

The Rector of al-Azhar in 2002 was called on to express a judgment on the practice of pre-specifying profits on an investment, and he referred to 4.29, where the injunction is not to devour the property of others in impermissible ways and to carry out trade by mutual consent (translated in Azhar 2010: 415–17). The latter is clearly present when an agreement is made on how much the investor will get back at the end of a period, say, and when the conditions of the agreement are mutually agreeable. Yet it is not always clear that this is so, since the investor may be obliged to take the offer that is made to him by the conditions of the market, since there may be few alternatives. There was certainly an agreement, both parties to it consented, and yet one may have benefitted to the disadvantage of the other, and that is often the case in business. Commerce and competition can be a rather cruel affair. The modern legal thinker, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, one of the most influential thinkers in the modern Sunni world, comments that Islam both forbids trade where someone's gain is another's loss, while at the same time advocating free market principles. His ringing defense of free trade and competition is difficult to reconcile with his claim that one person's gain should not involve another person's loss. If I am a more skillful shopkeeper than someone else, I will prosper perhaps at his expense, and he may go out of business. Mr Masoudi may benefit from Mrs Khan's going out of business, since then the local customers may have no recourse but to all shop at his store, but if his store is cleaner, cheaper, better stocked and so on, this is all to the good. Of course, once Mrs Khan is out of action he can jack up his prices and not clean his store so assiduously, and here the general desirability of competition might usefully limit the deterioration of the service he provides, since a competitor might move in and challenge him, or customers may travel further for good service. Transactions do often result in losses for others, though, without being unfair. In the long run perhaps the community as a whole gains through competition, but there are surely often casualties along the way. Not everyone can compete successfully. In fact, al-Qaradawi's book is typical of many of the more popular texts on the topic in its incoherence. It is far more about producing ringing declarations of how wonderful it would be for Islam to be the main organizing principle of economics, and provides no detail at all on how to reconcile the obvious difficulties which arise when the commercial sector is to be regulated in terms of religion and its very general and vague principles. The new Muslim Brotherhood governments in the Arab world have very neoliberal economic policies, like the Islamist AKP in Turkey, and some assume that this is wrong, that there should be something very distinct about how Muslims see the economic system as operating. The evidence suggests otherwise.

Islamic economies

If we examine some recent studies of the different economies in the Middle East and North Africa, it is important to note the variety of economies that exist within the area but there are some remarkable similarities also. There is

obviously an overactive government sector in many of the economies. This is surprising since there is nothing *dirigiste* about the description of the economy in either the Qur'an or the *hadith* literature. There is a stress on the significance of charity but it is a bit of a stretch to get from there to the sorts of highly state directed economies of the current Middle East that have in the view of many played a large part in the current unrest there. One of the problems with such economies is that they have been very poor in providing employment, since the state has such a dominating effect on society that individual risk taking and enterprise is elbowed out. What is particularly interesting though is that for most countries in the Islamic world there is nothing on Islam that we need to know to understand their economies, and no notion that there might be something different about the economies of this area given its preponderant religious orientation toward Islam. The term "Islam" does not even appear in the index of a recent work on monetary policy in the Middle East and North Africa (Cobham and Dibeh 2011). Since the theme is money and banking it is perhaps surprising that Islamic banking is totally ignored, and perhaps not if there is nothing very different about this form of finance. What makes religion irrelevant here is that even where there are Islamic banks, banks which do not charge interest, they do structure their financial instruments in line with prevailing interest rates, and have to do so since there are other banks available who do not even have to try to be Islamic and who are happy to offer a rate of interest on money deposited.

A study of Islamic entrepreneurship (Khayed and Hassan 2011) looks at business attitudes in Saudi Arabia with respect to the sorts of ideas and ambitions that those setting up and promoting commercial enterprises possess. The authors establish plausibly from the start that there is nothing incompatible between commerce and Islam, and they delve back into the history of the Prophet and the early years of Islam to make this point. The *hadith* literature is as always particularly helpful here, and of course the Islamic world has for a long time been a center of commercial activity. Indeed, Islam has spread around the world in the way in which it has often through traders and their activities. In many parts of Africa, for instance, Muslim traders set up businesses and gradually encouraged the general population to embrace Islam if they were impressed by the behavior and status of those traders. There is also the notion that Muslims should carry out business in a particular kind of way, one which embodies the principles of Islam. We have seen that it is unclear often what these principles are, and it is not surprising to learn that one of the most persistent frauds in modern times is by criminals who find their victims through some affinity they have with them, such as religion. What a lot of Muslims have asked for is the creation of specific Islamic institutions such as banks which operate in accordance with Islamic principles, and which avoid the sorts of commercial arrangements that are illegitimate from a religious point of view. The research presented here though suggests that while many respondents would like to use Islamic banks, few do and even fewer know what they do. Further, the main issues that were selected by Saudi entrepreneurs as contrary

to Islam were not issues in banking or partnership arrangements, but marketing topics such as advertising, promotion and deception, issues that are common to all economies and have no specific Islamic features about them.

Before we conclude that there is nothing distinctive about Islamic approaches to economics, we need to think about how the law of commerce can be adapted to allow commerce to flourish. Maha-Hanaan Balala argues that the best way for Islamic economic law to develop is through a common law process. She uses this approach to explore various controversial issues in Islamic law, including securitization, interest, risk, the sale of debt and the operation of a dual banking system, with Islamic and other kinds of banks within one jurisdiction. She has Malaysia in mind here. It is the basis of her approach, not the detail, which is so interesting though. She takes it for granted that no one really understands precisely what Islamic finance is, since apart from the name, which is bandied about widely, there is no general agreement on what if any reality accords with it. A solution is to use a common-law approach, using precedent and significant examples, to exemplify the principles of justice that lie at the basis of Islamic finance, and work out from there what sorts of practices are acceptable and which are not. She is alert to the danger of what she calls "re-characterization," where a familiar financial vehicle which is objectionable on religious grounds is described in such a way as to make it apparently acceptable, but the suspicion is that a sleight of hand has taken place here. She does not say this, but a legal system in which authorities are perhaps able to receive some sort of reward for characterizing an arrangement as *halal* or permissible is not likely to operate without blemish. One wonders for example whether the Rector of al-Azhar was under any pressure to come out with the judgment that he produced in 2002, and in fact during a variety of governments in Egypt the al-Azhar authorities frequently produced *fatawa* that were entirely in line with current government policy.

The most flexible of the Sunni schools of law in theory is undoubtedly the Hanafi, and Balala bases herself firmly on it, and in particular its application of general principles of welfare in providing a methodology for interpreting scripture when it seems to impose difficulties on people. As she points out, and it is worth pointing out, Islamic law is not supposed to be just for Muslims, but for everyone. When God revealed the Qur'an he presented a message for the whole world, and the economic arrangements he advocated are the best for everyone, not just the Muslim community. If everyone is not a Muslim then on the principle of welfare we need to make allowances and arrangements to allow a variety of ways of doing things. Balala suggests that a common-law approach is helpful here, since it enables us to work from the general principle and some legal practices that are both in accordance with the law and yet also not onerous to observe. This latter point is significant, since the role of law in Islam is not to make things harder for people but easier, since it accords with what it is in their interests as a whole to do. So while interest and speculation are forbidden, the *salam* system is accepted, according to which it is alright for someone who is not yet in possession of a product to borrow money on the

basis of its eventual appearance. This is clearly an important issue for farmers, among others, who need money to cover them until their crops come in, and the person who provides the funds will expect to do so at a discount to the final value of the product. In a sense this may look like speculation, since the person lending the money does not know that he will get it back. There may be no crop in the end, given the vagaries of the weather and so on. The lender is entitled to receive some return for depriving himself of his capital and for in effect risking it. This may seem rather similar to a rate of interest, but Balala argues that there is a significant difference here. It could be the idea that there is something solid behind it, namely, the prospect of the crops, but it is worth noticing that this is only a prospect. Yet there is often something solid behind lending money, like property, and it is still the case that an interest rate is involved, and apparently forbidden by Islam.

Islamic bonds

What is important about the prohibition on interest but acceptance of the value of money is the concept of certainty. Islam accepts that the lender is forgoing the opportunity to engage in profitable transactions with his own capital which is going to be used by someone else. He is, therefore, entitled to reimbursement for missed opportunities. There is an opportunity cost here, in the language of economics. But we cannot tell precisely what this cost is. Payment for it can only be made after the fact on the basis of actual return on the borrowed capital foregone and so is really a charitable act without any expectation of monetary benefit. There may be a return but nothing can be legally insisted on, so it is essentially rather risky.

This has led to the creation of a variety of Islamic bonds known as *sukuk*. These involve the sale of certificates to investors who then lease them back to the issuer for a fee. The fee is what replaces the rate of interest. The predominant forms of *sukuk* are known as *mudaraba*, *musharaka* and *ijara*. *Mudaraba* is where the lender is considered a part-owner in whatever investment is being made. Coupon payments on the loan are drawn from the profits of the venture according to a ratio agreed upon when the contract is drawn. Should the venture fail, and this is vital for the bond's religious status, the borrower does not have to repay the lender. *Musharaka* arrangements are structured just like *mudaraba* bonds with the exception that the lender is expected to take a role in the daily management of whatever venture is receiving the funds. *Musharaka* partnerships are increasingly rare in modern Islamic finance because they require a great deal of manpower investment on the part of banks. Even *mudaraba* loans make up only 5 percent of the assets of most Islamic banks. (In fact, some 80 percent of Islamic banks are typically involved in still another loan type called *murabaha* which is controversial within the Islamic banking community because it is virtually identical to an interest-bearing loan.)

The structure of choice for sovereign state *sukuk* issues is *ijara*. Under this arrangement, the borrower (often a sovereign state) sells tangible assets at a

price agreed upon by contract to a "special purpose entity" (SPE). This SPE in turn issues *sukuk* bonds in an amount exactly equal to the purchase price of the assets. The SPE then leases the assets back to the state at an amount equivalent to the coupon payments of the *sukuk*. At the maturity of the *sukuk*, the SPE sells the assets back to the sovereign state at a price agreed on beforehand. At this point the SPE dissolves and the *ijara* contract is concluded. Thus, *sukuk* bond issues are backed by real assets to which all bondholders can claim partial ownership. According to Islamic law, the *sukuk* issuer cannot guarantee the return of principal or interest payments without turning the agreement into an ordinary interest-bearing loan. The money that bondholders receive must be considered lease payments on the underlying assets and, presumably, reported as such for purposes of taxation. The sovereign *sukuk* introduced a new class of investors to government debt financing quite different from the one that had previously bought sovereign debt. While conventional investors have certainly participated in sovereign *sukuk* issues, Islamic investors and institutions concerned about the role of investment are by far the predominant customers.

This enthusiasm for Islamic financial vehicles might be even larger were it not for the severe shortage of scholarly boards to approve the bonds. The same group of tried and trusted scholars are called on all the time to validate the structure of the financial instruments and sometimes there has been an issue which turns out to have jumped the gun, since once it is examined it turns out not to be acceptable, and so has to be withdrawn. There is concern that should *sukuk* bonds regularly be found problematic after issuance, investors who demand *shari'a* compliance might pull out not only from the affected bond but from *sukuk* bonds as a whole. A crisis in confidence could threaten the entire Islamic finance industry. For one thing, the theological process by which issues are judged to be *halal* or otherwise is completely below the surface for the individual Muslim investor. It is not known how widespread this fear of a crisis in confidence is within the Islamic investment community. Any perceived risk of such a crisis would probably reduce the trading price of such bonds vis-à-vis bonds that do not contain that risk. All other things being equal, one would expect investors to demand additional return from *sukuk* bonds over conventional bonds issued by the same sovereign authority due to the potential risk of a crisis in *shari'a* compliance. Surprisingly, and contrary to what mainstream risk-return models would suggest, there is little evidence that *sukuk* investors demand a premium for this risk, at least thus far. The premium is after all to be cashed in terms of acting to please God and everything that it brings with it.

One additional potential risk of the current system for judging *sukuk* compliance with *shari'a* is that religious regulatory bodies could use their power for political ends, perhaps by implicitly threatening to declare noncompliance on the bonds of sovereign nations that support unpopular political positions. Another area of broad uncertainty is whether religious authorities will declare Islamic banking activities (presumably including *sukuk*) subject to *zakat*, a kind of tax Islamic governments have historically imposed on wealthy Muslims to

fund charitable activities. It seems likely then that the differing investor bases of the two kinds of bonds are at the root of the differences in bond yield between *sukuk* and conventional bonds issued by the same country. The two bond markets are essentially isolated from one another due to the *sukuk*'s religious underpinnings. Consequently, different expectations about changes in returns stemming from systematic risk has created a spread between their yields.

It would appear that the *sukuk* market is a mostly passive one. While conventional bond yield fluctuations can usually be explained by the logical responses of the conventional bond market to changes in macroeconomic risk, *sukuk* markets evidence little variation in *sukuk* returns as a result of such risk. Thus, conventional markets react to adverse or positive news in equity, oil or risk-free interest rates as would be expected with emerging-market debt securities but *sukuk* investors mostly ignored these movements. This could be a result of the importance of the "piety premium" to *sukuk* investors: the unseen utility benefit of holding a *shari'a*-compatible bond for Muslim investors is not sensitive to changes in macroeconomic risk. Alternatively, the passivity could be a function of a lack of alternative assets for *sukuk* investors. Whereas conventional bond investors can easily move to risk-free or less risky assets, *sukuk* investors have far fewer options.

The relative passivity of investors in *sukuk* suggests that they are not as responsive to conventional financial signals. These results are consistent with the notion that *sukuk* investors are in general less sensitive to changes in the conventional business markets. For example, while conventional investors increased exposure to debt in developing markets like Pakistan and Malaysia as their economies grew, *sukuk* investors kept exposures constant. It is difficult to know if the behavior of the Islamic bond yield spread is a consequence of an immature sovereign *sukuk* market or a permanent feature of the different sensitivities to systematic risk of the two markets. Over time the link between the yields of each market may come closer together as after all many investors supply funds to both markets and would seek to achieve financial as well as spiritual returns from their capital. On the other hand, the *sukuk* yield tends in countries with dual systems of banking to be in line with that of equivalent bonds. That suggests they are not very different from what they seek to replace.

Interest

Islam apparently condemns interest for moral reasons, because interest exploits the need of individuals and stems from greedy and selfish motives of the owners of capital in complete disregard of benevolence, justice and fair play. Rent or sharing property, under normal circumstances, is different. There are some who argue that only that type of interest which is charged by rich money-lenders on loans to the poor is prohibited by the Qur'an. The Qur'an, after declaring all interest-based borrowing and lending unlawful, says "if a debtor is in want, give him time until his circumstances improve" (2.280). It has been argued that the Qur'an has, in this verse, directly refuted the idea that all interest is forbidden by mentioning that during the time of its revelation not

all the borrowers were needy, otherwise the conditional statement "if a debtor is in want" would have appeared meaningless. Thus it is concluded that in those times too interest-based loans were taken out for commercial purposes as well and so interest in general is not prohibited by the Qur'an: "O you who believe, do not take *riba* charging doubled and redoubled" (3.130). Some conclude that the Qur'an has condemned charging of only compound interest in this verse, while others argue that creditors are required to refrain not just from accepting back any value more than the principal extended to the debtor, but should avoid all other favors such as gifts or services which cannot be attributable to any other reason but the fact that they are creditors.

There are thinkers like Fazlur Rahman and Rauf Asfar who argue that only excessive compound interest is prohibited by the Qur'an, and not the moderate, simple kind. In any case, a refusal to offer interest would surely encourage the hoarding of wealth and discourage investment, and as a result society as a whole will be disadvantaged. It is not impossible to devise methods of regulating interest so that it does not burden borrowers and also hamstring them in the future if conditions suddenly change and make it difficult for them to discharge the debt. Indeed, this is what the common law in the Anglo-American legal tradition often does, although Asfar does not make this point. Case law in most Western countries does sharply distinguish which debts have to be paid and which do not, how interest may eventually be avoided, and what the consequences are for those who fall on hard times. There are also often restrictions on what levels of interest can be charged and what counts as customers really understanding the sort of agreements they are undertaking in this respect. This is because such an arrangement is in the general interest, and not just the interest of those who fell foul of an agreement that they voluntarily agreed to. Now, one could cynically say, as always with religious law, that the techniques for making what is done legal look very artificial. This is especially so if one follows, as most Sunni Muslims do, the Hanafi legal school, which emphasizes general principles such as welfare and the idea that the law should not be burdensome. This often leads to what look like sleights of hand, a form of words or way of doing things, where not much difference takes place in what is done, but much is changed in how it is described. It is here that Balala is right in calling for a common law approach, since in that case by case methodology one can build up a series of examples, instances and ways of doing things that are more like what is said to be clearly *halal* than otherwise, and where it is generally accepted that what lawyers have to deal with is not so much a *halal/haram* dichotomy as a continuum of legality and illegality. For religious enthusiasts this might seem to disparage the clarity and purity of the Qur'an and what stems from it, but religious law is based not only on God's will but also on human behavior, with all its complications and imperfections. In any case, our grasp of God's will and how it should be carried out is itself often imperfect. It is common law with its careful and piecemeal approach that represents how we ought to understand Islamic financial law and how it will develop and extend its influence globally.

This represents a way forward likely to impose greater legal clarity. Judges in religious courts do obviously refer to the particular case in front of them by referring to other similar cases, and the judgments that are reached in those cases. One of the conceptual tools that makes this sort of argument more plausible is the existence of some principle that lies behind the approach to law. In the Hanafi tradition this is the principle of *istihsan*, the principle of general well-being, a principle that can obviously and quite easily moderate the harshest interpretation of Islamic law. So for example according to this principle *riba* or what is often taken to be interest might be regarded not as interest per se, but as illegitimate interest, a rate of interest which is so high that it defeats the point of borrowing money, since paying it back is well-nigh impossible. The general well-being might be regarded as best served by having moderate levels of interest, if this is not directly forbidden by the canonical texts, and in fact of course the profit sharing arrangements which exist in explicitly *shari'a*-structured financial instruments are rather like interest but in another form. The assumption is that riskier enterprises would attract a demand by investors for higher rates of profit sharing, and that this rate would fluctuate also with the rate of interest in the economy as a whole, since investors have available to them the non-Islamic banking sector. In any case, from a moral point of view, is an investor not entitled to receive more of a return for putting money into a riskier prospect? Islam is critical of speculation, but here again the term can be interpreted in a variety of ways, and a company that is developing a new product, or it might be better put as trying to develop a new product, can be seen either as objectionably speculative (if it fails) or as far-seeing and innovative if it succeeds.

Again we are faced with one of those unsavory choices in talking about religion and economics, of either stressing the distinctness of the religion's teachings on economics, at the cost of making it look far from sensible, or accepting that the religion accepts the desirability of the main aspects of economic life, and that makes the religion look vague. If Islam genuinely forbids interest, and anything that resembles interest, then it really is a radical approach to human commercial interaction and an entirely new sort of economy is envisaged. The fact that it is right to be cautious about present-day Islamic banking arrangements may be largely due to the fact that in an environment in which there are non-Islamic alternatives, i.e. interest, it is difficult for other forms of banking without some interest equivalent to exist. Or so it would seem. On the other hand, Islam also advocates sexual modesty and marriage as the appropriate place for sexual relations, yet in a culture where it is possible to stray the existence of this possibility does not excuse those who do so. Nor does it suggest that such rules are implausible or unrealistic. If however Islam merely advocates more of a commitment by people to charity and social justice, that seems quite easy to accept, and there is no reason why almost any economic system should not share that commitment, at least nominally. There is throughout the Qur'an a passionate demand for justice and charity within the context of free trade, and there is no suggestion that there is anything

wrong with such forms of commerce, provided that appropriate measures are taken to help those who have been unfortunate and who do not do well in society. There is nothing in the Qur'an or the *hadith* to upset the reader of the *Wall Street Journal*, who also probably is broadly in favor of helping the poor and not concentrating all the time on wealth creation as though this were the only aim that has significance. Who could argue with that? But if this is what Islamic economics is all about, it is hardly very distinct from other approaches to economics.

A more plausible but even vaguer suggestion is this. People living in a society and genuinely trying to base their lives on the directions of God and his Messenger would produce a harmonious and prosperous polity. After all, religion comes from God, who knows what sorts of creatures we are since he has created us, and he instructs us to live in certain ways that are in accordance with what he knows is best for us. If we do so we flourish, if we fail to do so we suffer. A society in which people really are interested in regulating their lives in accordance with God's will is appropriate for an economic system that will not only produce wealth but also distribute it in a reasonable and just manner. This really is a theme of the Qur'an, and the fact that most Muslim societies, if not all of them, do not live up to this ideal is perhaps an indication that they are not really Muslim societies. People sometimes do not really think about what God wishes them to do before acting, and so give charity grudgingly, and seek to hoard as much of their earnings as they possibly can, perhaps by concealing them from the tax authorities. People do not always treat their employees with respect or even pay them their due, if they can get away with it, and working conditions are often grim and exploitative. The fact that on the whole there is mass emigration from Islamic-majority countries to the rest of the world suggests that the situation in those countries is far from ideal. It is not just that they are often poor, although they are, but also that the ways in which people live and treat each other are lacking in the sort of respect that all religions regard as significant. This is very much one of the themes of the recent unrest in the Arab world, and suggests that although countries often call themselves Muslim, they are not experienced as being so by many of their inhabitants if Islam is to be more than just formally interpreted in terms of rituals and prayers.

Islamic markets

Here there is scope for being less negative on what an Islamic economics would turn out to be, and there is no need really to criticize the variety of loose principles that those talking about the topic often employ. Clearly the main principles of being moderate in one's dealings with saving and spending are not going to be easy to specify. The principle of devoting adequate resources to charity is also not something that has an obvious answer, but will have to be discussed and worked out depending on the vagaries of a particular situation and those within it. What sort of interest is burdensome is hardly obvious either. In my state in the United States, Kentucky, a bill was presented

to the legislature in 2011 to regulate more closely the many check-cashing services that exist and which can charge enormous rates of interest. The owners of those businesses pointed out that they are handing out money with no security whatsoever, and so it is reasonable to expect a high rate of failure to repay. They also pointed out that the conditions of the agreement are clear, and that they offer the convenience of cash at very short notice. Was it not reasonable, they suggest, for customers to pay a premium for such services, since unless they did they would be unable to offer them? This is not in itself a poor argument to justify what seem otherwise to be egregious rates of interest, the sort that the Qur'an describes so nicely as devouring those involved with them. As we know, someone who merely makes the minimum payment periodically will eventually be paying huge rates of interest, but they consented to do this and it is not the duty of those carrying out such trade to insist that customers are prudent. The Qur'an seems to contemplate firmly a free market economy and in such a system some will be extravagant and others cautious, and naturally not everyone will be able to establish for themselves a middle position between the extremes, something that the Qur'an constantly demands. Muslims are very much over-represented in the financial services industry in many countries with non-Muslim majority populations, and there is no evidence that they are any more guided by moral restraints than anyone else. Presumably if their behavior was very different from the norm they would not be as successful as they are.

As has been mentioned before, this middle position is difficult to determine. We do need to leave scope for risk takers, and they may abandon the idea of a middle position while they are pursuing their ambitions. This may be ruled out as speculation, but it is difficult to know what is speculation and what is not. Suppose that I think that the price of a raw material which I use in my business is going to rise in price a good deal, and as a consequence I spend everything I can, and more, on buying in stockpiles of the item. If I am wrong and the price suddenly drops, I am left with far more expensive material than my competitors, and presumably will suffer as a result. They can price their goods below my price and still make a profit. If I am right it looks as though I was prudent, but I had no guarantee of the success of my strategy, and it could have undone my commercial operations entirely. Is the middle position to buy some extra material but not a lot? Not necessarily, since we are not talking about buying lottery tickets here, this surely would be banned by Islam as speculation. A business owner can use his or her own intelligence to try to work out the future and take decisions on that basis accordingly. Farmers have been doing this ever since markets existed. Sometimes they get it right and sometimes not, and surely when the Qur'an urges moderate behavior it does not mean that one should never take risks.

The problem of trying to find a religious interpretation of economics is complex. The normal ways in which markets operate are on some interpretations unaffected by religion, in which case it looks like religion makes little difference. By contrast, the market could be transformed entirely into

something different, and probably unworkable, in which case the religion might make things a lot worse than they were before. Islam, like many other religions, calls for a moral revolution in our lives which is supposed to bring about a new kind of commercial life. Putting commerce in its place by giving an appropriate role to charity would not transform the nature of commerce, but it would change the nature of society, perhaps for the better. If believers were to put commerce in a more subsidiary place in their lives by contrast with religion, then both commercial life and what it led to might be an improvement on the present situation. This brings out something significant about the impact of religion on economics, and that is that it does not represent an easy solution, like a new rule to make markets work better. It is all about a gradual change in the moral consciousness of the individual and the society of which he and she is a part, and the economic implications which then ensue.

Further reading

Azhar 2010, Balala 2011, Cassidy 2011, Cobham and Dibeh 2011, Iqbal and Mirakhor 2007, Khayed and Hassan 2011, Kuran 2010, al-Qaradawi 1975, Rahman 1964, Vogel and Hayes 1998.

8 Islam and morality

Character of the Prophet

The Prophet is often described by Muslims as embodying a huge number of virtues, and is called by Sufis the perfect man, *al-insan al-kamil*. He was kind, loyal, patient, trustworthy, honest and as his youngest wife 'A'isha said of him, his character was the Qur'an. He exemplified the ethics of the Book, and some of the Book refers to him. His character has often been attacked by those hostile to Islam, since if he is regarded as the perfect man by the religion, an excellent way of attacking it is through criticism of the character of its leading representative. It is worth pointing out however that the Qur'an never says that Muhammad is anything but a human being, a point that is reiterated quite often. Yet there is a good deal of language which praises him in extraordinary ways. Does he deserve to be described in this way?

His behavior with respect to consummating his marriage to 'A'isha has often been criticized outside the Islamic majority world. He married her at six and consummated the marriage at nine or thereabouts, according to most accounts, and that is much too early by the standards of today in most countries. Those defending the Prophet point out that his first marriage was to a considerably older woman, Khadija, and this lasted a long time, although it might also be pointed out that she may have provided him with financial support at a time when he needed it since it is said that she was a successful businesswoman. His other wives seem to have been selected for political reasons, or to help provide support for women who otherwise would have been in difficult situations, and even 'A'isha was the daughter of an important local political figure, Abu Bakr, with whom it was doubtless very useful to establish family links. There is some indication in the Qur'an that his many wives led to comment in the community at the time and needed to be justified. It certainly led to criticism by Christians, many of whom did not think it was appropriate for a religious leader to have even one wife let alone the number the Prophet had. As a hero he seemed very flawed to them, particularly the medieval writers, since he was clearly a military leader and ruthless or effective politician, depending on how one wants to see his behavior, characteristics which contrasted with the Christian ideal of the times and indeed today. The critique of the Prophet in the medieval Christian

world spends a lot of time on the number of his wives and speculates on how inappropriate this is in a religious leader.

The age of 'A'isha was not an issue then, and is not now in the same part of the world, since in 2012 one of the leading legal authorities in Saudi Arabia, 'Abdul 'Aziz al-Shaykh, announced that women could get married at 10 or 12, by which he probably meant that sexual relations could start at that age once sanctioned by marriage. He points out quite accurately that this is not uncommon with the previous generation, and presumably has been common in the region for a very long time. So at the time of the Prophet it was acceptable, and until recently in many other jurisdictions was not illegal either.

Muhammad's military prowess is well attested in Islamic history, the defeats as well as the successes, and he seems to have been an effective leader with few qualms about bloodshed. He suffered early setbacks which no doubt stiffened his treatment of enemies later on. By the standards of the time he seems not to have done anything remarkably evil. Defeated enemies were often killed and their wives and children sold into slavery, but this was common at the time and for much of the earlier historical period also. No doubt in his role as a political ruler Muhammad had to compromise and be careful what he said and did when in a relatively weak position. Perhaps on occasion things were done that would not have otherwise been allowed by him to happen. These are all familiar features of leadership. It is worth saying that a good deal in the history of the Prophet is not particularly complimentary which suggests that it might be true. For example, marrying an older woman and becoming economically dependent on her, in the case of his first wife, if that was the case, is not exactly noble, nor is Muhammad's apparent status as an orphan. His possibly being illiterate, although useful in "proving" that he did not compose the Qur'an, is also not a positive feature, although of course at the time illiteracy was common. His military and political history contain many defeats as well as victories, he was expelled from his home city Mecca and apparently was accused of being mad by his countrymen who rejected his message. In fact, the long process of conversion suggests that he was not that successful as a messenger for a long time, and we know that prominent members of his own family persisted in rejecting his message. All these negative facts, if they are facts, and it has to be said that we really know nothing that can be proved about the Prophet, are actually helpful in suggesting that they might be facts since they go against what we might otherwise expect to be told about him.

The "by the standards of the time" argument

The most common defense now of the problematic things that the Prophet apparently did is the "by the standards of the time" defense. It establishes that if you put his actions within the right historical context they become comprehensible and even defensible. A way of undermining this defense is to say quite rightly that the Prophet was not sent to humanity to glorify the standards of the time (2.170). On the contrary, he was there to overturn those standards and

improve things with the message that he brought from God. It is not unusual for religious reformers to argue that religions need to be reformed to take account of different circumstances, and indeed different standards, and it is remarkable to read of a twenty-first century legal authority in Saudi Arabia advocating sex (within marriage) to very young girls. One wonders what notion of consent one can have at that sort of age, or whether this was of any concern to him. The fact that this was not much of an issue in the past, where children were generally regarded as the property of their parents to be disposed of in marriage as they liked, and at whatever age seemed appropriate to them, is not really much of a defense, although it might work as an excuse. A comparison with the Jewish Bible might be appropriate here, since that is also a book of its time, and many terrible things happen in it. The ways in which the Israelites dealt militarily with their enemies is sometimes particularly harsh, on some occasions not only the men on the opposing side were killed, but also the women and children, and even the livestock! On the other hand, those standards of behavior are not taken to be examples of perfection valid for all time. Nor do they reflect huge credit on the actors involved. The Jewish Bible is often quite critical of even its major characters. One has to be careful with the "by the standards of the time" strategy, since it serves more to explain than to justify.

It is useful to compare the treatment of the major characters in the Jewish Bible with the prophets in the Qur'an. In the former book a critical line is often taken on even the major heroes in Jewish history, they come out as very imperfect characters. They lie, steal, deceive, murder, run away and so on, and often do not faithfully carry out the divine commands they receive (Leaman 2001: 204–13). Some Muslims see this as a sign that the texts have been tampered with, since how could God have selected such imperfect people to represent him on earth? Perhaps the Jews were annoyed at being asked to obey God and so they created as their prophets imperfect men who would be easier to emulate. This is not an unreasonable assumption if it is argued that they also perverted the Torah in order to make it more amenable to their wishes as to how to act. The prophets in the Qur'an are all quite different from each other, and some of course do not appear in the Jewish Bible at all, but they all manifest trust in God as something very definitive of their behavior and thought. Yet in the Jewish Bible the commentators often suggest that Moses (Musa) was punished by not being allowed to lead the Israelites to Israel because on two occasions at least he did not trust in God to help them and intervened himself, as when he struck a rock to produce water. It is worth pointing out also that the history of the Israelites in the desert on their way to Israel was hardly one of prolonged trust in God according to the Jewish Bible, but on the contrary they often turn away and blame Moses for bringing them out of Egypt. In an interesting discussion of this period Maimonides claims that the reason God took so long to move them from Egypt to Israel was because he wanted them to transform their thinking from Egyptian to new forms of thought, from being slaves to being free human beings, and this took time and the experience of living as a distinct group in a hostile environment. God could just have transformed their thinking himself, of

course, but he wants us to change gradually by our own efforts, with the assistance of divine law and leadership (Leaman 1997b: 64–101). Even Moses is not reckoned as perfect, though, and the earlier and later prophets in the Bible are far from perfect also, and so only to be emulated with care.

The Prophet Muhammad is different, according to Muslim accounts, he really was an extraordinary human being and it is appropriate for everyone to look on his life as a paradigm of how people ought to live. This is why for many Muslims the stories about how he behaved, even in trivial matters, are worth knowing and copying. For the Shi'a the family of the Prophet itself is remarkable and the series of imams who are produced from it are the only appropriate leaders of the *umma* as a result. For the Sunnis who do not necessarily share this view of the family of the Prophet it is nonetheless deserving of respect and the Prophet himself is of huge significance. This fact means that the "by the standards of the time" argument has to be used with care. The Prophet cannot really be said to have acted by the standards of the time if he is worth emulating, since the standards of the time were evil, on the whole, and Islam was sent to transform them. The point of the Qur'an is not to get people to live like first/seventh century Arabs.

On the other hand, the standards of the time set the context within which the Qur'an was produced and its leading and final prophet operated, so they are relevant. In just the same way the language of Arabic is relevant, it is the language in which God produced his final revelation, according to Islam, and has to be understood if the message is to be grasped. Not only Arabic has to be understood but the Arabic of the time, and the way to understand the text is to understand the standards of Arabic vocabulary and grammar of the time. In his attack on the project of using Greek philosophy in the Islamic world the theologian al-Sirafi criticizes its translators (Leaman 2001: 11–12, Leaman 2009: 22–3) for not really knowing either Greek or the original context in which the texts they were dealing with were produced (they often worked from Syriac and not original texts). This is a reasonable complaint, unless we know the context we find it hard to translate, and so the standards of the time are really closely linked with understanding what happens at that time. So "by the standards of the time" set out a way of understanding a text and also a lifestyle, and is an appropriate defense for the events of the time, when they seem awry by modern standards. Qur'anic Arabic is also distinct from modern Arabic, although the former has played a huge role in the construction of the latter, and it would be inappropriate to criticize one on the basis of the other.

This argument will not really work though since we do criticize one form of language on the basis of another for exterior reasons, like its grace, perspicacity, ease of use, scope and so on, and language changes often to take account of factors like this. Languages change to become easier to use and to fit into new contexts, although their earlier versions are still often capable of being understood and of having been used to produce very beautiful works. Beauty is not the only important factor in language either: "And We did not give Prophet Muhammad knowledge of poetry, nor is it appropriate for him. It is only a

message and a clear Qur'an" (36.69). Poetry is misleading, it can be used to deceive and has no obvious link with practice or the truth, according to the Qur'an. The idea that the Prophet was a poet is obviously difficult to reconcile with the account of the origination of the Book and poetry at the time was seen as an alternative source of information about how to live, one that needs to be resisted. We are often told that it was an important activity in Arabia before the arrival of Islam, and no doubt one of the reasons why the Qur'an was written in such attractive language was to attract the attention and indeed the allegiance of the local population. This does not mean it is poetry, though, although it clearly has poetic elements in it. The point is that the language of the time has to be taken seriously as describing the truth, not taken as a poetic evocation of some possible world. Within this context we have to take as true what we are told about the Prophet and when we make judgments based on that description we cannot be limited by "the standards of the time."

Muslim moral character

Islam presents itself as a comprehensive way of life, and morality is naturally one of the most important aspects of that way of life. The most fundamental moral characteristics of a Muslim are piety and humility. A Muslim must be humble with respect to God and with other people. After all, one of the translations of *muslim* is slave or servant, and that is an appropriate translation:

> And turn not your face away from people, nor walk in insolence through the earth. God certainly does not like the arrogant boaster. And be moderate in your walking, and lower your voice. The harshest of all voices is really the voice of the ass.
>
> (31.18–19)

Muslims must be in control of their passions and desires. A Muslim should not be vain nor attached to the ephemeral pleasures of this world. The material world is not that important, and the trappings of success in it are often unrepresentative of what our lives actually are. The emphasis on the afterlife might make Islamic morality seem prudential, since we might be encouraged to do good to merit a happy life in the next world, but this is not an appropriate motive. If we are good then we are likely to acquire such a reward, but doing good for the sake of the reward is limited in its moral depth. Thinking of the next world enables us to put this world in its place, in the sense that we know that this is only part of the whole of existence, and quite a small part. Our place in it is even smaller: "The day when neither wealth nor sons will avail, but only he that brings to God a sound heart" (26.88–9).

A very important claim about righteousness comes in the second *sura*:

> It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in God and the last day and the angels, and the

> Book, and the messengers; who spends of his wealth, in spite of love for it, to relatives, to orphans, to the needy, to the wayfarer, to those who ask and for the freeing of slaves; and who is steadfast in prayers, and gives alms; and those who fulfill their covenants which they made; and who are patient and indefatigible in poverty and sickness and throughout all periods of fighting. Such are the people of truth, the pious.
>
> (2.177)

The suggestion here is that righteousness and piety are linked. The key to virtue is the right relationship with God, who knows the intentions behind all actions. The love and continuous awareness of God and the day of judgment helps us to be moral in conduct and sincere in intentions, with appropriate devotion and dedication: "Indeed, the most honorable among you in the sight of God is the most pious" (49.13).

The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of establishing a pattern in our lives and incorporating ethical values into that: "And God loves those who are firm and steadfast" (3.146). Patience is often hardest and most praiseworthy when it goes against what we would otherwise seek to do. It is particularly important to use our resources to help others and restrain our emotions when others offend us as we hope God will do (3.133). Morality controls and channels our selfish desires into more appropriate directions, including our vanity and poor habits. Muslims should not only be virtuous, but also see to it that others are virtuous also, and that the society in which they live embodies the moral virtues they uphold, insofar as they can. We return to this familiar *sura*:

> You are the best of the nations raised up for men; you insist on what is right and forbid wrong and believe in God; and if the people of the book had believed it would have been better for them; there are believers among them but most of them are transgressors.
>
> (3.110)

It is important to understand that Islamic ethics sets up a challenge to Muslims:

> Let there be among you a community that calls to the good [*khayr*], supports virtue and forbids vice [*munkar*].
>
> (3.104)

This is by no means a call for the smug sense of self-satisfaction of religious people who are carrying out their religious duties and feel that they are doing everything that God wants. For one thing, to be a genuine Islamic community is more than nominal, and requires that the individual members of the group really see themselves as part of a group and not only a random collection of individuals with a few things holding them together. One of the advantages of being in a community is precisely the feeling of being in a community, not being by oneself and with the support and companionship of others. Muslims

are called on to construct the "best community" by insisting on right conduct (3.114). Of crucial significance here is the character of the individual Muslim, how that comes over to other people and encourages them to behave well and avoid what is wrong.

Humility

Humility is one of the most significant virtues in Islam, and also one of the hardest to acquire: "And by the mercy of God, you dealt with them gently. And had you been severe and harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from you" (3.159). The character of humility means feeling helpless before God, and compassionate toward others, so that the person does not feel superior toward anyone, or think that he has any rights over anyone else; rather he thinks that others are better than him, and that their rights come before his. The *ahadith* are very detailed on different kinds of humility and how important it is, while the Qur'an emphasizes the broad parameters of the virtue: "The servants of the Merciful are those who walk on the earth in humility" (25.63). Humility is the awareness that all our good qualities are granted by God, and that all praise and thanks is due to God and not to us. Any project we engage on is morally suspect if it is not carried out in a humble manner, and purity requires humility. We are sometimes fortunate in having adequate resources of health, wealth and success in life, but these factors are due to God and not us and we should be grateful. Arrogance, self-satisfaction and pride are the opposites of humility and an effective way of resisting these negative character dispositions is to acknowledge our total dependence on God through prayer.

The Prophet advised his followers to humble themselves before God and other Muslims: "Give good news to the humble-hearted" (22.34). Humility comes out as modesty, patience and respect toward others. Submission to God leads a person toward a more tranquil life with a direction, while self-pride and arrogance leads one to a life of turmoil and hatred. It is not possible to be in real submission while behaving arrogantly and with contempt toward others: "Successful indeed are the believers who humble themselves in their prayers" (23.02). Those who disciplined themselves to live this life looking toward the next world are those who accepted the test of life with faith and wisdom. We all have goals that we would like to achieve in life, but these are relative and we should appreciate this. We have an eternal goal which is being with God in heaven and if we avoid the sins connected to arrogance, God may place us in heaven and reward us for our humility. "Indeed, He does not like the arrogant" (16.23) and there are many stories of how the Prophet and his Companions did not enjoy the trappings of power, but helped the weak and did not acquire great personal wealth or the trappings of political supremacy. How accurate these are as statements of fact we do not know, but it is clear what these accounts portray as desirable behavior for those in power.

Arrogance is the basic root of all evil, as when Iblis refused to bow down to Adam since he thought he was better than the first human. After all, he was

made of fire while Adam came from clay (7.11–12). Thinking one is better than someone else is dangerous since it is an easy step from there to being happy with one's level of religious and moral performance, and that smug feeling of self-satisfaction should be strenuously resisted by religious people. It is nonetheless a constant temptation. Arrogance is also involved in thinking that one can work out what we are supposed to do without requiring divine guidance, or perhaps wavering in our following of God's law when we cannot see the point of it. In the Qur'an we are sometimes told that we may not know why we should do what we are told to do (2.216) and we may dislike doing it (4.19) but it is in our interests. Questioning what we are told to do by God is the opposite of humility. We are his creatures and he knows how we should behave better than we do.

This approach can be followed a bit further to suggest that we should carefully restrain ourselves from using our own ideas about how we should act by contrast with doing what God tells us to do. There is certainly a role for reason in religion, but it is not always used properly to help us get from the initial propositions of the religion to where they go logically. Sometimes we use reason more broadly, to challenge those propositions themselves or to provide an alternative account of how we should act and what that action should involve. So for example if we see ourselves as "progressive" we might come to reinterpret the traditional ways of understanding some of the basic rules of religion, since we find them incompatible with how people live now, or want to live. This might be seen as arrogant, as suggesting that it is up to us to decide what we are going to do and how we are going to do it, whereas a religion that emphasizes humility puts those decisions precisely at the disposal of someone who is not us. When we examine the rules of a religion we often come across ways of doing things that we may think are arbitrary and not closely related to anything important in the religion. The rules of modesty are a good example here, when the Qur'an makes references to the importance of both men and women being modest there is not much discussion of what this means precisely, and as we know different interpreters at different times and in different places have come to different understandings of what modesty actually means in practice. There are problems in thinking that it is up to each Muslim to work out his or her own rules, though. Being asked to do what we do not want to do is not a problem if it is seen as part of a process of encouraging us to be humble. To give an example, if a lecture is to start at 9 a.m. then that is the time that students who wish to attend the whole of the lecture from the beginning should come, but it could always start at some other time. Once the starting time has been fixed, then students have to abide by it, even though they may regret it or find other times more convenient. How much more is this the case, it might be thought, if the rule has its basis in something that God our creator has embodied in a text? We may not understand why it is as it is, or we may prefer it to be different, and this is part of what is meant by being humble, we recognize our submissive role in a universe where we are called on to play a part which is given to us by someone far above us.

The Islamic community as a moral unit

We need to ask ourselves how far Muslim communities have applied themselves to this task and how successful they are. There is certainly a good deal of rhetoric on the distinction between the close knit communities in the Islamic world, if we are to use that expression, the ways in which children look after parents and the emphasis on marriage and childcare. The need to bring children up in a stable environment is obviously important as is the sense of solidarity which extends throughout the individuals within the community. Whether this is any more characteristic of Muslim communities, though, as compared with communities or groups of other religious types is difficult to say. It is certainly true that more rural societies may include people who cooperate with each other more than more urban societies, and that people who have been brought up to expect less materially may be less interested in material enhancement and more oriented toward traditional institutions like family and friends. There is nothing essentially Islamic about this, though, and thinking that there is falls into the danger of stereotyping the "typical" Muslim family in ways that need to be questioned. It might be regarded as a positive stereotype yet it is still unrealistic and encourages people to set up expectations and goals that are unlikely to be achieved given the facts of the societies in which they may live. In large industrial societies the state sets up institutions to help those who need help, and this inevitably bites into the notion of community and its self-support systems. As a result the need for community assistance is diminished and perhaps as a result the need for community is less, at least in a material sense.

It is often said that the Qur'an as a whole is characterized by the spirit of *hilm* or clemency, kindness (*ihsan*) in human relations, justice (*'adl*), avoiding what is wrong (*zulm*), abstinence, control of passions, and the rejection of pride and arrogance. These are abstractions and they need to be applied to the problems and realities of life. One of the reasons why Greek philosophy was so much used in Islamic philosophy is its ability to do this, to work out some of the ways in which we can change our character through behaving in certain ways, and how behaving in certain ways can initiate personal changes that are desirable. It led to one of the protracted debates in Islamic ethics over whether the rules of Islam are there because they accord with what we want to do anyway and encourage us to act well because of this, or whether on the contrary they are as they are in order to make us do things we do not naturally want to do for the reason of making us better. This was an argument developed at some length by two Persian thinkers, Miskawayh and al-Ghazali. The latter argued that we do not naturally want to get together on Fridays to pray, or give charity or go on pilgrimage, these are difficult, sometimes dangerous and often unpleasant activities. Prayer itself, especially the early morning prayer, and fasting during Ramadan, are not always delightful things to do, and yet the point of them is that God has commanded Muslims to do them and in that way emphasized that he is God and in control of our desirable behavior. The point of doing

something we do not like to do is to change us in ways that make us aware perhaps that there are many things we ought to do which we do not like, since we live in a world which was not created for our benefit.

By contrast, Miskawayh points to all the aspects of religious life that are enjoyable and satisfying, the feeling of solidarity when one prays with others, the satisfaction of carrying out one's religious duties, the feeling that the rites and rituals of Islam can fit in perfectly easily with the other things we need to do. So these were duties set up for Muslims because they are pleasant and in this way we are encouraged to follow religion. It fits in well with our nature. This is hardly surprising, since God created that nature and the religion that goes with it. They fit together nicely, and it is quite easy to see a positive social intention behind any religious instruction. As al-Ghazali points out, this is a bit simplistic since there are many aspects of religion that are not obviously pleasant and where we get the feeling that what we would otherwise wish to do is being blocked by what God wants us to do (Leaman 2009: 112–17), and the Prophet even refers to this feeling when he talks of God knowing best, in a situation where we would have liked to go in a different direction (4.19).

Our normal goals, such as the pursuit of wealth, social standing or power, and even the love of knowledge, are illusory, since they relate only to this world. The point of religion is to orient us toward the next world and to change our character accordingly. Many things are pleasant and should be avoided. For example, al-Ghazali divides the arts into the categories of allowed, reprehensible and forbidden. The acceptable arts are those dealing with religion or which inspire fervor. Arts intended for pleasure or entertainment only are either reprehensible or forbidden. This brings out nicely the contrast between what we would otherwise quite naturally tend to do and where we need divine instruction helping us to know what to avoid. Here al-Ghazali fits into the normal way of looking at the relationship between religion and reason of his time, where religion is directed at everyone and reason at those who can use it properly, a limited group. Most people have material interests at heart and they need a religion which speaks to them in material terms, since otherwise they will not be able to use that religion. Only more advanced thinkers and spiritually developed people can really appreciate the lack of significance that our physical nature in fact possesses. Religion addresses everyone, and so uses the sort of physical language and ideas which will resonate with the widest possible constituency.

This is where the significance of *hilm* comes in. It is not a virtue that is equivalent to a set of actions like charity or piety, where you can say quite clearly that an individual has acted charitably or piously and so is a charitable or pious person. *Hilm* is a way of acting, it is a characteristic of being charitable and pious, and other personal qualities also. As such it is difficult to know when one has attained it, in the sense that there is no level of attainment which represents success, since it is a way of doing other things. But saying that mildness and kindness are important does not mean that one has to be mild and kind all the time, there are situations in which it is appropriate to react forcefully and even violently, according to Islam, and where not to do so would be

dangerous. Getting the balance right is both difficult to do and something that Islam prides itself on providing the means to accomplish. Here we need to point to the *ahadith* as a collection of stories, discussions, reports and so on which deal with how Muslims ought to act in different and sometimes difficult situations. A good deal of argument extends on which *hadith* are genuine and otherwise, but in a sense it does not really matter, since genuine or not they all point to ways of working out how Muslims ought to behave. The fact that they often go in different directions is not a bad thing, although it is often treated as such by those seeking a clear path to how to act. There is a clear and straight path to how to do some things in an Islamic way, like being pious for example, or relatively so, and the *hadith* on this are generally also clear, but on the far harder task of becoming *halim* or kind, that is far from easy to establish and the *ahadith* are, as one would suspect, all over the place. The best way to see this in much of the commentary material is by examining how those of different schools and tendencies in Islam and those outside of the religion select certain *hadith* to back up the point and interpretation they wish to push. Not surprisingly, *ahadith* which present arguments not in line with those who use them tend to be assessed as weak, and there are so many of them that a plausible case can be made for almost any view. That is not a criticism of *hadith*, since it is an acceptance that what we have here is a highly valuable repository of information, anecdote and supposition that allows us to work out a range of positions which, in line with the Qur'an, can move a theoretical idea into practice. What the *ahadith* do is not tell us what charity is, but rather how the concept can be used, much in the way that the philosopher Kant spoke of the schemata in the critical philosophy. The schemata show us how we can use our concepts, and the *ahadith* demonstrate how the more general ideas in the Qur'an can be applied to our daily lives.

God and morality

One of the obvious issues that arise within the context of religion are the respective powers of God and his creation. God is the ultimate creator, the source of all being and in the Qur'an we are told he knows everything that happens. He is in charge of punishment and reward and directs our lives. On the other hand, we must presumably have some scope to take our own decisions since otherwise it does not seem just for us to suffer or be rewarded as a result of our actions. Yet the Qur'an sometimes suggests that God even decides who is to be a believer or otherwise, which makes it rather difficult to understand how he can punish people for not being believers. This led to a protracted controversy on how far we are free to take our own decisions, and how far those decisions are really the action of God, with us only seeming to act independently. We are seen by some like the Ash'arites to "acquire" those actions from God, who is the only real actor.

A linked issue is whether we can use reason to work out our duties, or whether we can only know how to act if we have the guidance of religion.

The position of the Qur'an might look clear on this, since it talks a good deal on the significance of the role of the messenger, the conduit of information from heaven to earth, and if we did not need such an individual it seems strange for God to have sent such a person to speak on his behalf to humanity. The Qur'an suggests that without guidance we would be lost. On the other hand, some Muslims argued that divine guidance was appropriate for most people, but some people did not need it since they could work out their duties by themselves, just using reason. Clearly this would be only a minority, but the principle is important, that reason is sufficient to find out our duties, we do not have to go to religion. Needless to say, the argument continues to show that the conclusions of reason and religion are the same, but the routes to the truth are distinct. The importance of the controversy is whether God controls what is good and evil, and our way of finding out, or whether this is something he merely confirms when someone else works it out.

Theodicy

Some obvious issues arise within the context of religion and these include the respective powers of God and his creation. A linked issue is whether we can use reason to work out our duties, or whether we can only know how to act if we have the guidance of religion. The position of the Qur'an might look clear on this, since it talks a good deal about the significance of the role of the messenger, the conduit of information from heaven to earth, and if we did not need such an individual it seems strange for God to have sent such a person to speak on his behalf to humanity. The Qur'an suggests that without guidance we would be lost. On the other hand, some Muslims argued that divine guidance was appropriate for most people, but some people did not need it since they could work out their duties by themselves, just using reason. Clearly this would be only a minority, but the principle is important, that reason is sufficient to find out our duties, we do not have to go to religion. Needless to say, the argument continues to show that the conclusions of reason and religion are the same, but the routes to the truth are distinct. The importance of the controversy is whether God controls what is good and evil, and our way of finding out, or whether this is something he merely confirms when someone else works it out.

The traditional problem of evil follows from the control that God has over the world and its creatures. Why does he not organize what he controls in ways that prevent suffering from occurring, since he always could? In response to the question, "if God exists why is there evil in the world?", there does not seem to be a problem for many Muslim thinkers. An omnipotent God who is omniscient and all good has seemed to many philosophers to be a contradiction, and one of those attributes has to go if the other two are to persist as divine attributes. That is, God could be all powerful and all good, but might not know what was happening, so could not prevent it. Or he could be all good and all knowing, but unable to do everything. Finally, he could be all knowing and powerful but not all good, so evil does not bother him.

For the Ash'arites, the only one who can judge what is good and what is evil is God. Whatever God decides or does is by definition good. So "God does good" is a tautology because good simply means "whatever God does or approves of." Islam suggests that things people may consider "evil" are things that either contain something good in them of which we are unaware or represent a sin for which the wrongdoer is responsible and anyone wronged will be recompensed. Even people who die for no fault of their own can get the reward of paradise and so will have suffered no ultimate loss at all.

On this sort of approach, God, the owner of everything, can do whatever he pleases and wants with his creation, his property, and we are nothing compared to God and thus lack the authority or power to question him. We lack the authority to question God and thus cannot object against God or what he allows to happen in the world. Since on this view God is the only ultimate reality, and has created the concept of morals, right and wrong, good and evil, then whatever he decides is just, is just. He is fully entitled to do whatever he does and therefore whatever he does is just. The Islamic definition of God being just or having the name *al-'adl* is based on the idea that whatever he does is inherently just since he is the ultimate reality and the only rightful judge. So much so that even if the owner and creator wanted to destroy his creation, we are told that no one could say that is unjust. This world is nothing compared to the eternal world of the afterlife. So any loss or gain incurred in this life is nothing. The only thing that really matters is the eternal life. Provided that God correctly rewards and punishes people in accordance with their deserts, as by definition he does, we can have no reasonable complaint with whatever he does. This world was created as a test for us. God wanted to create beings that would have the potential to be even greater than angels. Angels worship God and do good because they are incapable of committing any wrong. Angels have no choice but to worship and obey God. God thus wanted to create a being whose worship of God would be greater because it would be done out of free choice. Thus God decided to create a being which, like angels, will be able to think, but unlike the angels, was provided with the passions and free will:

> Behold, your Lord said to the angels: "I will create a viceroy on earth." They said: "Will you put there someone who will make mischief and shed blood while we celebrate your praises and glorify you?" He said: "I know what you know not".
>
> (2.30)

Humans alone were fit to be representatives of God on earth. That is because we, and not angels, can deal with fear, hunger, thirst, desire and so on. These are all attributes that make us human. If God gave such attributes to angels, they too would be no different than humans. Thus God created a being which has desires, needs and temptations, but still chooses to worship God and sacrifice, which angels cannot do in the same sort of way. Those who in this life are prepared to commit themselves to God and do good will be rewarded with

eternal paradise. Those who choose to do wrong and follow their base inclinations instead of God will be punished in hell. Any good they gain by committing wrong in this life will be negligible compared to the hereafter. Those who do wrong or are wronged will be recompensed accordingly in the hereafter. Those who suffer due to what are rather misleadingly called acts of God, since everything is really an act of God, will likewise be recompensed in the hereafter.

> Be sure we shall test you with a degree of fear and hunger, some loss in goods or lives or earnings, but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere, who say, when afflicted with calamity: "To God we belong, and to Him is our return." They are those on whom there are blessings from God, and mercy, and they are the ones that are rightly guided.
>
> (2.155–7)

If no undesirable things happened in life we would think this is paradise and would be content with this life. However this life is only temporary, it is not paradise, and undesirable events help us remember that. Thus God says:

> And indeed We will make them taste of the penalty prior to the supreme penalty, in order that they may return. And who does more wrong than one to whom are recited the signs of his Lord, and who then turns away? From those who transgress We shall certainly exact retribution.
>
> (32.21–2)

When people begin to forget God and become content with the worldly life, God may send them a small hardship, small compared to the hereafter, so that through that hardship they may pray, remember and reconnect to God. Thus sickness, a disaster, a death in the family, loss of wealth, etc. are all meant not to be punishments necessarily, but a reminder. "And often it is seen that after people are afflicted with difficulties they remember God but when God bestows his grace, they enjoy God's blessings and forget him" (39.8). The implication here is that in good times people often attribute their good fortune to good fortune and not to the power of God to direct their lives.

Moses and Khidr

When Moses was asked by the Children of Israel who the wisest person in the world was, he rather immodestly suggested that he was. God disapproved of his reply which is hardly a good example of humility, and sent Khidr to teach him a lesson. Khidr told Moses he would teach him but Moses needs to refrain from asking him any questions. When they crossed a river in someone's boat Khidr cut holes in the boat and Moses protested at this ungracious behavior. Khidr reminded him that he was not allowed to ask him any questions. Then Khidr killed a child he came across who was playing, and Moses again

protested, and again received the same reply. Finally they came to a village where the inhabitants were unpleasant to them, and Khidr helped a wall not collapse without receiving any return, which Moses was indignant about yet again. Khidr replied that since Moses had no patience he would leave him, but before he went he would explain what he had done. He made holes in the boat so that when it was repaired it would seem to have a blemish and not be seized by the ruler. The child who was killed had good parents and he would have grown up to become evil and threaten the faith of his parents, whereas another child that was to be subsequently born would do the reverse. Finally, the wall hid a treasure and belonged to good people, and by maintaining it Khidr preserved their property until such time as they would be able to take advantage of it (18.60–82).

The moral of the story is that we never know the wisdom behind the happenings in the world and because of our limitations are thus in no position to judge God. Even Moses had to be taught this truth. Is this persuasive as a solution to the problem of evil, though? The trouble with this strategy is that it seems to give up too early. If God knows and we do not know the answer to this theoretical problem then there is no point in discussing it, but we can discuss the plausibility of God knowing the solution as a solution. The idea that in any case people are rewarded or punished in the next life for anything that happens in this life that goes against apparent justice is banal. On the other hand, the argument here is that suffering, even if apparently undeserved, has an educative function, and the point then could be that we have to put up with undeserved suffering in life from arbitrary authority at least occasionally since it trains us to expect anything at all to happen, and this increases our mental flexibility and ability to accept even orders and consequences we do not understand. It is part of being in the role of an inferior within a system, and an important part. We are after all the creatures of God, slaves in fact according to some of the translations into English of Muslims or *muslimun*, and we must accept such treatment as then appropriate. We can be confident that when it comes from God that it has a good reason behind it and will end up well for those who deserve it.

The case of Job

The normal approach to Job's suffering is to wonder why an innocent person should suffer. As we have seen, it could be argued that suffering is merely an aspect of one of God's attributes, not in the sense that he directly wants us to suffer, but if we are to benefit by his provision of the physical senses we have to accept the possibility of things going wrong. For example, we cannot enjoy eating unless we have an appetite, and having an appetite means sometimes being hungry. So the problem of evil is not really a problem since the evil that we perceive to exist is not really evil, it is just an inevitable part of being the sorts of creatures we are, and we should use this sort of physical suffering to help us understood how powerless we are with respect to our creator.

Yet in the Qur'an we are told that Job was, as in the biblical account, rewarded eventually by God who was impressed by his patience and by the fact that he always turned (*awwab*) toward Him (38.41–4). The adverb "always" is important here, since it means that he did it when things were good as well as when they were bad, the mark of a sincere person. In fact it might be said that what also impressed God with Job (Ayyub) in the Qur'an was the latter's prayer that his sufferings were not allowed to interfere with his relationship with God. Job had identified correctly that his relationship with God was the truly important thing in his life and real suffering would occur were that relationship to come into question, as it could were Job to blame God for his sufferings and think they were undeserved and inappropriate. A general acceptance of suffering is important in many interpretations of Islam, and the fact of suffering does not in any way invalidate our relationship and dependence on God. The account of Job suggests that we should not seek to change that relationship just because we do not appear to do well out of the relationship on a particular occasion.

The Qur'anic Job is very different from the biblical Job. The latter holds God responsible for his sufferings and constantly rails at him to respond with an explanation for what is happening. The only fair description of the biblical Job and his accusations against God are aggressive and persistent, accusations which go on for a long time and take up much of the text. There is a resemblance between them, though, and that lies in the fact that the biblical Job, despite his nagging of God, never denies Him. But there is also a huge discrepancy between the accounts in that the biblical Job seems to be rewarded in the end for asking awkward questions and challenging God, by contrast with his friends who respond to his sufferings with theological solutions that rather resemble the Qur'anic approach. God only pardons them at the end of the book of Job at Job's request. So the book of Job is altogether a far more skeptical account of our relationship with God than that found in the Qur'an, hardly surprising given the differences between the biblical accounts of the prophets and that found in the Qur'an. The latter is far more respectful of the prophets than is the former, and presents a much clearer picture of the role of suffering in our lives and how it is connected to the afterlife. Job in the Bible is dubious about the afterlife, commenting that who knows what happens when we die, whether we go up or go down, and he is not referring here to heaven and hell, but more to the possibility of eternal life or disintegration into our physical bits and pieces. If he addresses them in so direct a way that they find it impossible to disobey, then there is hardly merit in obeying, or in God choosing to allow one to believe. The Qur'anic Job does not use tentative language at all, by contrast with the biblical Job, although there is plenty of other such language in the Book.

Perhaps then those who find this approach to the problem of suffering unsatisfactory are in the position of Moses in the example of someone who has little patience and needs to be taught to cultivate that virtue by Khidr. When Moses is a bit too assured of his own importance God decides to take him

down a peg or two by teaching him a lesson, and this is what happens. It is just because although Moses did not know it he was getting a bit above himself, and even someone of the stature of Moses, one of the major prophets, is capable of going awry and requiring correction. Yet this sort of example does not really work in the case of someone who is obviously undeserving of suffering receiving it, like a horribly malformed child, for example, and it is not very helpful to say that God knew how he would have developed had he not been malformed, and it would have been worse than the present situation, or that it does not matter since in the next world he will be compensated. A servant is not entirely at the disposal of his master, nor even in the past were slaves under many systems of law. Similarly, those who own property do not always have the right to dispose of it entirely as they wish.

Even if we bypass the legal issues here, the moral ones are significant. I may have the legal right to treat a dependent however I wish, but do I have the moral right to do so? Even if parents are allowed to kill their children, they did after all produce them, are they morally allowed to do so? It will no doubt be said that what we call "allowed" is equivalent to what God does, but that is both too strong and too weak to produce the conclusion that is being sought. If nothing that God does can be questioned, then that is where the argument stops and it is a waste of time wondering why. If we can wonder why God acts in particular ways, then saying that only God knows is not really to say enough, since it means that really we should not wonder at what happens but merely accept it. This is as we have seen a respectable religious doctrine, and one to which many Muslims are wedded. It follows from it though that we cannot question divine decisions, and so they are above morality. That means that we cannot argue about them, which we have just been doing, and this seems to be wrong. After all, someone might say that he thought that no amount of reward in paradise would compensate him for the suffering he experienced during a period of his life, where that suffering was apparently undeserved, and who are we to say differently? The courts have to decide in cases of compensation what it means for the injured party to be made whole again, but of course many litigants will feel that nothing can be done to make good what they have suffered, although some money would certainly help. Insurance companies often publish lists of what you get for missing limbs, for instance, or the inability to do something as the result of an accident, but a lost leg is not really equivalent to a few thousand dollars, for example. It might be said that divine compensation is different from this, and no doubt it is, but however perfect it is would it be irrational for someone to prefer to have his original life left without the undeserved suffering? This is very much the territory of the biblical Job as opposed to the Qur'anic Ayyub, since the former rails for most of the book against the notion of divine justice and is dubious about the possibility of compensation, since he has little time for the notion of an afterlife. The brief reference to Ayyub in the Qur'an is very different since it consists of an entirely faithful servant merely praying that his sufferings do not interfere with his relationship with God.

Abortion

As with many religions, there exists a variety of views in Islam on the acceptability of abortion. Some theologians see it as acceptable in some situations, at some stages of the fetus and its growth, while others are very restrictive on its application. As so often when religion has to link up with what the state wants to do anyway, there is a tendency for the religious authorities to go along with public policy. The Qur'an clearly disapproves of killing other humans: "Take not life which God has made sacred" (6.151). Unlawful killing of a single individual human is equivalent to the murder of the whole of humanity: "Because of that, We ordained for the children of Israel that if anyone killed a person not in retaliation for murder or for spreading mischief on earth, it would be as if he killed all mankind. And who saved a life, it would be as if he saved all mankind" (5.32).

Sura 17.31 produces an instruction which might seem to rule out abortion: "Kill not your children for fear of want. We shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you. Verily the killing of them is a great sin." But is the fetus a child or does it have the status of a child? Do the rules against killing people apply to the fetus, since the fetus is not yet a person? At what stage does it come to be a person, or resemble a person?

The Qur'an says in an exceptionally fine passage:

> We created man from an essence of clay: then placed him, a living germ in a secure enclosure. The germ we made a leech; and the leech a lump of flesh; and this we fashioned into bones, then clothed the bones with flesh; Then we develop it into another creation.
>
> (23.12–14)

This verse reveals how the fetus is formed and transforms into a complete human being. The elaborate process of the development of the first human being is given in the Qur'an as follows:

> He who has made everything which He has created most good. He began the creation of man with clay, and made its progeny from a quintessence of the nature of a disgusting fluid. Then He fashioned him in due proportion and breathed into him something of His spirit [*ruh*]. And He gave you hearing and sight and understanding.
>
> (32.7–9)

During the development of the fetus, the body at some stage receives the divine aspect of life and subsequently the human faculties of hearing, sight and understanding start to be developed. But when does this happen? The general agreement is that before it happens there is only a potentially living thing in existence, and that is not enough of a person for it to count as a person. So contraception is unproblematic, for instance. At some stage though the

personhood of the fetus becomes actualized when it is enlivened, and there are a variety of ways of working out when this happens. The Islamic concept of human life extends to the fetus, even while it is a part of the mother and if somebody assaults a pregnant woman which leads to her losing the child, he would thus be committing two crimes: one for assault, and the other for killing the fetus.

There is a *hadith* on the authority of Abu Hurayra that two women fought, and one threw a stone that killed the other and her fetus. The Prophet was asked what should be done, and he suggested that blood money be paid for the death of the woman and a slave of either gender released for the fetus. The guardian of the woman who was liable to pay was indignant and complained that he should not have to pay on behalf of something that does not eat or drink, talk or walk, all comments that were rejected by the Prophet. The fetus' right to life is an absolute value, even if this fetus is illegitimate. There is a story of a woman coming to the Prophet admitting that she had committed adultery and was now pregnant. She was told to have the baby, and when she weaned it she returned to the Prophet. He took the child from her and gave it to someone to look after, and then ordered that she be stoned to death.

It is generally clear that the *shari'a* allows abortion only when doctors declare with reasonable certainty that the continuation of pregnancy will endanger the woman's life. This permission is based on the principle of the lesser of the two evils known in Islamic legal terminology as the principle of *al-ahamm wa'l-muhimm* (the more important and the less important). In the present case, one is faced with two forbidden things: either to abort the unborn child or let its mother die, and a distinction needs to be made between these two alternatives. The woman is often taken to be more important than the child because her life is already established while the fetus is barely established and it does not have a role in a social network yet, unlike the woman. On the other hand, abortion just because a child would be inconvenient is a problem, given the declaration that children should not be killed just because of poverty: "And do not kill your children for fear of poverty: We give them sustenance and yourselves: surely to kill them is a great wrong" (17.31). It is often said that these verses in fact were revealed to forbid the pre-Islamic Arab practice of killing unwanted children, especially girls, due to their poverty or disinclination to have girls. This was of course a period when contraception, which is generally acceptable in Islam, was largely impossible or ineffective.

What is significant is the time of abortion, for those who accept it as legal. When the soul enters the fetus is the crucial question. After that stage abortion would be equivalent to murder. Hanafi scholars, who comprised the majority of orthodox Muslims in later centuries, permitted abortion in the first four months. According to them, a pregnant woman could have an abortion without her husband's permission, but she should have a good reason for it, perhaps to do with the difficulties of looking after another child while she was still feeding an earlier one. The Shafi'i school (dominant in Southeast Asia, southern Arabia, parts of East Africa) allows abortions to be performed up to four

months. For the Maliki school (prevalent in North and West Africa) an abortion is permissible with the consent of both parents up to day 40 but not after that. For the Hanbali school (predominant in Saudi Arabia and United Arabic Emirates) abortions are generally prohibited from the fourtieth day. The ithna 'ashari Shi'a tend to accept the 40-day point at which a fetus starts to have rights, while the other Shi'a schools have varying opinions on the issue. In many countries with large Muslim populations the principle is that of 2.233: "A mother should not be made to suffer because of her child." As a result, abortion is possible for health reasons.

Some Muslims argue that abortion is permissible if the fetus is younger than four months (120 days). They quote a reported statement from the Prophet that refers to a human being starting as a fertilized ovum in the uterus of the mother for 40 days, then it grows into a clot for the same period, then into a morsel of flesh for the same period, then an angel is sent to that fetus to blow the *ruh* into it and to write down its age, deeds, sustenance, and whether it is destined to be happy or sad. Assuming the *hadith* to be authentic, before the *ruh* is blown into the fetus at 120 days, the fetus is not really a completely living entity, and therefore aborting it does not amount to killing it. It therefore becomes clear that aborting a fetus before 120 days is still killing a living entity, but not really something that is complete, unlike abortion after that presumed period. Some Muslims argue that the only case when aborting a fetus, before or after 120 days, is allowed in Islam, is when a medical situation threatens the life of the mother, leaving only two options, to let either the mother or the fetus survive, but not both. They argue that the mother can have other children, whereas the child cannot make up for losing the mother. It is clear what assumptions this rests on, and one could see how in a society where women are not inevitably linked with childcare the loss of the mother might not be regarded as so obviously a disaster as compared with the loss of the child.

One wonders how this ruling would vary if there was a different conception of women's roles in society. Suppose the woman were not at the center of a family, perhaps she works in a job and a baby would be inconvenient for her career or lifestyle. Also, utilitarians often prefer the fetus over the mother since the former is likely to live longer than the latter, after it is born, and so there is a greater series of happiness likely as a result of the birth of the child, compared with the survival of the mother. Rules on abortion in Islamic majority states often have more to do with public policy than Islam. In May 2012 the Turkish government announced its plan to limit women's access to legal abortion, later dropping the item from the parliament's agenda after harsh reactions from society. Only 28 percent of Turkish women work in the paid economy, and if they are supposed to have at least three children each, this will hinder their progress in this direction. It seems to be the AKP government's policy to restrict the freedom of women to choose how many children, if any, they are to have, and to condemn abortion as murder and sexual acts which cannot lead to pregnancy as unnatural in ways that interfere with personal life that has led to many objections. The government has perhaps come to the conclusion

that a bigger population will be good for the economy, for Turkey's role in the world and especially for the political impact of Turks abroad. It may also be the case that they are concerned at relatively more rapid family growth among Kurdish as compared with Turkish communities in the country. This brings out a fact about the discussion of abortion in majority Muslim countries, and that is that there is a remarkable link between the policy on abortion and what governments think is in the interests of the state. At times when an increased population is deemed desirable, abortion becomes problematic, and vice versa.

Circumcision

In 2012 a court in Cologne, Germany, ruled against male circumcision carried out on small children, arguing with much plausibility that an operation that removes part of the body in an irrevocable way that someone cannot consent to constitutes assault. Circumcision is a strange custom when looked at in that way, and is in many countries illegal when carried out on women, even women who consent to it and are adult. It is important in Islam and Judaism, though, and follows on from Abraham who is said to have circumcised himself. It has the advantage of being a procedure that is often thought to be helpful and is frequently carried out when there are no religious principles involved, just in the interests of the individual concerned. Christianity made an interesting move when in order perhaps to distinguish itself from its Jewish origins it started to talk about circumcision of the heart, and to criticize the physical nature of the ritual. The German court quite rightly pointed out that a problem with the practice is that it permanently changes the body of the child, in a way that has no obvious health reasons, although some do have it done for health reasons, but is carried out for religious reasons by Jews and Muslims. We would not allow a religion to chop off a toe, for instance, of minors who could not be said to have consented. Such minors could presumably sue parents later on for assault and actual bodily harm, and might well expect the state to intervene on their behalf before it happened. The notion that religious freedom should allow such violent behavior would be laughed out of court.

What needs to be noticed here is that the ritual of circumcision could have developed in different ways, as it did in Christianity. The earlier physical ritual could have been replaced by something entirely spiritual, or at least something less radical. Yusuf al-Qaradawi has played an interesting role on female genital mutilation, as female circumcision is often called, in criticizing the *ahadith* which appear to call for it. On the other hand, he has accepted that whether or not it is done should be left to the views of the women in the household. This is no more arbitrary than many of his other rulings, and it does bring out nicely the significance of custom in contemporary Islam. It also brings out something that is very important and involves upholding the principle that one might be required to do something which one does not want to do. Having a body irreparably altered is similar to getting up early in the morning to pray in at least this regard. Whether we think it is called for by the religion is quite

another matter, of course, but it is the principle that is important here, and the principle is "you may come to hate something which is good for you and you may come to like something that is bad for you, God knows and you do not" (2.216). Doing things we do not initially want to do is part of a process of changing ourselves and there is no reason why an adult should not be able to take decisions about what is in his or her own interests, spiritual and material. Whether we can take that decision for children is difficult to justify, however firmly the ritual is embedded in the religion.

Further reading

Chande 2006, Cook 1983, al-Dunya 1997, Esposito 2002, Leaman 2001, 2002, 2009, al-Shaykh 2012, Yusuf 2005.

9 Islam and law

Crime and punishment

Most of the details in the Qur'an about punishment deal with the next world, not this one, but in the media a great deal of attention is paid to the strict physical punishments that exist for a series of offenses. Is this justified? There is good reason to think it is in the sense that if a legal system has very different laws from the norm in most countries, then we need to look at the rationale for those laws. In Islamic law a distinction is made between three broad categories of offense, *hadd*, *ta'zir* and *qisas*. The concept of *hadd* is there to deal with the worst crimes and are mentioned in the Qur'an, whereas *ta'zir* are milder, and *qisas* represents acts for which compensation and restitution is possible, and indeed desirable.

Hadd crimes are quite clear, they have no maximum nor minimum terms of imprisonment or punishment at the discretion of the judge and/or court. They have fixed penalties, not only fixed but fixed by God. These are murder, apostasy from Islam, theft and adultery in the sense of illicit sexual intercourse, for which there is no discretion in response, and defamation (unsubstantiated accusation of adultery), robbery and alcohol consumption, where there is. *Ta'zir* are more minor offenses and affect welfare in general, and it is appropriate for the state to regulate such behavior, whereas *qisas* continues that principle by bringing in a system of compensation for past wrongs to ensure that the social fabric is maintained. *Shari'a* is valid for all times and places but the application of *shari'a* requires *ijtihad*, the individual judgment of a legal thinker. As al-Qaradawi points out in his many broadcasts on al-Jazeera and in his books, out of 6,236 Qur'anic verses, only ten directly address the topic of *hudud* and its punishments, and the word itself refers to the boundaries set by God for human behavior. If those boundaries are exceeded then God insists on a punishment, and he points out also that if *shari'a* is applied it should be totally applied for the punishments to find their appropriate role. They cannot function except as part of a whole Islamic way of life.

There are also the *zanni* (deduced) *hudud*, which are derived from the *sunna*, such as the penalty for drinking wine. Some legal authorities said it is 40 lashes; others said it should be 80 lashes, while some others, like al-Bukhari and al-Tabari,

said there is no specified penalty for drinking wine but it should receive a lesser *ta'zir* punishment. Al-Qaradawi agrees with the application of a discretionary punishment, which could be whipping, imprisoning or imposing fines. Another z*hanni hudud* is the one for apostasy, derived from the *sunna*. There are many *ahadith*, as well as some references in the Qur'an, about putting apostates to death. However, there are many suggestions also in those reports that apostates should repeatedly be given opportunity to repent. We shall be examining this issue at greater length in due course. Another example of a *zanni hudud* is the stoning penalty for a married adulterer, which is sometimes extended to illicit fornication in general, a penalty derived from the *sunna* and not the Qur'an. That does not mean that there is anything questionable about it, but it does mean that it does not have the obvious authority of a direct command from God behind it.

Along with these rules are the whole social system of Islam, where people give charity and ensure that no one in the community is without means. There is a constant stress in Islam on charity (*zakat*), giving to the poor is one of the pillars of Islam. The implication that al-Qaradawi derives from this is that the *hudud* punishments to do with theft only really apply in a society where there is no unsatisfied basic need. We are told that 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, the second caliph, suspended the theft penalty during the Starvation Year, as people were stealing because of need and hunger. When a rich man came to 'Umar complaining that his slaves were stealing, after investigating the matter and knowing that this master had not met the needs of his slaves, 'Umar told him to attend to the material needs of the poor or be punished. So social justice should be applied first and people's needs should be met in order to establish the proper conditions which should be established in order to apply *hudud*. As al-Qaradawi points out, in many so-called Islamic countries it is only the poor, or the foreigner, who suffers the *hudud* penalties, the rich whose crimes are similar, albeit on a larger scale, are excluded and continue to prosper. Exactly the same point could be made about punishment in other legal systems, those who are wealthy and have power in society find it much easier to evade the harshest, or indeed any, penalty than others. The penalties then only operate appropriately within a total system of justice, which for al-Qaradawi means Islamic life. This fits in nicely also with the principle of *tawhid*, of course, and the relationship between the macrocosm and the microcosm. When the need is to establish a society based on unity, the severest penalties are appropriate for those who threaten that unity, since they are upsetting the divine plan for the universe. Were they only to behave more in line with divine law, the world as a whole would be a much better place, and so they deserve to be punished for their lack of obedience to the message of God and in a sense preventing the improvement of society in general.

When someone commits a crime with a prescribed punishment, it is sometimes argued that the authorities should not start with applying the *hudud* penalty, but rather should seek a lesser punishment if any doubt about guilt or mitigating circumstances exist. A general rule of much Islamic jurisprudence is

that doubt should suspend *hudud*. Many jurists widen the range of doubt based on the idea that is often reported in the *ahadith* that one should be as lenient as possible, and it is better for the authorities mistakenly to forgive than to punish in error. On the other hand al-Qaradawi goes into great length also on the desirability and indeed importance of punishment in controlling crime and criminals, being skeptical of the point of prison for very serious offenders. The implication is that these sorts of punishments are devised by God and those in line with his thinking in order to bring about a better society, and that a society where everyone does what God orders will be worth defending and enforcing. The jurisprudential basis for applying *hudud* with regard to adultery is linked to the adulterer committing his or her act publicly. Thus, the adultery penalty is applied under some schools of law only when four individuals witness the act of illicit sexual intercourse, or when the adulterer confesses four times before a judge that he or she has committed that act. In that case, the defendant should be informed of the penalty before he or she confesses. Moreover, the four witnesses must be competent to give testimony, and the judge must interrogate them to determine if they are lying or in any way untrustworthy in their testimony. If any of these conditions are not met, the penalty might well not be applied. In that case, the adulterer may have the chance to repent without receiving the penalty. Of course, there are other understandings of the law of adultery which is less forgiving and circumscribed by issues of evidence.

Even when guilt has been established beyond doubt and there exist no mitigating circumstances, although it has to be said that the idea of such circumstances do not exist in the Qur'an with obvious reference to such an offense, there still remain conditions for *hudud* sanctions to be applied:

1 It must be established that the accused committed the crime freely rather than under duress, and was fully aware that the act is illegal and a punishable crime.
2 The defendant has publicly committed the crime or confessed to committing it.

When the elements of a crime categorized as punishable by *hudud* laws are established, the *hudud* penalties should be applied. However, if these elements are not present, then *ta'zir* (lesser, discretionary punishment) could be applied. *Ta'zir* is to be applied under the authority of the imam or judge. By contrast, applying *hudud* is often regarded as the exclusive domain of the state. Thus no group in any place has the right to apply *hudud* to a group of people outside of the authority of the state, and an Islamic state at that. Al-Qaradawi here does not mean a state that calls itself Islamic but a state that is really Islamic and applies all aspects of Islam. This clearly means that when an individual or group decide to carry out on their own behalf the rather severe penalties involved in traditional *hudud* they might be at fault, since it is an official body which is the only appropriate organization to do it. It is not difficult to see the sense of this, since a group of people can easily be swayed by emotion and the passion of the moment, and even more so is this the case for an individual. The ways in

which small groups of people take the law, as they see it, into their own hands is problematic. On the other hand, it could be argued that in the absence of any appropriate legal institution or political structure more informal ways of carrying out harsher penalties are necessary and more in line with Islam.

Hudud are mentioned in the Book in the sense of limits of proper behavior that must be observed in a variety of contexts. Six of the 14 instances of *hudud* in the Qur'an occur in just one passage (2.229–30) in the context of marital relations and limits that the spouses must observe in the case of estrangement, separation and divorce. The punitive connotation of *hudud* can admittedly be subsumed under the concept of limits, as penalties are definers of the consequences of behavior and limits that separate acceptable behavior from the reverse. *Hadd* is defined as an offense for which a specified punishment is stipulated in the Qur'an or authentic *hadith*. The Qur'an stipulates such punishments for four offenses, namely adultery, theft, slanderous accusation and highway robbery. *Fiqh* (Islamic law) raises this number to six, adding wine drinking and apostasy (and according to some seven, including mutiny). The text condemns these as heinous behavior which must be avoided but provides no punishment for them. The prevailing *fiqh* treats the *hudud* as fixed and mandatory punishments, which leave little room for rehabilitation and repentance, despite the fact that these are stipulated in the Qur'an. All that is needed is a proof of the offense which must then be followed by enforcement, thereby leaving no room for flexibility and discretion. Each of the four Qur'anic verses on *hudud* specifies a punishment, which is then followed, in every case, by a reference to repentance and reform. The text thus leaves the door open to leniency for those who have fallen into error, and those who show a willingness at correcting themselves. As is generally the case with law, a good deal is left to the discretion of the particular legal authorities.

The four Qur'anic verses on *hudud* consist basically of two provisions each, one specifying the offense and its punishment, and the other that provides for reformation and repentance. The legal severity about *hudud* has largely ignored the latter portion of the text. Only the penalties were adopted but no provision was made to implement or encourage the repentance (*tawba*) and reformation (*islah*) aspects of the *hudud*. A structure of penalties and a penal system was created with no space for an educational and reformative process. To apply quantified punishments is a relatively simple task for courts whereas the hierarchy of reform institutions, probation, counseling and so on has a very limited role even today in the Islamic world. However, in the case of apostasy it is reported that the second caliph, 'Umar, ordered the apostate to be given three days in which to repent, failing which the *hadd* is to be implemented.

Some Muslim commentators seek to review the structure of *hudud* from a strictly Qur'anic perspective, and conclude that the *hudud* can no longer be seen as involving mandatory fixed penalties. The Qur'anic penalties should be retained but only in the sense of uppermost limits, reserved for the most heinous offenses. All other instances of *hudud* as specific penalties will be graduated in line with the needs of each individual situation. This would

essentially convert all instances of *hudud* to the level of what is known as *ta'zir* in the sense of variable deterrent punishments. The judge would thus be authorized to order a suitable punishment while taking into consideration the individual circumstances of each case. This is proposed to apply not only to cases where some level of doubt in the proof of *hudud* may arise and consequently relegate them to *ta'zir*, as is the position now, but even to cases of *hudud* that are free of such instances of doubt. But that would mean that in effect the *hudud* become *ta'zir*, which seems to go against the principle of the legislation. Perhaps an answer would be to retain the *hudud* in principle but in practice to convert them to *ta'zir*.

This is an example of change, perhaps inspired by influence from outside the majority Islamic world, which appears to challenge some of the important features of Islam. On the other hand, a substantive revision of the *hudud* might be worth considering due to the difficulties encountered in their implementation. Muslim countries have generally avoided the enforcement of *hudud* due to the severity of these penalties, yet because of public pressure they have not dared to produce a new interpretation of *hudud*. The issue of *hudud* thus persists and is made worse by Western media and human rights activists that have taken the *hudud* as an excellent weapon for anti-Islam propaganda. Yet Islam is based on certain crucial ideas, and *hudud* are not among them. Punishment of any kind is rather remote from the spiritual core of any religion. Often the apparent harshness and arbitrariness of the application of such punishments deter those who would otherwise be sympathetic to Islam, although there also certainly some who are attracted by the strictness of the punishments and their clear and violent application on some occasions. There is evidence that some converts like the idea that Islam has clear penalties for obvious crimes, by contrast with the rather weak attitude of much secular legislation.

Apostasy and the death penalty

There are some Qur'anic verses that are really at odds with a legal penalty for apostasy. Thus the Qur'an is very emphatic that victory belongs to truth. It says: "Truth has come and falsehood has vanished. Surely, falsehood was bound to vanish" (17.81) and also "We throw truth against falsehood and it destroys it, and behold it then vanishes" (21.18). Islam is founded on truth and will inevitably in the end prevail. Truth, in other words, will out. Within this perspective Islam has no need for keeping people under its fold on pain of death. Such measures befit those systems that are essentially built on falsehood because that is the only way their followers can hope to slow down their inevitable march to defeat and disappearance. For a religion based on the truth it is more advantageous perhaps if people are free to examine ideas and then choose the religion or ideology or system they want. This is why the Qur'an establishes that "There is no compulsion in religion. Right has become distinct from wrong. So whoever rejects evil and puts faith in God has grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold that never breaks. God hears and knows"

(2.256). This verse is usually understood to mean that people cannot be compelled to become Muslims but can they be compelled to stay Muslims? But the words "no compulsion in religion" are very general. They should apply equally to entering or leaving any religion, including Islam. Moreover, apostasy is a move from *islam* to *kufr* (disbelief). But what if we cannot establish the *islam* of a person? For example, consider a person born in a Muslim family who at one point described himself as a Muslim according to custom but he never really believed in Islam. If he then renounces Islam, is he really moving from *islam* to *kufr*? Is he really bound by the laws of Islam considering that he never really made a choice to live by them?

From the confident conviction that the message of the Qur'an is based on truth and therefore will prevail, comes also the Qur'anic condemnation of *fitna*, which could be regarded as the sort of conflict involved in persecuting people for their religion, which is described as worse than killing in battle:

> And fight in the way of God those who fight you but do not transgress due limits … *al-fitna* is worse than killing. … Fight them till there is no *fitna* and the religion is for God.
>
> (2.191–3; see also 2.217)

Contrary to what some commentators suggest the words do not have to mean "till everyone accepts Islam" because it is definitely known that the Prophet made peace with many tribes even though they had not accepted Islam (4.90) and because the Qur'an explicitly states that when opponents incline to peace the Prophet should do the same (8.61).

That the death penalty for apostasy conflicts with the Qur'anic perspective is also shown by those verses in which it is stated that the Messenger came not as a watcher over people but only as one who clearly declares the truth (5.92, 99, 13.40, 16.35, 82, 24.54, 29.18, 36.17, 42.48, 64.12). Significantly, the first of these verses is addressed to the believers, since it is *after* explicitly addressing the believers and giving to them some laws (5.90–1) that the verse says: "And obey God and obey the Messenger and beware. Then if you turn away, know that our messenger's duty is only to communicate clearly" (5.92). The Qur'an then continues addressing believers, giving some further regulations, and then says again that the messenger's role is to present the message (5.99). People can accept it or not, and there is no threat of death at least in this world. There is no reason to think that the guidance for dealing with the apostates is essentially the same as its guidance for dealing with other *kuffar*. Briefly, this guidance is that we should treat them according to the degree of friendship or hostility they show to Islam and Muslims.

There are a variety of different kinds of apostate:

1 An apostate leaves Islam because of ignorance of Islam or some confusion that leads him to think that his new religion or way is truer and better. Such a person will be willing to listen to Muslims if they want to show him that

he has made a mistake. Muslims should treat him kindly and argue with him in the best possible way (60.8, 16.125).

2 An apostate leaves Islam, not out of a belief that he is moving to something truer and better, but to benefit himself in some way. If such an apostate does not engage in any hostile activity against Islam and Muslims, there is no need to be hostile to him (4.90). But since he has clearly preferred *kufr* over *iman* the following commandment of God will apply: "O you who believe! Do not take for friends and allies your fathers and your brothers if they love disbelief more than faith: if any of you do so, they are the wrong doers" (9.23). The term often translated as "friends" could also plausibly be rendered as "leaders," which produces a rather more acceptable interpretation. Beyond avoiding friendship or obedience and alliance with apostates of this second type, the Muslims can impose boycotts against them, like the boycott imposed by the Prophet on the three Companions mentioned in 9.118. These three Companions did not commit apostasy but simply failed to join the Muslims in *jihad* without a good reason, although later on they repented.
3 The third type of apostate is one who leaves Islam and then engages in hostile actions against Islam and Muslims, e.g. knowingly engages in propaganda against Islam and Muslims blatantly ignoring facts that he is expected to know well, passes secrets to the enemy, takes part in fighting against the Muslims. Such an apostate can be punished by anything from exile to death. But his offense is not apostasy but the evil actions which it leads him to commit.

The fact that it has become traditional to see death as the penalty of apostasy is not in any way definitive:

> When it is said to them: "Follow what God has sent down," they say, "No! We shall follow what we found our fathers following." What! Even if their fathers did not understand [*ya'qilun*] anything and they were not guided?
>
> (2.170, see also 5.104, 43.23–4)

A person commits apostasy (*irtidad*) or becomes an apostate (*murtadd*) on the standard view if he is a Muslim and then at a later time takes one of the following actions in a public way:

1 Converts to another religion.
2 Rejects a part of the Qur'an after recognizing it to be a part of the Qur'an.
3 When the whole *umma* agrees that a certain interpretation of some Qur'anic verses or *ahadith* is unacceptable, then the person who holds such an interpretation may become an apostate by a decision of the *umma*, although this is an argument which depends on the notion of there being just one community, and that is a difficult argument to accept.

Normally, however, having an interpretation of a part of the Qur'an or *hadith* different from the one held by other Muslims does not result in apostasy so it would have to be something quite central to Islam for the accusation to have force.

An apostate is different from a hypocrite (*munafiq*). A hypocrite is a person who is outwardly willing to say or do what a Muslim says or does but in his heart has decided not to believe in Islam. An apostate, in contrast, is someone who openly and knowingly does or says something that makes him a non-Muslim after he had called himself a Muslim. It is not always easy to distinguish between them and the issue of what makes someone a Muslim is quite complex. It is the public nature of apostasy that is worth noting here, and makes it especially damaging in the eyes of many Muslims, for whom the only appropriate penalty is death. The apostate is more than just an unbeliever, then, and more than someone who believes but has doubts, or difficulties with practice.

It is a significant fact that the Book does not prescribe any punishment for apostasy. Of course, the Qur'an does not tell us everything. Some suggest that the punishment for apostasy is not a detail that we can expect God to leave for the *ahadith*, especially if that punishment is death. Taking the life of a person, if done without a just cause, is regarded by the Qur'an as tantamount to killing all human beings (5.32). Even lesser penalties for theft (cutting of hands, 5.38), illicit sexual intercourse (100 lashes, 24.2), and unsubstantiated accusation of adultery (80 lashes, 24.4) were not considered by God as matters of detail to be left to the *ahadith*. Therefore there is no reason why God would consider the more serious penalty of death for a more serious sin of apostasy as a matter of detail to be left to the *ahadith*. It is also relevant that the Qur'an refers to apostasy several times (2.217, 3.86–90, 4.137, 9.66, 9.74, 16.106–9, 4.88–91, 47.25–7) and yet does not prescribe any punishment for it. The verses that refer to apostasy are found in *sura*s of the Medinan period when the Islamic state had been established and penalties for crimes could be prescribed and applied, apart from 16.106–9. *Sura* 5.32 refers to only two crimes for which a person can be killed as a penalty for a crime, murder and *fasad* (spreading mischief in the land). The next *aya* reads:

> The recompense for those who wage war against God and his messenger, and strenuously set out to create mischief through the land is execution, or crucifixion, or the cutting off of hands and feet from opposite sides, or exile from the land. That is their disgrace in this world, and for them in the hereafter is a severe punishment.
>
> (5.33)

Even in the case of *fasad* when someone wages war against God and his messenger and promotes mischief, death is not the only possibility, as it is not for murder either (5.45). Thus according to the Qur'an the apostates are to be treated like other *kuffar*. If they are prepared to live in peace with the Muslims, they are to be left in peace, and if they assume a hostile attitude, then they are to be responded to harshly.

Freedom of expression

The Danish cartoons case involved the publication, in 2005 and in early 2008, of cartoons that depict Prophet Muhammad as a terrorist figure. The *Jyllands-Posten* newspaper announced that this publication was an attempt to contribute to the debate regarding criticism of Islam and self-censorship, and it succeeded in the sense that the publication led to a huge reaction by Muslims all over the world holding demonstrations, burning and desecrating the Danish flag. There was violence against Danish property including the Danish Embassy in Syria, Lebanon and Iran. In the course of commission of these acts, Muslim religious and political leaders seemed often to support the use of violence, and attempts were later made to kill those connected with the cartoons at the newspaper and other papers that had reprinted the cartoons (although wisely very few took this on). Alongside all these reactions to the Danish cartoons, Danish products were boycotted. By describing the Prophet Muhammad holding a bomb on top of his head the attempt was made to humiliate Muslims, in the view of many. Why are Muslims so sensitive to criticism? In the case of criticism of other religions and religious figures there is not usually any kind of violence, but rather a market in ideas. However, this was not the case following the publication of the Danish cartoons. This was not an isolated incident but quite frequently someone produces a media product that is felt to be insulting to Islam and its Prophet and there is a significant violent reaction in Muslim communities throughout the world.

On February 21, 2006 Wafa Sultan took part in al-Jazeera's weekly 90-minute discussion program, where she described her thesis that Islam as a political ideology preaches violence and applies its agenda by force. She accused Muslims of intolerance of criticism, and supported the Danish cartoons, as a matter of free speech. Upon expressing her views directly on TV, Sultan received numerous threats and was attacked generally by Muslims everywhere, through every available electronic medium. Threats were targeted at the al-Jazeera channel, and especially the program on which she appeared. Some asked for an apology from the channel, while others sought to cancel the whole program and fire its host Faisal al-Qassem. This might be taken as a sign that the Islamic community is less able to take criticism than are other religious communities. On the other hand, it might be taken as evidence that Muslims, unlike others, have a serious and committed attitude to the truth of their religious principles and are prepared to defend them, sometimes vigorously. If it is thought that people's eternal futures are going to be jeopardized by the attacks on Islam being allowed to continue, or the welfare of the community itself is threatened by them, is it not acceptable to take action against such attacks?

A Turkish pianist, Fasil Say, in 2012 caused huge controversy by quoting Omar Khayyam in a tweet, where the latter wonders whether heaven could be a brothel. He does seem in that passage to be poking fun at the Islamic idea of heaven, and especially the provision of women for the men there. As a result Say faced charges of inciting hatred and public enmity, and insulting "religious

values." The Public Prosecution Service claimed Say's tweets could lead to a "collapse of public order." They certainly offended a lot of religious people in Turkey, as does his claim to be an atheist, but then Muslims should be used to the idea that their view of the afterlife has some questions attached to it, since there are many who see it as requiring some sort of explanation and justification, and presumably that is what Omar Khayyam is referring to when he makes his witty and rather disparaging remarks about the standard understanding of the religious view on the topic. What is at the basis of the extreme fear of criticism of basic religious ideas is a theory of how religion and culture are linked. There is taken to be a fragile connection between these social phenomena, and any break in the connection through people making fun of something important or throwing doubt on a view widely accepted can disrupt the social fabric, and the result of that is chaos and confusion. In fact, there is an Arabic word for it, *fitna*. Poking fun at religion is dangerous precisely because it can lead to *fitna*, to disruption of stability and appropriate social relations, and this is very much the language used in Turkey, which is still officially a secular country, legally speaking. It is worth mentioning that even liberal democracies in many cases have laws which disallow the public expression of views likely to cause, as the formula goes in English law, a breach of the peace. Governments often do not allow into their country people who are likely to be dangerous to the social and political fabric, and may restrict those already in the country if it is felt that through their talk they might lead others to bring about violent actions. There is no such thing then as universal free expression, all countries to one degree or another restrict such expression in the interests of the state.

It might be that the Danish artists are wrong about the way they view Islam, but still their views on Islam are as they perceive reality. If they are wrong, then the market of ideas is open to prove the opposite. The depiction of the Prophet with a bomb on his head can be very provocative and irritating, yet it is a form of expression, and this is what free expression is about, not about insulting others merely for the sake of insult, but about the expression of views, as provocative as they might be, and as much offense as they might cause. Even if the project is about insulting others merely for the sake of insulting them, this is also part of free speech and should be tolerated. After all, our motives for doing things are often unworthy but they result in desirable states of affairs. In trying to defend the person of the Prophet, all sorts of interesting consequences are possible, but to assume right from the start that any attack on him is defamatory and Islamophobic means that there is no possibility of development from that point.

It is always difficult to know how to react to objectionable views. This is a familiar issue for school teachers, since if a child produces a racist comment in school, reacting negatively may only amplify the behavior, and encourage it. After all, it gets a reaction from authority, and perhaps that is what the child is looking for. On the other hand, ignoring the comment may seem to validate it, or surreptitiously support it, and that would be wrong also. There is no obvious solution to this sort of dilemma, and in the familiar Muslim way the right path is probably to find some sort of middle position. This would involve the

teacher stating his or her disapproval of the comment but not doing anything more about it. A society can do the same thing. Some European countries make it illegal to deny the existence of the Holocaust, whereas in the United States people are quite free to assert that it never happened, although they imply it sounds like a good idea, and neither strategy seems entirely satisfactory. A middle position would be to say that of course it happened, but if people want to be stupid about it, no doubt for their own political purposes, and deny it, then that is up to them. This strategy does at least have the virtue of not putting some facts on a pedestal above others as having to be accepted, and also not giving the impression of some conspiracy by the state to suppress a hidden truth. The free expression of views which have a direct dangerous effect, like how to make bombs, are another matter, of course, yet for a liberal democracy to ban and punish views of an objectionable nature that do not directly relate to behavior is dubious, and gives some support to the suspicion in the Islamic community that double standards are at play.

Blasphemy

One of the interesting things about blasphemy laws is that they often arose in colonial times from rulers who just wanted a quiet life, and if the various religions in their territories could be obliged to respect each other's faith, or at least say nothing in public to give the contrary impression, then it was easier for colonial administration to continue. Polygamy was often legally sanctioned for the same reason, it went against the law in European countries but could be tolerated for the colonies, and even sometimes for the colonials living in Europe. Even today there is a certain degree of acceptance of polygamy among Muslims even in Europe and North America. An old blasphemy law in India from 1927 banned insults directed against any religion at all. In 1986 it was modified in Pakistan to protect only Islam. The law calls for life imprisonment or a life sentence for anyone who defiles the name of the Prophet. In 1990 a religious court ruled that the penalty for crimes under the law Section 295-C of the Constitution is execution. It states: "Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation, or by imputation, innuendo or insinuation, directly or indirectly defiles the sacred name of the Holy prophet Muhammad … shall be punished with death and shall be liable for a fine." Presumably not in that order. This has proved to be very effective in enabling grudges against the non-Muslim minorities in Pakistan to be pursued, and of course there is no measure on the legislative repertoire to punish blasphemy against any other religion except Islam.

An issue in Pakistan which has caused great controversy is the treatment of the Ahmadis. The Ahmadiyya believe that God sent someone to be the Messiah, someone who was called on to reveal a serious error in Christianity with its belief that Jesus was part of the deity. They regard themselves as Muslims, but other Muslims do not and so their language is taken often to be blasphemy. In 1993 the Supreme Court in Pakistan heard a case where the Ahmadis

claimed that they were being denied their rights to religious freedom which is guaranteed under Article 20 of the constitution. The appeal was lost since it was argued that their use of Islamic phrases was illegal under the Trademark Act of 1940. Since they were not Muslims, their use of language to suggest they were constituted blasphemy. The notion of trademarking religious language is intriguing, and has been used in Malaysia also to interfere in the casual use of phrases like *insha'allah* (if God wills) which have become part of ordinary language yet have a religious resonance for believers which does not exist for those merely repeating a formula. The position of the Ahmadis is rather different since they claim to be Muslims and the fierce antipathy to them brings out how religions tend to resent more those who are most similar in their beliefs and practices, not those who are clearly distinct.

Shari'a law in the United States and Europe

By 2012 several states in the United States had declared that Islamic law would not be legal in their territories, and in various European countries also stern condemnations of that law have been pronounced. By Islamic law a vast variety of things is meant, including the harsh punishments for a variety of crimes, including acts which are not counted as crimes in Western countries, such as adultery and blasphemy. The rather restrictive clothes that some Muslim women wear is also now a legal topic, and some countries have ruled those out as legal street wear, and discriminated against women who wear it inside also by making it impossible or difficult for them to practice their careers while doing so. The main point is that the law of the state is broadly secular, and Muslims should not seek to impose themselves and their law on broader society. The background to this legislation is that there is something very objectionable about Islamic law even when it is used to settle internal religious issues, and it is worth considering how strange it is to seek to ban a system of legislation that exists within a community even where all parties to a dispute agree that the dispute be settled in terms of that legislation. Of course, if some of the parties to the dispute do not accept the framework within which the issue is being settled then the state should not accept the judgment. It is rather like marriage carried out by a religious group. Provided all parties agree to the marriage, the state would generally be expected to accept it, and make it legal not only within the religious community but in the state as a whole. Some states insist on a civil as well as a religious ceremony, but many do not, although of course the regulations appropriate to civil marriage have to be followed for the religious marriage to be valid in a secular state. On the other hand, there is often a lot of flexibility in varying the application of civil law to incorporate issues such as the number of female spouses one is allowed.

Islamic law provides non-Muslim citizens with a choice when it comes to personal law: they can either be judged in Islamic courts and abide by the decision of Muslim judges, or they can resolve the issues in accordance with their own courts and system of legislation.

> So if they come to you, either judge between them, or turn away from them; if you turn away from them, they cannot hurt you in the least. And if you judge, judge with justice between them. Verily, God loves those who act justly.
>
> (5.42)

The Hanafi school accordingly approves appointing non-Muslim judges to adjudicate issues between their people. It is in general important that groups in society have the ability to carry out their own family activities without being hindered by the state. Marriage, divorce and related issues should be allowed to follow the rules of each religion. There are some disagreements among Islamic lawyers on the acceptability of wills transferring property in items such as pork and alcohol, even among non-Muslim groups, in an Islamic state. But Islamic law permits religious minorities to drink alcohol or eat pork, although these actions are considered violations of Islamic law. Islamic law criminalizes alcohol consumption for Muslims, and sometimes for everyone, and it is considered one of the main crimes for which is provided a specific punishment.

However, Islamic law also balances the freedom of religious minorities to practice acts related to their faiths against the interests of the Islamic state in keeping such crimes out of Islamic society. This balance results in an exemption of religious minorities from punishment as long as they do not drink alcohol in public or become intoxicated. This restriction is logical because it keeps Islamic society safe from an illegal practice and allows religious freedom for minorities. All of the main schools of Islamic law exempt religious minorities from the criminalization of alcohol consumption. In countries that count themselves as Islamic there are problems sometimes in gaining access to alcohol, and in some countries it is absolutely forbidden to everyone, but this is actually an innovation in Islamic law. There is no freedom to murder or steal, of course, since this would be incompatible with the general rules of any civilized society. Some Muslim groups will seek to enforce barbaric customs which do involve murder and theft of their own family members when it is thought that dishonor occurs due to the actions of relatives, but this has nothing at all to do with the official legislation of Islam itself. It is true that there are specified harsh penalties for adultery but no indication that these can be carried out arbitrarily by family members acting on their own behalf. On the other hand, it might be claimed that in a non-Muslim society where there is no possibility of enforcing such laws, it is reasonable for individuals to take the law into their own hands. This is after all the application of divine law, not just carrying out what some might think for any reason at all is justice.

Similarly with the application of rules of modesty, which in a non-Islamic society will not be made compulsory for the population at large. Is it permissible for Muslims to insist that everyone obeys those rules, even if they are not Muslims? The answer seems to be negative, since how can such rules be forced on those who are not Muslims? The relevant verses in the Qur'an are quite clear in applying first of all to the wives of the Prophet and then to believing

women, by which we are probably entitled to think the reference is to Muslim women. However, if one really thinks it is important in society for such rules to be obeyed, then they should be obeyed by everyone. If they are not, they will perhaps bring their observance by Muslim women into desuetude, although the evidence in many Western societies suggests this is not the case. Restrictive clothing flourishes for Muslims in societies with cultures where many other citizens wear very provocative clothes, as has often been noticed. Yet members of religious groups might be offended by the latter sorts of clothes and are they not entitled to have their preferences recognized by the state in some way? This brings religion into conflict with liberalism, which makes a strong distinction between offense and harm. According to classical liberalism, it is alright to offend others provided that such offense does not constitute harm, and in general it does not since it is a good thing for the public at large to indulge in experiments in living and observe the results of such experiments. For others though such offense can mean harm, and is liable to be avoided through legislation to protect the public, even (and perhaps especially?) the unwilling public.

It is on issues to do with dress that religions really are seen to clash with secular society, and in some militantly secular societies such as France there are even restrictions on the *hijab* in government buildings and on the more restrictive and concealing *niqab* anywhere in public at all. Since the whole point of the *niqab* is to be worn in public, in private it would not need to be worn unless in the presence of non-*maharim* who are unlikely to be in the house in any case, such a restriction by the state law is significant. In Turkey it used to be the rule that *hijab*s were unacceptable on government premises and even some private institutions such as universities. It was paradoxical that in an overwhelmingly Muslim country such as Turkey women were not able to wear the *hijab* in a variety of normal occupations and activities, while in the United States and Europe, for instance, the *hijab* is ubiquitous in a wide range of female roles, and even more restrictive clothing is frequently seen. The anti-religious nature of this legislation in Turkey should not be overemphasized. After all, in the early days of the Turkish Republic the traditional fez was also outlawed, and this has nothing religious about it, but referred to a previous time when Turkish men wore distinctive headgear. The Kemalist government felt that this sort of outfit represented a backwards and non-European custom and abolished it accordingly. Similarly with the *hijab*, its use was discouraged by countries who sought to modernize and regarded religious clothing as looking backwards. As so often on the topic of clothing we need to make a sharp distinction between religion and culture.

Further reading

Coulsen 1974, Goldziher 1981, Peters 2005, al-Qaradawi 1975.

10 Islamic education

It is often argued that there is such a thing as Islamic education. To a degree this is part of the current enthusiasm for putting "Islamic" in front of a concept and thinking that one has said something distinctive about it. Discussions of Islamic education generally take a certain form. First of all there is an explanation of how Islam values knowledge and science. This generally refers to the Qur'an and the *hadith* reports. Then there is a reference to the former glories of Islamic civilization from the point of view of learning and science, and there is no shortage of material here that can be quoted. Finally, there is some mention of the parlous state of the present Islamic world, and a call for the development of what is called Islamic science or education, where this means something much more holistic and religious than what goes for education in the world at large.

There is also a counter position which is also quite popular and that is generally presented by those critical of Islam. This suggests that religion is generally antagonistic to science and education, and so Islamic education would necessarily be narrow and restrictive. It would concentrate on religious topics and issues, and deny students a wide curriculum. Teaching methods are authoritarian and gender differentiation in both access to education and also of further opportunities after education prevail. This sort of narrative focuses on those parts of the world such as Taliban-led Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan, and some countries in the Arab world that severely curtail the education of girls and women. They also have a very narrow curriculum for boys, and in general cannot be said to prepare them adequately for life in this world at least. It is worth noting that this is not an argument specifically directed against Islam but against any culture that has a restrictive view of which and how children should be educated.

The early sources on education

A more balanced view between these extremes is required. Let us start by looking at the Qur'an and how it starts in the view of many commentators, i.e. with the order *iqra'* or recite (or read) at 96.1. There are many references to knowledge in positive ways (2.151–2; 4.113; 5.110; 12.22; 28.14) and even

to the idea of knowledge being possible from outside of the Islamic sphere, as in the famous *hadith* "Seek knowledge even from China," which seems to validate quite general knowledge from anywhere. "Are those who know and those who do not know to be reckoned the same?" we are asked at 39.9 and it is certainly the case that in its early centuries the rapidly growing Islamic empire did enthusiastically embrace the various types of intellectual tradition to which it became heir, or at least those which were easiest to assimilate within the view of knowledge and education which swiftly developed within that empire. Civilizations which wish to survive and prosper work with the culture that they conquer. It was appropriate for the Arab invaders to recognize the positive features of the new territories which they now controlled, not just in terms of the people who lived there but their ways of doing things and their grasp of ancient forms of knowledge. An invader is not only a new possessor of the physical capital of the conquered land but potentially of its cultural capital also. A conqueror who is going to hold onto his conquest for a long time does well to concentrate on both. After all, to ignore the cultural capital runs the danger of allowing it to become eventually a source of differentiation from and even opposition to the new regime. Cultural capital is useful also in helping the new authorities improve their own living and working standards, if what they find in the new territory is superior to what they had at home, as it so often is.

One of the points worth making about the first few centuries of the Islamic empire is that the majority of its inhabitants were not Muslims. They were Jews and Christians and Zoroastrians, and a variety of other religions, and the new rulers were not that keen for everyone to become Muslims all at once. For one thing, non-Muslims were taxed at different, and higher, rates than Muslims and this useful source of revenue was not something the new regime was eager to forego. Initially there was no problem in incorporating religious groups within the empire who were not Muslim since often the new Muslim rulers proved to be rather more acceptable than their predecessors. For Christians, for instance, divided as they were up into many different sects, rule by some kinds of Christian government was often more oppressive than by Muslims. In this early situation the way to get people to convert to Islam was often not through force, although sometimes it was through force despite the frequently quoted *aya* "There is no compulsion in religion" (2.252) but through what is today called soft power. This often involved argument and debate and this required a grasp of the rhetorical and reasoning techniques of the more literate parts of the world, and these were not initially the Arab world. Although the Arab world valued poetry and language, this was often in oral form and eschewed some of the complexity of a culture that emphasized writing and also ancient forms of argument and knowledge based on the Greeks and their successors. Soft power involves using the mechanisms familiar to a community to change that community's ways of thinking about things. Along with the intellectual demands goes the need to offer a moral paradigm which impresses others, as in 3.110: "You are the best community for humanity: you advocate righteousness, forbid evil and believe in God." Referring to the existence of a

variety of cultures and religion we are told "If God wanted, he would have made you one nation, but so that he may test you in what he has given you, you should compete in terms of good deeds" (5.48). The Muslim community should show by its quality that it is worth emulating. In much of the Islamic world also there is a clearly delineated model of how converting brings with it a range of social and economic benefits.

In the early years of Islam education was often religious education. This is hardly surprising, any new religion has to instruct new believers in what to believe, and old believers need to be instructed in the correct form of belief in their faith. Mosques frequently had attached buildings, or just used part of the mosque, to instruct young people in particular in the preferred interpretation of Islam and all that went with it, including law, grammar, the science of the *hadith* and so on. The development of specific colleges arose out of this educational effort, and the madrasa system has continued to exist today to prepare students for a world in which they will be called upon to practice the right form of their religion. Given the necessity for education to present the correct doctrine to students, it is not difficult to appreciate that it became especially important when a big change took place in the orientation of the ruling power. So for example when countries went from Sunni to Shi'i, or vice versa, it was particularly important to teach the new official doctrine. In addition, some rulers used the system of Sufi institutions that swiftly grew up within the Islamic empire to project their power, perhaps into parts of the world that were not that friendly to them otherwise. What is worth emphasizing is that education does not take place in a vacuum, in any culture, and the Islamic world was no exception. This remains the case today, where different types of Islam are embodied in a variety of educational institutions, which try to carve out for themselves a degree of influence over their students and their understanding of their religion. In that way those institutions, and the political groups linked with them, seek to exercise a degree of political and financial influence.

There was also secular education, although not very extensive except in a variety of places and times. The *Dar al-hikma* in Baghdad (3–7/9–13 centuries) was based on the idea of the importance of creating a significant library as a research facility, and also was the basis of a translation project designed to bring the major accomplishments of the classical world, as mediated by later commentators, into Arabic. This institution, with the determined backing of the ruler al-Ma'mun and the financial resources of the 'Abassid state, brought to Baghdad a whole team of scholars and thinkers and created a considerable intellectual buzz in the city, from all accounts. This process was later replicated during some periods of Islamic rule in al-Andalus, what is today Spain, where a city like Cordoba became famous for its extensive libraries, and in parts of Persia and later on the Ottoman Empire. It is worth pointing out that at the same time in Europe libraries were often small and little used and standards of literacy even among the aristocracy were low. There were periods in the past then when the Islamic world represented the best in contemporary science and its educational institutions were highly respected internationally. Some have

even argued that these early Islamic educational institutions became the model on the basis of which European colleges were formed. This is an interesting issue, and it brings out an even more interesting and rather obvious point, which is that there was not much difference between the notion of education in the Islamic world and elsewhere. Had there been a huge difference, one type of institution could not have been taken as a model for what might be developed elsewhere. Science is science and mathematics is mathematics whether carried out in Baghdad or Birmingham. It may have been true that the early interest in astronomy in Islam was based on the need to determine the direction of prayer, as is often argued, but this is certainly not where the interest in the science ended. It seems unlikely in any case that establishing the *qibla* was really the main motivation for anyone being interested in the stars, especially at a time when astrology was reckoned to be one of the exact sciences.

Islamic science

Those who advocate a specifically Islamic science often look back to a supposed golden age when Islamic science was at its height and say that we need to get back to that time. The trouble with this line is that when Islamic science was at its height there was nothing Islamic about it, apart from the religion of many of the participants. Although scientists added little religious phrases to the beginnings and ends of their treatises, there is no evidence that their religious views had anything at all to do with their scientific work. This is not in any way to throw doubt on their piety, although there is no doubt from what we know of some of their lifestyles that they were not particularly religious. The idea that they pursued science in order to describe how God constructed the world, or to explore the unity of the whole of creation, is far-fetched, and even if it is true does not serve to make their science any different in quality from any other science.

This is worth saying even though it may seem to be obviously true. A contemporary critique of science suggests that it is amoral, atomistic, materialist and many other unpleasant descriptions are applied also (Nasr 1996). This is because scientists today are largely without wider religious views, we are told, and they just do what they are told to do, have no interest in wider moral and aesthetic aspects of what they do or an understanding of the role of human beings in the universe. Scientists are mainly specialists, they concentrate on a small area of the book of nature and have little interest or awareness of the wider whole. They certainly do not grasp that the natural world is created by God, that it provides evidence of him and his mercy and that we are placed within it to respect it and care for it. In particular, the principle of *tawhid* or unity, the idea that God is one and essentially the cause of everything which exists, so that everything should be understood to be part of one basic being, is not grasped by most scientists (perhaps not even by most Muslim scientists) and this results in a science that is piecemeal and unambitious, and also does not set out rules for how the scientist can deal with the world. Modern science tends to regard the material world as just stuff to be manipulated in any way one wants, and we have seen recently how

dangerous that can be, with human actions damaging the eco-system and potentially threatening our very hold on this planet as a livable environment.

The significance of *tawhid*

It is important to make a distinction between Islam and other religions on the issue of *tawhid* or unity. Islam is not just a system of belief but a way of life, and the behavior of the Muslim should be aligned with his beliefs and vice versa. The Qur'an holds out for Muslims a complete way of living and this includes a method of looking at the world and everything in it. So the Muslim scientist is obliged to regard his or her subject matter as the creation of God, as linked up with the rest of creation, as something to be treated with respect and consideration, and as something often very beautiful and indicative of its divine origins. How different this is supposed to be from the ordinary scientist who sees the working environment as just something to work on and the site for the advancement of their careers. The normal scientist need have no qualms about treating nature in any way at all, since for him or her it has no transcendental significance, and there are no limits on what they can do, or what they can be asked to do. Nature is just something to be manipulated and once it is used that is the end of its purpose for us.

This dichotomy between the Muslim and the non-Muslim scientist is profoundly wrong, it fails to relate to anything real either in the past or today. There is no evidence that Muslims are any better at dealing with the environment than non-Muslims or that they are more considerate in their dealings with their working material, or more importantly that they do anything different from anyone else. Many scientists with no religious views at all are very concerned about the implications of their work on nature and humanity. They may be strenuously opposed to religion and very much committed to preserving as much of the natural world as they can. There is no evidence that the great Muslim scientists of the past, or today, have any very different approach to the world based on their faith. It might be said that if they were genuine Muslims then they must have had such an attitude, as opposed to being nominal Muslims, but that is wrong also. Some religious believers feel that one need not adopt any particular attitude of care toward the natural world since if God wishes it to end then it will end, and who are we to interfere in the divine plan? The reference in the Qur'an to humanity being the representative of God on earth does not mean we have to relate to the earth in a particular way, in just the same way that a political leader or caliph does not have to be kind to his subjects, or care about them, since he will have to vary his attitude to them and his behavior in accordance with the exigencies of the time, and these could demand cruelty, violence and harsh government. Certainly when one looks back at Islamic history, and even more recently, we see many instances of this. Again, it might be said that the rulers are not then Muslims, or genuine Muslims, but they certainly thought they were and others thought they were also. No doubt they could have produced religious

justification for what they did, since political authorities can always produce ideological support for their actions, whatever they may be.

Islamic exceptionalism

Islamic exceptionalism, like all other forms of exceptionalism, is dubious in value. It is based on the idea that there is something unique about Muslims, about the societies, families and states in which they live and everything associated with them, including science. Yet there is no evidence for this, and we should be careful about assuming that everything that Muslims do when they practice their religion and what goes along with it is superior, or inferior, to what others do. We are told that Islam is not just a system of beliefs but a total lifestyle, as though this makes it special, of course most religions also see themselves as advocating a distinct lifestyle. Few religions advocate a policy according to which its followers can do whatever they like.

If we are to take seriously the claim that Islam is a religion which seeks to establish a moderate position between extremes, then an Islamic education will presumably be a blend of the spiritual and the material, the directly religious and the secular. We all need to know about how electricity works and the basics of mathematics, for example, and we may believe that the basis of the former at least is God, but this is hardly relevant to our understanding of electricity itself. The Qur'an itself is a very practical work, as are many of the *ahadith*, and although there is a strong emphasis on the next world, there is also a commitment to getting things done efficiently in this world. We are told: "And that man can have nothing but what he strives for" (53.39). There is also a famous *hadith* in Tirmidhi where the Prophet comes across an untethered camel and a praying Bedouin, whom he asks for the reason that the camel is loose. The Bedouin replied that he was going to pray first and trust God to look after his camel. The Prophet suggested that he tie up the camel first and trust in God afterwards, by which he presumably meant pray afterwards. The idea that God would look after the camels while one is praying goes against our experience, and the Prophet was suggesting a prudent approach here to the relationship between religion and our practical lives.

The implications of this for education are clear and they are that an entirely religious education is too extreme for Islam. We cannot spend all our time praying and studying religious books and leave it to others to look after ourselves, or expect God to do it. God expects us to make sensible decisions about how to behave and we should combine our religious learning with secular information since that side of our life is important also. With secular education we can earn a living, and learn how to live in the world. This is by no means a distraction from more important spiritual ends, but should be combined with them. The slogan that Islam is not just a set of beliefs but is also a way of life might mean that it represents an ordinary way of life combined with a set of religious beliefs, and those beliefs should make our lives better, in the sense that we then set out to live in accordance with how God wants us to live.

Islamic pedagogy

Where pedagogy is concerned an equally balanced approach is required. There is scope for rote learning and also for the student to take charge of his or her own learning and decide what view they are to take on the information with which they are being provided. Are there though not some things which are so important and which we believe to be so true, that it is an error to imply that any doubt may attend them? This is often the case when we think of religion. It is difficult to teach someone a religion which is to be their religion in a dispassionate and objective manner, since until they reach a certain age it might be thought they are not really in a position to decide which religion they ought to adopt, and unless they are taught early about the religion and its rituals and languages they will not be in a position to decide later on in any case. There is of course the danger that the teaching may be so successful that the student is firmly within a religious tradition and finds it impossible to consider any serious alternatives. In any case when we have made a significant commitment to a particular faith and lifestyle it is difficult to throw it off and plump for something different, although many people do take this step. The trouble with not teaching a religion as though it were true is that the student may grow up with some lukewarm knowledge of a variety of religions and then be asked to choose one, or none of them, and this is not really to bring someone up within a religion. Religions are not like a buffet in a restaurant where one can help oneself to whatever variety of alternatives one fancies on a particular occasion, although again that is how many people treat religion. Unless you can experience a religion from inside, carrying out its practices and learning its doctrines with the attitude that this represents the truth and how one ought to behave, one really will not be in a position to make an informed decision about whether to continue with that lifestyle or not. You will not know what you are accepting or no longer accepting.

There is much in Islam to encourage a much more critical pedagogy, despite the practice of much education in majority Muslim societies. For one thing the Qur'an does not call on its hearers to believe blindly and accept what it hears on the basis of faith, but to consider and reflect on the arguments and information provided. The very style of the Book is supposed to be miraculous, and this is not something we are supposed to just accept but it is the conclusion of an argument. The Qur'an invites us to consider better ways of expressing the same point than what is found in the Book, and if you cannot do this then this is evidence of its miraculousness. That is generally how establishing a miracle goes, one looks for an alternative suggestion as to how something could have come about, and if there is no alternative then the only rational conclusion is that a miracle occurred. Even after accepting the miraculousness and divine origins of the Book, the scope for discussion does not stop there since next comes the whole debate of how to understand it. Even if we agree on the general parameters, there remains, as in all religions, tremendous scope for variety and Islam does consist of sects and divisions accordingly. This provides

space for discussion, controversy, differences of opinion and debate, and there is no reason why an Islamic education should not include all of these.

Evolution

Many Muslims, like some Christians and Jews, find evolution a very difficult theory to accept. The Qur'an has a verse similar to the Bible about creation: "God created the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them, in six days" (7.54). This has not caused any huge problem for Muslims because the reference to days here is often taken to be an indeterminate length of time. Other Qur'anic verses make this even more plain: "He directs the whole affair from heaven to earth. Then it will again ascend to him on a day whose length is a thousand years by the way you measure" (32.5); and "The angels and the spirit ascend to him in a day whose length is fifty thousand years" (70.4) and "a day in the sight of your lord is like 1,000 years of your reckoning" (22.47). So the earth could easily be billions of years old. Ideas like the Big Bang theory, or the Theory of the Expansion of the Universe, or the earth revolving around the sun – based on their understanding of other Qur'anic verses are in themselves not problematic. There is a specifically Islamic argument for the existence of God, the *kalam* cosmological argument which tends to assume something like the Big Bang theory. In fact, evolution is possibly even hinted at: "What is the matter with you, that you are not conscious of God's majesty, seeing that it is He who has created you in diverse stages? See you not how God has created the seven heavens one above another, and made the moon a light in their midst, and made the sun like a lamp? And God has produced you from the earth, a growing thing" (71.13–17). God "made from water every living thing" (21.30; see also 24.45).

Those who see no problem with evolution and Islam often quote Ibn Khaldun:

> One should look at the world of creation. It started out from the minerals and progresssed, in an ingenious, gradual manner to plants and animals … The animal world then widens, its species become numerous, and, in a gradual process of creation, it finally leads to man, who is able to think and reflect. The higher stage of man is reached from the world of monkeys, in which both sagacity and perception are found, but which has not reached the stage of actual reflection and thinking. At this point we come to the first stage of man after the world of monkeys. This is as far as our physical observation extends.
>
> (Ibn Khaldun 1958: 195)

It is worth saying though that Ibn Khaldun is not to be taken as a guide to theological acceptability, although it is worth noting that a significant Muslim intellectual should appear to have no problems with the idea of something like evolution.

Some Muslims see the theory of natural selection and the respect which scientists pay to causality in general as aspects of *shirk*. The theory implies that species arose quite naturally out of earlier versions and that seems to rule out divine intervention in the ways that the Qur'an refers to when it says that God created Adam and the rest of humanity. This was done directly by God, not the result of a natural process. On the other hand it could be that the natural process itself was set off and directed by God, and that he intervenes at every stage, albeit through a natural process.

> It is he who created the heavens and the earth with truth. The day he says "Be!" it is. His speech is truth. The kingdom will be his on the day the trumpet is blown, the knower of the unseen and the visible. He is the all-wise, the all-aware.
>
> (6.73)

Does this mean that God could not have done it via evolution? To say that Darwinism is just a theory is true, but it is a well-attested theory and the fact that many Christians have problems with it does not mean that Muslims should follow them on this.

There is a much wider point here, which is that it is important in religion for God's hand to be regarded as visible in the world. This is certainly important in Islam. If there is anything that can be said to run through the Qur'an it is an emphasis on the role of God in everything. On the other hand, the visibility of the divine presence is not important, and indeed might represent *shirk* or associating others with God. The translation of Muslim as slaves is significant here, we are slaves in the sense that we live in a world entirely under the direction of God. The theory of evolution, like other scientific theories, might put God at a distance from the world, in the sense that he would be seen as working through a process like natural selection. But there is nothing essentially problematic about this, especially given the many references in the Qur'an to the importance of looking at the world and understanding it, and the idea that everything in the world, like the Qur'an itself, is a sign of something else, something divine. This is not the place to assess theories like Darwinism and the other biological accounts that are linked with it, that is an issue for scientists and, as is often said, science changes over time. It is a huge mistake to link science with religion in a direct way since what seems to be the scientific truth at one point quickly becomes outdated later on. What is relevant here is whether Darwinism is incompatible with Islam.

Religious critics of Darwinism present a confusing variety of attacks, and Islamic critics fall into this way of doing things also. The only important issue is whether it matters. Muslims are right to consider whether the impact of Darwinism is damaging to religion, since in general it is. Darwinism presents an account of the development of species which makes no direct reference to God, but then so does physics, chemistry and so on. Darwinism suggests that there is a natural answer to the question of how so much variety exists in

nature, and how complex beings managed to come about. But there is also a natural explanation to how the water in my kettle boils and how the keys on my computer link up with the screen, and we do not find that challenging to religion. We might seek to recharacterize natural causality in terms of God's will and deeds, and we could describe evolution similarly. However, the theory of evolution has become a symbol of not finding a significant place for God in the world, and as such many Muslims totally reject it, even refusing to study it since it is so obviously out of kilter with a system of faith that insists on a powerful and active God. But it does not have to be taken in this way, just as explaining why the lights go on when I flip a switch in terms of electricity does not have to be taken as a denial of God's role. It is God after all who is the basis of electricity itself, according to religion, so pointing to a natural cause is a scientific detail within an overriding religious understanding of nature. One might even say that the significance of faith is that it helps us to respect both science and the role of God in the world, since whatever we learn about with the former cannot challenge whatever we believe with the latter.

Further reading

Daftary 2000, Ibn Khaldun 1958, Leaman 2003b, Nasr 1996.

11 Islam and the Other

It is often argued that before we can define who we are, we have to have some idea of who we are not. Our concept of "the Other" tells us a lot about who we think we are. Religions have much to say about the Other since they want their adherents to have a clear idea of how they should behave, what they are to believe and what future lies in store for them. A good way of doing that is by contrasting some religious principles with those of others. In fact, this is the principle that lies behind this book, that a useful way of understanding a religion is to look at some of the debates which exist within it and between it and other religions, so the notion of the Other becomes immediately relevant.

In the spring of 2012 the Turkish Prime Minister made an interesting comment about the leader of the main opposition party, the CHP, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu who is an Alevi. The Alevis are a group who regard themselves as Shi'i Muslims, and who tend in Turkey to vote for secular parties and in favor of secularism itself. This incident has already been commented on in the discussion on friends. The Alawites over the border in Syria also regard themselves as Shi'i Muslims, although it has to be said their religious views are said to be far more heterodox, and as such have a particularly close relationship with 'Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law and cousin who appears in the names of both groups. Although until recently Prime Minister Erdoğan was very friendly with the Syrian regime, by the time the great repression in Syria started in 2011 his policy had changed and he became entirely hostile, calling for a change of regime and he implied there was a link between the Syrian Alawites and the Turkish Alevis, and by extension between the leader of the main Turkish opposition party, the Alevi Kılıçdaroğlu and Bashar Assad. He commented that you know who someone's friends are by their religion. This is perhaps a reference to an *aya* where Muslims are warned about making friends outside of Islam (5.51). In the *aya* the Qur'an suggests that those non-Muslims are only friends of each other.

Is this a position which can really be found in Islam? The Turkish Prime Minister has won three elections for his Justice and Development Party (AKP in Turkish) which has tried to reduce gradually the power of secularism in Turkey and establish a more powerful presence in the world. It has to be said right from the start that the AKP in Turkey does not only advocate a form of

Sunni Islam but also a notion of Turkishness which has difficulties with minorities such as the Kurds. Even if they are Sunni (which most Kurds are), they often feel unhappy being identified as Turks. Government policy which seeks to bring within its label Turks and Turkic people everywhere, and even to a degree those who had been in the former Ottoman Empire, has not been universally welcomed by those it seeks to embrace. The AKP represents a blend of enthusiasm for Islam and nationalism, like many parties seeking to attract votes, and implying that a rival party leader is a member of a heterodox religious group, perhaps not even a real Muslim group, and that he has links with a government that is now suddenly seen as an enemy, is effective party politics. The claim of Alevis to be recognized as a religious minority in Turkey, which only provides resources and state support for Sunni Islam, is met with the puzzled response that the state would support them if they were a Muslim community, but they are not and so should receive no such support.

Where this excursion into modern Turkish politics takes us is to an indication of the complexity of religious identity, in Islam as in other religions. To be really Turkish the suggestion is that one has to be not only Muslim but the right sort of Muslim, and you have to ignore any ethnic or cultural differences which might mean you are in fact a member of another ethnic group. Since the Turkish government seems to think there is only one form of Islam, naturally it will only support that form of Islam. In this it is continuing the policy of the previous secular governments, which also provided resources and official support for just Sunni Islam, which is after all the form of Islam practiced by the majority. One might think then that if for even for the secular governments the Alevis and the Kurds are the Other, then this is not a religious idea so much as a national one, and the religious governments of the AKP are merely following the tradition of many earlier decades of secular republican rule.

The point is that Erdoğan's illiberal remarks about the Alevi leader of the CHP are not necessarily inspired by his view of Islam, but perhaps are part of that longstanding nationalist stand by successive Turkish governments, both secular and religious, of standing with the majority against the minority. The religious parties in Turkey often accuse the secularists of nationalism, of trying to replace religion with nationalism, but as we saw when discussing Islam and nationalism, there is no difficulty in practice in combining religion with nationalism. At least today the issue is largely dealt with rhetorically but in earlier times whole communities such as the Armenians and the Greeks were wiped out and excluded from areas of the country. The sort of ethnic cleansing that occurred in Turkey is supposed to have reassured Hitler that no one would get that upset by what he had in mind for the Jews, since nothing very damaging was done to Turkey for what it did to the Armenians. The Armenians were a small Christian minority who lived in strategically important parts of the country and could indeed have assisted the enemy in an attack on Turkey, which is often given as the reason for their destruction in World War I. The Greeks were also a Christian minority who along with the Armenians frequently had dominant roles in Turkish commerce and so displacing these

groups brought considerable income, property and money into the hands of their erstwhile Muslim neighbors.

Yet this all seems very much in contrast to a common understanding of the principles of Islam. God says in the Qur'an that he is lord of east and west (55.17), which means presumably that his message is universal and everyone is invited to embrace Islam. During the *hajj* an immense variety of races and nationalities gathers at Mecca to celebrate the festival, and no distinction is made between them, at least not officially. Mecca and Medina are supposed to be exclusively Muslim cities, due to a *hadith* in which the Prophet is reported to have said that unbelievers should be kept out of the holy cities, and even more broadly out of Yemen, which then meant more than the present country and included much of the Arabian peninsula. In practice few steps are taken to ensure this, and there are other ways of interpreting that *hadith* in any case. There is no reason in general why Muslims should not live quite amicably with members of other faiths, or no faith at all, and for much of their history they have done so successfully. The Ottoman Empire, which covered much of the Middle East and Balkans for centuries, did privilege Islam and saw a gradual growth in the proportion of its Muslim population, but it allowed minorities to live within it under a variety of discriminatory legislation that varied in its severity and application from place to place and time to time. For example, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Portugal saw significant Jewish communities setting themselves up again in the Ottoman Empire, whose rulers welcomed the commercial opportunities of these newcomers who brought with them new and useful skills. On the other hand, Jews who were troublesome were soon dealt with and the Shabbetai Zvi movement of Jews from Europe who crossed the Empire to get to Jerusalem where Shabbetai was going to be revealed to be the Messiah was quickly broken up. When offered the choice between conversion or death Shabbetai rather ingloriously chose the former, and his group eventually all converted to Islam and became known as the Dönmeh, to take on a mysterious aura in later twentieth-century Turkish political mythology as an omnipotent secret Jewish society intent on controlling Turkey, and from there the world. Forced conversions were not unusual, although they were not usual either, perhaps not unrelated to the fact that it was in the interests of the Empire to be able to tax non-Muslims at a higher rate than locals.

The Qur'an itself says that there is no compulsion in religion (2.256), but as so often it is not entirely clear what this means. It could mean that one should never force anyone to adopt a religion and if it means that then certainly Muslims have transgressed that ruling for a very long time indeed. The Ottoman Empire, for example, impressed into service as soldiers young Christian men who were obliged to convert and who as the Janissaries became significant military and political factors in regime change in the Empire. Throughout the Islamic world at different times there were massacres of communities of non-Muslims, forced conversions and expulsions, in both the Sunni and Shi'a worlds. These events occurred and still occur. There is evidence in the twenty-first century that members of the tiny Jewish community which lives in Yemen, a remnant of a far

larger Jewish population which lived there for many centuries, have been attacked and murdered solely because of their Jewish identity. Churches in Nigeria are burned to the ground and worshippers killed purely because they are Christian, and non-Muslims in Indonesia and the Philippines are targeted and regularly killed on the basis of nothing more than their religion. These very negative facts should not be overemphasized. Religious groups of all kinds often have problems in coexisting with other religious groups, especially when they are all competing for the same resources, and human beings look for any differentiating factor that they can use to identify someone appropriate for mistreatment. As always, we need to distinguish between Islam and the local culture, since there is nothing in the former that calls for such behavior. On the other hand, there are aspects of Islam which can be taken in that way and plenty of local politicians and religious leaders who are ready to accept that invitation with alacrity. There is nothing unique about Islam here, religions are inevitably flexible enough to make room for almost any kind of action, however ethically problematic that might be.

The *tahrif* issue: did Jews and Christians falsify their religious books?

It is important to note that Islam does not see itself as a new religion but as the original religion of monotheism, a religion which was obscured and corrupted by later Jewish and Christian texts and communities. Islam as a word is after all a reflection of submission to God, and the prophets in the Qur'an clearly exemplify this through their words and behavior. They are very different from the cheating, lying, cowardly and disobedient prophets in the Jewish Bible, for instance, or even from a Jesus who died what was taken at the time at least to be a disgraceful death on the cross. So in a sense those who adhere to other religions are not just people who have made problematic choices, but they are the descendants of those who weakened their commitment to monotheism and the original message from God. Although they received advice about how to live and what to believe through their prophets, they changed the message to make it more amenable to their existing lifestyle and beliefs. For the last 14 centuries they have had the opportunity to embrace Islam, the original religion of which their faiths are merely pale imitations, and have not done so, and there are consequences to such ill-advised behavior.

There are a variety of ways of taking this position. One is to say that those who are not Muslims, including People of the Book such as Jews and Christians, really are beyond the pale of acceptability and Muslims should be very careful in their dealings with them. It does warn in the Qur'an about taking them as friends or authority figures, since they are only each other's friends (5. 51). The context in which this verse was produced reflects probably a period of conflict when the enemies of the nascent Islamic community, which should really more accurately be described as the born-again Islamic community (since it was not really new), worked together against the Prophet and his followers,

rightly perceiving a threat to their hegemony. It would have been a mistake for the small band of Muslims to trust them or rely on them for help. Whether this should be broadened out to cover all relations with Jews and Christians is problematic, but perhaps nonetheless we should consider this route. After all, the Qur'an is not only a description of a message given at a certain limited time but sees itself as presenting important information for people at any time and place. This is a standard issue for all religions, of course, namely, which statements should be taken as being specific and limited in time and place, and which applies everywhere and at any time. It has arisen in every section of this book.

There are also a variety of ways of regarding the Torah and the Gospel, the Christian Bible. The latter is not called the Gospels since the assumption is that the fact that there are four versions of it is immediately indicative of the problematic nature of the central Christian message. These books could be regarded as versions of the truth, as pale versions of the truth or as so corrupted by their users that they no longer contain anything of value. If they are pale versions of the truth then it might be thought that they would be worth respecting, and yet this runs the danger of suggesting that they are worthy companions of the Qur'an, and if that is true then the latter has less of an elevated status. It is like regarding the Qur'an as a more up to date model of something with which one is thinking of replacing an older model. There are people who prefer the old model and refuse to upgrade. For this to be rational they have to be able to point to something in the old model which is done better than on the new model or something objectionable about the new model by contrast to the old model. In modern life it is important that most people regularly upgrade since otherwise industry comes to a halt. We expect each new model to be better than the previous one, and indeed often issues arise with old equipment that the new model seeks to resolve. This seems a rather strange way of understanding a religion, though, since the issue of truth is very important here. If it is true that Muhammad is the last prophet, indeed the Prophet who encapsulated within his message the most perfect account of everything there is to know and its implications for our actions, then we can hardly say "thank you, but we will stick to what we did in the past."

Although today people often refer to groups of Muslims as conservative or traditional, we need to realize how revolutionary the original message of the Qur'an was. It upset the tribal system that was in place in the Arabian peninsula and the Book encourages the hearer not to follow the tradition of our ancestors if they go against Islam. The message is very much do not do things just because they have always been done in the past and we are expected to do them now. This approach is often taken up against the other monotheistic religions and suggests that they contain a lot of error which cannot be held onto with an easy conscience. For example, we are told in much of the *hadith* literature that Judaism is so legalistic because the Jews were intent on not doing what God told them to do (2.75, 4.44–7, 5.13), a very accurate reflection on much of the Jewish Bible, and so God punished them by obliging the Jews to follow even more laws than at the beginning, although the specific offense

mentioned is trying to kill Jesus (4.160). The Jews were punished by having even more restrictions placed on their behavior (Leaman 2006: 59–73).

Similar points have been made about the Christian Bible, which makes so much of the death of Jesus. Yet according to the Qur'an Jesus did not die but was taken up to heaven to await the last judgment. God would not allow him to die a disgraceful death at the hands of his enemies, the Jews, but in fact changed the appearance of those around at the time so that a Jew was killed instead of Jesus, and God made the Jew look like Jesus (4.156–9). It must have come as a shock to the Jew, of course, but then as an evil person intent on murdering a prophet, something Jews are often claimed to be keen on, he was hoist on his own petard. Most Christians are convinced of the death of Jesus, it is one of the main pillars of the religion, and on this very basic issue they are mistaken, so it is difficult to see what is worth holding onto in the rest of the New Testament. The Qur'an is a far less historical work than the bibles, and although there is much in it that resembles its predecessors, we should be careful before we fall into the trap of thinking that all three books are rather similar and only disagree on fairly minor details. There are few details in the Qur'an about the biblical characters although they frequently figure in the Book. The Qur'an sees itself as a far purer account of the prophets than the bibles, and rightly so, since it concentrates not so much on what happened but why it happened and what God's role was in it all. This is not just a matter of emphasis, though, or of stressing something that was not stressed in the earlier works. The form and matter of the Qur'an is entirely different from the bibles.

Are the prophets in the Qur'an the same as those in the bibles?

The title of this section seems easily answered, since surely the same characters often occur in all three books, with a few linguistic changes of course since they are each written in a different language. It is very important for some of the religions that they refer to the same people, since otherwise the New Testament cannot represent the completion of prophecy outlined in the Old Testament, and the Qur'an cannot be the culmination of monotheism, incorporating whatever is true in the earlier religions. The fact that the way in which they refer to the same people is different is hardly relevant, since a historical account may be linked with an account that concentrates on other features of the situation. The Qur'an tends to be more abstract and programmatic in style and this is entirely appropriate if it is seen as purifying and solidifying the ultimate meaning of the original message. In any case, we are told that the other messages as they have come down to us are corrupted, so we do not perhaps have much idea of what was meant by them, and that sort of reconstructive task is unnecessary anyway since we now have the Qur'an. We are also often told that in the *sura* Mary there are more references to Mary than exist in the whole of the New Testament, and in the rest of the Qur'an there are many references to the leading characters of the Jewish Bible and several other characters identified as prophets who are not to be found there. That is

what religions frequently do, they recycle the main characters of other religions, give them a new role or say something different about them. This is a means of establishing some basic continuity with what went before, useful in the conversion process, and very helpful also if the aim is to establish some sort of dialogue between religions, which is itself often an effective part of the conversion process.

We should be careful here and notice that the thesis that the main characters in the three main religious books are the same is very much an Islamic thesis and need not be shared by Jews and Christians. The issue is not so much who the Qur'an is seeking to identify by using the same names, but what descriptions they think are appropriate of them. Would Jesus be Jesus if he had not been crucified? For many Christians this is a vital aspect of the religion, not only his death but subsequent resurrection, and everything that is linked with that. It is not the case that this is a story in the New Testament which could be replaced by something else and we can just go on as normal. If one had to point to something crucial about Christianity it is not the virgin birth, which the Qur'an accepts, but the death and then resurrection of Jesus, so it is not by chance that Islam denies this key point. The Qur'an also spends a lot of time attacking the idea that Jesus was more than just a man, which is a more ambiguous issue for many Christians also, and is not so crucial to Christianity as the idea that he was revived after death. For that revival to be possible he must first of all have died, of course, not just seemed to have died. The Qur'an suggests that Christians who think that Jesus really did die have not only made a mistake but a serious mistake. This is perhaps an indication that the Book acknowledges the radical nature of what it is claiming by contrast with standard Christian belief. It is not like discovering that Jesus in fact did not carry out all the miracles with which he is credited, or that he had a hitherto unknown penchant for olives at breakfast time.

It is worth visiting a similar issue from the Jewish Bible, the character of Job. In the Bible Job, who is never identified as Jewish, suffers and loudly complains about his suffering (Leaman 1997a). His friends produce standard religious explanations of his suffering and he rejects them all. Finally God appears and produces a poetic account of divine power, as a result of which Job wisely agrees not to complain any more. God then says he will forgive Job's friends for their pious speeches if Job intercedes on their behalf, which of course he does, and Job is rewarded with twice of what he lost. As we saw in the chapter on morality, this is very different from the Ayyub of the Qur'an, who only appears very briefly, again on the model of the Book abstracting most of the detail to be found in the bibles. Ayyub does not have any queries about the justice of his suffering, he only worries that it will lead to a weakening of his relationship with God. He prays that this will not happen. Similar differences could be found in the treatment of many of the other "common" prophets in the bibles and the Qur'an.

We can see here that the links between the three religions are not as close as often thought by Muslims. Just using the same name does not mean referring to the same prophet, and the style of each of the three books is markedly different from the others. The argument that corruption of texts took place would

of course account for this, but unless we know it happened we need to work with the texts that we have before us now. Pointing to putative problems in the bibles is perfectly acceptable as a theological move by Muslims, and contrasting them with the Qur'an works well also. One can then argue for the superiority of some texts over others, and for one particular prophet to everyone else. Within what is often rather misleadingly called interfaith dialogue much of this goes on, after the constant reiteration of similarities between the books. It is worth questioning the value of this approach.

Is the God of Islam the God of Christianity and Judaism also?

It is popular in modern times when writing about religions to emphasize the links between them, and also the principles which they hold in common. The very fact that we can call them all Abrahamic suggests to some that they must share things in common, at least in all respecting Abraham. However, one of the facts of religion is that the most bitter antagonism often arises through minor disagreements and technical differences, and that conflict within a religion is often more protracted than between quite distinct religions. The more similar the views of believers, the more they find whatever remains distinct as crucial in their relations with each other, and the more worthy of being the basis of a conflict, it often seems.

The view of the Qur'an about the Abrahamic religions is as always with religion complex. Islam is the *din al-fitra*, the original religion, which before its final revelation through the Prophet Muhammad was revealed by earlier prophets such as Moses and Jesus. Unfortunately, though their message was the authentic word of God at the time, it was interpreted incorrectly by their communities, and subjected to *tahrif* (2.75, 4.46, 5.13), *tabdil* (2.59, 7.162) and *talbis* (2.42, 3.71): corruption, adulteration and alteration. This is very distant from the thesis that the Abrahamic religions are just different ways of presenting the same basic truth or truths. It is worth pointing out that this view of the religions being linked in this way is a very Islamic view, and not one likely to be shared by the People of the Book. Jews do not regard the New Testament or the Qur'an as having any religious significance for them, and Christians feel no necessity to acknowledge the truth of Muhammad's mission as recounted in the Qur'an. Islam has to show why as the youngest of the religions it is the best. It does this by suggesting that in fact it is not the youngest but the oldest religion, the original religion which Judaism and Christianity have changed and formed into their own apparent religions which preserve only a slight connection with the divine origins of faith itself. This explains why for instance Jesus is represented as having been crucified in the Gospel, as the Qur'an refers to the Christian Bible, when he was merely taken up to heaven according to the Qur'an and why the stories of the Jewish prophets are often rather different from their accounts in the Jewish Bible.

There are a variety of ways at looking at these differences of approach. There is a tendency for a religion that comes out of other religions to stress the common factors between the new faith and the old ones. After all, this is

helpful for conversion, since one can argue that there is not that much difference between the faiths, and so conversion is not such a big deal. In a store merchandizers who are trying to get the public to buy a new product will often link it with older and more familiar products so that the public know what sort of thing it is and find it tempting. The Qur'an often lumps Jews and Christians together as People of the Book, and other groups are also linked with them in this respect of having a book, but then it also sometimes takes a harsher view of Jews as compared with Christians (Leaman 2011: 82–94, Leaman 2006: 59–73). Christians at least, unlike Jews, believe that Jesus was a prophet, and Jews set out to kill Jesus and show a general disinclination to treat those sent to bring them messages with respect, but Christians nonetheless have many mistaken ideas about Jesus. They believe according to the Qur'an that he has a divine or semi-divine status, and this belief is wrong, and they believe that he was crucified, instead of taken up to heaven, and this is also wrong. They did not try to kill Jesus, this is the responsibility of the Jews, who are said to tend to try to kill their prophets (although of course they do not regard him as a prophet). There is a real issue as to whether Christians will be saved when the world comes to an end, since although their behavior may have been virtuous and they did believe in the prophethood of Jesus, they also lacked faith in God to such an extent that they believed he could have allowed his prophet to die the sort of humiliating death that is represented by the crucifixion. They also fail to understand what specifically happened to Jesus since they do not accept the prophecy of Muhammad and the authority of the Qur'an so they are clearly only in possession of a much earlier and incomplete message. Not that God sent them an incomplete message, but they have manipulated what he sent them, so they misunderstand its real nature, and good evidence of that is provided by their refusal to accept the last message as conveyed through Muhammad. The implication is that had they understood the message they received from Jesus they would have moved onto accepting the final message.

But surely as President Obama said when trying to take the heat out of the controversy about the building of an Islamic center near the site of the attacks on New York City, we all pray to the same God. Not all Muslims are so sure: there was an attempt in Malaysia in the first decade of the twenty-first century to forbid non-Muslims referring to God as Allah, the Arabic word for God which is not as such limited only to Muslims when referring to God if they are Arabic speakers. It is an interesting question though whether the God of the Qur'an is the same as the God of the other Abrahamic texts, He seems rather more aggressive than the God of the New Testament but not as aggressive as the God of the Jewish Bible, and to distinguish him from those Gods we are told: "And the Jews say, Ezra is the son of God and the Christians say, the Messiah is the son of God. That is what they say with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved in the past" (9.30). He adds to this criticism of Christianity by saying: "He is God … who has not begotten (112.1–3). He creates just by saying 'Be!' And it is" (2.117), which fits in nicely with the other Abrahamic texts, but it is the only thing quoted here that does

not distinguish him from the God of the other religions. We don't know who Ezra is taken to be here, but he stands for a false messiah for the Jews, and there have been plenty of those in the past. The point of comparing him with Jesus is to suggest that both the Christians and the Jews fell for false messiahs, and this almost makes them unbelievers, a very serious charge indeed. They appear to fall into the category of *munafiqun*, hypocrites, another serious charge, since the implication is that they do not really believe in what they say. They all received the pure monotheistic doctrine from their prophets and they adulterated it and made it dirty and inaccurate, albeit more in line with what they wanted to do anyway. They turned something tidy and neat into something messy and mixed up with other things, hence the point of the accusation of *shirk* or idolatry, associating God with other, lesser, beings.

We have a more difficult issue here to resolve, and that is that we do not have to accept that the God of the Jews and the Christians and the Muslims is the same God, even if we are monotheists. We may accept that there is just one God, but if we disagree about the ways he is described, what does it mean to say that he is the same person? Those hostile to Islam often say that the Christian God is a God of love while the God of the Qur'an and the Jewish Bible is vengeful and violent, and yet it has to be said that Christian history and other significant Christian theological works provide little evidence of such a distinction. These sweeping generalizations about how religions classify God as compared with other religions rarely get it right, and this is hardly surprising given the complexity of what is after all the leading character in a complex system of thought such as a religion. The God of present-day Jews and Christians, not to mention any other community that might be regarded as having a book, is not the same as the God of Islam. It is not like the Ka'ba which went from being originally monotheist and constructed by Abraham and his son, to being polytheist and then finally monotheist again, and throughout this period it seems to have come under divine care and concern. But then it is the same physical object, so even if its use is corrupted, it itself can remain as it was. If the concept of God in Judaism and Christianity is corrupted, though, that concept does not remain the same, its sense changes and as such it changes and no longer captures the idea of God as Islam would interpret it.

Looking at the issue from the point of view of Judaism and Christianity, is their God the same God who appears in the Qur'an? He is according to President Obama, but perhaps an American politician should not be taken to have said the last word on this issue. Jews would have to accept that the Torah which we are told was given to Moses on Mount Sinai is not in fact the text they have in front of them today, not just in the sense that there are a few differences but it is totally inaccurate and self-serving. Christians would have to accept that Jesus was not really crucified, but his apparent death was a test set for Christians who are really to be rewarded at the end of time for not believing that God would allow Jesus to be killed in such a gruesome way. He was not then resurrected and nor does he have any status except as one of the prophets sent to the world by God at one stage or another. How far is this

the same God as the God in the New Testament? Issues of identity are rarely simple to determine, yet it does not seem difficult here to see that there are problems in identifying these very different accounts of who the prophets were.

Who may Muslims take as friends?

> O believers! Take neither Jews nor Christians as your friends [*awliya'*]: they are only friends of each another. Whoever of you disobeys this commandment will be counted as one of them. Surely God does not guide the wrongdoers. (5.51)

This is apparently the idea that one can trust people only if they are members of the same group. *Wali* means a friend, someone who is close, and a helper. It can also be taken in the sense of being someone to whom one defers, a person in authority. There are problems with having good relations with people with whom one disagrees about basic issues, or so it might be thought. Of course, to a degree it depends on whether the People of the Book are treated as believers or otherwise. They are certainly not Muslims, but are they nonetheless believers, as suggested by the label of "People of the Book"? If they are at least regarded as believers then there will be a basic level of agreement between Muslims and them upon which friendship could develop. But even if they are not regarded as believers, it is still feasible to make agreements with them and there is no reason to be impolite or aggressive toward them. "God does not forbid you to be kind and equitable to those who had neither fought against your faith nor driven you out of your homes. In fact God loves the equitable" (60.8). The *aya* continues: "God only forbids you to make friends [*wali*] those who fought you on account of your faith and drove you out of your homes and backed up others in your expulsion. Those who will take them for friends are indeed the wrongdoers" (60. 9). There is another passage of the Qur'an that is often quoted to support the above view. "Let not the believers take for friends or helpers unbelievers [*kuffar*] rather than believers. If any do that in nothing will there be help from God, except by way of precaution that you may guard yourselves from them" (3.28).

It is worth noting that the Qur'an allows Muslim men to marry Jewish and Christian women: "Likewise, marriage with chaste free believing women and also chaste women among the People who were given the Book before you is made lawful for you" (5.5). While mentioning the closeness of the husband–wife relationship, the Qur'an says: "And of His signs, another one is that He created for you mates from among yourselves that you may find comfort with them" (30. 21). It is unimaginable how a Muslim would be able to have intimate relations with his non-Muslim wife and yet be able to maintain a distance in general with non-Muslims. Someone is either your wife or she is not, although it could be that wives are to be excluded from the general rule, of course. As a result of his marriage with a non-Muslim, a Muslim is going to have in-law relatives. Should Muslim men treat all such relatives with

suspicion? Moreover, as a result of the Qur'anic permission for Muslim men to marry non-Muslim women, some Muslim children will have non-Muslim mothers. In view of the conventional understanding on the issue, should there be a distance between their fathers and their mothers? "O humanity! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you might get to know one another. Surely the noblest of you in the sight of God is he who is the most righteous. God is all-knowing, ever aware" (49.13). This getting to know each other is not easy to do at a distance.

It is important to distinguish between certain sorts of people:

> Among the people of the Book there are those who if you trust them with a treasure, will return it to you; and among them there are those who, if you trust them with a dinar, will not return it to you, unless you keep standing over them.
>
> (3.75)

> They are not all alike. Among the people of the Book there is a party who stand by their covenant; they recite the word of God in the hours of night and prostrate themselves before him. They believe in God and the last day, and enjoin good and forbid evil, and hasten to vie with one another in good works. And these are among the righteous.
>
> (3.113)

> And surely among the People of the Book there are some who believe in God and in what has been sent down to you and in what was sent down to them, humbling themselves before God. They trade not the signs of God for a paltry price. It is these who shall have their reward with their Lord. Surely God is swift in settling account.
>
> (3.199)

On the other hand:

> O believers! Do not make your protecting friends those, from among the people who were given the Book before you and the unbelievers, who have made your religion a mockery or pastime, fear God if you are true believers. When you call for prayer they make it as an object of mockery and pastime; this is because they are a people devoid of understanding.
>
> (5.57–8)

It is the same instruction God gave to Muslims regarding the hypocrite fellow-Muslims as well.

The Qur'an says:

> He has already revealed for you in the Book that when you hear God's revelations being denied or ridiculed by people, you must not sit with

> them unless they change the topic of their talk, otherwise you shall be considered guilty like them. Rest assured that God is going to gather the hypocrites and the unbelievers all together in hell.
>
> (4.140)

4.88–9 and 3.100 emphasize the problems of associating with those who are intent on making fun of religion and turning others aside from their religious views and duties.

The references here to *al-yahud* and *al-nasara* could well mean "these Jews" and "these Christians," i.e. precisely those who are creating the mischief mentioned in the relevant verses of the passage. The prefix *al* in Arabic is the definite article and refers to a particular group. On the other hand, although we may emphasize the context, perhaps a wider point was being made here against all members of those communities. It is sensible advice for a religion that seeks to distinguish itself from the existing faiths on offer to urge its followers not to spend too much time with those of the old religions, since contamination may result. This example is rather inaccurate since Islam is seen as really the oldest religion, the original monotheism practiced by Adam and Abraham, which was later corrupted by the People of the Book. Staying close to those who corrupted the original religion, and surely this means all the People of the Book, is not good advice for those who seek to re-establish what they have gone out of their way to traduce.

We are also told: "Rest assured that believers, Jews, Christians and Sabians – whoever believes in God and the last day and perform good deeds – will be rewarded by their Lord; they will have nothing to fear or to regret" (2.62). If they have nothing to fear from God, surely Muslims may associate with them, although of course "Many are the *Jinns* and men we have made for hell. They have hearts but they do not understand, eyes but they do not see, and ears but they do not hear. They are like cattle, but more misguided: for they are heedless" (7.179). These sorts of people are difficult to remain friends with safely, since they remain obdurate regardless of the signs they are sent as to how they ought to behave. On the other hand, we often like to have as friends people who are very different from us, and there is a danger of infection of course, something the Qur'an refers to, but apart from that, which we could always take into account, there is also the possibility that we will make our friends more like us. Sometimes one acquires a friend who is very different and even dangerous, and they are a lot of fun to be with, since although they encourage others to do things which they will perhaps regret having done later, they have the charisma to bring others along with them and brighten the lives of those around them.

Further reading

Leaman 1997a, 2006, 2011.

12 Islam and belief

Who is a believer?

What is *iman* or belief in Islam? All the different theological schools answered this question in a particular way. Some were very restrictive and some less so. It is an important question and not only legally since its consequences are paradise or hell. From a legal point of view there are implications also, on who can marry believers, on the preparation of *halal* food and basically on who can be taken to be members of the *umma* or community. In a country run on what are often called Islamic lines this has significant political implications, determining who can hold certain kinds of office and who can give evidence in court. In previous times unbelievers paid a special tax, the *jizya*, solely because they were unbelievers. This is often more positively represented as protection money, and was an acknowledgment of their lack of necessity to participate in the military functions of the state. However, the primary meaning of the question dealing with belief is eschatological and a matter of who can be saved:

> The likeness of paradise, which the godfearing have been promised, rivers flow beneath it, and its fruits are eternal, and its shade: that is the requital of the godfearing, while the requital of unbelievers is hell.
>
> (13.35)

A useful way of determining who is a believer is not to ask what you have to believe to be a believer, but wonder what makes someone an unbeliever. There has been a tendency for theologians to denounce others as unbelievers (*takfir*) and this is a process which is worth trying to understand if we are to discover what a believer would need to believe. Is someone who has an idea that is *kufr* or unbelief as a result an unbeliever? Not necessarily. Charging those who appear to be fellow Muslims with unbelief is often called *fitna* or conflict and, compared with the early dissensions that drove the community to internal struggle and division, the sort of conflict that can easily destroy a community and it should as a result perhaps only be applied very carefully and in quite specific circumstances.

There are some things a Muslim would be expected to know and if he does not then he may well be a *kafir*. There are principles of what is necessarily

known as being part of the religion. This includes such things as the oneness of God, the attributes of prophethood, that prophecy has ended with Muhammad, the resurrection of the dead, final judgment, reward and punishment, the everlastingness of paradise and hell, the need for prayer, *zakat*, fasting Ramadan, and the significance of the pilgrimage, the unlawfulness of wine or adultery, and perhaps some additional principles based on less standard forms of Islam. These are well known among everyone as Muslim rules, even to those who are not Muslims. Anyone who denies them would be a strong candidate to be counted as a nonbeliever. To deny something less significant, an aspect of faith that not everyone knows, and that an ordinary Muslim might not know unless it were pointed out to him, is only unbelief (*kufr*) if he persists in denying it after he understands that it has come to us from God or his messenger. After all "We do not charge anyone except according to its capacity" (6.152) and 65.7 both make it clear that we are only responsible for what we choose to do.

Then there are issues on which the scholars tend to disagree among themselves. It is often suggested that these issues should not be based on a fanciful interpretation of the Qur'an or *sunna* that violates the grammar or diction of the Arabic language. They should not contradict some other significant text that is both *qat'i al-wurud* or unquestionably established in its transmission from God or his messenger. This could be either a verse of the Qur'an, or *hadith* that is *mutawatir* or established by so many different channels of transmission which can be identified that it is impossible that all could have conspired to fabricate it. Something that is *qat'i al-dalala* or uncontestable as evidence is a plain text which does not admit of more than one meaning, and which no *mujtahid* can interpret in other than its one meaning or construe in other than its apparent sense. It should not violate *ijma'* or consensus, the agreement of all Islamic *mujtahid*s of a particular time upon a ruling or a point of evidence that bears on a ruling, such as the interpretation of a particular Qur'anic word or phrase. Finally, it should not contradict anything that can be validly derived from either of these principles.

We are told to "Ask those who really know, if you know not" (16.43). If those who are trained in working out such issues cannot resolve them, it is hardly surprising that sometimes ordinary believers cannot either. This sort of approach to defining a believer obviously assumes the existence of a group of people who are experts in religion, and have the ability to interpret scripture, but there is nothing essentially problematic in this, since we do generally accept that there are experts in particular areas of study, so why not in religion also? Such an approach appears to be very much orientated toward Sunni Islam with its emphasis on consensus and the idea of a group of religious specialists leading the community, and with its lack of reference to the family of the Prophet. On the other hand, the Shi'a also defer to experts, albeit different experts from the Sunni, and rely on those experts to define who according to them can be counted as a believer.

The first thing to know about declaring someone an unbeliever is that the *'aqida* or Islamic creed of anyone of who has announced "There is no god but

God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God," is legally valid as evidence of belief until incontrovertibly proven otherwise. This principle is backed up by a very significant *hadith* of 'Usama ibn Zayd:

> The Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) sent us on a foray, and we made a surprise attack at dawn on al-Huruqat in the lands of Juwayna. I caught up with a man, and he said, "There is no god but Allah," and I ran him through. I later had concerns about this, and mentioned it to the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), who said, "He said 'There is no god but Allah,' and you killed him?" and I replied, "O Messenger of Allah, he only said it out of fear of the weapon." He said, "Why didn't you split him open to see if his heart really said it or not?" and he kept repeating this till I wished I had not become a Muslim before that day.
>
> (*Muslim*, 1.96–7: 96. S)

The point is that one should often believe a declaration of faith even if there is good reason to suspect its genuineness. As the Prophet suggests, who are we to say who is a believer or otherwise? He went on to say "Whoever charges a believer with unbelief is like someone who had killed him" (*Bukhari*, 8.32: 6105. S). He also is taken to have said that "Any man who says, 'O kafir' to his brother, one of them deserves the name" (*Bukhari*, 8.32: 6104. S). The implication is that it could well be the accuser.

The way this debate has developed often means that such issues should be determined by a *qadi* or Islamic judge because sometimes the difference between a believer and the opposite is importantly legally for issues like who can marry a Muslim woman, what should happen to property, who may slaughter animals and so on, and these do not extend to taking over the divine role of deciding on each person's character at the end of his or her life. In matters of faith, a Muslim is always presumed to be a Muslim until there is external evidence and firm proof that he has ceased to be one. Such a proof must be publicly observable because the influential *hadith* of 'Usama ibn Zayd backs up the legal idea that rulings are based upon outward evidence, while God is responsible for the inward.

The restrictions on *takfir* or declaring someone an unbeliever are often taken to be that every Muslim's faith is valid until proven otherwise. It is not the legal obligation of the ordinary Muslim to judge another's faith, but rather that of the *qadi* or judge. There are occasions where it must be legally decided in order to determine who can marry whom and so on, and it is a dangerous undertaking to charge a Muslim with unbelief. Often declaring others unbelievers is itself a sin and it is worth noting that factions which declare others unbelievers lay themselves open to the charge of being unjust. It is perhaps problematic to take any scholarly position about which major authorities among the Islamic intellectual hierarchy differ as the decisive criterion of any Muslim's faith. It is often argued that Islamic law avoids prescribed penalties (*hudud*), including the

penalty for apostasy, by identifying extenuating circumstances (*shubuhat*) if at all possible.

The 'Usama ibn Zayd *hadith* shows that a Muslim's legally entering Islam and acknowledging his allegiance by having said the profession of faith (*shahada*) is an accepted and public fact. It is a verbal action, more than just the expression of a few words but what philosophers sometimes call a speech act. No one can thereafter be considered a *kafir* without an equal certainty, since the Prophet condemned 'Usama for doing so. The legal position stemming from this *hadith* has led many legal thinkers to advise caution in throwing around accusations of *kufr*. The Hanafi school follows the Qur'an in classifying the process of associating others with God (*shirk*) as the worst crime, closely followed by disbelief in him, or anything in the message of the Prophet, or sarcasm about any of that material. Disbelief includes:

1 reviling the religion of Islam, or God, or the Prophet, denying any matter necessarily known to be part of the religion of Islam, that is established by a text from either the Qur'an or *mutawatir* (authoritative) *hadith*, provided the text is entirely clear as evidence and there is no reasonable possibility of disagreement about it;
2 denying any matter established by unanimous consensus of all the Companions (*sahaba*), where its unanimity is firmly established, and it was explicitly announced;
3 denying the existence of God;
4 believing that things cause effects through themselves or by their nature, without the will of God;
5 denying a matter of unquestionable scholarly consensus (*ijma' qat'i*);
6 denying the existence of the angels, the *jinn*, or the heavens;
7 believing something intrinsically unlawful whose unlawfulness is unquestionably established, such as drinking wine, to be lawful (*halal*), as opposed to arguments about the property of someone else, who might or might not own what he appears to own;
8 derogatory comments (*istikhfaf*) about any ruling of divine law or making fun about religious issues even if you do not actually believe it yourself;
9 demeaning any prophet, or saying that prophethood is acquired through the efforts of the prophet and does not come exclusively through the grace of God;
10 calumny against 'A'isha the wife of the Prophet – this is obviously a problem for the Shi'a but that hardly matters here since this is a very Sunni list of criteria;
11 denying that the Prophet's message was intended for the entire world.

Anyone who does something that is on this list shows that he or she is an apostate, and should be invited to re-enter Islam. There can be no doubt after all that the individual concerned is then an apostate. He can either repent and confirm his belief in Islam or else be killed, though a woman is merely incarcerated ('Ala' al-Din 'Abidin n.d.: 424–5).

On these criteria some of the more radical thinkers in modern times might be threatened with *takfir*, and have been. At least those of them who are women can at least be only imprisoned rather than killed. While this might seem harsh, albeit less harsh on women, the legal problems of actually convicting someone are potentially high. What would count as evidence of *kufr*? Accepting hearsay evidence against people is forbidden: "O you who believe: when a corrupt person brings you news, verify it, lest you harm people out of ignorance and come to regret what you have done" (49.6). Normally there must be at least two male witnesses who testify that they have heard him make a statement of unbelief according to the Hanafi school, and if the individual then denies that he has made such a statement, he is legally difficult to touch. In any case, we can perhaps leave their more serious punishment to later on: "Those who offend God and his messenger are cursed by God in this world and the next, and he has prepared for them a humiliating chastisement" (33.57). What is often important is intention. After all, there was no intention of the Companions of the Prophet to offend him by staying too long in his house, and so while they are told not to do it, there is no hint of punishment:

> O you who believe, do not enter the rooms of the Prophet unless you are given leave to partake of the food, do not wait for it to be prepared, but rather enter when given permission, and leave without talking when you finish eating. You really offend [*adha*] the Prophet otherwise.
>
> (33.53)

His visitors tended to prolong their time at his table with conversation and made it difficult for him to get things done, presumably, and they were encouraged not to linger, something it is very easy to do when in a convivial atmosphere with someone whom one very much admires. Such tedious guests are not though blameworthy in the sense that they seek to annoy anyone or take advantage of hospitality. They stray into becoming nuisances and as such it would be inappropriate to punish them for it. Perhaps some believers can similarly wander into disbelief?

A problem in defining someone as an unbeliever just because he is a member of a group who are themselves suspect is that "No bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another" (6.164) which is also why a Muslim's membership in a particular group or sect is not in itself legal evidence that he is a *kafir* even when the tenets of the group include ideas that are *kufr*. The individual Muslim is only answerable for what he personally believes and does. As the theologians often say, we enter the grave alone.

Iman and action

An important aspect of being a believer is having the right attitude to God and his Book: "O you who believe! Fear God as he should be feared, and die not except in a state of Islam" (3.102). *Iman* is often seen as the statement of the

heart and tongue, and sometimes as the actions of the heart, tongue and limbs. Although some theologians deny this and concentrate on the heart only. The Qur'an does sometimes link belief with action: "But give glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness, that their portion is gardens, beneath which rivers flow" (2.25) and: "As for those who believe and do righteous acts, the all merciful will bestow His love on them" (19.96). *Iman* or faith in God can never be achieved, according to some, unless there are *actions* confirming what the tongue is saying. One such action is the testifying of *La Illaha Illa Allah; Muhammadur RasulAllah* which can be translated in English as "There is no deity except one deity – God, and Muhammad is His messenger." We are told that to be saved one needs to come before God with a sound heart (26.88–9). But does coming to God with a pure heart involve any sort of action? "God will not take you to task for a slip, but He will take you to task for what your hearts have earned" (2.225). It seems not, and provided we have the correct intentions, our actions are not significant. Again, the emphasis is on our own thoughts and conscience, and does not explicitly mention action. It is sometimes said that for one to really have *iman* or faith in God one has to go through several stages. One must pass all of them, and these involve wanting to find out about God, examining the Qur'an and *sunna*, accepting Islam and saying with the heart and the tongue the *shahada*, and then confirming that belief by performing actions solely for the sake of God. It is this last condition that is crucial, although of course reciting the *shahada* is also an action. More is perhaps meant than just producing prayers and recitations, and there is the necessity for works, as Christians often put the issue.

It is worth noting that no action is truly done for the sake of God if it contains *shirk*. The whole purpose of being alive is to worship God and no one else: "And I created the *jinn*s and humanity so that they should worship me" (51.56) and "Worship God and join none with him in worship" (4.36). What is it to act in such a way as to act for God? One might think that whatever it means, it involves some sort of action, and this has to be orientated toward God. This is perfect *iman* which is established in the heart, proved with the tongue, and proved with the body. But is *iman* which is not perfect not still *iman*?

Iman and Islam

It is sometimes said that *iman* is our inward deeds, while Islam outward actions. This is because *iman* principally is the belief instilled in the heart, a sort of mental submission to God while Islam is to submit actions to those thoughts. Both *iman* and Islam are frequently interchangeable. The Archangel Gabriel (Jibril) differentiated between them in the well-known *hadith* often reproduced in the collection of 40 significant reports by Nawawi, where he asked the Prophet:

> Oh Messenger of God! What is *iman*? He replied: "it is to believe in God, his angels, books, messengers, the last day, and destiny whether good or

> evil." And what is Islam? The Prophet replied: "It is to testify that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is his messenger, perform prayers, pay *zakat*, fast the month of Ramadan and go on *hajj* when you have the means."

In the above *hadith*, *iman* is mainly associated with inward actions or the deeds of the heart, while Islam is associated with outward actions or deeds of the senses. Even when the testimony of faith is counted among the verbal actions of *iman*, it is reflected in the explicit acts of worship of Muslims including prayers, fasting, *zakat* and *hajj*, which is often taken to be equivalent to Islam.

Iman can be taken to include verbal deeds, actions and strong belief. The heart and tongue provide evidence of faith while the heart and senses are the basis for it. Verbal deeds include remembering God or *dhikr*, reading and/or listening to the Qur'an, calling on God, supporting what is good and urging others to do it, forbidding what is evil and warning others against it, teaching and guiding those who go astray to the right path, and so on. On the other hand, actions result in further actions. We love or hate for the sake of God, believe in destiny, have patience in times of suffering, fearing and seeking his pleasure, putting our trust in him and asking him for forgiveness. The actions involve bowing, prostration, standing and sitting before God in prayer, *tawaf* (circumambulating the Ka'ba) during *hajj*, *jihad* or fighting in the cause of God, giving charity and similar actions of a religious nature. It is not entirely clear whether it is possible to have faith and do nothing or whether if faith is to be stronger or weaker it is manifested in terms of actions, which are equivalent to Islam.

Faith is often described as belief in the heart, words on the tongue and actions of the body. As such it could increase or decrease, and even Abraham refers to this at 2.260. There are other references to decreasing faith at 74.31 and both increase and decrease at 9.124–5. It is a common experience that on particular occasions we feel our faith very much strengthened (that is perhaps one of the points of *dhikr* or remembrance of God). At 51.21 we see the idea that looking at the world in the right sort of way increases faith and many *ahadith* suggest that sinful acts are evidence of a lack of belief. Some theologians deny that faith can increase or decrease, while others say it can do one and not the other.

Human knowledge and the afterlife

Aristotle very briefly talks about the idea of human beings having a passive intellect, a facility for knowing which finds an object in our minds, and he implies there must also be an active intellect, something that gets the whole process of knowledge in us going (*De anima* iii, 5). One of the intriguing features of the quote is that it implies that something epistemological is possible only if something ontological is available. It suggests that human thought is possible only if something makes it possible and that something comes from outside of us to do this, outside of us as thinkers. Ibn Rushd insists on just one

active intellect that makes thought possible and just one passive intellect for everyone which embodies this thinking, in which we as individuals somehow participate. Although the process is set in motion from outside of us, it defines us, since for Ibn Rushd we are defined by our rationality. There is an interesting moral consequence of this that is not often noticed, and only becomes obvious when we compare their views with those of Aquinas. For the latter we are defined by our relationship with God, and so while that relationship persists we are still who we are. For those who base ourselves on rationality, though, a radical change in our mental capacities may well make us non-beings and no longer worth keeping alive. So this aspect of definition is not just a *façon de parler* but has huge consequences for how people may be treated and whether they really are people or the same people any more. As far as the afterlife is concerned it also follows that what gets us there is rationality, for Ibn Rushd, a very different view of the role of religion in our lives as compared with the normal view that it is morality and devotion to God which is efficacious in this regard.

We are here already a long way from Aristotle, for whom of course the afterlife was very shadowy indeed and who was not at all interested in our relationship with God in the sort of sense that Jews, Muslims and Christians are. Ibn Rushd was of interest to his contemporaries and those subsequently because he was an interpreter of Aristotle, but perhaps more because he established a new agenda, he moved Aristotle on into the new age, tying up loose ends and linking him with the sorts of issues that were of interest to those who were members of the Abrahamic religions. The question of how thought is possible is a persistent one in philosophy, and when Ibn Rushd's analysis is added to Aristotle's few and hesitant comments, we start to get the idea of a systematic approach to the topic. As human thinking becomes progressively better perfected, the theory goes, it moves from being representative and imaginative to becoming intellectual. Ultimately it merges with the active intellect itself, which is the principle of intellectual thought. As a result, the material part of us comes under the control of the principles of thought and so we can range intellectually more widely than if we were restricted to our senses and what we could derive from them.

A point which is rarely made but is worth making is that the active intellect idea is important not just for Peripatetic philosophy but also for the two other major schools of thought in Islamic philosophy, *tasawwuf* (Sufism) and *ishraqi* or Illuminationist philosophy. It also has a role in Sufi or mystical thought. Suhrawardi identifies the active intellect with light and what flows from God, so again something ontological leads to the epistemological. Where does light come from? It comes from somewhere else. Where does thought come from? It comes from somewhere else, according to both Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra. Light is something that is not itself visible but makes other things visible, and the active intellect is something that is not itself thought but makes other things think, makes thought possible. It is worth pointing out here that we do not have to take this ontological/epistemological dichotomy that seriously. After

all, Kant's categories and regulative principles also look like they are things that actually exist which make our judgments about objects possible, but clearly they are not since Kant denies that we can actually know that the external world or eternal peace exist, while at the same time we needed to assume they do if other parts of our lives are to be rationally experienced. For experience to be more than just experience and objective, something has to make such objective experience possible, and that is for Kant a number of ideas and concepts. They are the conditions of objective experience. So when Suhrawardi talks about light it is not that that light actually exists, just that what gets human thought going is like what gets objects seen, the presuppositon of light. It is easy to identify this source of light with something divine, but just as easy, although more prosaic, not to do so. The idea of the active intellect is based on what happens when we make our experience more and more abstract, until a stage is reached when it is entirely abstract, insofar as human beings can reach this level. This is the level of the active intellect, and there is nothing especially difficult to understand in what goes on when thought becomes more abstract. For example, to take an Aristotelian example, when we study triangles we often start with a particular triangle and then move on to finding out about triangles in general. The triangle in front of us becomes a symbol of all triangles, in just the same way that the words appearing on this page become representatives of all such words, and not just the signs on the page. What makes this sort of intellectual progression possible is the fact that we can abstract our ideas, and this definitely represents an advance from a stage of thinking at which we cannot.

What is of more significance here is not the ontological status of what makes human thought possible but what implications this has for the soul and the existence of the soul after death. For Ibn Rushd there is just one active and one passive intellect, an idea he most likely found in Themistius, and this one can be identified with one thing as well as one principle (of thought) but its ontological status is not really relevant for its role. That is why the idea of there being just one passive intellect caused so much controversy, taken in an ontological sense it implies that everyone shares a common thing, perhaps in the way according to the Ash'arites that humans acquire (*kasb*) parts of the results of divine power in enabling them to look as though they are acting independently. The active intellect concept also has very little to do with the idea of one soul that continues on after our bodies are gone, and implies that the only thing that survives will be the rational thoughts that become part of the one intellect and this is certainly not an individual afterlife in which our personalities continue in some shape or form. Many Muslim thinkers did not see the point of insisting on the active intellect as that which makes thought possible since they asked why this role could not be safely left to God, surely the efficient cause of everything anyway. Here though we have one of the great advantages of the Neoplatonic system, its ability to account for thought in a way that does not involve more beings than strictly necessary. For theistic Neoplatonists God certainly has a role somewhere along the way, and no doubt it is ultimately God

who makes what I am typing now possible, but strictly speaking it is something else, the active intellect which makes the thought I am expressing now possible, since there is a logical connection, they argued, between an action and what makes that action possible. It is not surprising that there should have been so much controversy on this issue since this is very much a transcendental type of argument, something we are familiar with from Kant, and these are difficult kinds of arguments to classify, since they neither look strictly logical nor entirely empirical. That is why Kant used the concept of the synthetic a priori, which in itself looks like a strange concept somewhere between the two clear ideas of how concepts are related to each other of the demonstrative and the scientific. His idealism he classifies as transcendental and steadfastly refuses to make any judgments on the basis of it as to what if anything exists, an agnosticism about existence which horrified Mulla Sadra when he found something similar in Suhrawardi.

For the Sufis the different and progressive stations, *maqamat*, actually exist and one can only process to one if one starts at an earlier one, or so it seems. The role of reason is to grasp what comes to it and organize it in a way that makes it knowable, and there are different levels of doing this based on the different levels of knowledge that one may attain. The notion of something coming from outside and making knowledge possible is present in many of the Sufi accounts, and our role is to prepare ourselves spiritually so that we are ready to receive what is available to us from without. Often Sufis are contemptuous of the idea that the active intellect is the furthest we can go in knowledge, a Peripatetic doctrine, and they are also skeptical of the idea that only *ittisal* (contact) and not *ittihad* (unity) is possible when we are affected by the active intellect. Ibn Sina strongly opposed the idea of uniting with the active intellect since he did not see how the individual being could emerge out of that relationship once it was established. After all, if we become the same as the abstract ideas we employ, how do we ever stop using them? Our experience suggests we do, and so such an account will not work. If however instead of uniting with them we merely connect with them, nothing stands in the way of our disconnecting also, and thinking about or doing something else.

The Sufis did use the notion of the active intellect, but they broadened it to operate not just on the intellect but also on the heart, which they saw as a much wider form of human consciousness, and more inclusive faculty also. For the Peripatetics it is the rational soul that is of crucial significance, and this was seen by the Sufis as a very limiting doctrine, ignoring and failing to value those aspects of our thought that are not necessarily rational and yet which can certainly be called knowledge, in their view, of a deeper kind. Here again we seen to be getting a very long way away from Aristotle, and yet he really established the parameters of this way of speaking. The possibility of knowledge comes from without and once it affects us it changes who we are, it moves us along to a higher or lower form of consciousness, where we become aware of a particular type of subject matter. The doctrine of the identity of the knower, knowledge and known fits nicely into this sort of model, and although

Aristotle himself did not move the theory in this direction, it was there to be moved. Once we start to ask in the Aristotelian way what causes knowledge, how does it come about, we get into the sort of problematic that we have seen here and then of course there are a wide variety of directions in which we can go. Ibn Sina rejects what he takes to be Porphyry's view in the *Eisagoge* that the soul when it knows becomes identical both to what makes it know and the object of knowledge, since if that happened it would no longer be able to know anything else, since it cannot keep on being identical to a range of different things. This difficulty led Mulla Sadra to develop a theory of the soul and indeed of everything in accordance with which they are constantly changing, so this no longer becomes a problem. The identity which existed at one time is constantly replaced by a new identity as things change. The soul is organized in such a way that it is prepared to know things even before it comes across any intelligible forms which will make such knowledge possible. When the form is used by the soul it remains itself but goes beyond where it had been before, since now it has knowledge. For Mulla Sadra the soul is now richer since it is connected to reality, to existence, and itself becomes more real. Hence his objections to the ways in which the Peripatetics talked about knowledge as abstraction, using the very specific term *tajarrud* to give the sense of being stripped away from the world. When knowledge is actual then the formal apparatus is thoroughly involved in dealing with matters of fact. When it is merely potential it is only abstract and is, as it were, held in suspense until it is needed, like the reserves in a sports team. Mulla Sadra dislikes this language, since he takes it to imply that knowledge should be identified with the abstract, with essences, and not seen as intermingled in the process whereby existing things come to be known to the soul and enrich the knower. The height of our knowing, reached at the stage of the acquired intellect, is precisely where the soul comes into contact with the intelligible concepts we use in knowledge but without any content, and so the senses are not needed here, only the rational intellect, according to the Peripatetics. It is bit like counting without using your fingers and toes, counting at the level where you understand the abstract concepts of number and can use them to do mathematics. We do normally think of this as a higher skill level than being restricted to only give material examples of mathematical concepts, yet Mulla Sadra is correct in thinking that this sort of formal knowledge does not actually tell us anything about existing things, merely about connections between ideas. In that case, he suggests, it is not really knowledge.

This is a point which is made in one form or another by many Sufi and Ishraqi thinkers. The Peripatetics stop the process of knowledge at the level of rational knowledge, but there is a whole range of forms of knowledge beyond that, including intuition, mystical knowledge, knowledge by presence, all depending on the particular theory one is considering. What will no doubt occur to anyone is that it seems strange to use a thinker like Aristotle, who did not have a mystical bone in his body, to peddle mystical ideas. Once what makes knowledge possible is seen as coming from outside of us, the floodgates

are open since it can be identified with just about anything. Perhaps here we have real evidence of the Platonism of Aristotle, the unwillingness to accept that knowledge is feasible as a result of our experience and what we derive from that experience, and nothing more. Of course, that sort of empiricism does not mesh well with theism, and the Islamic thinkers we have been considering certainly had religious aims in mind, perhaps only indirectly, in the development of their theories. Not in the sense that they would change their views in order to provide room for religion, but because they needed a range of concepts and ideas which they could employ when discussing religious issues, and anything less would have been entirely unsatisfactory.

The human soul may through its own efforts and talents rise to great intellectual and spiritual heights. To attract the active intellect it has to be well-prepared, but the idea that anyone (such as God) could then intervene is lacking from most accounts. This point can be and was quite easily transferred to the notion of prophecy, so that to be a prophet is more or less a natural process. God could prevent one from reaching this point, something that Maimonides for one considers, but why should he? If someone is morally and intellectually suited to prophesy, surely this is in accordance with divine wishes in any case. Yet this is a very subversive idea since it essentially relegates God to the sidelines as an observer rather than a direct actor in his world.

Then there are the implications for the afterlife. Aristotle was wedded to the idea of the inseparability of the body and soul if individual identification is to be feasible, since without matter how can we differentiate between people? This notion very much persists in much of the Neoplatonic literature in the Islamic and Jewish worlds. Any sort of afterlife seems also to be intellectual rather than anything more personal and ethical, and it is difficult to see how individuality would then survive. If what survives us are our immortal abstract thoughts, then they do not survive as us. They do not survive either as a result of our good deeds. To a large extent they replace us and whatever survives is not something that most people would be very interested in.

The major issue here for philosophers who adhere to a religion is that religion comes to be seen as a problem, in that without thorough allegorization it fails to do justice to the actual state of affairs of the relationship that human beings have with their souls. The religion stops explaining the truth but has to be reconciled with the truth, a basically defensive strategy. It is not surprising that so many of these claims about knowledge and the soul were condemned under the label of Averroist in thirteenth-century Paris, and as usual when something is banned, one assumes that the target was a fairly widely held opinion, since otherwise it would hardly have been worth banning. What is important is the agenda they set, and this was one basically where religion has to find a way of fitting in to what seemed to be the most rational approach to the nature of the human soul. This is the point that those who objected to the account of the active intellect by Ibn Sina missed when they wondered why God could not be the cause of our knowledge, rather than the latter being contact with the active intellect. The answer is that he could be, as a link with

demonstrative truth. The Aristotelian God concentrates on such knowledge, after all, so it is not difficult to identify it with him. That is the whole problem of adding a religion to Aristotelianism, it can be done but appears throughout superfluous and requires special pleading to look even remotely plausible. Aristotle was just such a secular thinker, and although his thought was taken and developed in religious directions, one cannot help but wonder at the damage it may have done on the way to traditional religious sensibilities (Leaman 1997c, 2002, 2009).

The day of judgment

Three different types of people will be dealt with on the day of judgment:

> And We shall set up balances of justice on the day of resurrection, then none will be dealt with unjustly in anything. And if there be the weight of a mustard seed, We will consider it. Everything will be appropriately taken into account.
>
> (21.47)

The *yawm al-qiyama*, the day of resurrection, is mentioned in about 70 *ayat* in the Qur'an. On this day, the trumpet will be blown by Israfil and the souls will return to their bodies. They will then rise to meet God and be dealt with (39.67–8). There is a great deal of discussion in the *ahadith* of what will happen on that day, and the general view is that the behavior of people while they lived will be the basis of the judgment that is made. There are three kinds of people who will be dealt with on that day, the disbelievers, the believers who have sinned and the righteous. The disbelievers will be full of despair and regret: "On the day when the hour will be established, the *mujrimun* [unrighteous] will be plunged into despair" (30.12). Their despair is magnified when they realise that even their good deeds will not avail them for they were not done for the sake of God, so they really have no merit: "And We shall turn to whatever deeds they did, and We shall make such deeds as scattered floating particles of dust" (25.23).

The believers will be distinguished in terms of their appearance as well. Where the disbelievers are covered in pitch and covered with fire, the believers will have faces and limbs that shine, according to many *ahadith*. However, the believers who are sinners will not be spared from the trials on the day of judgment:

> And whosoever deceives his companions as regards the booty, he shall bring forth on the day of resurrection that which he took illegally. Then every person shall be paid in full what he has earned and they shall not be dealt with unjustly.
>
> (3.161)

> Verily those who purchase a small gain at a cost of God's covenant and their oaths, they shall have no portion in the hereafter. God will not speak

> to them nor look at them on the day of resurrection, nor will he purify them and they will have a painful torment.
>
> (3.77)

The third category of people are the pious who will be distinguished on the day of judgment. Where others are filled with dread and terror, they will have no fear. They will be reassured by the angels and told that this is the day they were promised would come (21.101–3). They will not even hear what takes place in hell.

> It will be said to the true believers: My worshippers! No fear shall be on you this day, nor shall you grieve, who believed in our *ayat* [signs] and were Muslims.
>
> (43.68–9)

According to many Islamic philosophers such as Mulla Sadra, when we die we face an afterlife which is appropriate to us given our experience and activities in this world. Each individual mind makes its own heaven or hell. The "imaginal world" is the third world that exists in addition to the world of material bodies and the world of intellects (Leaman 2009: 95–8). In addition to extended forms and shapes of objects individuated by their matter, there can arise ideas that become so powerful that they are part of us and appear as concrete particulars, so we really experience them and are closely affected by them. It is difficult to know how to regard this imaginal realm. It plays a huge role in *ishraqi* thought, and some have argued that it is just a powerful form of imagination, with no additional ontological meaning. After all, imagination has a wider scope than just the consciousness of the imaginer, in the sense that it impinges on others, it leads to actions that persist and to the production of things that continue also. The difficulty in thinking of imagination literally continuing after the death of the body is that it is essentially a physical faculty in the language of philosophy and so how could it continue without anything physical to continue in? Once the body has gone there is nothing for imagination to operate with or on. Of course, one way out of this dilemma is to construct some shadowy ontological intermediate realms which have enough physical in them for imagination to persist, and some of the language of al-Suhrawardi who first used the notion of the imaginal realm suggests this. The idea that the imaginal occurs in the *barzakh*, the intermediate zone between this world and the next world, is helpful and much used, although in Suhrawardi it gains a different and specifically *ishraqi* interpretation by being the boundary between light and darkness. The imaginal world (*'alam al-mithal*) is situated between the physical world and the world of the causes of light. He works from this principle to construct a wide range of different levels of being in his system. He himself refers to four kinds of existence, material, spiritual, intellectual and imaginal, but his cosmology is much more complex than that. There are certainly plenty of types of being in existence for imagination to find something to latch onto in the next

world, or as it comes closer to the next world, were he to wish to find such an embodiment for the faculty of imagination.

It is unlikely that Mulla Sadra would take this path, though, since unlike Suhrawardi he sees existence rather than essence as at the source of metaphysical reality. Suhrawardi could multiply beings almost at will, since for him concepts and what goes along with them are the primary topics of analysis, whereas the issue of whether they actually exist is a secondary issue. Mulla Sadra took exactly the opposite line, and for him existence is the main issue, so concepts are only worth discussing if first we could identify some way for them to exist. That way in which they exist in fact defines them and establishes them as appropriate topics for discussion. This sets the standard of debate rather higher, in a sense, since Mulla Sadra has to find some argument which establishes that things exist before it is worth talking about them, according to his principles, and perhaps he had in mind here reversing the great expansion of beings to which Suhrawardi seems to be wedded in his metaphysics. It does though raise the issue directly of what can be said to exist imaginally after the death of the body, and here Mulla Sadra suggests that en route to the next world we continue to exist with the sole subject of our consciousness being the imaginal, the strong impressions and ideas which we take from this world, and these are used as the basis for our ultimate destination in either heaven or hell. There is certainly some basis to this view from Islam itself, and it is not difficult for Mulla Sadra to find relevant religious material to back up his ideas on the topic. It certainly seems to be closer to the Qur'anic account of the afterlife than the afterlife of the Peripatetic philosophers, with its exclusive emphasis on the intellectual and the abstract.

Further reading

'Abidin n.d., al-Ghazali 2002-continuing, Leaman 1997c, 2002, 2009.

13 Islam and Sufism

Is Sufism Islamic mysticism?

Sufism is a term very loosely used to cover a vast variety of thinkers and their thoughts, and some have even argued that it is more a construction of orientalists than a real category of Islam. Many reject the idea that it is Islamic mysticism since they may either think that Islam does not have any mystical tendencies, or because they think that Islam is closely connected to mystical ways of thinking and acting and so there is no separate area for mysticism in the religion. The former object to the rather radical things that some Sufis say about Islam, and about religion in general, and regard Sufism as a perversion of genuine Islam. There is also a tendency in some forms of mysticism to be antinomian, i.e., to be generally unenthusiastic about following the laws and rituals of religion, and this is also likely to lead to a negative reaction by literal minded religious authorities. The contrary view is that Sufism is in fact the heart of Islam, a term which is often used, and should alert us immediately to danger, since it is very much the thesis of this book that religions do not have hearts in the sense of essences. Sufism for this group is merely a deeper aspect of Islam, it is something that really has to be grasped by the Muslim as expressing an aspect of Islam without which life as a Muslim cannot be complete.

A famous *hadith* much quoted by Sufis has God announcing "I was a hidden treasure and I wanted to be known. So I created the world." The world is full of creatures and things that provide evidence of a just, generous and merciful creator. It is often said that there are two aspects of this creation, the love that lies behind creation and the justice which is represented in the realms of law and politics, and which has a rather sterner aspect. God is one in a radical sense that really he is the only thing capable of living by himself, and although he has created the world he need not have done so and need not keep it in existence for any longer than he wishes. "Wherever you turn, there is the face of God" (2.115) brings out well his ubiquity but we need to be constantly reminded of the divine presence. Its very ubiquity leads to its being ignored and taken for granted on many occasions. The Sufis have ceremonies and rituals in connection with this, *dhikr*, or remembrance, which stimulates the individual mind to think about God and his role in our lives and in that of the world. The more

this is done, and the better we get at it, the closer we can come to God until the stage is reached, perhaps, at which we unite with him, in the sense that we lose ourselves in him. Our sense of who we are completely disappears. The idea is not that we become the same as God, an impossible task, but that we come to appreciate the real nature of the world, insofar as we can, and the real nature of a world created by God. Normally our lives are lived in very piecemeal ways, with concerns about our physical welfare and success in our dealings with others, and it is very easy not to remember the basic fact that we are part of a universe created by God. This is not just an intellectual claim but has real implications for our lives and our attitudes to everything around us. Sufism seeks to illuminate this feature of what it is to have a belief in God and for that belief to matter for those who hold it.

As intellectual life in Islam developed a variety of strands also came about, and some of these were in competition with each other in some rather obvious ways. For example, theology and philosophy projected onto the religion a more abstract idea of how to understand the religion, and the basis of their work is reasoning. Sufism actually became very complex over time, especially its details of the way to improve one's own spirituality. This meant moving from stage (*maqam*) to stage, from state (*hal*) to state of spiritual awareness, and this required a guide, in much the same way that the Prophet is a guide for the whole world, and could be characterized as a long and fairly tortuous process. Instead of reason, the Sufis used something they thought was higher. Ways of discovering the truth such as intuition (*dhawq*), imagination (*khayal*), and the sort of more personal knowledge represented by *'irfan* is the method that is to be employed in *kashf*, unveiling the appearances that are before us in the ordinary world of generation and corruption. This sort of reasoning is synthetic rather than analytical, it concentrates on putting things together rather than splitting them up into their discrete parts. Sufi writings can take a variety of forms, and some are very theoretical while others are highly poetic. The theoretical material follows on from the problematic of the *kalam* (theology) in dealing extensively with the links between divine *tashbih* and *tanzih*, God's transcendence and immanence, which are difficult to reconcile. Some *ayat* emphasize one, some the other. For example, God refers to his proximity to humanity when he says "And we are nearer to him than the jugular vein" (50.16), as well as "And He is with you wherever you are" (57.4), both of which suggest that God is omnipresent. The question is, what is the method we should employ to understand this apparent paradox? How can we describe a being in anthropomorphic language whom we know not to be like us, and so not describable in those terms? Yet they are the only terms we have since language divides and analyzes, while we require a language to do precisely the opposite. Here we come to see the significance in Sufism of the whole process of increasing in spiritual depth and personal growth through the stages and the states. These involve language no doubt but also the growing ability to see beyond and behind the language, we can use our experiences to interrogate the language and reveal its limits. Here it is worth recalling that the term for

knowledge, *'irfan* or *ma'arifa* refers to the sort of knowing that is involved in knowing a person, not just factual knowledge, a distinction characterized by Bertrand Russell as the difference between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description.

Sufis see themselves in their practice and belief as firmly based on the Qur'an and other Islamic sources of authority. So the famous *hadith* by Gabriel where he is supposed to have said that Islam involves belief, practice and *ihsan*, or fine action, can be taken to indicate the need for spiritual development and refinement, and hence Sufism. According to this *hadith*, the Prophet and a few of his companions were sitting together when a man appeared and asked him several questions. When the man departed, the Prophet told his companions that this had been the angel Gabriel, who had come to teach them their religion. After all, if anyone could identify Gabriel it should be Muhammad, since Gabriel was the person who transmitted the verses of the Qur'an to him over 20 years. The religion (*din*) of Islam turns out to have three main aspects. They are submission (*islam*), faith or belief (*iman*), and acting well (*ihsan*). A reasonable way of defining submission is to bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is his messenger, to perform the daily prayers, to pay the alms tax, to fast during Ramadan, and to go on the pilgrimage to Mecca if you have the means to do so. Faith is generally taken to be faith in God, his angels, his scriptures, his messengers, and the last day, and also in whatever else might be relevant to the sort of Muslim a believer might happen to be. Doing the beautiful is often taken as being equivalent to worshipping God as if you see him, for even if you do not see him, he sees you. The first two categories, submission and faith, involve doing things and do not seem that complicated, but as we saw in the chapter on belief there is far more complexity here than one might initially think. The most difficult to link to practice is the notion of *ihsan*, which in many ways is strange since it is the only aspect of the three dimensions of Islam which directly refers to behavior. Islamic law and theology do not really deal with *ihsan* since it is not so much a matter of what Muslims ought to do or believe but more a way in which they carry out these obligations, and the appropriate authorities in this area are the Sufis, according to the Sufis themselves.

Sufism and law

The personality of Muhammad himself is seen by many Sufis as an example to follow, and his ascent (*mi'raj*) can be taken in both a physical and also a spiritual sense. The relationship between Moses and Khidr can be interpreted as the link between law and inner awareness, between the exoteric and the esoteric, the public and the personal, the inner and the outer. The emphasis in the Book on morality fits in nicely with the idea of the importance of personal attention to one's spiritual and ethical character, and there are as always many *ahadith* which can fit in with mystical forms of expression. From the Sufi point of view it is questionable whether Sufism should really be classified as mysticism since they

see it as firmly part of normal Islam. Religions contain a more public aspect to do with what people do legally and a more private aspect dealing with their thoughts and how they are to develop. In the discussion of the nature of belief, *iman*, in Islam there is a good deal of discussion of this contrast. The tendency to see Sufism as the more acceptable part of Islam by some is understandable but misleading for Sufis themselves, since they see it as an essential aspect of Islam, not a choice that they have made. The emphasis on the character of the Prophet is helpful here, since if Sufism is based on the leading character in the religion, it cannot be marginal. Although the Prophet of Islam had a definite physical presence, he was a military and political leader as well as a husband and parent, he is also taken to be a symbol of something deeper and more subtle, a representative of perfection to which everyone should aspire. From a physical point of view this might mean that he represents someone whom we should seek to copy in his eating habits, and from a more spiritual point of view perhaps he is someone whose thoughts we should try to emulate.

Yet Sufism has often been seen as incompatible with Islam by some Muslim groups, and this is a strain that runs through a lot of Sufi literature, it is apologetic and seeks all the time to show that it is part of the Islamic mainstream. Nowhere is this more evident than in the work of al-Ghazali, who at a late stage of his life said that he discovered Sufism as the best route to the truth and wrote the enormous *Ihya' 'ulum al-din*, a series of books which literally mean "Bringing back to life the sciences of religion" in which he strenuously argued for the compatibility between Sufism and traditional Islamic belief and action. One of the entertaining aspects of this effort though is that al-Ghazali constantly uses very appropriate *hadith* to help make his many points in the volumes, and yet a large number of those *ahadith* are officially classified as weak. His supporters point out that he was not a specialist in *hadith*, yet one does not have to be a *muhaddith*, a specialist in *hadith*, to know that many of his *ahadith* are not regarded as strong by the tradition, and it is the tradition which he claims to be addressing in the huge effort involved in the whole project. For the opponents of Sufism the *hadith* are generally an important source of knowledge and can only be so if they are treated seriously and carefully, which is why so many Muslim scholars spent so much time working on and studying them. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that al-Ghazali was thumbing his nose at the tradition while at the same time apparently arguing how compatible it is with Sufism. The apologetic tone of the books throughout does bring out clearly how Sufism was under suspicion, and was regarded then and is today by many Muslims as heterodox and to be thoroughly avoided. Many Sufis like al-Ghazali both argue for the acceptability of Sufism from a normative Islamic point of view, and also thumb their nose at some aspects of the latter, not surprisingly stoking the fires that they claim to be attempting to quench.

A good many rituals have grown up around some forms of Sufism that especially evince suspicion. There are additional prayers and an emphasis on private rituals, or rituals carried out in groups of like-minded believers, perhaps under the supervision of a religious leader, and sometimes involving music and/or

movement. The emphasis on religious leaders is sometimes taken to extremes and the graves of saints have become shrines to be visited and prayed at, with substantial religious foundations being constructed around them and institutions founded subsequently which seem very much to reflect the idea of Sufism as encouraging a cult of the personality. The opponents of Sufis sometimes destroy those shrines and graves, acts which are often denounced as vandalism and cultural violence, yet these places are taken to represent an attack on the principle of *tawhid*, the unity of God, and the encouragement of *shirk* or polytheism. *Shirk* is often defined as worshipping others as well as God, and such shrines and sacred places do raise those sorts of issues. In 2012 the rebels in Mali set about destroying even mosques in the country that were associated with Sufi saints and scholars, yet their reasoning is that people would not only pray at those sites but also pray to those sites, and this is incompatible with (their version of) Islam. For an audience who see these places as merely aesthetic objects, or as indeed spiritually significant sites, such a policy is clearly despicable. One can see how one would justify such destruction though if one regarded those places as serious impediments standing between Muslims and their spiritual welfare, which of course eventually translates into a possible eternity of punishment and regret.

The perils of Sufism

One can also see how the language of Sufism may appear dangerous. We are often told that only God truly exists, all other things are an emanation or reflection of him, or are his "shadow." The point of religion is as a way of reaching to a truth beyond the teachings of individual religions, although Islam is the best way available to us. The soul is trapped within the prison of the body but can, by looking inward, recognize its essential affinity with God; the enlightened soul can progress along a path which leads to annihilation in God, provided God makes this possible. The seeker after truth has to purify his *nafs*, his personality and reorient it toward love (*mahabba*); then he must be cast into the flames of passion (*'ishq*) to result in the transformation or annihilation of the self (*fana'*) through the means of perplexity and wonder (*hayra*) to result in some level of everlastingness (*baqa'*). It is not difficult to see why this sort of language arouses suspicion.

Farid al-'Attar's long poem *The Conference of the Birds* is a description of the stages on the Sufi path. The birds of the world gather together to seek a king. They are told by the hoopoe that they have a king, and he is the Simurgh. He lives far away and the journey to him is not easy. The birds are at first enthusiastic to begin their search, but when they realize how difficult the journey will be they start to make excuses. The nightingale, for example, cannot leave his beloved; the hawk is satisfied with his position at court waiting on the local kings; the finch is too afraid even to set out, and so on. The hoopoe responds to each of their excuses with anecdotes which show how their desires and fears are mistaken. The group flies a little way, formally adopts the hoopoe as

its leader, and then prudently decides to ask a series of questions about the way before proceeding. The birds arrive eventually at the court of the Simurgh. At first they are turned back; but they are finally admitted and find that the Simurgh they have sought is none other than themselves. The moment depends on a pun in Persian, only 30 (*si*) birds (*morgh*) are left at the end of the journey, and the *si morgh* meet the Simurgh, the aim of the expedition.

The hoopoe in 'Attar's poem is presented as the birds' guide and leader; he is therefore the equivalent of a *shaykh* leading a group of seekers after the truth along the appropriate path. Most of the poem is structured around the hoopoe's answers to different birds' objections to the journey or questions about it. At the beginning the birds are identified by their species, and each species clearly indicates a certain kind of person, so that the nightingale is the lover, the finch is the coward, and so on. The birds are very interested in how to approach the journey, what they will find on the way rather as those on the Sufi path are working with a guide who is going to help them along the way and they want to know how to prepare themselves and even whether it will be possible for them to continue. Some of the things that the *shaykh* will say are difficult to understand, since he will encourage the individual seeker after the truth to think in different ways from those normal to him and this might well involve shocking him out of his complacency and the sorts of attitude with which he is accustomed. So many of the stories are puzzling in an attempt at forcing the listener to work out some way of understanding them which really extends his way of thinking and prepares him to a degree to the very different way of thinking that is required if he is to be successful on his quest for the deeper truth that is potentially available to him. The hoopoe tells the tale of the poor fisherboy befriended by the king who casts the boy's line and catches a lot of fish, which he gives to the boy. The next day he makes the boy a ruler with him.

It is not clear what this is taken to show, yet it is worth comparing with the passage where a bird has asked the hoopoe why the latter is spiritually successful whereas all the other birds are not. The hoopoe says it is because Solomon had glanced at him; he goes on to say that this glance is worth far more than prayer. The hoopoe does after all appear in the Qur'an. Prayer is important but is not enough to get to where one wants to go. It is like the boy's constant fishing and it is not until the king's visit that he is ultimately successful. Both normal actions are required and also something else has to happen, something that comes from elsewhere, like the glance of Solomon or the help of the king, before the glance of Solomon. The story is about individual effort as well as grace and the fact is that both are necessary for spiritual progress. This fits in nicely with the claim that there is nothing especially unusual about Sufism and it should not be identified with a type of mysticism, since it involves both standard religious tasks like prayer and also a belief in the ultimate need for God to do something, like apply his grace to the searcher after truth. Sufis often say that it is a necessary condition of success to advance through the various stages of spiritual growth, and a sufficient condition for God to open the door for him.

On the other hand, some of the significant features of the poem are quite hard for ordinary people to master, like the necessity for destroying the self, and the importance of passionate love. The self is equivalent to our sense of self-importance and there can be no spiritual progress until this attitude is dissolved, and one way of accomplishing this is through love. Yet all the examples of love are of deviant love, of a superior to an inferior, for those of different religions, for men for men and so on. It is often argued that this is in order to bring out the paradoxical nature of the thought processes that are needed to escape from the self, the familiar respectable forms of love continue our normal ways of thinking and doing things, but once we contemplate a radically alternative way of being in love we are obliged to alter our sense of who we are. There is a good argument for the idea that we need to disrupt our normal way of looking at things if we are to approach the truth, and this is something that mystics often suggest. It does imply though that the mystical stance is very different from the normal one that people undertake when looking at the world, including looking at it through the lenses of their religion. After all, many Muslims see their religious obligations as being quite clear, specified in the Qur'an, the *hadith* and the *sunna* of the Prophet, and they seek guidance in addition from the legal authorities and their legal school. To contemplate doing things which are forbidden disrupts this sense of knowing how to behave, what is allowed and what is not, and its aim is to disturb our sense of knowing what the language we use really means. Yet we are told that the Qur'an is written in a clear Arabic, and the main efforts of the early commentators is to spend a great deal of time and effort on lexicography, so that we are sure that we understand all the aspects of the language that is being used in the Book. As a result we will better understand what it means. But once we start to think of religion as being elusive and difficult to follow, we might wonder whether the *ihsan* is starting to be emphasized at the expense of the other aspects of the duties of a Muslim. The text is undoubtedly very beautiful, but does it really have a clear message to convey which will help us learn how to live our lives and what to believe?

Sufism vs. Wahhabism

It is often said that Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world today, was converted to Islam largely through the influence of Sufi missionaries. The combination of religions and animist beliefs that dominated in the region was very responsive to a version of Sufi Islam and enormous numbers of people embraced Islam and have remained within the Muslim fold. Yet in the twentieth century Sufism seemed to disappear quite rapidly from Indonesian religious and political life, battered as it was by the joint forces of an increasing desire to imitate the West, and also the influence of Wahhabism from Saudi Arabia with its generous resources and desire to instill a more orthodox interpretation of Islam, according to their views, into the inhabitants of the country. In any case, as Gellner argued persuasively,

Sufism was mainly a phenomenon of the countryside, and one assumes that over time the significance of the cities would expand and that of the rural areas decrease. Statistically it certainly looks as though throughout the world there is a very rapid movement of people from the country to the city, and part of becoming urban and modern is throwing off the rural beliefs and practices of the past. The Wahhabi influence is just one way of being modern and Muslim, there are other ways as represented by what is sometimes called "liberal Islam" where Islam is combined with many of the characteristics of liberal democracy and consumer culture. Sufism is squeezed between these two extremes, and would gradually, or rapidly, be expected to disappear.

However, this is not what happened in Indonesia, and in many other parts of the world also. For one thing, as people moved to the cities they did not abandon their original beliefs or social patterns of behavior totally, and in some ways these became more important as people tried to negotiate new lives in an alien environment. They sought to use the social networks with which they were familiar, and a very important factor in many parts of the world, the economic links which exist between the Sufi organizations based in the country and its members in the city. When people arrive in the city they may know very few people, or no one, and it is natural in those circumstances to fall back on what is known, in this case perhaps Sufism and its structures. As more people move from the country to the city those structures can be strengthened and reinvented in a new context, since the newcomers will need help in finding work, accommodation, official permits and so on, and any sort of link with home is helpful in this respect. It also of course helps reinvigorate the organization by not only providing it with members in new places but also, as they succeed, a flow of returned income and a continuing stream of contacts which strengthens the power and influence of the group within what was an alien environment. In countries suspicious of religion Sufism can escape public censure due to its privacy and apparent disinterest in politics. It can however have a significant political impact. Many of the members of the Turkish political right were linked with the Iskenderpaşa community and the Gumushanevi lodge of the Nakshibendi Sufi order, including Necmettin Erbakan, Turgut and Korkut Özal, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and Ahmet Tekdal (Demirci 2001). These individuals include the precursors and founders of the AKP, the party which has been in government in Turkey since 2002 and which has by 2012 won three consecutive elections. People of a like mind meet under the auspices of Sufism and the practices they undergo strengthen their solidarity, and this can be used to help them work together with political aims in sight. So although Sufism itself may be apolitical, its results are often very practical.

The Islamic revival, which started really in the 1970s in many Islamic-majority countries, then has two aspects, an outer and an inner one, to use the language of Sufism. The outer one refers to a greater religiosity in the public sphere all over the Islamic majority world, involving a number of features. These include a growing number of mosques and madrasas, the increasing popularity of some form of head covering for women, more segregation

between men and women, the popularity of Islamic forms of greeting, higher attendance at prayers, especially during work time, growing membership of Islamic clubs and associations, especially in higher education institutions, political support for government policies which are seen as being in line with Islam and a serious interest in participating in Islamic banking. Perhaps more important than all of those is the fact, widely noted by those who have experience of the region, that the social mores of the educated elite has radically changed. Whereas during prayer time in the past they would have been drinking a whiskey and soda while contemptuously watching their servants performing their religious duties, now they also pray and eschew alcohol. It became cool to be religious, not just the preserve of the old and the poor. This is not what is supposed to have happened, since as societies got richer, more educated and more developed they should have progressively abandoned religion, as was after all the European norm. Islam seems to have bucked this trend, if it is a trend, and has re-established itself firmly within many of the countries in which it exists in significant numbers.

But not just one form of Islam, and that is the important point to make here, although attention is generally paid to those ways of being Muslim that are more obviously deviant from the norm of social behavior, or different physically from the past. I am writing this in that rare phenomenon, a hot week in London, and the subway is full of women completely covered in black, wearing what looks like rather hot polyester, while other women are wearing almost nothing. There are far more Muslims in London now than in the past, of course, but in the past very few of them would have worn such clothing, even if they did in the countries from which they originated. Many of these fully veiled women do not come from elsewhere, they are British and have decided that this is what they should wear. There are plenty of women on the subway who are also Muslims and who are indistinguishable from everyone else, and who may regard themselves as just as good a Muslim as anyone else, since they do not feel that their religion has any particular style instructions to convey. They may be more interested in what they see as the inner aspects of religion as opposed to the outer, the *batin* as compared with the *zahir*, a distinction constantly made in Sufism. Their enthusiasm for Islam may find its form in the additional prayers that they say in order to facilitate *dhikr*, or in other rituals they perform, or in what they read and think about. They may come to decide that they also ought to wear more restrictive clothing, and it is a grave error to distinguish sharply between different forms of Islam if by that is meant that they cannot be mutually acceptable to many Muslims. While theoretically we tend to distinguish between different forms of religion, there is often no reason why they should not be combined. It is worth recalling that the major critic of Sufism, Ibn Taymiyya, was himself a Sufi, of the Qadiri school, so he knew very well what he was attacking.

The revival of interest in Islam has not only then brought about an increase in allegiance to Salafi Islam but to other varieties as well, including Sufism, and this is hardly surprising if one sees Sufism not as a separate school of the religion

but as merely an aspect of ordinary Islam, as some of the most intelligent commentators on Sufism such as Chittick have it. If people are intent on deepening their faith then this can take the shape of increasing their application to prayers, to following *shari'a* and to deepening their understanding of religion, but it can also, or instead, take the form of taking steps to improve their spiritual condition along something like a Sufi path. After all, the public activities of religion leave some people feeling cold, with the attitude that there needs to be something else, and this can easily be represented as a more refined spiritual character, and the way to acquire that could well by the Sufi way. Here we find a system, not just an arbitrary set of techniques and advice, to rival or complement traditional theology or *kalam* and philosophy. In just the same way that over a few rather basic passages from the Qur'an a vast theoretical literature has arisen within what came to be called the Islamic sciences, so Sufism itself has become a complex theory, with different schools of thought, varying practices and a wide variety of spiritual advisors available to the individual follower. Now with the growth of cyber-Islam one does not even have to be in physical contact with the *shaykh*, since he (or even for some more radical groups she) can be accessed electronically.

The Internet is a powerful arena for arguments between these different approaches to Islam, if they are different. The Salafiyya tend to attack the Sufis for their heterodoxy and accuse them of heresy at worst, innovation at best, while the Sufis often counter by pointing to the narrow-minded nature of their opponents and their own stress on features like love which is supposed to give the reader or hearer a nice warm fuzzy feeling that there cannot be anything problematic about it. The contrast between a religion based on a rigid application of law and ritual with one more firmly grounded in love and flexibility is tempting to make but very misleading. For one thing, many Sufis are also scrupulous followers of the law, and they see Sufism as merely a way to give their following the law a greater spiritual depth. What after all is wrong with following a law rigidly if God gives us the law to follow? He has created us and the law, and presumably knows better than we do what we should do and what is in our interests? Since he has this information he can construct a law which perfectly represents the nature of reality, and we should follow it carefully and completely. There is no incompatibility between this and seeking a spiritual path to understand the very same form of conduct which we also need to grasp legally.

Two kinds of knowledge

Islam is said to emphasize the significance of knowledge in the sense of *'ilm* and there are certainly many references to derivatives of the term in the Qur'an. It is constantly emphasized in theology also, and it is obvious that all theology is very much based on the use of reason to try to work out what we can know about our relationship with God and what implications that has for our practice and future in the next world. God is said to have taught Adam the names of

everything, and this notion of God teaching humanity runs through the Qur'an constantly also, with many uses of expressions like book, writing, evidence and so on, and a constantly argumentative style. Presumably readers are supposed to consider those arguments, find them compelling and then accept them, and although faith at one level is obviously important, Islam presents itself as a very rational religion. The sorts of epistemological leaps of faith which are much discussed specifically in Christian theology seem out of place in Islam, since there are no actual direct miracles apart from the miracle of the Qur'an itself. Readers are expected at some stage to become convinced of what they read and hear, and the evidence from all around them, to draw the necessary conclusions that they should accept Islam.

There is though in Islam another kind of knowledge, often translated as *ma'arifa* or gnosis, a more personal and certain form of perception, the sort of knowledge that is much described in what is generally known as mysticism. Unlike the sort of knowledge we find in ordinary arguments, which is well defined by Aristotle as demonstrative knowledge and its variants, *ma'arifa* is more like an experience which brings with it a level of certainty that cannot be achieved through the argumentative process. Unlike discursive knowledge, it is also difficult to communicate, and often seems very personal. *Man 'arafa nafsahu faqad 'arafa Rabbahu*, "One who knows his own self knows his Lord" is a very much cited Sufi slogan, and this brings out nicely the links between the personal and the general in much Islamic thought. If a person really understands himself then he will understand how he has been constituted, what his role in the universe is and so on. That will involve knowing a lot about his creator, since it was his creator who gave him that role and made him in that way. This is quite clearly the sort of knowledge that is ordinary knowledge, it does not need flashes of sudden intuition or anything special like that. On the other hand, the way in which we can sometimes appear to grasp a good deal of information all at once, by seeing things from a particular point of view, is more than just an intellectual step. It is not something we can acquire through learning something new, but is rather a way of having our present knowledge, and it is never easy to work out how to reach that level or how to maintain it. This is perhaps the reason why it often seems to be deeper or more significant than other kinds of knowledge.

It is worth noting that the controversy about Sufism continues within Islam, with its protagonists often trying to argue that it is a perfectly acceptable aspect of Islam, and its detractors accusing it of *bid'a* (innovation) or even *kufr* (unbelief). The implications for the topic of knowledge are clear and relate to whether the sort of knowledge that the Sufis try to reach is appropriate as an aspiration for Muslims. The trouble with it is that it is quite difficult to reach, and according to many Sufi writers involves rigorous training, seclusion, guidance by an appropriate teacher and so on, all of which are difficult for most people to take on given their other commitments to earning a living, raising a family and so on. Then there is the implication that those who have this sort of special knowledge know more than other Muslims, or that ordinary Muslims

really do not know very much at all, compared to the Sufis, and this is damaging for the sense of religious unity. It would be a shame if the level of knowledge that most believers could be expected to realize is quite limited. This would suggest that there exist a hierarchy of believers, something certainly accepted by many of the philosophers in the Islamic world, but a dangerous doctrine nonetheless. That does not mean it is not true, and there are indications that one could argue that in religion as in every other sphere of life there are different levels of skill and knowledge, and we should not be surprised at this. On the other hand, what is distinctive about religion is precisely the fact that it is designed to attract everyone and provide them with a guide to life, both in terms of knowledge and action. Any religion that makes vast distinctions between different kinds of participant is likely to fail, since a religion that aspires to be successful has to appeal to the broadest possible constituency.

Here there are potential problems with Sufism. Logic and ordinary sense perception are no good in telling us anything significant about God since he is beyond our rational faculties, and invisible. So Rumi spends a lot of time talking about how we should only use faculties like inspiration, revelation, imagination and illumination. We are like mirrors that reflect the deity, but the mirror has become occluded due to our fascination with the self and the material world. "Whosoever shall strive for Our sake, We will guide him into Our ways" (29. 69) is a hopeful sign that the obscurity may be lifted by those who approach the issue of how to come close to God appropriately, and the chief way is to disparage the importance of the self. We need to see ourselves entirely as part of God, as directed by him and the effect of his actions, as part of his unity, that divine unity which encompasses everything including ourselves. Despite the difficulty of the enterprise it is eventually possible since in the words of the already mentioned *hadith* "I was a hidden treasure and I desired to be known; therefore I created the world in order that I might be known." Appreciating the beauty of the world is a way of recognizing the divine role and opens it up to us. The danger is that we see the nature of the world that we can experience as significant, but it is only a glimmer of what is real, and that is what lies behind it, the esoteric, the source of the light that falls on us in the everyday world. Once we get some idea of divine reality we get a long way from the thinking of the ordinary believer, with his hopes of reward and fear of punishment, with his adherence to a law, and his desire to please God and model himself on the Prophet Muhammad. The latter for example is seen as highly significant for many Sufis but as the perfect man in whom all the qualities of God are encapsulated, someone who serves more as a representative of divine illumination than as a real person. There is certainly a trend in the literature of thinkers such as Jami, Junayd, Rumi and al-Hallaj which disparages our ordinary ideas of religion and seeks to replace them, or supplement them, with the sorts of thinking which they recommend, whereby the individual really interiorizes the meaning of the rituals and beliefs of official religion. Only in this way does the individual really become the microcosm reflecting the macrocosm of which they are a part, and not just a part of the macrocosm.

We need to reflect on the frequently quoted 2.109, "Wherever you turn, there is the face of God," which is taken to indicate the importance of seeing ourselves as entirely surrounded by God and part of him. Even our ordinary actions, those actions which we think we carry out ourselves, need to be referred to him and it is only when we really see ourselves and our lives as entirely directed by God and part of him that we get close to the nature of reality, according to much of the language of the Sufis. This clearly calls for an entirely different form of knowledge than that which we normally employ, and it is hardly surprising that this should be so given the revolution in thought that Sufism potentially represents.

Knowledge and the heart

Knowledge according to many Sufis is to be found in what they call the heart, and God is its source. The trouble with ordinary knowledge is that it is either abstract and entirely general, or it is limited in its scope since it depends on what we can experience. It has no self-certification, we believe that we know but can never really be sure. When Mansur al-Hallaj announced, "I am the truth," he was accused of blasphemy and was sentenced to death since his opponents did not understand that an individual human being can come so close to the truth that he becomes the same as it. The language of light is often used here, with the idea being that when one allows light to enter into the heart, the process ends with the heart becoming not only imbued with the light but the same as the light. This lack of control and the disappearance of the self is very difficult to write about using the language which normally is used to describe ordinary matters since these are based on the ordinary idea of individuality whereby we are separated from God, and analytical language is precisely that, it divides and separates, and describes the effects of those processes. We think, we act, we relate ourselves to God through religion, and this sort of language does not take us any further in our spiritual progress to understand passages in the Qur'an such as "You did not throw when you threw, but God threw" (8. 17). It is only when we let go of our notions of what we can do and know and allow ourselves to become infused with the light of God and become part of his knowing and acting that we really make progress. Yet this is to present an entirely different form of understanding of what knowledge actually is, and one result is that it is difficult to know how to assess what is said. That feeling of certainty which may apply to some experiences should certainly be respected but is difficult to communicate, quite naturally given the problems of language that have just been described, and so it is not at all clear how such knowledge claims can be assessed.

One implication of the Sufi account of knowledge is that there are different categories of believers, and Sufis are in a better position than many ordinary believers, in much the same way that philosophers often see themselves as having a far more perspicuous grasp of what Islam means than do most of the rest of the believers. There are clearly dangers in such a position for Sufis, since

they constantly emphasize the importance of humility and yet seem to end up with the position that they have a different, and far better, way of understanding religion than does everyone else. It also leads to the difficulty of whether they feel the need to do the ritual things that ordinary Muslims do, given the thesis that ordinary Muslims do not really understand what they are doing or why, since the inner meanings of those actions are not really accessible to them. This is an awkward thesis to reconcile with the idea that Sufism is not Islamic mysticism but merely a dimension of Islam itself, the sort of thesis that many Sufis and scholars of Sufism propound. It might be simpler to distinguish different groups of Sufis, some for whom the laws of Islam are significant and others who think they can transcend those laws, and it is certainly an error to treat Sufism as just one school of thought.

Sufism and philosophy

The connection between Sufism and philosophy is both deep and controversial (Leaman 2009: 71–84). Peripatetic philosophy tends to prioritize the principle of *'aql* or reason, which emphasizes the sorts of knowledge available to human beings. The knowledge acquired through reason or discursive thought is regarded by *ishraqi* philosophers as indirect since it is based solely on mental concepts. This knowledge they call acquired knowledge (*al-'ilm al-husuli*). The intellect is often identified with universal reason and is equivalent to divine knowledge, which comprises everything in creation and is beyond human understanding. However, the prophets and spiritually advanced thinkers can to a degree achieve union with it, we are told. This union is one of the causes of "unveiling," and happens when the human intellect is illuminated by the universal intellect or the active intellect (the term used by Peripatetic philosophers). In other words, when the universal intellect illuminates the human intellect it enables the human intellect to possess the faculty of intuition and this makes possible a grasp of how everything is arranged in the universe.

The knowledge obtained by using the faculty of intuition is based upon immediate experience and signifies direct vision and participation in the knowledge of the truth. This form of knowledge is referred to as "knowledge by presence" (*al-'ilm al-huduri*) or "knowledge of the heart." This type of knowledge has the directness of sensual experience but deals with far deeper realities. Intuition when linked with faith enables certain people to understand the meaning of religion. So both Sufis and philosophers agree that the human intellect may be the source of knowledge. However, the Sufis questioned the validity of knowledge obtained from the human intellect if it is not illuminated by the divine intellect. The philosophers can have no guarantee that they will attain such illumination if there is no spiritual practice or "purification of the heart" and this often involves more than just the intellect. The Sufis pointed out as proof the verses in the Qur'an and the *ahadith* which allude to the heart as the seat of knowledge when talking about what is inside us, as for example: "O men, now there has come to you an admonition from your Lord, and a

healing for what is in the breasts and a guidance, and a mercy for the believers" (10.58).

This particular school of philosophy emerged from a long development which dated back to the sixth/twelfth century and the introduction of a new philosophical vocabulary by Suhrawardi and Ibn al-'Arabi. Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi established a new school in Islamic philosophy which came to be known as the school of Illumination (*ishraqi*) whose basis is reconciliation between the intuitive (*dhawqi*) approach and discursive (*bahthi*) philosophy. For Suhrawardi, intellect has a highly exalted position but his concept of intellect is the glowing red intellect (*'aql-i-surkh*) which he defines as the intermediary between the realm of pure light and sheer darkness. This intellect, which itself is a source of light, illuminates the human mind and its being. Many of his shorter works are written in symbolic language describing the journey of the initiate toward gnosis and illumination.

This sort of philosophy had drawn some of its intellectual perspectives from Ibn al-'Arabi who had absorbed philosophical elements into his system of Sufism. In turn, this Sufism was absorbed into the philosophical structure. There came about an integration of four major schools of Islamic thought: *kalam*, Peripatetic philosophy, *ishraqi* theosophy and *'irfan*. The outstanding thinker here was Sadr al-Din Shirazi or Mulla Sadra. He worked on a synthesis of the three means available to humanity to attain truth – revelation (*wahy*), illumination and intellectual intuition (*dhawq*), and rational demonstration. The relationship between Sufism and philosophy appeared as a synthesis of the three modes of knowing the truth available to humanity: revelation, intellectual intuition and reason. This is certainly a very potent combination of theories but whether it really can be seen as a coherent unity of such diverse ideas is questionable. It is a matter of whether reason can really be extended in this way, or whether its limitations in terms of logic are final and represent the limits of our thought. This is a controversy which is not limited to Islamic thought, of course, but represents a debate which has taken place for a long time between mysticism and philosophy.

Further reading

Attar 1984, Chittick 1983, 1994, 2008, al-Ghazali 2002-continuing, Leaman 2009, Mandaville 2005, Nasr 2004, Ohlander 2008.

14 Islam and entertainment

Pictures of the Prophet

Is it acceptable to represent in a picture the Prophet Muhammad? There is of course the prior question whether it is alright to represent any living thing in a picture, but let us assume that this can be done, and the issue is one of the appropriate subject matter. Currently this is often regarded as very problematic by non-Muslims and people often say that Islam forbids such an enterprise. However, there exist many such images, and until fairly recently it was quite common for the exquisite books of illustrations which Muslim rulers commissioned and put on display in their palaces to contain such images, and these were put on display in museums. They often show a man whose face is covered with a veil, in a white turban, surrounded by angels and a halo around his head. Sometimes we see his face and it is bright, as though it reflects the light of heaven. Museums are often reluctant to display such items now since they assume they will be regarded as offensive. There is nothing explicit in the Qur'an about the topic, although there are plenty of *ahadith* which are critical of painting as an activity in general. The problem with representing anyone is that it runs the risk of *shirk*, associating God with someone else.

There is a good argument for not representing the Prophet from the fact that he is so important in Islam that were he to be represented there would be a tendency for people to regard the image as being significant also, and perhaps even being the conduit for devotion to God. This is after all what Muslims often think of some Christians doing, yet Muhammad was only a messenger, different from the other messengers and prophets in the sense of being the very last one, but still just a man. As someone who was head of both a religious and political community, it must have been tempting to commemorate his stature in coinage and in other material ways. The fact that this did not happen, and the fact that the Qur'an does not mention it happening, is often taken as a sign of the humility of the Prophet. Although he was in charge of everything and in frequent communication with God, via Gabriel, he wanted the attention to fall not on him but on God, the giver of the message of Islam. The logic of this was drawn by the Wahhabis who destroyed the buildings said to have been lived in by the Prophet and his family in the holy cities of Mecca and Medinah

because they detracted from Islam. They were sites for prayer and pilgrimage of many Muslims, especially the Shi'a, and the guardians of the holy places disapproved of anyone being noticed in religious rituals except for God.

This sort of argument justifies the ban on praying at the tombs of important people, and the kings of Saudi Arabia are for that reason buried in graves whose site is unknown to most people. On the other hand, photographs of the king are ubiquitous in the Kingdom. The idea that particular places are especially important is not an Islamic idea, since God is everywhere. But are the Saudis themselves not the guardians of the holy cities of Mecca and Medinah? Is there not something special about these places, even though God is omnipresent? Mecca is where the Prophet comes from but its significance does not lie there, and his flight to Medinah saw the start of the Muslim community and calendar, yet it is not the connection with him which is significant. It is the role that these cities play in God's plan for humanity, and reflected in the fact that Muslims are supposed to pray five times a day in the direction of Mecca, and go on pilgrimage at least once in their lifetimes to the mosque in the city that houses the Ka'ba stone. These were important places for Muhammad also, and Jerusalem is of course another such significant location, but they are not important in Islam because they were important for him, it is rather the other way round. *Shirk* is always a problem in a religion that has people and rituals that make it easy to personify physical things. Take for example the *hajj* ceremony for instance which involves circling round the Ka'ba stone and stoning the devil at Mina, not to mention returning home with water from the Zamzam spring. In particular, the role of the Prophet Muhammad is so crucial in Islam, he is after all even named in the *shahada*, the basic statement of faith that is recited by anyone who becomes a Muslim, that there is a constant danger of his being given too much significance. A way of countering this tendency is to forbid paintings of him, or at the very least discourage the creation of such images, since they would very likely come to be treated as though they were connected to him, and so could function as intermediaries, or as him in some way.

The problem with images of the Prophet is also that they are sometimes offensive, not that they are images, and Muslims have opposed such images, not unnaturally. But there is also the danger of treating as too important what is after all only a human being. On the other hand, the Prophet is of some significance: "Say: 'If you love God, follow me and God will love you'" (3.31). The Prophet is not just anyone, but he is the last Prophet sent by God to the world, so disparaging him is a significant action in a religious sense. There are many *ahadith* which insist on deep affection for the Prophet, an affection that we are told sometimes should surpass what we have for our family and closest connections. Love of the Prophet is not based on who he is but on the divine origin of his message. Thus, like the love of God, it is also expressed by total obedience to his commands. We are told "Whoever obeys the Messenger has obeyed God" (4.80) and "Say: 'Obey God and obey the Prophet'" (3.32). Perhaps then the decision not to portray the Prophet was a conscious policy to ensure that people did not confuse the two and thus fall into the sin of *shirk*, the most grievous sin that anyone can commit.

Pride and hypocrisy

There are some *ahadith* which mention what the Prophet calls the lesser *shirk*, *riya'*, the desire to be admired for carrying out one's religious duties, or pride in general. In some ways this might be seen as an attack on some forms of what came to be Sufism, which emphasizes the significance of *ihsan* or fine behavior in the actions of Muslims, and which sometimes transformed practice so that it involved all sorts of extra and elaborate rituals. *Riya'* occurs when the internal motive for acting in a particular way is to impress others, not to praise God. The reason it is linked with *shirk* is perhaps this passage from the Qur'an: "Have you not seen the one who takes his desires as his god?" (2.43). In the case of *riya'* the individual is motivated by his need to impress others and it is this which explains his action. To call it the lesser *shirk* is to insist on a demanding but appropriate morality where the Muslim is clear about why he is doing things and avoids acting on behalf of his feelings in the guise of being religious. Obviously this is an insidious temptation for anyone acting within a structure like a religion, and is reflected in the Qur'an by the emphasis placed on those who are called *munafiqun* or hypocrites. The main problem with *riya'* is pride and images reflect pride, or at least certainly can do. The conclusion is often then that they are better avoided.

> And so we have appointed for every Prophet enemies – devils among mankind and *jinn*s, inspiring one another with adorned speech as a delusion. If your Lord had so willed, they would not have done it, so leave them alone with their fabrications.
>
> (6.112)

Here there is the suggestion that the negative forces in society should be tolerated. God after all sent them and has a purpose for them, and they need to be resisted and rejected. This is a useful way to look at *riya'*, the lesser *shirk*, at the ways in which we become distracted by our desire for a good reputation or popularity to do the right things for the wrong reasons, or to do the right things in over-elaborate ways in order to win praise. This of course would not fool God, although they try to deceive God "and those who believe, while they only deceive themselves, and perceive not" (2.9). People set out to deceive God and do not understand that he knows what is going on and such action would inevitably fail. "And when they meet those who believe, they say: 'We believe,' but when they are alone with their devils [*shayatin*], they say: 'Truly, we are with you; verily, we were but mocking'" (2.14). These *shayatin* could be interpreted also as our inner impulses which tempt and distract us from a pure trust and devotion to God, and also with polytheism. "Verily, the hypocrites seek to deceive God, but it is he who deceives them. And when they stand up for the prayer, they stand with laziness and to be seen, and they think of God only a little" (4.142). Of such people it may be said: "They are deaf, dumb, and blind" (2.18). When things go wrong they soon react: "How

then, when a catastrophe befalls them because of what their hands have sent forth, they come to you swearing by God, 'We meant no more than goodwill and conciliation!'" (4.62).

In a description of how physical things may delight and at the same time deceive we are told: "And when you look at them, their bodies please you; and when they speak, you listen to their words. They are as blocks of wood propped up. They think that every cry is against them. They are the enemies, so beware of them. May God curse them! How far they go astray!" (63.4 in the *sura* called *al-Munafiqun*, the hypocrites). Referring to the hypocrites talking to the Muslims, there is the warning: "They swear to you that you may be pleased with them, but if you are pleased with them, certainly God is not pleased with the people who are rebellious" (9.96). As far as the hypocrites themselves are concerned, they are discouraged by God from joining the Muslims on their expeditions since they would have been likely to have spread dissension and conflict and confusion:

> And if they had intended to march out, certainly, they would have made some preparation for it, but God was averse to their being sent forth, so he made them lag behind, and it was said, "Sit you among those who sit." Had they marched out with you, they would have added to you nothing except disorder, and they would have hurried about in your midst sowing sedition among you, and there are some among you who would have listened to them. And God knows all about the wrong-doers.
>
> (9.46–7)

Of course, in a splendid sarcastic comment: "Had it been a near gain and an easy journey, they would have followed you, but the distance was long for them, and they would swear by God, 'If we only could, we would certainly have come forth with you.' They destroy themselves, and God knows that they are liars" (9.42). They just want an easy victory and a share of the spoils, to follow the example being used here. This could also be given a wider interpretation, whereby we tend to seek public praise for our actions at the expense of setting about them with the genuine desire merely to please God, and the thing about *shirk* is that it is all about constructing intermediaries with God, other things that we can admire and even worship alongside and perhaps eventually instead of God. Hence the problems that some Muslims, in particular the Salafis, find with praying at particular places like graves, by important buildings and in having paintings and physical objects which we value for how they look (although for some discussion of the rich development of ideas about art in Islam see Leaman 2008). This might seem to get us to a rather humorless approach to Islam, where we are allowed only to do things that are directed toward God and avoid anything else which might distract us from this end. "I have not created *Jinn* or mankind except for my worship" (51.56) and this makes it look like all we are designed to do is worship God. Everything else is a distraction and a waste of time. Hence the destruction of the idols of other

religions, such as the Buddhas at Bamiyan in Afghanistan, or even of Islam itself, as in the attacks in modern times on the shrines of Sufi saints in Timbuktu and the Indian subcontinent. These all are taken to distract Muslims from the right sort of worship and so need to be removed. In fact, shrines which purport to be Islamic are more dangerous, in the view of some Salafis, than those which are obviously not. So-called "Islamic" sites have the opportunity to deceive and it is important to do away with them so that their malign influence is removed physically at least from the community.

Arguments for music

The issue of music is controversial in Islam, since it also can be a distraction to prayer and thinking about God. Some Muslims disapprove of most forms of music, regarding it as frivolous and an unworthy activity for religious people. Others argue that music is one of those pleasures that God has given us the ability to enjoy and we should avail ourselves of it. There are many *ahadith* which are negative on music, or on most kinds of music, although their validity is often criticized by those who support music as an Islamic practice. A crucial *aya* is 31.6 which refers to activities that are objectionable and the quite reasonable implication is that what leads to evil is itself evil. God tells us what he does not want us to do and we need to work out what is likely to lead to this state of affairs, and if music is one of the undesirable activities because of what it leads to, then it should obviously be avoided. The hostility that exists in the Islamic world toward music is often directed at certain kinds of music, those that are seen as likely to lead to immorality, or which are likely to do so. Music is often regarded as a very potent source of un-Islamic and even anti-Islamic values, since it encourages people and in particular young people to think of themselves as sexual beings first and so interfere with morality and the other activities which Islam demands. There is a tendency in many religions to disapprove of things which do not lead directly or fairly directly to religious aims and music seems to fit the bill here, since much of it is completely unrelated to religion. Even the main *hadith* which can be taken to approve of music regards it as an acceptable but not very serious activity.

> 'A'isha reported that the the Messenger of God came to her residence while two female singers were singing on the 'Eid. The Prophet lay down and Abu Bakr entered and chided her "Satanic musical instruments in the presence of the Holy Prophet?" On hearing this God's Messenger turned towards him and said: "Let them".
>
> (Bukhari, No: 907)

The report evidently proves that the Prophet allowed singing music during religious festivals. This is evidenced by the fact that the Prophet's wife enjoyed singing and music. Although Abu Bakr tried to stop the performance, the Prophet did not interfere with it, and let the performers and the audience

enjoy themselves. Therefore, in light of this evidence we can conclude that music can sometimes be considered allowable in Islam. But perhaps only on certain occasions? There is no suggestion here that the Prophet himself enjoyed music, only that he countenanced its use on certain occasions and by particular people.

The following narrative from another of his wives also deals with the issue:

> Umm-i-Salama narrates: A slave girl belonging to Hasan ibn Thabit came to us on 'Eid al Fitr. Her hair was untidy and she carried a tambourine and was singing. Umm-i-Salama rebuked her. But the Holy Prophet said to her: Umm-i-Salama, let her. Certainly every nation has an 'Eid and this day is our 'Eid.
>
> (*Mu'jam al-kabir*, No: 558)

Another *hadith* about music at a wedding shows the Prophet approved of singing and playing music on such occasions. Some other versions of the narrative reveal that the Prophet noticed that there was no singing or music being played in the house where the marriage ceremony was being conducted. He felt strange and enquired about the reason. He knew that the Ansar liked music and singing and did not want to interfere with a well-established and harmless custom. When the Prophet returned to Medinah from his expeditions it is said that people expressed their joy by singing, slave girls had musical instruments to play with their songs, the Prophet and the Companions heard these songs and did not express their disapproval. On the contrary, the Prophet expressed his approval of singing women. On his travels through the desert the Prophet was happy to listen and encourage singing especially if it encouraged the camels.

Not only did he not apparently disapprove of singing, he was happy for it to be done with musical accompaniment. The *daff*, a simple drum or tambourine, is specifically mentioned. The Prophet did not impose any restriction on using the *daff*, a common musical instrument used at that time. Does that suggest that only music to the *daff* is acceptable, though? This is not so much a question specifically about music as about how far Muslims should seek to emulate what they take to be the lifestyle of the Prophet and those around him of whom he approved. One might say that the acceptance of the contemporary musical instrument in the time of the Prophet implies that today the Prophet would approve of the electric guitar. On the other hand, one might by contrast say that the references to that particular instrument at the time of the Prophet are an indication that only that sort of instrument is acceptable even today.

Many *ahadith* suggest that the Prophet did not consider singing evil. In fact there are stories where the Prophet not only allowed people to sing, play instruments and even dance before him, and he criticized others for disapproving of such behavior. This suggests that the Prophet may have liked music. There is of course nothing wrong with beautiful sound, it may be enjoyed while reciting the Qur'an but also poetry, for example, poetical compositions in praise of God and other positive examples of the art of poetry. A

beautiful voice is a very agreeable thing and when applied to beautiful text is even more so, and eminently desirable.

We are told that the Prophet spoke approvingly of the penchant for the Prophet David and his followers to use music and musical instruments in singing the praises of God. Commenting on 21.79, Ibn Kathir writes:

> And this was because of his reciting the Psalms in a melodious voice. When he would sing it the birds would stop in the air and sang in response to David, as did the mountains. It is for this reason that when the Holy Prophet passed Abu Musa Ash'ari, when he was offering his night prayer, he stopped and listened to his recitation for he had a very beautiful voice. The Holy Prophet said: "Indeed he has been given one of the musical instruments of the people of David." Hearing this, Abu Musa said: "Had I known that he was listening, I would have pleased him more". Abu 'Uthman Nahdi says that he did not find any drum, flute or a reed sound more pleasing than the voice of Abu Musa.
>
> (Ibn Kathir 1982: 187)

So it seems that the Prophet believed that David had a melodious voice, as did Abu Musa Ash'ari. If he did, and the Qur'an refers to this admiringly, why should we not also admire such voices and the music on which their tone is based? Is not music with instruments merely an extension of the beauties of sound as represented by the human voice? Using the reverse of the principle that something that leads to what is evil is itself evil, we might say here that something which leads to what is lovely is itself agreeable.

Arguments against music

On the other hand, there are powerful arguments against music. We should be aware that nothing has been prohibited by God except that which is harmful to Muslims and society as a whole. There are great dangers associated with music. Islam totally forbids adultery and also those things that lead to it. God comments: "And do not come near to adultery, for it is a shameful deed and an evil" (17.32). Not only is it evil but the *aya* continues to suggest that it opens the door to further evils. Islam does not only prohibit adultery and fornication, but also those things that may lead to it. This is the reason why the Qur'an orders Muslim men and women to lower their gazes and not display their bodies excessively to each other. It prohibits one from being alone with someone from the opposite sex unless a close relation. Informal interaction with the opposite sex has also been made unlawful unless, again, one is a close relation, and basically someone who could not marry the other person.

This is also one of the main reasons for the prohibition of music, as it affects one's emotions, creates arousal, passion and excitement, and also leads to various physiological changes in the person. Men are motivated to do illicit things by music and the voice of women singing. This particular point is not

specific to Islam, since even Tolstoy acknowledged the danger that music can do to human behavior, and how it should be shunned or at the very least controlled. This is the reason why God says: "O wives of the prophet! You are not like other women, if you are god-fearing. So do not be soft in speech in case those whose hearts are diseased be moved with desire" (5. 32). Similarly, it is also unlawful for women to listen to the voice of non-*mahram* (unrelated) men with lust and desire. Music can lead a person to adultery and fornication. Therefore, Islam takes the preventive measure rather than suffer the consequences. This is also one of the principles of Islamic law, the idea of preventing an evil before it actually materializes, and is in fact a principle of many systems of law of discouraging people from doing things which lead to evil, even if in themselves there is nothing apparently evil in them.

One of the harms of music is that it distracts one from God. It serves as a temporary means of pleasure and satisfaction, which makes one forget who we really are and why we have been created. "I have created *jinn* and humans only so that they serve me" (51. 56). Music and frivolous activities directs us to seek physical pleasure and prevents us from real spiritual growth. Instead of thinking of our creator and his creation we think instead of things that human beings have done and place inordinate significance on them. After all, much modern music is about love, fornication, drugs and sexual freedom. These are unacceptable aims for human beings, and even if it does not lead a particular individual astray, the law is there for everyone and should be universally obeyed. "And there are among men those that follow idle tales which lead away from the path of God and make fun of it. For such there will be a humiliating punishment" (31.6). These idle tales are often compared in the *ahadith* with music and singing, and especially the singing of women. These constitute dangerous activities and they take us away from our main purpose in life, which is to worship God.

In any case: "Those who witness no falsehood, and if they pass by futility, they pass by it with honorable avoidance" (5.72). Falsehood is often taken to be music. God says to Shaytan: "Lead to destruction those whom you can among them with your voice" (5.64). That seductive voice (*sawt*) is often taken to be equivalent to music, singing, dancing and idle things. There are a large number of *ahadith* and also opinions of the *fuqaha* which defend the prohibition of musical instruments and unlawful singing. Even singing on a topic which is acceptable is unacceptable in their view if it is sung, or accompanied by musical instruments.

As we have seen, those who hold music to be lawful usually present the *hadith* of Bukhari in which two girls were singing in the presence of the Prophet and 'A'isha. However, the permissibility of music cannot be justified with this *hadith*. First, these young girls were singing without any unlawful musical instruments and, second, the content of the song was martial, thus perfectly lawful. Also, they were not professional singers as the words of the *hadith* clearly indicate. Some try to justify music with the *hadith* in which the permissibility of playing the tambourine or drum (*daff*) is mentioned. The

conclusion is sometimes drawn that this instrument at least is permitted. However, according to many legal authorities, to play the tambourine or drum is permissible at weddings, as it is not designed for entertainment and pleasure only. Musical instruments that are solely designed for entertainment are unlawful, with or without singing. However, to play the tambourine (*daff*) at weddings (and other occasions according to some *fuqaha*) might be permissible. As far as songs are concerned, if they consist of anything that is unlawful or they prevent one from the obligatory duties, then they will be unlawful. However, if they are free from the abovementioned things (and they are not accompanied by instruments), then it might be permissible to sing them. On the other hand, it can be seen that even if music is allowable, it is hemmed in with restrictions and certainly does not cover the wide notion of music that is today such a significant part of popular culture.

The celebration of *mawlid* (the Prophet's birthday)

Of course, today there are many musical instruments and styles of singing that are entirely different from those that occurred in the past. Some Muslims accept the *daff* as an instrument since at least it is mentioned in often approving ways in the *ahadith*, but modern instruments are rejected since they are not mentioned there. How could they be, since they did not then exist? This raises the issue of how to deal with festivals like the *mawlid*, the Prophet's birthday, which also do not occur in the Qur'an, and yet which for many Muslims are important events. Should a holiday be celebrated that was not celebrated by the Prophets or his Companions? It is generally true that something the Prophet did not do could be legal, and that not all innovations are to be rejected. There are some accounts of the Prophet celebrating his birthday and within each legal school (*madhhab*) a large number of thinkers who say approving things about it. Its purpose after all is not an evil one, to celebrate the birth of the Prophet of Islam, and provides scope for increasing the faith of the community, bringing them together and encouraging charity and other good works. So the fact that it might be seen as an innovation is not in itself for most *fuqaha* a reason for denying its lawfulness. By contrast, for the Salafiya it is entirely forbidden and a dangerous innovation, since they do not take seriously the (few) reports of its being celebrated by the Salaf and so reject it altogether.

Yoga

Is Yoga acceptable as a practice for Muslims? It is highly suspect in countries where Hindus and Muslims are in close contact, since yoga is essentially based originally on Hinduism and its philosophy, and incorporates much of its metaphysics. It has been condemned in *fatawa* in Malaysia and Indonesia in the twenty-first century, although it is worth pointing out that what was banned was called "Hindu yoga" and it is not clear whether it is thought that this is all yoga or only some kinds of yoga. There are certainly Sanskrit words in yoga

and a link originally with the religious practices of Hindus, but the likelihood of people becoming Hindu as a result of yoga seems remote. If the intention of the yoga exerciser is to enjoy exercise and relaxation, then this can just as easily promote thinking calmly about religious topics in his or her own religion as it can in Hinduism. One can certainly see how the clothes used in yoga would be problematic in mixed sex classes and it is not difficult to understand the sensitivity of the issue in areas of the world where everyone was until a few centuries ago non-Muslim, and then Islam came and either encouraged or forced people to convert, and an enthusiasm for a pre-Islamic practice might seem like nostalgia for the old ways. It might even encourage people to convert back to their old religion, or come to see Islam in a negative light.

Some defenders of yoga for Muslims point out how similar many of the practices of Sufism are to yoga, but this actually makes it worse, since those who condemn yoga from an Islamic perspective are generally unsympathetic also to Sufism. They worry about the point of meditation, reject additional prayers and rituals, and disapprove of the ecstatic elements in many forms of Sufism, including the music and dance which sometimes exist. Sufi traditions employed elaborate spiritual disciplines that was like yoga in the Tantric tradition. Both involved the idea that there are secrets which need to be explored and that the body contains a mystical physiology as the locus for meditation. Such meditation includes syllabic formulae, visualization and controlled respiration. These are all common in yoga as an exercise form. Pointing out that this is a shared factor between Sufism and yoga will only increase the suspicion of many Islamic religious authorities and confirm them in their poor opinion of Sufism. There are close connections between the language of Ibn al-'Arabi and much of the yoga literature on the connections between the body as a microcosm, and the macrocosm of the universe, and God, that fits nicely into a lot of yogic language. Those who seek to establish what they regard as a purer form of Islam are suspicious of this sort of language. They often wish to differentiate Islam precisely from all other beliefs and worldviews.

This touches on an interesting legal issue in Islam, and not only in Islam. An activity exists which in itself is acceptable. There is nothing after all wrong with exercise or meditation, although the latter would need to be focused on something respectable for it to be religiously sanctioned. So it looks like the action can be pursued. But, and it is a big but, suppose the action generally takes place within a context where things which are forbidden take place. People may tend to wear clothes that are unacceptable, say things that use the vocabulary of other faiths, and take up time that would be better spent doing something religious. Is it then acceptable? Is it possible to abstract the activity away from its context, since the context is obviously going to be an inappropriate one for Muslims. Another example might be of a Muslim going out with his workmates to the pub for a drink, where the Muslim sticks to non-alcoholic drinks, but he has to be in the company of those drinking alcohol. It is important that he goes, the conversation might be important for him and anyway bonding with workmates is a desirable activity. But the pub is an

undesirable place, where drinking of alcohol takes place and where the Muslim might find himself tempted to do something wrong. Should he make an excuse and leave?

Here we need to look at the extensive literature in Islam on temptation and how to resist it. When God elevated humanity to be his representative on earth the angels are said to have complained and to have predicted that there would be some examples of very poor behavior. After all, men come from clay whereas angels come from fire, and they cannot sin. God replied that he knew what he was doing, and the angels do not, a familiar response in the Qur'an. Human beings are expected to find the right path and stay on it, and for that purpose God always provides guidance, even before the sending of the Qur'an, so that humanity is never without some form of revelation. A frequently quoted reference in the Qur'an to temptation and resisting it is found in the account of Yusuf or Joseph and his tribulations at the hands of the flirtatious Zulaykha who was intent on getting him to have illicit relations with her (Leaman 2003a). This is a popular subject of illustration in Islamic art and gives artists free rein to portray erotic encounters, a topic which was obviously popular with their royal patrons. Yusuf did resist temptation, and directed his thoughts to God when feeling in psychological difficulty, and this is often taken to be an excellent way in which Muslims should deal with temptation. They should prepare themselves by acknowledging the power of our physical urges to lead us into immoral action and orient themselves toward thinking of God instead, putting our feelings then in some sort of wider context which allows them to be controlled.

Does that not mean though that if this is what we need to do then we do not have to worry about getting into situations where temptation arises? For example, Muslims are told to lower their gaze and preserve their modesty when dealing with members of the opposite sex and one might wonder why this should be necessary. Could they not just resist temptation even when looking at semi-naked people? In that case there would be no need to have any rules about dress, since the anti-temptation machinery could come into play to prevent anything illicit taking place, or even inappropriate thoughts. People sometimes complain about the rules that religions have, and some religions are replete with rules, but rules are useful ways in many cases of helping the individual to live the sort of life that the religion advocates. Modest dress might be expected to make it easier for people to adhere to the laws about what men and women ought to do, or more basically regular prayer helps the individual think about God. Now, the reverse is sometimes the case. The very regularity of prayer may result in the believer going through the ritual without thinking about what he is doing, and there is something very satisfying in having a routine which structures the day and night, a routine that is believed to have come from God. Muslims are often hungry and thirsty during Ramadan when they are not supposed to eat and drink, and it is a good process of training to realize that one need not eat or drink just because one wants to (of course, if there is a serious reason for eating and drinking, it is permissible to do so). We

can regulate our desires and temper our urges, and part of being civilized is doing so, and religions are excellent at helping us do these things by presenting us with rules that are helpful in this respect.

There is always a danger that the rules will take over the religion, something that can happen in any religion, and the result is that the adherent identifies the religion more with the rules than with the original intention behind those rules, perhaps, and the result is a narrow interpretation of what the religion actually is. There is also a danger that the adherent will feel that since he has carried out the rules, he has done everything he needs to do from a religious point of view, and this is an entirely natural belief, especially when the rules are difficult to observe. Religions tend to be very aware of these competing dangers and generally specify some principles that need to be employed which can reconcile them. For Islam this could be the "you shall be a people in the middle" principle, which might naturally be interpreted to suggest that a moderate path be selected between the extremes of a pronounced religiosity and a very relaxed attitude to ritual. The idea of Islam as the perfect religion mediating between the asceticism of Christianity and the pronounced materialism of Judaism is significant here also.

This perhaps gives us a way of dealing with the yoga issue. Here is an activity which certainly has its source in a different, and competing, ideology. It needs then to be approached with caution, since it may be that Muslims who engage with it would surreptitiously be encouraged to acquire ways of thinking and behaving that are opposed to their religion. On the other hand, just because it has its roots elsewhere is not a reason to reject it, although some religious authorities do use this as a principle for accepting or rejecting activities like sport not mentioned in the *hadith*. There are no reports of the Prophet and his Companions playing soccer, for example, and this is itself enough to throw a cloud over the sport, in the view of some. In the early days of the rapid expansion of Islam throughout the world the local cultures often seemed to have some interesting and useful features connected to them and these were studied and translated into Arabic, and there was in Baghdad a whole institution dedicated to this purpose. The view was taken that anything of value could be incorporated into Islamic culture, although there was also opposition at the time from the more xenophobic members of the community. The opposition often took the attitude that non-Muslims had nothing to teach Muslims, and so their products are better ignored. It is worth noting how defensive this view is and how fearful of the outside world, and how lacking in self-confidence.

Sport

Is sport acceptable in Islam? There are *ahadith* which show the Prophet Muhammad ruling on a case of physical training in youth. One such example is the *hadith* "No competition except in camels, arrows, or horses" which speaks of training in archery, and horse- and camel-racing, and similar activities. There

are also other *ahadith* which stress horse riding, swimming, and archery. On studying these terms, and the normal needs of the situation prevailing then, the *ahadith* are perhaps examples of needs in time of war. Sport often has some military function, helping prepare young people for military service, and obviously for any activity involving physical alacrity some sort of training of the body is highly desirable. It also has a serious psychological aspect, helping people get used to succeeding and failing at activities and learning how to deal with these two inevitable features of competition. It trains people to compete but also to work together with other people, to be punctual and self-disciplined, and these are all helpful social traits well worth cultivating. As a result most societies have been keen to promote sport, an activity which also does a lot to bind people together culturally and link them with a higher national and/or regional polity.

Sport can be problematic since it is so all-encompassing and can encourage people to stop praying and to regard trivial things to be of huge significance. Religions want their adherents to treat the religion as of significance in their lives, and sport can get in the way. On the other hand, Islam with its emphasis on balance could well argue that in a full life an individual should be able to combine his or her religious duties with leisure activities such as sport. It is known that horse-racing is used for gambling and betting. What is the ruling on strictly the entertainment side of the sport, namely, looking and attending? A problem with this activity is that it is associated with the forbidden aspects of horse-racing and Muslims might well worry about such behavior. It might come under the "what is likely to lead to something forbidden being itself forbidden" rule. If it is acceptable to look at horse-racing but not bet perhaps the corollary is that it is acceptable to look at pornography and nothing more, which is certainly not true according to legal scholars.

A prominent Egyptian religious authority Sheikh Abdul Moneym al-Shahat caused a huge amount of controversy when he referred in 2012 to a disaster at a football game in Port Said and refused to call the dead "martyrs," which they obviously were not, but which is an expression many Muslims use for anyone who has died and been blameless. Al-Shahat quite rightly said that not everyone who died unjustly was a martyr, and so those who died at the Port Said stadium in northern Egypt did not sacrifice their lives for God. "They were not in a war fighting for God, they were just having fun. This fun distracts Muslims from worshipping God," he is reported to have said in a sermon he gave in a mosque in Alexandria. Shahat added that the "fun" which victims sought when they went to the stadium is forbidden in Islam in the first place. "Only three sports are allowed in Islam: javelin throw, swimming, and horseback riding. Other sports are forbidden." Shahat added that football is a sport imported from the West and criticized football players who join foreign clubs. "Unfortunately, like in the West, football players play in foreign clubs and get very high salaries while many scholars are struggling to make ends meet."

Money spent on football, Shahat argued, should go instead to Qur'an reciting competitions. This is a fairly frequently expressed view by many Islamic

religious authorities, and is shared by religious authorities in other religions. The idea that sport is in some ways a competing ideology to religion is prevalent and needs to be challenged, since sport is indeed both international, body orientated and independent of religion. There is a famous saying of the coach of Liverpool Football Club, Bill Shankley, that football is not a matter of life and death, it is more important than that. Language such as this clearly could give offense to the religious, for whom religion is the most important thing we should concern ourselves with and any alternative enthusiasm should be vigorously resisted.

The discussion of sport and Islam often descends into an argument about women and what they should wear if they participate in sport. This is only an issue when non-*mahram* men are to be present, of course, and there is no legal problem in women wearing anything at all in the company only of women. If sport is merely recreation then there are no problems in wearing highly restrictive clothing, since they may prevent one's performance from being excellent, yet this is not the point of the activity of sport in these cases anyway, so it hardly matters. It is a problem for those who think that women should just stay at home, but then for those people whatever women do outside the home is a problem, sport included. At the competitive level restrictive clothing is a problem, since anything that interferes with performance is likely to condemn the sportswoman to always losing. Surveys suggest that even at the recreation level women participate far less in sport if they are Muslims than if they come from other groups in society, and this is perhaps surprising given that most sport, even recreational sport, is gender segregated, so there would be no need for contact to take place with non-*mahram* males. Even as spectators women can be limited in sport, as when recently Iranian women had to protest to be allowed to attend soccer matches in Iran, something they were keen to do to support the national and local teams. The idea that women would do better to stay at home and attend to the affairs of the household has even been used to discourage them from attending mosques, so it is hardly surprising that it is used to prevent them from watching sport. On the other hand, in the 2012 Olympics for the first time an athlete appeared representing Saudi Arabia, and although there were restrictions on her participation (she had to be accompanied by a suitable male guardian, wear a *hijab* and so on) this was actually a radical departure from the past practice of the Wahhabi state.

Further reading

Leaman 2003a, 2008, al-Shahat 2012.

Glossary

adhan call to prayer

ahwal states, *hal* state

'alim a scholar, pl. *'ulama'*

Allah God

al-arkan (al-Islam) pillars or foundations (of Islam)

'asabiyya solidarity

aya verse (of the Qur'an), literally sign, pl. *'ayat*

balagha eloquence

daraba beat, strike

da'wa the propagation of Islam

dhikr remembrance

din religion

Eid al-Fitr, 'Id al-Fitr the concluding feast of *Ramadan*

fana' annihilation of self

fatwa the opinions of specific legal thinkers, pl. *fatawa*

fiqh jurisprudence

fitna dissension

furu' branches

had, pl. *hudud* limit, linked with penalties

hadith a traditional saying and/or report of the actions of Muhammad and those close to him, pl. *ahadith*

hafiz a title denoting one who has learnt the Qur'an by heart

hajj the major pilgrimage to Mecca

halal appropriate or permitted within the bounds of Islam

haram forbidden, the opposite of *halal*

hilm mildness

'idda waiting period

i'jaz miraculous

ijtihad independent judgment based on Islamic sources, an attempt at establishing a pragmatic interpretation of those sources in the light of contemporary conditions

imam usually refers to one who leads the prayers, a religious authority for a community. In Shi'a Islam imam it refers to religious leadership *and* continuity of spiritual authority based on the family of the Prophet

iman belief, faith

'irfan gnosis, mystical knowledge

Islam "submission" to God

Isma'ili a form of Shi'a Islam, which itself fragmented to forming disparate branches including the Fatimids, the Nizaris, the Assassins and Bohoras

istihsan welfare

*Ithna 'Ashari*s the "Twelvers", a form of Shi'a Islam following a line of 12 imams descended from the Prophet

jama'at congregation

jihad "striving" to attain an Islamic objective, the term has spiritual and can have martial connotations

Ka'ba a structure regarded as holy (in Mecca)

kalam theology

kashf unveiling

khalifa caliph, vice-regent, successor to Muhammad

khayal fantasy, imagination

khayr good

khutba sermon

kufr unbelief

ma'arifa mystical knowledge

madhhab a "school" of Islamic interpretation, such as the Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki and Shafi'i. *madhahib* (pl.)

mahr dowry

mahram group of people, close relations, who a woman cannot legally marry

ma'na concept

maqam place

mashha'i Peripatetic

masjid mosque, place of prayer

mawlid birthday of Muhammad and/or anniversary of "saints"

medeniyet social, urban

minbar the mosque equivalent of a "pulpit"

mujtahid an "interpreter" (of Islam, especially Islamic jurisprudence), a practitioner of *ijtihad*

munafiq, munafiqun (pl.) hypocrite, hypocrites

munkar wrongdoing

mushaf the definitive recension of the Qur'an

mut'a temporary marriage

nafs soul

nazm style

qibla direction of Muslim prayer (toward Mecca)

Qur'an revelation received by the Prophet Muhammad, via the angel Gabriel

Ramadan month of fasting (*sawm*), and the month in which the Qur'an was revealed

riba interest, usury

riya' arrogance

rububiya lordship

salafi "pious ancestors," Muhammad's companions and the early Muslim community, representing a paradigm to be emulated; a term used to advocate a return to the authentic principles of Muhammad and his community

salah prayer

sawm fasting in Ramadan

shahada the principle of proclaiming a belief in a One God whose Prophet is Muhammad

shahid a witness, frequently used in the sense of a martyr

shari'a Islamic law, based on the Qur'an (and other Islamic sources); divine law, as revealed to the Prophet

shaykh religious leader

Shi'a party or sect, the followers of the line of 'Ali ibn Abu Talib (d. 40/661)

shirk idolatry

Sufi often regarded as an Islamic mystic

sukuk Islamic bond

sunna the customary practice of Muhammad

sura a chapter within the Qur'an, pl. *suwar*, divided up into verses or signs, *ayat*

tafsir commentary on, or exegesis of, the Qur'an

tahrif corruption (of a text)

takhyil imaginative

tanzih transcendence

taqlid imitation

tariqa a "path" generally a term associated with *Sufi o*rders

tasawwuf Sufism

tashbih similarity

ta'til negation

tawhid unity

'ulama' scholars

umma Muslim community

ummi illiterate

usul principles

uygarlık social, civilized

zakat annual alms or taxation

zulm oppression, wrongdoing

Bibliography

There exists now a very impressive resource for finding references and that is Oxford Bibliography online, which has a large section devoted to Islamic Studies, and readers are encouraged to go there for more information on any of the topics mentioned in this book. It is constantly updated and, since its topic is bibliography, very useful for anyone looking for publications in its widest sense on anything to do with Islam.

'Abbas, I. (1978) *Ittijahat al-shir al-'arabi al-mu'asir* (Directions of Contemporary Arabic Poetry), Kuwait: al-Majlis al-watani li'l-thaqafa wa'l-funun wa'l-adab.

Abdel Haleem, M. (1996) "Early Kalam" in Nasr, S. and Leaman, O. (eds.) *History of Islamic Philosophy*, London: Routledge, ch. 5, 71–88.

'Abduh, M. (1954) *Risalat al-tawhid* (Treatise on Divine Unity), Cairo: Dar al-Manar.

'Abidin, 'Ala al-Din (n.d.) *al-Hadiyya al-'Ala'iyya* (Gifts of Guidance), ed. Muhammad Sa'id al-Burhani. Damascus: n.p.

Abu-Lughod, J. (1987) "The Islamic City: Historic Myth, Islamic Essence and Contemporary Relevance," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19: 155–76.

Abu-Lughod, L. (ed.) (1998) *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Afkhami, M. (ed.) (1995) *Faith and Freedom: Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Afshar, H. (1998) *Islam and Feminisms, An Iranian Case-study*, London: Macmillan.

Afshari, R. (1994) "Egalitarian Islam and Misogynist Islamic Tradition: A Critique of the Feminist Reinterpretation of Islamic History and Heritage," *Critique: Journal of Critical Studies of Iran and the Middle East* 3, 4: 13–33.

Ahmed, L. (1992) *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Ali, K. and Leaman, O. (2007) *Islam: The Key Concepts*, London: Routledge.

'Ali, Y. (trans.) (1999) *The Holy Qur'an*, Beltsville: Amana Publications.

Anawati, G. and Gardet, L. (1950) *Introduction à la théologie musulmane*, Paris: Vrin.

Aristotle (1968) *De Anima, Books II and III* (*with passages from Book I*), D. Hamlyn (trans.), Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Asad, M. (2005) *The Message of the Glorious Qur'an*, Baltimore: The Book Foundation.

Asad, T. (2006). *Formations of the Secular Modern: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.

Aslan, R. (2010) *Beyond Fundamentalism: Confronting Religious Extremism in the Age of Globalization*, New York: Random House.

Attar, F. (1984) *The Conference of the Birds*, A. Darbandi and D. Davis (eds.), Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics.

Azhar, R. (2010) *Economics of an Islamic Economy*, Leiden: Brill.

Balala, M. (2011) *Islamic Finance and Law: Theory and Practice in a Globalized World*, London: I.B. Tauris.

al-Banna, H. (n.d.) *Bayn al-ams wa-al-yawm* (Between Yesterday and Today), Beirut: al-Risala.

Barlas, A. (2002) *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*, Austin: University of Texas Press.

Barrett, P. (2008) *American Islam: The Struggle for the Soul of a Religion*, New York: Picador.

Besim S. (1986) *Arabic-Islamic Cities: Building and Planning Principles*, London: Kegan Paul International.

Bougarel, X. (2005) *The Role of Balkan Muslims in Building a European Islam*, Brussels: European Policy Centre Issue Paper 43, November 23.

Bougarel, X., Helms, E. and Duijzings, G. (eds.) (2007) *The New Bosnian Kaleidoscope*, Aldershot: Ashgate.

Bozdoğan, S. and Akcan, E. (2012) *Turkey*, London: Reaktion Books.

Brockopp, J. (ed.) (2010) *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, C. (ed.) (1973) *From Madina to Metropolis: Heritage and Change in the Near Eastern City*, Princeton: The Darwin Press.

Brown, J. (2006) *Why the French don't like Headscarves*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

——(2012) *Blaming Islam*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

al-Bukhari, M. (n.d.) *Sahih al-Bukhari*. 9 vols. Cairo 1313/1895. Reprint (9 vols. in 3). Beirut: Dar al-Jil.

Burdett, R. and Sujdic, D. (2011) *Living in the Endless City*, London: Phaidon.

Campanini, M. (2007) *The Qur'an: The Basics*, O. Leaman (trans.), London: Routledge.

——(2011) *The Qur'an: Modern Muslim Interpretations*, C. Higgitt (trans.), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Cassidy, J. (2011) "Prophet Motive," *New Yorker*, February 28, 22–5.

Çelik, Z. (1999) "New Approaches to the 'Non-Western' City," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 58, 3: 374–81.

Chande, A. (2006) "Suffering," in *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia*, O. Leaman (ed.), London: Routledge, 600–4.

Chittick, W. (1983) *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

——(1994) *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

——(2008) *Sufism: A Beginner's Guide*, Oxford: OneWorld.

Cobham, D. and Dibeh, G. (eds.) (2011) *Money in the Middle East and North Africa: Monetary Policy Frameworks and Strategies*, London: Routledge.

Cook, M. (1983) *Muhammad*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

——(2000) *The Qur'an: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Corbin, H. (1993) *History of Islamic Philosophy*, L. Sherrard (trans.), London: Kegan Paul International.

Coulsen, N.J. (1974) *A History of Islamic Law*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Craig, W. (1979) *The Kalam Cosmological Argument*, London: Macmillan.

——(1993) *Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Crone, P. and Hinds, M. (1986) *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Daftary, F. (ed.) (2000) *Intellectual Traditions in Islam*, London: I.B. Tauris.

Davidson, H. (1968) "Arguments from the Concept of Particularization in Arabic Philosophy," *Philosophy East and West* 18, 4: 299–314.

——(1987) *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Demirci, E (2001) "Tasavvuf Geleneği ve Iskenderpaşa Cemaati," (Sufi Tradition and the Iskenderpasha Community), *Eğitim Bilim Dergisi* (Journal of the Educational Sciences), March, www.angelfire.com/ak4/zikrullah/ha/gelenek/t_gelenegi.html.

al-Dunya, Ibn Abi (1997) *Al-Sabr wa'l-thawab 'alayhi* (Patience and its Rewards), Beirut.

Elsheshtawy, Y. (2008) *The Evolving Arab City: Tradition, Modernity & Urban Development*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Engineer, A. (1994) *The Qur'an, Male Ego and Wife Beating*, Bombay: Institute of Islamic Studies.

——(1995) *Muslim Women, Veil and Qur'an*, Bombay: Institute of Islamic Studies.

Es, M. (2011) "Imagining European Mosques: What Lies Beyond the Politics of Visibility?" in Eade, J. and Eckardt, F. (eds.) *The Ethnically Diverse City: Future Urban Research in Europe 4*, Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 249–73.

Esposito, J. (2002) *What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Esposito, J. and Kalin, I. (eds.) (2011) *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century*, New York: Oxford Univesity Press.

al-Farabi (1985) *al-Madina al-fadila* (The Virtuous City), R. Walzer (trans.), *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State: Abu Nasr al-Farabi's Mabadi' Ara Ahl al-Madina al-Fadila*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Faroqhi, S. (1987) *Men of Modest Substance: House Owners and House Property in Seventeenth-Century Ankara and Kayseri*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fetzer, J. and Soper, J. (2008) *Muslims and the State in Britain, France, and Germany*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Filiu, J.-P. (2012) *Apocalypse in Islam*, M. DeBevoise (trans.), Berkeley: University of California Press.

Friedmann, Y. (2003) *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gellner, E. (1969) *The Saints of the Atlas*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

——(1981) *Muslim Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

——(1992) *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, London: Routledge.

Genequand, C. (1984) *Ibn Rushd's Metaphysics: A Translation with Introduction of Ibn Rushd's Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics Book Lam*, Leiden: Brill.

al-Ghazali (1403/1983) *al-Iqtisad fi al-i'tiqad* (Moderation in Belief), Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya.

——(1985) *Iljam al-'awam 'an 'ilm al-kalam* (Restraining Ordinary People from Theology), M. al-Baghdadi (ed.), Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi.

——(1409/1988) "Faysal al-tafriqa," *Majmu'a rasa'il al-Imam al-Ghazali*. 7 vols. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya.

——(1997) *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, M. Marmura (trans.), Provo: BrighamYoung University Press.

——(2002-continuing) *Ihya' ' ulum al-din* (Revival of the Religious Sciences), Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society.

Gilsenan, M. (1983) *Recognizing Islam: Religion and Society in the Modern Arab World*, New York: Pantheon.

Goldziher, I. (1981) *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Göle, N. (1996) *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Guénon, R. (2009) *The Essential René Guénon: Metaphysical Principles, Traditional Doctrines, and the Crisis of Modernity*, London: World of Wisdom Books.

Gülen, F. (2010) *Questions and Answers about Islam* 1, New Jersey: The Light.

Haddad, Y., Smith, J. and Moore, K. (2006) *Muslim Women in America: The Challenge of Islamic Identity Today*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Hadith. Three excellent online resources are to be found at http://shamela.ws/index.php/page/download-shamela; www.islamport.com/; www.dorar.net/enc/hadith.

Hakim, B. (1986) *Arabic-Islamic Cities: Building and Planning Principles*, London: Kegan Paul International.

Hallaq, W. (1993) *Ibn Taymiyya Against the Logicians*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Halliday, F. (1996) *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation*, London: I.B. Tauris.

Halm, H. (1987) *Shi'ism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Hassan, R. (1996) "Rights of Women within Islamic Communities," in Witte, J. and van der Vyver, J. (eds.) *Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 361–86.

Haykal, M. (1976) *The Life of Muhammad*, Philadelphia: North American Trust Publications.

Heer, N. (ed.) (1990) *Islamic Law and Jurisprudence*, Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Hodgson, M. (1962) "How the Early Shi'a Became Sectarian," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 82, 1: 5–21.

Ibn al-'Arabi, M. (1329/1911) *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya*. 4 vols. Cairo. Reprint. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.; Chittick, W. (1998) (trans.) *The Self-Disclosures of God,* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Ibn Kathir (1982) *Tafsir*, vol. 3, Lahore: Amjad Academy.

Ibn Khaldun (1958) *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, vol. I, F. Rosenthal (trans.), New York: Bolligen.

Ibn Rushd (1976) *Fasl al-maqal* (Decisive Treatise), G. Hourani (trans. and ed.), *Averroes on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, London: Luzac.

Ibn Taymiyya (1996) *al-'Aqida al-wasitiyya* (The Creed for Wasith), Houston: Darus-Salam.

Iqbal, Z. and Mirakhor, A. (2007) *An Introduction to Islamic Finance*, Singapore: John Wiley and Sons.

Izetbegović, A. (1989) *Islam between East and West*, Indianapolis: American Trust Publications.

'Abd al-Jabbar, A. (1965) *al-Mughni fi abwab al-tawhid wa'l-'adl*, Cairo: Dar al-misriyya li'l-ta'lif wa'l-tarjama.

Jackson, S. (2005) *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking towards the Third Resurrection*, New York: Oxford University Press.

al-Juwayni, A. (2002) *Kitab al-Irshad ila qawati al-adilla fi usul al-i'tiqad* (A Guide to the Conclusive Proofs for the Principles of Belief) Musa, M. and al-Hamid, 'A. (eds.), Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji.

Kahera, A.I. (2002) *Deconstructing the American Mosque: Space, Gender, and Aesthetics*, Austin: University of Texas Press.

Karčić, F. (1999) *The Bosniaks and the Challenge of Modernity: Late Ottoman and Hapsburg Times*, Sarajevo: El-Kalem.

Karić, E. (2002) "Is 'Euro-Islam' a Myth, Challenge or a Real Opportunity for Muslims and Europe?" *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 22, 2: 435–42.

Keddie, N. (2007) *Women in the Middle East: Past and Present*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Khalidi, T. (2009) *Images of Muhammad: Narratives of the Prophet in Islam across the Centuries*, New York: Doubleday.
Khayed, R. and Hassan, M. (2011) *Islamic Entrepreneurship*, London: Routledge.
Kniss, F. and Numrich, P. (2007) *Sacred Assemblies and Civic Engagement: How Religion Matters for America's Newest Immigrants*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
Koller, M. and Karput, K. (eds.) (2004) *Ottoman Bosnia: A History in Peril*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
Kuran, T. (2010) *The Long Divergence: How Islamic Law held back the Middle East*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Laffan, M. (2003) *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia: The Umma Below the Winds*, London: Routledge.
Lapidus, Ira (ed.) (1969) *Middle Eastern Cities*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
——(1973) "Traditional Muslim Cities: Structure and Change," in Brown, L. (ed.) *From Madina to Metropolis: Heritage and Change in the Near Eastern City*, Princeton: The Darwin Press, 51–72.
Lassner, J. (1970) "The Caliph's Personal Domain: The City Plan of Bagdad Re-examined," in Hourani, A. and Stern, S. (eds.) *The Islamic City*, Oxford: Cassirer, 103–17.
Leaman, O. (1997a) *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
——(1997b) *Moses Maimonides*, London: Routledge.
——(1997c) *Averroes and his Philosophy*, London: Routledge.
——(2000) "Can Rights Coexist with Religion?" *Journal of Semitic Studies* (Supplement) 12: 163–74.
——(2001) *An Introduction to Classical Islamic Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
——(2002) "Mecca," in Ember, M. and Ember, C. (eds.) *Encyclopedia of Urban Cultures*, Danbury: Grolier, 152–7.
——(2003a) "Appearance and Reality in the Qur'an: Bilqis and Zulaykha," *Islâm Araştırmaları Dergisi* 10: 23–37.
——(2003b) "The Search for Tradition: Islamic Art and Science in the Thought of Seyyed Hossein Nasr," in Faghfoory, M. (ed.) *Beacon of Knowledge*, Louisville: Fons Vitae, 305–15.
——(2006) *Jewish Thought: An Introduction*, London: Routledge.
——(2008) *Islamic Aesthetics: An Introduction*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
——(2009) *Islamic Philosophy: An Introduction*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
——(2010) "The Influence of Influence: How not to Talk about Islamic Culture," *Ishraq* 1: 35–45.
——(2011) *Judaism: An Introduction*, London: I.B. Tauris.
Lefebvre, H. (1991) *The Production of Space*, D. Nicholson-Smith (trans.), Oxford: Blackwell.
Leonard, K. (2003) *Muslims in the United States: The State of Research*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
Lewis, G. (2002) *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Lings, M. (2006) *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, Rochester: Inner Traditions.
McAuliffe, J. (ed.) (2002–6) *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, Brill: Leiden.
——(ed.) (2006) *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Madelung, W. (1985) *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam*, London: Variorum Reprints.

——(1997) *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Malcolm, N. (1996) *Bosnia: A Short History*, New York: New York University Press.
Mandaville, P. (2001) *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma*, London: Routledge.
——(2005) "Sufis & Salafis: The Political Discourse of Transnational Islam," in Hefner, R. (ed.) *Remaking Muslim Politics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 302–25.
——(2007) *Global Political Islam*, New York and London: Routledge.
Marcus, A. (1989) *The Middle East on the Eve of Modernity: Aleppo in the Eighteenth Century*, New York: Columbia University Press.
Markowitz, F. (2010) *Sarajevo: A Bosnian Kaleidoscope*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
Martin, R. and Woodward, M. (1997) *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu'tazilism from Medieval School the Modern Symbol*, Oxford: Oneworld.
Masoodo, B. and Kalmbach, H. (eds.) (2012) *Women, Leadership, and Mosques: Changes in Contemporary Islamic Authority*, Brill: Leiden.
Maussen, M. (2009) *Constructing Mosques: The Governance of Islam in France and the Netherlands*, Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press.
Mayer, T. (2001) "Ibn Sina's 'Burhan Al-Siddiqin'," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 12: 18–39.
Meister, C. (2009) *Introducing Philosophy of Religion*, London: Routledge.
Mernissi, F. (1987) *Beyond the Veil: Male–Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
——(1991) *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, M. Lakeland (trans.), Reading: Addison-Wesley.
Metcalf, B.D. (ed.) (1996) *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
Mir-Hosseini, Z. (1999) *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Moghissi, H. (1999) *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis*, London: Zed Books.
Montgomery Watt, W. (1948) *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
——(1962) *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Moojan, M. (1985) *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
Morewedge, P. (ed.) (1979) *Islamic Philosophical Theology*, Albany: State University of New York Press.
Morony, M. (2005) *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Muhajarani, A. (1996) "Twelve-Imam Shi'ite Theological and Philosophical Thought," in Nasr, S. and Leaman, O. (eds.) *History of Islamic Philosophy*, London: Routledge, ch. 8, 119–43.
Mulla Sadra (1981) *Wisdom of the Throne*, J. Morris (trans.), Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Muslim (2007) *Sahih Muslim*, Houston: Dar-us Salam.
al-Nashshar, A. (1984) *Manahij al-bahth 'ind mufakkiri al-Islam* (The Research Methodologies of Muslim Thinkers), Beirut: Dar al-Nahda al-'Arabiyya.
Nasr, S. (1989) *Knowledge and the Sacred*, Albany: State University of New York Press.
——(1996)*Religion and the Order of Nature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
——(2004) *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity*, San Francisco: HarperCollins.
Nawawi (2001) *Imam Nawawi's Collection of Forty Hadith*, Kuala Lumpur: IBT.
Neuwirth, A. (2010) *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike. En europäischer Zugang*, Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen.

Nursi, Said (n.d.) *Fruits of Belief*, Risale-i Nur Collection, H. Algar (trans.), Ankara: Ihlas Nur Neşriyat.
——(1998a) *The Rays*, S. Vahide (trans.), Istanbul: Sözler.
——(1998b) *The Words*, S. Vahide (trans.), Istanbul: Sözler.
——(1995) *Lem'alar*, Flashes collection, S. Vahide (trans.), Istanbul: Sözler.
——(1997) *Letters*, S. Vahide (trans.), Istanbul: Sözler.
——(2001) *Risale-i Nur Kulliyati* I, Istanbul: Nesil Yayınları.
——(2004) "Unsur-ul Belagat," *Muhâkemat*, Istanbul: Sözler Yayınevi.
——(2005) *Iarat-ul I'caz Isharat al-i'jaz* (Remarks on Miraculousness), Istanbul: Sözler Yayınevi
——(2006) *The Twenty-Fifth Word, The Miraculous Qur'an*, Ali Ünal (trans.), New Jersey: Light Publishing.
Ohlander, E. (2008) *Sufism in an Age of Transition. 'Umar al-Suhrawardi and the Rise of the Islamic Mystical Brotherhoods* (Islamic History and Civilization vol. 71), Leiden: Brill.
O'Meara, S. (2007) *Space and Muslim Urban Life: At the Limits of the Labyrinth of Fez*, London: Routledge.
Pavlin, J. (1996) "Sunni Kalam and Theological Controversies," in Nasr, S. and Leaman, O. (eds.) *History of Islamic Philosophy*, London: Routledge, ch. 7, 105–18.
Peters, R. (2005) *Crime and Punishment in Islamic Law: Theory and Practice from the Sixteenth to the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Piacentini, V. (1994) "Madina/Shahr, Qarya/Deh, Nahiya/Rustaq. The City as Political-Administrative Institution: The Continuity of a Sasanian Model," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 17: 85–107.
Pickthall, M. (2011) *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an; New Modern English Edition with Brief Explanatory Notes and Index of Subjects*; 7th Edition, Published by IDCI, available at: www.idci.co.uk.
al-Qaradawi, Y. (1975) *al-Hilal wa'l haram fi'l-Islam* (The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam), Casablanca: Dar al-Ma'rifa.
——(1989) *al-Sabr fi'l Qur'an* (Patience in the Qur'an), Cairo: Maktaba al-Wahba.
Rahman, F. (1964) "Riba and Interest," *Islamic Studies*, March: 1–43.
——(2009) *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Rajih, A. (1999) *al-Insan wa'l makan: al-qahira namudhaja'* (Man and Space: A Study of Cairo), in 'Ayyad, S. (ed.) *Misr: Nazarat nahwa al-mustaqbal* (Egypt, Future Perspectives), Cairo: Dar asdiqa' al-kitab, 111–33.
Ramadan, T. (2004) *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, New York: Oxford University Press.
Raymond, A. (1984) *The Great Arab Cities in the 16th–18th Centuries: An Introduction*, New York: New York University Press.
——(1994) "Islamic City, Arab City: Orientalist Myths and Recent Views," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 21: 3–18.
Reynolds, G. (2010) *The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext*, London: Routledge.
Rippin, A. (2001) *The Qur'an: Style and Contents*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
——(2006) *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*, Oxford: Blackwell.
——(2011) *Muslims: Their Beliefs and Practices*, London: Routledge.
Robinson, C. (ed.) (2001) *A Medieval Islamic City Reconsidered*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Roose, E. (2001) *The Architectural Representation of Islam: Muslim – Commissioned Mosque Design in the Netherlands*, Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press.
El-Rouayheb, K. (2005) *Before Homosexuality in the Arab–Islamic World, 1500–1800*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rowson, E. (1997) "The Effeminates of Early Medina," in Comstock, G. and Henking, S. (eds.) *Que(e)rying Religion: A Critical Anthology*, New York: Continuum, 61–88.
Roy, O. (2006) *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, New York: Columbia University Press.
Rubin, U. (1995) *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims, a Textual Analysis*, Princeton: Darwin Press.
Russell, B. (1959) *The Problems of Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Rutherford, D. (2003) *Raiding the Land of the Foreigners: The Limits of the Nation on an Indonesian Frontier*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Safi, O. (2009) *Memories of Muhammad: Why the Prophet Matters*, New York: HarperCollins.
Sageman, M. (2008) *Leaderless Islam*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
Said, E. (1979) *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage.
Saqqaf, A. (ed.) (1987) *The Middle East City: Ancient Traditions Confront a Modern World*, New York: Paragon.
Saritoprak, Z. (2006) "Eschatology," in Leaman, O. (ed.) *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia*, London: Routledge, 194–9.
Sayyid, B. (1997) *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism*, London: Zed Books.
Schimmel, A. (1985) *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
Schmidtke, S. (1999) "Homoeroticism and Homosexuality in Islam: A Review Article," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 62, 2: 260–6.
Schwartz, S. (2005) *Balkan Rose: A Balkan Jewish Notebook*, London: Saqi.
al-Shahat, Abdul Moneyn (2012) www.albawaba.com/editorchoice/egyptian-sheikh-claims-port-said-victims-are-not-martyrs-412287.
al-Shaykh, 'Abdul 'Aziz (2012) www.arabianbusiness.com/saudi-might-soon-set-min-marriage-age-report-454458.htm.
Sonn, T. (2006) "*asbab al-nuzul*," in Leaman, O. (ed.) *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia*, London: Routledge, 81.
Spencer, R. (2012) *Did Muhammad Exist? An Inquiry into Islam's Obscure Origins*, Wilmington: ISI Books.
Stowasser, B. (1994) *Women in the Qur'an*: *Traditions and Interpretation*, New York: Oxford Press.
Tabarani, S. (1983) *Mu'jam al-kabir*, Beirut: Dar ihya' at-turath al-'arabi.
Tabataba'i, S. (1981) *A Shi'ite Anthology*, W. Chittick (ed. and trans.), Albany: State University of New York Press.
Tagliacozzo, E. (2009) *Southeast Asia and the Middle East: Islam, Movement, and the Longue Durée*, Singapore: National University of Singapore Press.
Tibi, B. (2007) *Mit dem Kopftuch nach Europa? Die Turkei auf dem Weg in die Europäische Union*, Darmstadt: Primus Verlag.
Todorova, M. (1997) *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
——(2004) *Balkan Identities: Nation and Memory*, New York: New York University Press.
van Ess, J. (2006) *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Vogel, F. and Hayes, S. (1998) *Islamic Law and Finance*, The Hague: Kluwer Law International.
Wadud, A. (1999) *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, New York: Oxford University Press.
Wensinck, A. (1932) *The Muslim Creed*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Wild, S. (2006a) "Inimitability," in Leaman, O. (ed.) *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia*, London: Routledge, 295–6.

——(2006b) "Paradise," in Leaman, O. (ed.) *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia*, London: Routledge, 486–8.

Winter, T. (ed.) (2008) *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wolper, E. (2003) *Citizens and Saints: Sufism and the Transformation of Urban Space in Medieval Anatolia*, University Park: Penn State University Press.

Yamani, M. (ed.) (1996) *Feminism and Islam: Legal and Literary Perspectives*, New York: New York University Press.

Yusuf, H. (2005) *The Content of Character: Ethical Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad*, London: Sandala LLC.

Index of Qur'anic references

Index

There are limited references here to God, the Qur'an, and Islam, due to their ubiquity in the text