

THE VICEGERENCY OF MAN

Between Revelation and Reason

A CRITIQUE OF THE DIALECTIC OF THE
TEXT, REASON, AND REALITY

ʿAbd al Majīd al Najjār

THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT



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Text, Reason, and Reality

by

Dr. `Abd al Majīd al Najjār

Translated by

Dr. Aref T. Atari

International Institute of Islamic Thought
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P.O. Box 669 Herndon, VA 20172-0609 USA
Tel: (703) 471-1133 Fax: (703) 471-3922
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Foreword to the Second Edition

Praise be to Allah, with Whom we seek refuge, and peace be upon Muhammad (ṣaas),¹ the seal of the prophets.

Islam was meant to present to man the best community ever brought forth, namely, the balanced, missionary, and non-parochial Muslim ummah.² It is an exemplary model to follow, for it is guided by the soundest methodology, the most perfect and comprehensive Sharī`ah,³ and a worldview unique in its characteristics, foundations, and ability to motivate.

The Islamic methodology, which guides human life in all of its varied aspects (i.e. thought, faith, culture, knowledge, relationships, transactions, conduct, ethics, activities, and practices), is from Allah. It was conveyed to His Messenger, the Prophet Muhammad, by means of revelation. Revelation started when successive messengers were sent to their respective peoples to guide them back to the

¹ Muhammad (ṣaas): ṣaas is an acronym for ṣallā Allāhu `alayhi wa sallam (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). This phrase is said whenever the name of the Prophet is mentioned or whenever he is referred to as the Prophet of Allah. In conformity with contemporary American usage, it will be assumed after this point.

² Ummah: Community, nation. Specifically, the community of believers or the universal Muslim community. This term is also used to refer to a community that is identified by its ideology, law, religion, group consciousness, ethics and mores, and culture and art.

³ Sharī`ah: The collective name for the laws of Islam, including its complete religious and liturgical, ethical and jurisprudential systems.

straight path after they had lost their way through deviation and corruption. Muhammad came with the final message, the perfect methodology, and the complete Sharī`ah. As we read in the Qur`an: “The only [true] religion in the sight of God is Islam (submission to His will)” (*Āl `Imrān*: 19). In addition,

This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My grace upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as a religion.
(*al Mā`idah*: 3)

If anyone follows a religion other than Islam, never will it be accepted from him; and in the hereafter he will be in the ranks of losers [of all spiritual good] (*Āl `Imrān*: 85).

The Islamic Sharī`ah and methodology are not man-made. This fact, however, is not an indictment against human thought and *ijtihād*,⁵ for both are necessary to understand the characteristics, foundations, and effective role of Islamic methodology as the guide for one’s life. Its divine origin has endowed the Islamic methodology with several unique features, the most remarkable being the balance between its elements and foundations. Such a balance protects it from extremism, haste, rashness, and deviation. This

⁴ The Qur`an: The final revelation of Allah’s will for man. It was revealed, in Arabic, to the Prophet Muhammad over a 23-year period. He conveyed it to his Companions, who memorized it verbatim and passed it down, both orally and in writing, to succeeding generations.

⁵ *Ijtihād*: Considering that the accepted juridical sources of Islam are valid for all times and places, *ijtihād* may be described as a creative but disciplined intellectual effort to derive legal rulings from those sources while taking into consideration the variables imposed by the fluctuating circumstances of Muslim society. It is also a process of creative self-exertion to derive laws from the legitimate sources. One who engages in this activity is known as a *mujtahid*.

balance is manifested on different levels, one of the most important being the balance among sources of knowledge.

According to the Islamic methodology, there are two basic sources of knowledge: revelation and the universe. Reason and the senses are tools for acquiring knowledge. At times, reason is another source for some kinds of knowledge. By virtue of its balance and comprehensiveness, Islam overlooks no source of knowledge, and therefore accords to each source a significance corresponding to its role. No one source can displace another. Even revelation, the most authentic and powerful source, has its provinces. This is also true of such further sources of knowledge as the universe, life, and other beings. Human beings are directed to seek knowledge from all of these sources, from the revealed book (the Qur'an) as well as from the observed book (the universe), for there is no contradiction between the two. Considering revelation as the first and foremost source does not underestimate the role of reason. On the contrary, incalculable fields of knowledge are wide open and encourage the use of reason.

Balance was lacking in earlier philosophies and world-views, just as it is in those of today. Some of these unbalanced ideas managed to enter the divinely revealed religions and adversely affect their balance and purity. Other nations, seeing in Islam the way to return man to his proper balance and equilibrium, warmly welcomed Islam. Guided by this religion, man resumed his progress according to the divine teachings. In the course of this journey evolved the best ummah, the ummah of balance and the middle path, whose members strove to establish Islam, with its unique features of awareness of the divine, consistency, balance, practicality, and monotheism, as the global religion.

Though the divine ways are fixed, several deviations from the divine methodology have occurred. After the time

of the Prophet and *al Khulafā' al Rāshidūn*,⁶ all of whom ruled according to the divine methodology, a schism erupted between the intellectual leadership and the political leadership. The latter, after emerging victorious, assumed authority in a tribal coup d'état. This coincided with the early intercultural encounter between Muslims and other nations, whose cultures began to decline with the advent of Islam.

This schism afflicted the very essence of the methodology of Islamic thought. In their quest to confer legitimacy upon their leaderships, each party drew upon the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*,⁷ employed exegesis, and manipulated human interpretations and *ijtihādāt* in ways that were not known during the time of the Prophet and *al Khulafā' al Rāshidūn*. The cultures encountered in the conquered countries were introduced into the controversy as well.

After the major Islamic expansions had come full circle, Islamic civilization began to incorporate the most important centers of earlier civilizations and cultures. A wide-ranging movement to translate the works of those cultures into Arabic was launched. However, as the social thought and proper institutions necessary to contain the internal dispute had not been established, the Islamic ummah was afflicted with sectarian controversies, *kalāmī*⁸ arguments, and uncompromising debates among different factions. Classical Greek

⁶ *Al Khulafā' al Rāshidūn*: The four rightly guided political successors of the Prophet. These men are Abū Bakr al Ṣiddīq, 'Umar ibn al Khaṭṭāb, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, and 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.

⁷ The *Ḥadīth* is a body of literature that comprises the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad. The two most famous collections are those of Imām al Bukhārī and Imām Muslim.

⁸ *Kalāmī*: Derived from *kalām*, which literally means "words" or "speech" and refers to oration. This term is applied to the disciplines of philosophy and theology concerned specifically with the nature of faith, determinism, and freedom, and the nature of the divine attributes.

philosophy and Roman pagan thought and theological literature were also brought into this dispute.

One consequence of this was the enchantment of so-called Muslim philosophers with classical Greek philosophy, particularly with Aristotle, their “first teacher (mentor).”⁹ Divinity, prophethood, and creation were introduced into study and research. The thrust of these great intellectual endeavors was to reconcile classical Greek philosophy and paganism with the Islamic methodology and worldview. Classical Greek philosophy, which evolved in a pagan myth-abundant milieu, inflicted a great deal of corruption and deviation upon Christianity, for early Christian theologians and philosophers combined the classical Greek philosophical legacy with Christianity (a fact that is often overlooked).

The classical Greek myth concerning knowledge left its imprint on all who came under its influence. The myth is as follows: Zeus, the senior god, was enraged after learning that the god Prometheus had stolen the sacred fire, understood to be the secret of knowledge, and had given it to man without informing Zeus. Zeus did not want man to acquire knowledge and an understanding of other secrets, for that might cause man’s position to improve and that of the senior god and other gods and goddesses to decline. The myth concludes with Zeus taking a most horrible revenge on Prometheus.¹⁰ The Hebrews reported a similar myth regarding the struggle between man and God over knowledge. In sum, the early philosophies and their heir, contemporary Western philosophy, are full of conflict between dualities and thus devoid of balance.

⁹ If they consider Aristotle the first teacher (mentor), what position do they accord to Prophet Muhammad?

¹⁰ Sayyid Quṭb, *Khaṣā’iṣ al Tasawwur al Islāmī wa Muqāwimatuh*.

According to Plato, existence is composed of two opposing layers: absolute reason, the source of total capability, and primordial matter (i.e., *hayyūlā*), the source of total incapability. Between these two layers are other creatures whose rank rises or falls depending on the extent to which they draw from reason or the primordial substance. *Hayyūlā* is the antithesis of absolute reason, and its creation was not willed from non-existence.¹¹ The struggle between reason and substance, and between reason and the gods, is eternal.

These deviant conceptualizations, introduced into Islamic thought early in its history, adversely affected the balance between revelation and reason. Islamic *madhāhib*¹² were divided between those who disregarded and marginalized reason's role, and those who inflated and overestimated its role. This polarization caused the inclusive middle path of the Islamic approach,¹³ which views reason and revelation as necessary and complementary to each other, to be lost.

The Islamic methodology's balanced approach, according to which *naql* (revelation) addresses and informs *'aql* (reason) of domains that reason cannot explore, is unique. A case in point is *al ghayb*.¹⁴ Due to its imperfect tools of acquiring knowledge, reason cannot venture into this area. However, it can comprehend, rationalize, and explore the best forms of applying and implementing revelation in life. Neither one is a substitute for the other, nor can one work

¹¹ Ibid. See also al 'Aqqād, *Allāh*, 137.

¹² *Madhāhib*: Plural form of *madhhab*. This term, which literally means "way of going," refers to the legal schools of Islamic thought.

¹³ This is a translation of the Arabic term *al wasaṭīyah al Islāmīyah al jāmi'ah*, used by Muḥammed 'Imārah in his book *Ma'ālim al Manhaj al Islāmī* (Herndon, VA.: IIIT, 1991), 75-103.

¹⁴ *Al ghayb*: The unseen world inhabited by such spiritual beings as jinn, angels, and others that cannot be perceived by human beings. Also commonly known as *'ālam al ghayb*.

without the other. Both are from Allah: *naql* is a divine blessing that guides man and brings him out of the darkness and into the light, and *`aql* is the faculty that receives, understands, benefits from, and applies revelation to life.

In specifying the domains that fall under its jurisdiction, Islam protects human reason so that its efforts will not be wasted. A methodology to educate reason is set forth in the revealed texts.¹⁵ The scope of *al ghā'ib*, in which man is bound to believe, is extremely limited and exposed in a conceivable way. Islam leads man to believe in *al ghā'ib*, which results in certainty, peacefulness, and tranquillity. This represents a firm ground from which human beings can venture into *`alam al shahādah*¹⁶ and put revelation into practice, build a civilization, and fulfil the duties associated with *khilāfah*.¹⁷

Human beings are imperfect. Often, individuals are fascinated with their power, ability, and potential. They are also fascinated by reason, which allows them to distinguish, realize, discern, infer, and synthesize new materials and ideas.¹⁸ Ibn Hazm, describing the fascination of his contemporaries with reason, equated them with those who underestimated reason, saying that “both are irrational.”¹⁹ Imām Abū Ḥamīd al Ghazzālī pointed out how the terms *`aql* and *al ma`qūl* (conceived by reason) were misused to denote debates, chicaneries, and bickering on thesis–antithesis

¹⁵ See Muḥammad Quṭb, *Manhaj al Tarbiyah al Islāmīyah* (Dār al Shurūq).

¹⁶ *'Ālam al shahādah*: The seen world, all elements of which can be perceived by the human senses.

¹⁷ *Khilāfah*: The role of man as vicegerent of Allah. The term *vicegerent* is also used to signify the institutions of government that are a continuation of the worldly government of the Prophet.

¹⁸ Quṭb, *Manhaj al Tarbiyah*, 1:76.

¹⁹ Ibn Hazm, *Ihkām al Aḥkām*.

matters, which properly belong to *kalām*.²⁰ Those who opposed this approach were considered to be discrediting reason. Al Ghazzālī elaborated:

One cannot imagine discrediting reason itself, by which man is led to believe in Allah. Since reason was praised by Allah, how can it be discredited? And what is to be appreciated after that? If one were to say *shar`*²¹ should be commended, then the question arises: By which means should the validity of *shar`* be established? If that validity is to be established by discredited reason, then the *shar`* itself is discredited. Some may say that the validity is established by *`ayn al yaqīn* (certitude) and *nūr al imān* (the truest and purest faith given to us by belief), rather than reason and mental exercise. However, that is exactly what we mean by reason, which distinguishes man from other created beings, and by which man apprehends the facts.²²

This essential landmark in Islamic methodology was confused. The Muslim intelligentsia became divided into pro-*naql* and pro-*`aql* groups. The most extreme members of the pro-*naql* group stuck to the literal (external) sense of the texts and the lexical meanings of its words. Reason was not only reduced, but rather accused. The pro-*`aql* group's fascination with reason was excessive, for it not only extolled reason, but actually gave it a wide jurisdiction independent of the *shar`*. This camp immersed itself in speculative arguments to which the Muslim mind was not accustomed. Among the issues raised was that of *shukr al mun`im* (thanking the Benefactor). Can reason, in the absence of the *shar`*, reveal and enjoin this premise? Other questions revolved around the issue of assigning the non-

²⁰ *Kalām*: Theology, or the practice of defending the tenets of Islam through rational argument.

²¹ *al-Shar`*: The Islamic legal system; a synonym for *Sharī`ah*.

²² See al Ghazzālī, *Ihyā` Ulūm al Dīn* (Cairo: Dār al Sha`b).

existent, the creation of the Qur'an, and the source of classifying a human deed as good or bad: Is it the *shar`* or reason?

Assuming the existence of conflict between *naql* and *`aql*, different schools gave supremacy to the one of their choice. This engendered an unprecedented stream of research and study designed to interpret those *āyāt*²³ and *ḥadīth* perceived as being in conflict with reason. Such subjects as interpreting equivocal *āyāt*, interpreting equivocal *ḥadīth*, the convergence of the Sharī`ah and philosophy (*ḥikmah*), and averting conflict between *naql* and *`aql* consumed a significant amount of the scholars' time and effort. The extent to which the issue preoccupied Islamic thought requires research and educational means to uproot its adverse effects from the Muslim mind, which then must be re-educated. This could be done as long as this critical chapter remains open and liable to potential misuse.

Under the overwhelming influence of new technology and scientific attainment, which enabled that which had been considered impossible (i.e., atomic energy, missiles, and spaceships), man has become so enchanted with his mind that some individuals have declared, as did Nietzsche, the death of God and the birth of the Superman.²⁴

This sense of elation led man to deify reason and establish a deviant non-religious rationality as supreme. There is no doubt that reason can discover and innovate, and sometimes distinguish between right and wrong, helpful and harmful. But can it independently (without guidance or help) and accurately identify the elements of truth, good, and beauty along with the means to access each of them? No, it

²³ *Āyāt*: Plural form of *āyah*, a sign, indication, message, or aspect of Allah's creation. It is also translated as "a verse of the Qur'an."

²⁴ Quṭb, *Khaṣā'iṣ*, 7.

cannot. Man is permanently and urgently in need of the external help provided by true revelation, which is more informed and guides him to the right path.

Man's current infatuation with reason is more detrimental and influential than it has been in the past. Muslims were overcome by the present *fitnah*²⁵ while their civilization was declining, at a time when their intellectual thought was stagnating and in a state of recess and crisis. Its sweeping influence did not spare the majority of educated Muslims, who joined the Westernization camp. Although Westernization was countered by many sincere and concerned Muslims, their resulting partial defensive attempts often caused mistakes or new deviations. For instance, they did not present the Islamic methodology in its full comprehensiveness, perfection, and balance, or articulate its ideological basis, premises, theses, and intents. Rather, they focused on defending reason's significance by interpreting any text deemed equivocal, denying its authenticity, or arbitrarily twisting its meaning. It appeared akin to curing a disease by taking a medicine that could cause even more dangerous diseases.

In the recent past, Muslim reason has faced a delicate situation. Islam was equated with the Christian church, which was accused of fighting, degrading, and belittling reason while sticking to irrational opinions. Islam, its faith, beliefs, worldview, and methodology were held accountable for the Muslim world's backwardness.²⁶ This could be attributed partially to the over-conservative and rigid intellectual environment that immersed itself in tradition,

²⁵ *Fitnah*: Any affliction that may cause man to stray and lose faith in Islam and its spiritual values. Examples are personal or communal tests, trials and confusion, as well as civil war and oppression.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

opposed *ijtihād*, and denied a role to reason. This stagnation was manifested by some dull, close-minded *‘ulamā’* (religious scholars) who espoused beliefs and practices foreign to Islam (e.g., servicing mausoleums), and who were concerned mainly with insignificant issues (e.g., menstruation and childbirth blood). In the face of dilemmas and predicaments, these *‘ulamā’* could do nothing more than read some verses of the Qur’an or *ḥadīth*, or resort to obsolete solutions. The words “*jihād*” and “*ijtihād*” were rarely uttered.

In other parts of the world, reason was deified after its intellectual conquests enabled Europe to master the world and spread its hegemony over Muslim lands. At this critical moment, some Muslim scholars sought to defend Islam. Toward this end, they highlighted the multidimensional role of reason and *ijtihād* in Islamic methodology and Muslim life in general. During this endeavor, some raised the role of reason to that of revelation. They maintained that the text should be reinterpreted if any contradiction with reason was found. This is reminiscent of al Ṭūfī and others, who held that the text and reason are superior to revelation. As a result, they presented many strange interpretations for some Qur’anic verses regarding *al ghā’ib*. Both Muḥammad ‘Abduh and his student al Maghribī were influenced by this approach, as reflected in the former’s exegesis of *Juz’ ‘Āmmah* (Section 30), and the latter’s exegesis of *Juz’ Tabārak* (Section 29) of the Qur’an. They also called for reinterpreting the text to comply with reason. The question arises: What reason is there to rule over the text?²⁷

Islamic methodology is an integrated entirety, as its components are interrelated (rather than contrasting). Thus, it does no injustice to other components by focusing upon one to the exclusion of all others. The first and foremost compo-

²⁷ Ibid. See also Quṭb’s criticism of Muḥammad Iqbāl.

ment is divinity and all of its related qualities, which are absolutely distinct and belong only to Allah. The relationship between Allah and man is the same as that between the Creator and the created. Revelation is from Allah, the Creator of man. Reason is a created tool to be used for assignments, and to serve as a means for apprehending, discerning, and applying. The revealed text is the authority, frame of reference, and source of guidance. Any contradiction between reason and revelation is, in fact, inconceivable. Any imagined contradiction is superficial, a result of the imperfection of the human mind, error, or lack of capability. Contradiction is removed by overcoming these defects. In all cases, the text remains the authority and reference. It is best understood in the light of the revelation's time, place, language, and other auxiliary tools.

The extremist understanding of this methodological issue generated several mistaken concepts that adversely affected other components of Islamic methodology. Examples are the freedom of choice (replaced by its antithesis of predestination and fatalism), causality and reasoning (forms of reason's activity), and the value and source of human deeds.

Ever since the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) embraced the cause of reforming the intellectual approaches used by Muslims, the issue of methodology has been its foremost concern. This importance derives from IIIT's belief that reforming methodology is the starting point for the entire process of reform. For this reason, IIIT has conducted several international and local seminars on methodology. It has called, and continues to call, upon scholars to write books and articles on the subject. Dr. `Abd al Ḥamīd Abū Sulaymān has written *Crisis in the Muslim Mind* and has dedicated most of his lectures and studies to this purpose. At the request of IIIT, Dr. Muḥammad `Imārah wrote *Ma`ālim al Manhaj al Islāmī* (Landmarks of Islamic Methodology),

the result of a joint project sponsored by IIIT and al Azhar University in the context of scholarly co-operation.

At this time, IIIT is introducing an edition of Dr. `Abd al Majid al Najjār's *The Vicegerency of Man: Between Revelation and Reason: A Critique of the Dialectic of the Text, Reason, and Reality*. This work, which focuses on *naql* and *`aql*, illuminates most aspects of this methodological issue, as well as its impact and implication for man's existential role of *khilāfah*. It is the institute's hope that Muslim scholars continue the path taken by Dr. Abū Sulaymān, Dr. `Imārah, Dr. `Imād al Dīn Khalīl, and Dr. al Najjār in reflecting on and exploring other issues of Islamic methodology to clarify ambiguities, distill knowledge, and address voids. Such studies, though representing their authors' views, are viable arrays in building the cultural and intellectual infrastructure that is indispensable to curing the ummah of its intellectual crisis so that it can build its own culture.

Methodological change, rejuvenation, and reform are contingent on direct referral to the methodology of the Prophet and his *khulafā'* (political successors). This requires resorting to the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and then studying, understanding, drawing inspiration, and implementing what has been learned. Our thought and behavior will be guided by the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the *Sīrah*.²⁸ And that is essential to resume an Islamic life, which is the source of pleasure for all believers.

All praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

Dr. Ṭāhā Jābir al `Alwānī

²⁸ *Sīrah*: The biography of the Prophet.

Introduction to the First Edition

The relationship between revelation and reason has preoccupied Islamic thought in the past and in the present. This is not surprising, for Islam seeks to establish life on the basis of the Shari`ah, simultaneously exalting reason and assigning it a role complementary to that of revelation. Drawing a contrast between revelation and reason, and articulating the role of each in revealing and enjoining the truth, was always a subject of debate in Islamic thought. This issue always comes to the fore when Islamic culture is faced with external (pertaining to reason) and cultural challenges. The encounter between Islamic culture and classical Greek philosophy, in the second and third *hijri* centuries,¹ engendered the issue of reconciling *hikmah* and the Shari`ah, which was the main concern for Muslim scholars at that time. Similarly, the issue of reason and the revealed text, which has arisen out of the encounter between Islamic culture and modern Western civilization, has become a main issue of debate for current schools of Islamic thought.

Whether in the past or in the present, Muslim scholars were mainly concerned with identifying the role of each part of this duality (first in apprehending the truth, and then

¹ The Muslim era begins with the *hijrah*, the emigration of Prophet Muhammad from Makkah to Madinah in 622 CE.

in guiding human life) and in highlighting points of convergence and divergence. In the first instance, Muslims were more assertive as they were supreme in thought, civilization, and culture. Thus the balance between the two parts was not impaired, and reason was not favored over revelation. The developments stopped at the boundaries of reconciling the Sharī'ah and *hikmah*, an endeavor reaching its apogee with Ibn Rushd's *Faṣl al Maqāl fī mā bayn al Hikmah wa al Shari'ah min al Ittiṣāl* (The Authoritative or Final Word on the Convergence of the Sharī'ah and Philosophy).

In the contemporary encounter, history has played many different roles. The extent to which the West has overtaken the Islamic world has been detrimental to the balance between revelation and reason, for reason has emerged as the more important element. Many voices in the Islamic world have called for the absolute jurisdiction of reason, resulting in revelation being relegated to a lower status. Moreover, the issue was oversimplified and treated so lightly that it was taken out of its own context. As a result, ill-conceived and hasty views abound, all of which indicate a lack of consciousness of Islam's ideological and intellectual dimensions. If a rigorous analysis of these dimensions had been present, the issue would have been discussed in the context of the intellectual, philosophical, and methodological discourse for the purpose of establishing truth, which does not conflict with religion.

The issue of reason and revelation, better known as reason and the text, is, in fact, one aspect of a comprehensive ideological worldview encompassing an all-inclusive matrix addressing divine and human existence, the existence of the universe, the relationship between Allah and man, as well as revelation and reason. In approaching the revealed text, reason ventures upon a non-linear, multi-

dimensional, philosophical, methodological, and intellectual quest. This was the focus of the scholars of *uṣūl al fiqh*,² who exerted commendable efforts and recorded invaluable views on this issue. This legacy can be enhanced and built upon by the contributions of modern scholarship in linguistics, research methodology, and many other fields. Existing approaches to the issue (reason and the text) have yet to live up to this aspiration.

The truth of this issue is undermined by those who are so fascinated with Western civilization that they seek to brush the text aside, as well as by those overzealous, close-minded proponents of Islamic thought who seek to invalidate reason. The injustice inflicted upon truth is already underway, although it has not yet become a sweeping phenomenon.

Perceiving the momentousness of this issue; the detrimental consequences of deviation, oversimplification, and precipitation; and out of concern for future Muslim generations, we present this modest contribution. It is an illumination of what we view as an essential doctrinal and intellectual system. Greater patience, diligence, and cooperation are required to arrive at a consequential conclusion.

ʿAbd al Majīd al Najjār

² *Uṣūl al fiqh*: The methodology of deriving laws from the sources of Islam and establishing their juristic or constitutional validity.

Preface

Endeavors to identify normative guidelines that may help humanity lead a better life will fall short of their goals if there is no sound conceptualization of the objective of human existence. A belief system specifying the ultimate goal of human existence is therefore essential, as such a system provides a sense of direction and harmony without which human efforts are prone to frustrating discordance.

When an ultimate goal exists, particularly a long-term one, resources are mobilized and capabilities are marshaled to attain it. If the goal is short-term, only part of those resources and capabilities are used. A Muslim with a long-term goal, namely, reaching the hereafter after death where he will be held accountable for his deeds in this life, will focus all of his energy on improving this universe in accordance with the divine orders.

In contrast, someone who believes that death is the end of existence will indulge his worldly desires. As this short-term aim makes limited demands upon a person's resources, his surplus capabilities will be allocated to efforts that defeat the goal of human existence and even dilute the high position granted to man on the basis of his distinguished potential. The fallout from such short-sighted aims is seen in the accumulation of weapons of mass destruction at the expense of millions of starving people, extravagance, luxury, and the pursuit of cheap sensual lusts that lead to the loss of awareness and reason.

Specifying an objective that is contradictory to such a shortsighted goal is not the only problem. Articulating methodologies for human behavior that could be conducive to realizing that objective and then applying them to life are paramount, complex, and delicate tasks. Many religions, philosophies, and doctrines have espoused sound aims, but have posited and then followed methodologies that defeated those aims and diverted people from God. In fact, man has often aspired to lofty and sublime goals only to be disappointed because of unsound methodologies.

Divinely revealed religions have identified the ultimate purpose of human existence and the methodology to secure it. Islam, the final revelation, has the last word here: The ultimate purpose is to be close to Allah and to work for His pleasure. This can be seen in the Qur'anic words: "I have only created jinns and men that they may serve Me" (*Dhāriyāt*: 56) as well as: "O man! Verily you are ever toiling on toward your Lord—painfully toiling—but you shall meet Him" (*al Inshiqāq*: 6). Islam also has illustrated the timeless *khilāfah* methodology for actualizing that goal.

Specifying the goal and the methodology in the last and ultimate revelation does not exempt man from his duties. Human beings have to comprehend and practice the goal and methodology spelled out in the Qur'an and the *ḥadīth*. The very fact that Islam is the ultimate revelation places a new and difficult burden on man, for each individual must rely upon reason to understand the divine text and apply it to life to realize gradually the long-term goal.

Upon undertaking this role, each individual is rewarded for success or punished for failure. At this point a question arises: How is the fate of man linked to a role, the actualization of which is conditional upon adherence to revelation and, at the same time, the use of reason?

The thrust of Islamic thought was to find answers to this duality. Thriving Islamic disciplines were intellectual illustrations of and endeavors to apply revelation to life. Intellectual divergence among Muslims, as seen in Islam's numerous sects and factions, reflects the differences accorded to ranking each polarity of the above duality on the basis of its role in actualizing the *khilāfah* methodology. Differences between the two polarities engendered scholarly disagreements as to the role and ranking of each.

Islamic thought was evenly divided on this issue, and thus a text-oriented school and a reason-oriented school gradually appeared. Adherents of the former gave absolute authority to the revealed teachings when dealing with *khilāfah*. Thus, reason was reduced to supporting direct applications of the literal textual meaning to one's daily life. The understanding that emerges from such an approach rarely changes over time.

There were different levels of literal trends within this school. The most extreme satisfied itself with the external meaning of the text, and left no room for reason to interpret the text differently, arrive at new forms of understanding, or take the general intentions of the Shari'ah into account. This was the approach of Hashawīyah, Zāhirīyah,¹ and other literalists who rejected *qiyās*.² This literalism led some Muslims to believe in the similitude and likeness of Allah to His cre-

¹ This term does not denote the school of Dāwūd al Zāhirī and his followers, but rather the literal tendency in understanding the revealed text (derived from the Arabic word *zahir*, meaning obvious, apparent, literal).

² *Qiyās*: Analogical deduction or reasoning. Recourse to analysis is only warranted if the solution of a new case cannot be found in the Qur'an or the Sunnah. Analogy then consists in extending a principle (*aṣl*) derived from the Qur'an or the Sunnah to the new case. Analogical deduction cannot operate independently of the texts (*nuṣūṣ*).

ations. Based on the literal meanings of some revealed statements, they argued that Allah is not totally distinct from the universe. Centuries later, some modern literalists stated that in this age of technological innovation, man cannot achieve *khilāfah* through revelation, as these innovations were not mentioned in the revealed text.

On the other hand, those who belonged to the school of reason accorded it a very significant role in the actualization of *khilāfah*. Reason comprehends and conceptualizes revelation, interprets the literal meanings of some revealed statements, and provides new judgments based on the general intentions of the Shari`ah. Different levels of rational inclinations could also be identified within this school, the most extremist of which pushed aside the language denotation through which revelation was conveyed. Such was the approach of the Bāṭinīyah,³ the ultra-orthodox Mu`awillah (hermeneutics), and proponents of the temporal nature of revelation-based prescriptions. Some extremists stated that if an individual reached a high level of spiritual loftiness, he or she could actualize *khilāfah* without performing *ṣalāh* (prayer), *ṣawm* (fasting), or ḥajj (pilgrimage to Makkah). In fact, one neophyte of such extremist views claimed that reason can substitute for revelation in organizing human life in the economic, societal, and family domains.

The existence of this deep schism between proponents of the text (who reduce reason) and proponents of reason (who seek to replace revelation) calls for painstaking attempts to articulate the relationship between both polarities. By undertaking to actualize such an articulation, man can be assured

³ Bāṭinīyah: From *bāṭin*, meaning “hidden” or “esoteric.” This Sufi sect alleged the existence of esoteric meanings behind the words of the Qur’an, all of which could be discovered through allegorical interpretation. They also searched for a living infallible leader and had recourse to Greek Pythagorean theories.

that he is proceeding on the right path toward realizing the goal of his existence. Any deviation in conceptualizing this relationship may cause the entire effort to fail. The history of the Muslim ummah shows that it experienced such painful consequences either as a result of adhering to revelation's external sense at the expense of reason, or as a result of following an ultra-hermeneutical approach, which provides fertile soil for extremist mysticism to inflict indifference, self-destruction, and denial of causality. The latter approach is being echoed today in calls for substituting revelation with reason.

This problem, historically known as *al 'aql wa al samā'* (reason and hearing) or *al hikmah wa al Sharī'ah* (wisdom and religious law), is known today as *al 'aql wa al naṣṣ* (reason and text). This issue always arises and generates intense debate whenever Muslims are faced with reason-based civilizations, as when classical Greek thought was translated into Arabic and when Islamic societies were overwhelmed by contemporary Western civilization. Being a response to external challenges rather than an autogenetic thesis, it contributed to the many flaws found in the Muslim approach to dealing with the relationship between revelation and reason, and the role of each in actualizing *khilāfah*.

The issue was sometimes the victim of improvisation and emotionalism. Under the overwhelming influence of classical Greek philosophy, Muslim Mashā'ī⁴ philosophers sought to reconcile *hikmah* and Sharī'ah, only to be countered by a trend rejecting not only classical Greek *hikmah*, but also denying any role to reason supplementary to that of revelation. Under the influence of the sweeping advance

⁴ Islamic Mashā'ī (peripatetic) philosophy is a school of thought in which the Neoplatonic interpretation of Aristotelian philosophy was combined with Islamic beliefs. It gradually became one of the most important Islamic philosophical schools.

of modern Western *ḥikmah*, this issue has been raised again. Impressed by this new *ḥikmah*, some Muslims presumed that the reason that generated it is alone capable of guiding human life. In a bid to maintain the supremacy of revelation, a counter-trend arose, one that gave almost no role to reason in actualizing *khilāfah*. As a result, reasonable and sensible approaches to the issue were lost.

Therefore the issue was not conceptualized in the natural context of a comprehensive philosophical and ideological matrix. Rather, it was often approached in an atomistic manner that had no encompassing ideological framework or coherent thesis. A sensible approach requires that this issue be addressed through a coherent matrix of ideological theses related to man's existence: a human being's nature, goal, destination, duty, and position in the universe. Analyzing these theses through such an investigation would produce conclusions based on sound foundations from within its own context.

Islamic scholarship, whether in *`aqidah* (creed) or *falsafah* (philosophy), did not give these issues the attention they deserve. Rather, Muslim scholars addressed them in a partial manner and within the context of other issues rather than as a coherent cluster. Except for such individual pioneering endeavors by al Rāghib al Iṣfahānī's *al Dhari'ah ilā Makārim al Sharī'ah* and *Tafṣīl al Nash'atayn wa Taḥṣīl al Sa'adatayn*, and those of Ibn al `Arabī al Ṣūfī in his analysis of *al insān al kāmīl*,⁵ these issues were of no concern to mainstream Islamic scholarship.⁶

⁵ *Al Insān al kāmīl*: The perfect man (or woman), one who has reached the ultimate level of spiritual development and thereby become a perfect embodiment of Islam.

⁶ This refers to the attention given by Ibn `al Arabī to this issue, and is not intended to lend support to his views, many of which are flawed and deviant.

The contradictory, extremist approaches to the issue lacked any thorough analysis of the nature of man's multi-dimensional existence. The flaws in the literalist school resulted from a scholarly misunderstanding of man's significant role in developing the universe. Presuming that Allah's pleasure could be obtained only by observing the forms of worship set forth in the outward text, they ignored the fact that worship is an all-encompassing concept within which a vast array of material as well as spiritual activities can be practiced. In contrast, the weaknesses in the reason-oriented school derived from its adherents' exaggeration of reason's position and role. Some went so far as to allege that man has become the master of the universe by virtue of reason, and that the goal of human existence is accomplished by conquering the universe through material struggle. This school did not consider the limits of reason, which mitigate the human quest to demystify the universe and decipher the individual's societal existence.

To sum up, the issue of the text and reason cannot be addressed correctly unless it is placed in an ideological context within which the multi-dimensional existence of man is investigated: man's position in the universe, his significance, duties, and ultimate goals. Both revelation and reason are tools for revealing the truth, according to which man espouses certain patterns of thought and behavior to approach the universe in a way designed to accomplish the ultimate goal. This book is geared toward such a conceptualization.

ʿAbd al Majīd al Najjār

CHAPTER 1

The Doctrinal Framework of *Khilāfah*

Prologue

An existential questioning innately arises in the human mind, for no sooner does one start dealing rationally with the universe than one begins to seek answers pertinent to a threefold question: the origin of the world, its destination, and its movement between the start and the end. This threefold question has been at the heart of philosophical scholarship ever since man started to philosophize. Answers were solicited from philosophical schools of thought, myths, and superstitions.

Ever since the beginning of revelation, answers to the above question were clearly and categorically furnished by divinely revealed religions. However, as man was vulnerable to forgetfulness or deviation, successive prophets were sent to confirm the message of their predecessors. The very first Qur'anic *āyah* to be revealed addresses man's origin: "Read in the name of thy Lord who created [the universe]" (*al `Alaq*: 1). Another *āyah* states: "Verily, to your Lord is the return [of all]" (*al `Alaq*: 8), which points out the destination of the universe.

Other *āyāt* suggest that the universe, the processes of life and death, and the movements and non-movements therein

Editor's note: The term *man* denotes all of humanity, as both men and women shoulder the responsibility of *khilāfah*.

work on the basis of a causality law established by Allah. According to this law, objects are causes of each other. Thus, the movement, appearance, or disappearance of an object or a phenomenon may be brought about by other objects or phenomena. This is also obvious in the following *āyah*: “Your Lord who created man out of a [mere] clot of congealed blood” (*al `Alaq*: 2). This Qur’anic verse reveals that Allah’s omnipotence governs this universe through the law of causality, by virtue of which a trivial clot causes the birth of man, the universe’s most significant creation. This law applies to all elements in the universe, regardless of importance or triviality.

The above-mentioned *āyah*, together with other relevant *āyāt*, unravel a clear-cut, conclusive stance toward all issues concerning the universe: its nature and elements, and the relationships among these elements. An elaboration follows.

The Duality of Existence

Existence, according to Islam, comprises divine existence and the existence of *al `ālam* (the world or the universe).¹ This duality is confirmed in the very first revealed *āyah*, “Read in the name of your Lord, who created” (*al `Alaq*: 1), which explicitly points to the two distinct existences.

The two extremes of this duality are totally distinct. Allah is characterized by absolute perfection, the very nature of which is beyond reason. The most one can do is ascribe to Him all absolute, perfect attributes. In contrast, the less-perfect world is discoverable by human reason. This dissimilarity between Allah and the world entails absolute unlikeness in position. Expressed differently, Allah is not restricted to a place or space, whether in terms of incarnation or juxtaposi-

¹ Ibn `Ashūr, *Tafsīr al Taḥrīr wa al Tanwīr*, 1:154.

tion. This issue falls into *ghā'ibiyāt* (matters of the unseen world), which cannot be grasped by human reason.

However, this absolute difference in position does not imply a divine irrelevance to the world. This Islamic view is in stark contrast with that of Aristotle, who stated that God set this world in motion and then left it to itself, retaining only a general awareness of what was going on therein.²

This is a clear departure from Islam's concept, which firmly establishes the relationship between the world and Allah, who is acknowledged as the Creator of everything, as the One who operates everything by means of His omnipotence: "He rules [all] affairs from the heavens to the Earth" (*al Sajdah*: 5). He knows all that is hidden and seen:

Nor is hidden from the Lord [so much as] the weight of an atom on the Earth or in heaven. And not the least and not the greatest of these things but are recorded in a clear record. (*Yūnus*: 61)

and He sustains the world by His care and kindness:

Should He not know—He that created? And He is the one that understands the finest mysteries [and] is well-acquainted [with them]. (*al Mulk*: 14)

According to this multi-dimensional relationship, Allah, although physically distinct from His creations, is close to them. This is clearly indicated: "We are nearer to man than [his] jugular vein" (*Qāf*: 16). However, such closeness was misunderstood by some to mean a tangible closeness (one perceptible through senses). They presumed that the divine relevance and closeness to His creation was a type of incarnation. This was the claim of such extremist mystics as

² Yūsuf Karam, *Tārīkh al Falsafah al Yunāniyah* (Cairo: 1936), 236.

Muḥiy al Dīn ibn `Arabī (d. 638 AH/1240 CE), who espoused pantheism and denied any distinction between the Creator and the creation.³

This duality is the starting point for conceptualizing existence. The origin of the world and its movement toward its destiny are attributed to the eternal, exalted divine existence. This duality also divides existence into *`ālam al ghā`ib* (the world of the unseen) and *`ālam al shahādah* (the world of the seen). *`Ālam al ghā`ib* is intangible and unobservable to man; only its existence and impact can be known. This world is the realm of divine existence, and contains the angels and jinns, paradise and hell, and many other realms that man cannot perceive. Only Allah knows thoroughly both worlds: “He knows the Unseen as well as that which is open. For He is the wise, well-acquainted [with all things]” (*al An`ām*: 73). In contrast, *`ālam al shahādah* is the material world that is actually or potentially perceived and observed by human senses under certain conditions.

Divine Existence

Man’s contemplation of the human soul, his inherent feelings and nature, and his reflections upon the regularity and harmony of the universe, lead to belief in divine existence. The human yearning for a Supreme Being with all perfect qualities, and from whom protection, security, and calmness are sought, is inherent. Arrogance may block such yearning, particularly in moments of elation, affluence, and strength, but it recurs in times of panic, weakness, and danger.

Human history shows that man, whether urban and settled or nomadic and rural, has continued to worship Allah,

³ For more details, see `Abd al Qādir Maḥmūd, *Al Falsafah al Şūfiyah fī al Islām*, 487 ff.

who provides happiness and protects from misery and misfortune. Though worship was sometimes performed correctly, time and again deviations crept in and distorted the truth.⁴

This ever-present inclination to search for a Supreme Being characterized by perfection points to the indisputable existence of Allah. No sensible man or woman is totally free of such a feeling, regardless of how long it lasts. This psychological yearning is indicative of and evidence for the divine existence. It is similar to saying that a feeling of thirst is evidence for the existence of water, or that the feeling of hunger suggests the existence of food.⁵

Similarly, many signs in the universe guide us toward belief in the divine. Each object, regardless of its importance or triviality, is characterized by marvelous harmony and order. The composition of each object and its location in the universe does not change over time, for the slightest change could lead to a disorder that could destroy life on Earth and in the universe in general. A case in point would be the composition of air. If this were to change, all life on Earth would be in grave danger of destruction. Likewise, any deviation in the movement of the stars and planets from their fixed orbits might lead to collisions that would have potentially disastrous results for all forms of life on Earth.⁶

The harmony and precise order of the universe's components provides cogent evidence that it originated from the wisdom, omniscience, and omnipotence of Allah, who created everything in due proportion. This also applies to the

⁴ For more details on man's inherent religiosity and the argument that Allah's existence is necessarily rather than deductively realized, see `Abd al Majīd al Najjār, *al `Aql wa al Sulūk fī al Bunyah al Islāmīyah*, 9 ff; and Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al Zarqān, *Fakhr al Dīn al Rāzī*, 183-84.

⁵ See Descartes, *Ta'ammulāt fī al Falsafah*, 113 ff.

⁶ On harmony in the universe, see Chrisy Morrison, *al `Ilm Yad`u li al Īmān*.

human soul: “Soon will We show them Our signs in the [furthest] regions [of the Earth] and in their own souls until it becomes manifest to them that is the Truth (*Fuṣṣilat*: 53).”⁷

Allah, whose existence is realized by one’s *fiṭrah*⁸ and manifested in the universe’s signs, harmony, and precision, is characterized by absolute perfection. Human souls yearn for His protection. He is totally distinct from everything else in nature or qualities, for only He is not characterized by deficiency and imperfection. There is nothing like Him. He is not subject to the laws of space, time, and movement. His very nature cannot be understood by human reason, which depends on senses, analogies, and comparisons.

All human qualities (e.g., power, will, knowledge, hearing, sight, power of speech, etc.) are illustrated in their divine perfection within the all-inclusive quality of Allah’s *waḥdanīyah* (oneness). This *waḥdanīyah*, the antithesis of pluralism and similitude, also points to His uniqueness in embodying all perfect qualities. As it is intertwined in all divine-pertinent domains, it is addressed extensively in the Qur’an and *Ḥadīth*. The revealed statements related to *waḥdanīyah* outnumber those related to any other divine quality, even those related to divine existence. Such an emphasis indicates the significance that the Islamic doctrinal matrix accords to this quality.

⁷ See Waḥīd al Dīn Khān, *al Islām Yataḥaddā*, 53 ff; Muḥammad Bāqir al Ṣadr, *Mūjaz fī Uṣūl al Dīn*, 22 ff; Muḥammad Ḥassan Āl Yā Sīn, *Allāh bayn al Fiṭrah wa al Dalīl*, 12 ff; and al Būṭī, *Kubrā al Yaḳīniyāt al Kawnīyah*, 81 ff.

⁸ *Fiṭrah*: The primordial nature of man, which includes an assertion by each pre-created individual that Allah is his or her Master. According to Islamic belief, each individual is created good and is then led astray (or not) by his or her surrounding community. This is in stark contrast with Christian belief, which claims that man is created as a fallen, and therefore prone to evil, creation.

In the pre- and post-Islamic eras, different forms of deviation from monotheism were seen. Pagans, Jews, and Christians did not argue about divine existence, but deviated from monotheism. Different levels of misunderstanding of the true meaning and dimensions of monotheism existed even among Muslims. The concept was sometimes reduced to a theoretical belief without practical implications, and at other times was confused with different types of similitudes, homology, and incarnation.

Monotheism also involves the domination and management of the universe, for it is an all-encompassing concept stating that Allah alone created the universe from non-existence. Thus, the law of causality is no more than a divine law according to which things are generated: “Say: ‘Allah is the Creator of all things; He is the One; the Supreme and Irresistible’” (*al Ra`d*: 16). The universe’s harmony and precise proportions prove the correctness of monotheism, as consistency in style is proof of one author: “No want of proportion will you see in the Creation of the Most Gracious” (*al Mulk*: 3); and “Not but for just ends and for a term appointed did Allah create the heavens and the Earth and all that is between them” (*al Rūm*: 8).⁹

In addition to creation, the universe is subject to Allah. This is seen in the fact that every addition or reduction, every transformation or variance in situation, follows fixed and consistent patterns pointing to the monotheistic God—Allah—who runs the world: “Not one of the beings in heavens and the Earth but must come to the Most Gracious as a servant” (*Maryam*: 93); and “Nay, to Him belong all that is in the heavens and on Earth: everything renders worship to Him” (*al Baqarah*: 116).

⁹ See al Mātūrīdī, *Kitāb al Tawhīd*, 21.

Man, despite his role as *khalīfah* (vicegerent), cannot escape from Allah, the Divine Ruler of the universe. Allah created man, and He alone is omniscient in the areas of human nature, abilities, motives, and needs. Only Allah, the Omnipotent, can establish the life system leading to the realization of human happiness and welfare, and the growth of all individual and collective human domains of life. Therefore, one essential dimension of monotheism is the Divine Ruler of human life. Expressed differently, each human being must comply with the divine instructions, adhere to what Allah has ordered, and refrain from what He has prohibited. Any deviation from this concept is close to *shirk*¹⁰: “But, no, by your Lord, they can have no [real] faith, until they make you judge in all disputes between them, and find in their souls no resistance against your decisions, but accept them with the fullest conviction” (*al Nisā’*: 65).

Oneness in rule requires the oneness of the worshiped Lord, who manages and controls every movement and event in this universe and in human life. As such, both the universe and man are subject to Him and obey Him. While man has been given free will to show obedience, other created beings are forced to do so. Other masters and rulers should be obeyed only to the degree that they adhere to Allah’s instructions. Any deviation from this concept is almost equivalent to *shirk*, which undermines the very concept of oneness.¹¹

¹⁰ *Shirk*: Worshiping other beings or elements alongside Allah. This is commonly seen in polytheistic religions, in which more than one god/goddess or force of nature is worshiped, and in the more materialistic civilizations, whose members worship power, influence, wealth, beauty, and similar ephemeral materialistic manifestations.

¹¹ On monotheism and its dimensions, see al Sayyid ‘Alī Khāminā’ī, *Rūḥ al Tawḥīd*, and Ismā‘īl al Fārūqī, *Jawhar al Ḥaḍārah al Islāmīyah*, 585.

In light of the above, it could be said that divine existence is not the highest cycle of the existence hierarchy¹²; rather, it is an absolutely distinct existence. Divine existence can be perceived by human reason, but the essence of that existence cannot be grasped. This divine existence (Allah) is the source of all beings, and it is to that existence that they are subjected and to which they will return.

Universal Existence

The universe encompasses all non-divine beings, including those non-material and extra-human beings whose natures are beyond human knowledge. Current scientific findings show that the amount of human knowledge of this world pales into insignificance when compared with all that remains unknown. This accords with the following *āyah*: “And He creates things of which you have no knowledge” (*al Nahl*: 8).

The inhabitants of the universe, according to Islam, can neither create nor imitate creation: “Those on whom, besides Allah, you call, cannot create a fly if all met together for the purpose” (*al Ḥajj*: 73). This suggests that the existence of the universe is neither autogenous nor independent, and, as such, that it is not eternal.¹³

Allah created the universe out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) and from a substance that did not exist before the creation:

¹² Under the influence of Platonist philosophy, some Muslim philosophers (e.g., al Fārābī and Ibn Sinā' [Avicenna]) conceptualized existence as a hierarchy of minds, the highest of which is the First Mind (Allah) and the lowest is the world of evil. See `Abduh Shamli, *Dirāsāt fī al Falsafah al `Arabīyah al Islāmīyah*, 227 and 364.

¹³ On the universe's need for the Creator, see Muḥammad Bāqir al Ṣadr, *Falsafatunā*, 10th ed. (Bayrut: Dār al Ta`āruf, 1980), 332 ff; Khān, *al Islām Yataḥaddā*, 53 ff; and Muḥammad Ḥassan Āl Yā Sīn, *al Māddah bayn al Azalīyah wa al Hudūth*.

“It is He who created all things and ordered them in due proportions” (*al Furqān*: 2); and “He is the First and the Last” (*al Ḥadīd*: 3). The above-mentioned *āyāt* point to the fact that everything in this universe, whether the first substance or the substances thereafter, was created by Allah. Therefore, He alone is eternal.

A misreading of some *āyāt* may generate a false impression that the substance from which the universe is created is itself eternal. Examples of this are: “He it is who created the heavens and the Earth in six days—and His throne was over the waters” (*Hūd*: 7); and

Moreover, He comprehended to His design the sky and it had been [as] smoke. He said to it and to the Earth: ‘Come together willingly or unwillingly.’ They said ‘We do come [together] in willing obedience.’ (*Fuṣṣilat*: 11)

Asked by the Yemenis about the inception of the observed universe, Prophet Muhammad answered: “In the beginning was Allah. Nothing was before or with Him. Nothing otherwise existed. And His throne was on waters.”¹⁴

It is highly probable that the false impression referred to earlier was caused by a misreading of the above two *āyāt* and *ḥadīth*. It was probably inferred that these statements highlighted the origin of the whole universe, whereas only this observed universe was meant. The Yemenis’ manner of asking their question supports this understanding. They said to the Prophet: “We came to learn our religion and to ask you about the start of this observed universe.” It is obvious that “this observed universe” is only one component of the

¹⁴ Narrated by al Bukhārī in his *al Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:128-29, Chapter: *Bāb al Khalq*, Section: Exegesis of *Āyah*: It is He Who Initiates the Creation ... It was also narrated by al Bukhārī in 9:152, Chapter: *al Tawḥīd*, Section: His Throne Was on Water.

whole universe, which began from time immemorial and underwent many changes.¹⁵

Understanding how this universe was created is not essential to belief in Islam. However, the Qur'an suggests that this universe underwent, by Allah's will, several stages of development until it took this observed state. It asks:

Do not the unbelievers see that the heavens and the Earth were joined together as one unit of creation before We clove them asunder? (al Anbiyā': 30)

A similar idea is referred to in *Fuṣṣilat*: 11:

Moreover He comprehended to His design the sky and it had been [as] smoke. He said to it and to the Earth: 'Come together willingly or unwillingly.' They said: 'We do come [together] in willing obedience.'

Likewise *al Fāṭir*: 1 states: "He adds to creation as He pleases. For Allah Has power over all things."¹⁶

Divine wisdom and perfection necessitate that creation be purposeful: "Not for [idle] sport did We create the heavens and the Earth and all that is between" (*al Anbiyā'*: 16). The purpose is explicitly stated in the Qur'an: The universe was furnished in such a way that man can undertake his role of *khilāfah* and perform the worship for which he was created: "I have only created jinns and men that they may serve Me" (*al Dhāriyāt*: 56). Worship of Allah, therefore, is the purpose.¹⁷

¹⁵ Abū al Wafā' Ghunaymī al Taftāzānī, *al Insān wa al Kawn fī al Islām*, 43 ff. See also Anonymous, *Sharḥ al Taḥāwīyah*.

¹⁶ Ibid. See also `Abd al Ḥalīm `Abd al Raḥmān Khidr, *al Zawāhir al Jugrafiyah bayn al `Ilm wa al Qur'ān*, 66.

¹⁷ Different views exist on why Allah created the universe. Some hold that the question itself is invalid. Others provide different answers, the most acceptable of which is given above. See Abū Maṣṣūr al Māturīdī, *Kitāb al Tawḥīd*, 96 ff.

Having been created by Allah, the universe is characterized by uniformity, order, and purposefulness. Uniformity is seen in the creation's composition and setup. Variant and abundant as the creation may appear, all of its members are composed from the same essential elements. The existence of common elements in man, other creatures, and soil are a case in point: "O man, if you have a doubt about the resurrection, [consider] that We created you out of dust" (*al Ḥajj*: 5). Another aspect of unity is the paired nature of created objects: "And of everything We have created pairs that you may receive instruction" (*al Dhāriyāt*: 49).

Interdependence, the concept that the survival of one creature depends on the existence of other creatures, is another feature of unity. Likewise, the extinction of some creatures may lead to the utter destruction of the whole universe: "We made out of water every living thing" (*al Anbiyā'*: 30).

Another display of unity is seen in the mobile nature of things. Though appearing still on the surface, mountains are forever moving: "You see the mountains and think them firmly fixed, but they shall pass away as the clouds pass away" (*al Naml*: 88). Other cosmic elements do not escape this law:

It is not permitted for the sun to catch up with the moon, nor can the night outstrip the day: each [just] swims along in [its own] orbit [according to law]. (*Yā Sīn*: 40)

Furthermore, it is assumed that there is a firm order in this world. Events are interlinked, for whether in cosmic bodies or in living things, there are regularities that hold across time and place. This reality indicates the existence of various *sunan* (divine fixed laws):

He brings forth thereby herbage of various hues; and then it withers. You will see it grow yellow. Then He makes it dry up and crumble away (*al Zumar*: 21)

and “But no change will you find in God’s way [of dealing]: No turning shall you find in God’s way [of dealing]” (*Fāṭir*: 43).¹⁸

This universe’s purposefulness is manifested in the marvelous harmony observable among its beings. Every created being plays a role that complements the roles undertaken by other beings, just as a large piece of machinery can function only when smaller pieces work together to contribute to the ultimate performance of the entire machine. “Not for [idle] sport did We create the heavens and the Earth and all that is between” (*al Anbiyā’*: 16). Therefore, any uncertainty or vanity is excluded. Probably we cannot realize the real nature of the ultimate aim toward which this universe, as a whole, is geared. However, the interaction and integration among its different inhabitants at least reveal some partial aims.¹⁹

Human Existence

Human beings are part of this universe, despite the fact that each individual is a unique being distinguished from others by physique, position, and role. An elaboration follows:

The Creation of Man. The design of man’s physique and the details of his role preceded, in Allah’s knowledge, man’s creation:

Behold, your Lord said to the angels: ‘I will create a vicegerent on Earth’; they said: ‘Will You place upon it one who will make mischief therein and shed blood?’ (*al Baqarah*: 30).²⁰

¹⁸ Muḥammad al Mubārak, *Nizām al Islām: al ‘Aqīdah wa al ‘Ibādah*, 41 ff. See also al Najjār, *al ‘Aql wa al Sulūk*, 39, 74.

¹⁹ Khāmina’i, *Rūḥ al Tawḥīd*, 11.

²⁰ This is a remarkable departure from philosophies that man’s existence preceded human nature. Such arguments seek to relieve man of any prior task, to exclude any authority other than man himself. Existentialism is the most prominent philosophy to advance such a viewpoint.

It is not unlikely that the universe, as a whole, and the beings therein have undergone many stages of development and change until both reached their present image. However, the Qur'an suggests that the first man, Adam, was created in his entirety from the very beginning and did not develop from animal strains of lower position in the hierarchy of beings: "We have indeed created man in the best of molds" (*al Tīn*: 4). Also relevant in this instance is *al Baqarah*: 15:29 and 38:72, which refer to man by his functional name of *khalīfah* and state that man was created in his entirety—a clear refutation of Darwin's Theory of Evolution. The story of human creation is narrated as follows:

Behold, your Lord said to the angels: "I am about to create man from clay. When I have fashioned him [in due proportion] and breathed into him of My spirit, fall down in obeisance to him." So the angels prostrated themselves, all of them together. Not so Iblīs: he was haughty and became one of those who reject faith (*Ṣād*: 71-74).

The creation of Adam is also likened to the creation of Jesus: "The similitude of Jesus before Allah is as that of Adam. He created him from dust, then said to him: 'Be,' and he was" (*Āl Imrān*: 59). Both the creation of Adam and Jesus include an element of surprise; it is a departure from the familiar law of causality. Both incidents suggest that man was created in his entirety, and that human beings were molded and qualified for their role from the very beginning.²¹

²¹ For a discussion of Darwin's Theory of Evolution, see Muḥammad Ḥassan Āl Yā Sin, *al Insān bayn al Khalq wa Taṭawwūr*; Munīrah al Ghayātī, *Madhab al Nushū' wa al Irṭiqā' fī Muwājahāt al Dīn*; Yaḥyā Ḥāshim Farghal, *Naqd Naẓariyāt al Taṭawwūr al Ḥayawī 'inda Darwin wa Atbā'uh*; and Maurice Bucaille, *Mā Aṣl al Insān?* (Riyadh: The Arab Educational Bureau for the Gulf States, 1985).

Given the fact that Allah's acts are not purpose-free, is it possible to infer the purpose beyond the creation of man? We read: "I have only created jinns and man that they may serve Me" (*al Dhāriyāt*: 56). According to this *āyah*, the purpose of creation is for man to worship Allah. This entails a human being's free choice to submit to and obey the will of Allah. Other beings do so, but out of force rather than their free choice. The purpose could also be to bestow blessing and happiness on human beings in this life and in the hereafter by providing them with the tools of reflection and comprehension, which assist in human growth, developing the universe, and attaining rewards in this life and in the hereafter.²² The sound doctrinal stance is to believe that man was created for a divine purpose that can be accomplished only by submitting to Allah, which, in turn, qualifies him to receive divine blessing. Nothing useful or practical can be attained by engaging in any further or deeper analysis.

Man and the Universe. In terms of creation and movement, man is a component of the universe, which serves as the stage upon which individual men and women perform their various roles. According to Islamic teachings, the relationship between man and the universe, as well as man's position in the universe, can be illustrated as follows:

The Unity of Man and the Universe. As both man and the universe were created by Allah, they have many things in common. Both were created from nothing by Allah's will, and both will return to Allah: "It is He who created all things and ordered them in due proportion" (*al Furqān*: 2); and "And to Allah belongs the dominion of heavens and the Earth

²² For more information, see al Māturidī, *Kitāb al Tawhīd*, 96 ff; `Abd al Jabbār, *al Mughnī*, 11:92; and Nawfal, *al Raḥmān al Raḥīm*, 31 ff.

and all that is between, and unto Him is the final goal [of all]" (*al Mā'idah*: 18).

Despite man's uniqueness, he shares with animate beings the essential substance from which everything was created: raw dust: "O man, if you have a doubt about the resurrection, [consider] that We created you out of dust" (*al Hajj*: 5). Man also shares the element of water with animals:

And Allah has created every animal from water. Of them there are some that creep on their bellies; some that walk on two legs and some that walk on four. (*al Nūr*: 45)

Along with other created beings, man is subjected to the laws of change and motion, laws that led Prophet Ibrāhīm to believe in the One and Only God:

Have you not turned your vision to one (Pharaoh) who disputed with Ibrāhīm about His Lord, because Allah has granted him power? Ibrāhīm said: "My Lord is He who gives life and death." He said: "I give life and death." Said Ibrāhīm: "But it is Allah who causes the sun to rise from the East. Do you then cause it to rise from the West?" Thus he who [in arrogance] rejected faith was confounded (*al Baqarah*: 258).²²

The Eminence of Man. The partnership between man and the universe does not make them equal, for man is considered higher than any other created beings:

We have honored the sons of Adam: provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favors above a great part of Our creation. (*al Isrā'*: 70)

²² On the unity between man and the universe, see al Najjār, *al 'Aql wa Sulūk*, 73 ff; al Taftāzānī, *al Insān wa al Kawn*, 65 ff; and al Mubārak, *Niẓām al Islām*, 53.

The eminence of man was addressed elsewhere in the story of creation, which suggests that his coming led to a radical change in the position of other beings, who now had to look up to man as the pivot of existence. The significance of other beings is measured by how close they come to man. The prostration of the angels,²³ until then the most honored of all creatures, and the eternal damnation of Iblīs for refusing to prostrate, indicate the level of change in the order of beings in favor of the newcomer: man.

The combination of material and spiritual ingredients in man's make-up has made each person unique:

Behold, your Lord said to the angels: "I am about to create man from sounding clay from mud molded into shape, when I have fashioned him [in due proportion] and breathed into him of My spirit, fall down in obeisance unto him." (*al Hijr*: 28-29)

Thus, in Islamic literature, man is referred to as the microcosm, the core, the kernel, and the gist.²⁴

Man is also favored on the cognitive level, for human beings have the tools that enable them to understand other beings and form a perceptual picture of external (surrounding) objects. External objects, when transmitted to human reason, transform men and women into micro-beings representing the macrocosm. This is one reason why man is the master of other creatures:

And He taught Adam the names of all things; then He placed them before the angels, and said: "Tell me the names of these if you are right." They said: "Glory to You, of knowledge we have none, save what You have taught us." (*al Baqarah*: 31-32)

²³ al Rāzī, *al Tafsīr al Kabīr*, 1:215 and 234 (Tahran).

²⁴ al Rāghib al Iṣfahānī, *Tafsīl al Nash'atayn wa Taḥṣīl al Sa`ādātayn*, 20-21.

Taskhīr (Subjugation) of the Universe to Man. Relevant to man's high standing is the subjugation of the universe to him, in the sense that the universe is prepared to help man undertake his *khilāfah* role. The dimensions, laws, and proportions are set in such a way that human beings can interact with the universe in a positive and productive manner: "And He has subjected to you, as from Him, all that is in the heavens and on the Earth: behold, in that are signs indeed for those who reflect" (*al Jāthiyah*: 13).²⁵

This subjugation is reflected in the firm quantitative and qualitative laws that govern the universe and fit man's abilities: "And He has made subject to you the sun and the moon, both diligently pursuing their courses and the night and the day has He [also] made subject to you" (*Ibrāhīm*: 33). This subjugation also is seen in the blessings and vast resources in the universe that are required to maintain human life. The fertile Earth is a case in point: "With it He produces for you corn, olives, date palms, grapes, and every kind of fruit" (*al Nahl*: 11); and "And cattle He has created for you [men] from them you derive warmth and numerous benefits and of their [meat] you eat" (*al Nahl*: 5).

This Earth is also flat in order to facilitate human mobility on land and water: "And Allah who has subjected the sea to you, that ships may sail through it by His command" (*al Jāthiyah*: 12); and "Allah has made the Earth to you as a carpet [spread out] that you may go about therein in spacious roads" (*Nūh*: 19-20). Moreover the laws governing the universe can be discovered through human reflection.

This relationship between man and the universe points to the divine providence: human beings are equipped to interact with the universe in a way that actualizes *khilāfah* duties, and the unity between man and the universe establishes feel-

²⁵ 'Imād al Dīn Khalīl, *Ḥawlā Tashkīl al 'Aql al Muslim*, 92 ff.

ings of closeness and harmony. Thus a favorable atmosphere is created, one in which human beings can release their potential, to venture and develop the universe. This is a great departure from the atmosphere of tension, fear, and animosity that inhibit and deactivate those potentials. Such an unfavorable atmosphere results in either frustration or crippling struggle.

This belief in man's exalted nature lays the foundation for human potential and encourages individuals to act in ways that lead to their improvement. It also banishes the feeling of inferiority toward the universe (nature), a feeling that led many people to fear nature to the extent of worshipping some of its symbols. Many times, human resources and potential were exhausted in such services and related sacrifices, which are in direct contravention to *khilāfah*. The belief in a subjugated universe generates a confidence and optimism that consider success attainable:

He who has made for you the Earth spread out and has made for you roads therein, in order that you may find guidance. And He who sends down rain from the sky in due measure. And We raise to life therewith a land that is dead; even so will you be raised [from the dead]. That has created pairs in all things and has made for you ships and cattle on which you ride. In order that you sit firm and squat on their backs and when so seated, you may celebrate the favor of your Lord, and say: "Glory to Him, who has subjected these to our [use], for we could never have accomplished this [by ourselves] (*Zukhruf*: 10-13).²⁶

²⁶ `Abd al Majīd al Najjār, "al Insān wa al Kawn fī al Tarbiyah al Qur'āniyah," *Majallat al Kulliyat al Zaitūniyah*, no. 8 (1985): 11 ff.

The Vicegerency of Man is a timely contribution to the debate on Revelation and reason that has always been a central issue in Islamic thought. The book aims to clarify the relationship between reason and Revelation, and to show that far from being mutually exclusive, they both contribute to a correct portrayal of reality.

Rooting his study firmly within the Islamic framework, Dr. al Najjār expounds on the role of reason and the intellect in helping humankind to accomplish the role of vicegerency of man on earth on two levels. Firstly, on the level of understanding the Revealed Text, and secondly, on the level of the application of the divine principles and their adaptation to the realities of human existence through time and space. In so doing, he shows the limits of using solely Revelation or reason in the search for truth, and demonstrates that a reconciliation of the two is necessary to serve the interests and well-being of humankind—which is the ultimate goal of Revelation.

DR. ʿABD AL MAJĪD AL NAJJĀR specialised in *Uṣūl al Dīn* from al Azhar University, Cairo. He has lectured at a number of universities in North Africa and the Middle East, and has written extensively in Arabic.

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