

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يَرْفَعُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ

وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ

**Allāh exalts those of you who  
believe and those who are given  
knowledge to high ranks**

*Holy Qur'ān (58 : 11)*





# MESSAGE OF THAQALAYN

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1. To provide a forum for scholars to make analytical studies of Islamic topics and themes.
2. To advance the cause of better understanding of the Qur'ān and the Ahl al-Bayt's ('a) contribution to Islam.
3. To publish English translations of Arabic and Persian works of Muslim scholars.
4. To endeavour to find Islamic answers to questions relating to the contemporary social, political, and moral problems.

\* \* \* \* \*

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## SYSTEM OF TRANSLITERATION OF ARABIC CHARACTERS

### CONSONANTS:

ء	'	س	s	ل	l
ب	b	ش	sh	م	m
ت	t	ص	s	ن	n
ث	th	ض	z	هـ	h
ج	j	ط	t	و	w
ح	h	ظ	z	ی	y
خ	kh	ع	'	<b>Persian Letters</b>	
د	d	غ	gh	پ	p
ذ	dh	ف	f	چ	ch
ر	r	ق	q	ژ	zh
ز	z	ک	k	گ	g

### VOWELS:

<b>Long:</b>	ا	ā	<b>Short:</b>	ـَ	a	<b>Doubled</b>	ـِـِ	iyy (final from i)	
	و	ū		ـُ	u		ـِـِـِ	uww (final from ū)	
	ی	ī		ـِـِ	i		<b>Diphthongs:</b>	ـِـِـِ	au or aw
				ـِـِ				ـِـِ	ay or ai

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# Globalization from the Shī‘ī Perspective

*Sayyid ‘Abd al- Qayyūm Sajjādī*

*Translated by Dr. Muhsin and Zahrā Shujā‘ Khānī*

One of the most stimulating issues of our times is the relatively new phenomenon of globalization. Stimulating, because of the way in which it has managed to challenge global beliefs and identities. As with all phenomena, the effects and the outcomes of globalization also intrinsically contain both pros and cons for all the main areas of man’s social life (political, economical, and cultural). For this reason, passing any absolute judgement on this issue or speaking of it in terms of black and white would amount to viewing the subject superficially. The polarity within the phenomenon of globalization is mainly in connection with its technological aspects and is rooted in its ideological nature. By employing communication technology, globalization plays the role of a bridge between indigenous and global phenomena, universalizes indigenous ideologies and norms, and leads to a transformation or the eradication of regional or local distinctiveness by universalizing culture and values. On the other hand, in the words of David Hardy, “by

breaking time and distance barriers globalization strips the human society of its identity and brings about a spiritual crisis". This is mainly because this phenomenon holds in its sway all the identity-shaping elements or in other words, time and place, and results in bridging distances and breaking the time barrier.

Keeping in view the effects and consequences of globalization on human societies and owing to the existing conditions of Islamic societies the challenges and conflicts posed to Islamic societies and thinkers assume a greater magnitude. This is due to the fact that whether globalization is considered as a historical trend or a Western project it encompasses the ideals of liberalism, which is the dominant global trend of the contemporary world. Thus, Islamic identity and culture are faced with a serious challenge through the phenomenon of globalization. In other words, it is through globalization that the challenges that religious tradition faces at the hands of Western modernity arise within the masses - raised through a certain special group of intellectuals of society - turning the interaction of the Islamic society with the new phenomena into a concern for Muslims in general and the Muslim youth in particular. Keeping in background the view presented by Anthony Giddens it could be said that if modernity brought about an identity crisis for traditional societies, globalization spread this crisis to the masses and to the vast circle of traditional societies. The question that arises is about how the Muslim thinkers propose to respond to this concern. What is the potential and the prospect offered by Islamic thought and culture in providing new definitions for the "Muslim identity" and "modernity"? Specifically, what prospects and grounds can be identified in the jurisprudential and theological thought (especially of the school of the Ahl al-Bayt) for offering rational answers to the issues that have emerged because of globalization?

This discussion enquires into the potential of the Shi'ah jurisprudential and theological thought in responding to the phenomenon of globalization. Obviously the enquiry into intellectual capacities holds priority over the actual background and problems. The first subject is concerned essentially with a rational approach while the second is concerned with a sociological one. An interesting hypothesis concerning this discussion is that the jurisprudential-theological Shi'ah thought, with an emphasis on normative and rational elements in the religious Islamic understanding on the one hand as well as an emphasis on the dynamic element of jurisprudence on the other, gives us considerable access to answers as regards the concerns of the age of globalization. For this purpose, the contents of this discussion shall focus on the following points:

In order to discover the potential of the Shi'ah political thought a comparison between the principles and the objectives of a global Islamic government – that gets highlighted within the framework of Shi'ah thought as regards the government of the Mahdī (the universally-awaited Saviour) and the social conditions of the time of his emergence – with the principles and the objectives of liberal globalization and the liberal democratic model can provide the answer. According to the belief in the emergence of the Mahdī and his victory over global evil and the consequent establishment of a Divine rule on earth, the failure of all the models formulated by man for a just administration of society will only bring about the grounds for despair, disillusion, and despondency in the contemporary man and will itself pave the path for the acceptance of the belief in Mahdawīyyah (Divine rule on earth through the Mahdī) Thus, we are left with no option but to draw a comparison between the prime objectives and features of liberalism, as the dominating theory for globalization, and the belief in the rule of the Mahdī. For this purpose, we shall study:

The nature and the features of globalization;  
The nature and the features of the global Islamic rule;  
A comparison between globalization and the global Islamic rule.

Throughout this discussion, we shall aim towards establishing that globalization comprises an ideological aspect as well as a technological one. From the ideological point of view, there is a conflicting relationship between globalization and the global Islamic rule while from the technological aspect there is a kind of agreement between them. It is obvious that according to these two aspects the relationship between globalization and the global Islamic rule ranges anywhere between a total conflict and a total alignment and coordination. By distinguishing between these two aspects, we can argue that globalization by nature and origin has evolved through the course of history on the foundations of progress and development and, especially, because of the astonishing progress in the area of communication technology. We could therefore say that globalization is a kind of a hollow model into which any community can pour in its ideas to present to others, no matter how much the teachings of Western liberalism have managed to occupy a dominant portion of this model. Thus, the Islamic society, too, has the opportunity to employ the rationale and the sublime teachings of the Islamic culture in order to satiate the thirsty and despondent human society. However, this desired “elixir” can be offered within the basic framework of globalization.

### **A. The Nature and the Features of Globalization**

To begin with, it needs to be pointed out that there is no consensus regarding the nature and the features of globalization. This is probably natural to quite an extent because here we are facing a phenomenon that is still evolving and has not yet

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reached completion for it to be possible to provide a particular definition or a comprehensive description about it. Three main rationales from three different approaches have attempted to study this phenomenon, viz.: A realistic approach, a liberalist approach, and a radical approach. The first and third approaches believe that globalization is an ancient and age-old phenomenon while the liberalistic approach considers it to be a new phenomenon. Realists like Giplin (1987) and Samuel Huntington (1993) regard the “New Age” as an extension of the cold war period with the only difference being in the form of power play. According to them, there is no major difference between the global politics of the pre and post cold war periods and it is only the arena of rivalry and the form of power play that have changed. Giplin is of the opinion that the game has now taken on an economic form while Huntington believes that the politics of power still continues, with the only difference being that now the positions of the players of the game have changed, and now it is the civilizations that have replaced the government-nations in global politics.<sup>1</sup>

The “radicals” that mainly comprise the neo-Marxists also hold the same views as the “realists” and believe that today’s scene is merely a new phase in the expression of imperialistic ambitions and that globalization is simply a new form of colonialism.<sup>2</sup> However, the liberalists and the individualists have declared the end of the cold war as the ultimate victory of liberal democracy and regard it as a totally unprecedented phase in the history of mankind. According to this view, the end of the cold war is not merely a new phase in human history but it is rather the end of the history and the evolution of human ideology and is the universalization of the Western liberal democracy and the ultimate form of human rule.<sup>3</sup> These writers do not consider the arena of the dominance of the liberal model of democracy as being confined to Western countries and categorically speak of

its universality. This indicates that there is a fundamental process underway to dictate a common evolutionary model for all human societies; or in brief, something like a global human history in order to establish liberal democracy.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, even though Francis Fukuyama does not speak of globalization per se, his theory of “The End of History” serves as the very foundation for globalization.

Notwithstanding the verbal and sometimes the substantial differences in the various definitions of globalization, the common point in all these definitions is that whether we look at globalization as a process or a project, it is indicative of a situation in which mutual relations, interdependence, and mutual influence have increasingly grown to such an extent that the radius of the influence of the political units has crossed national boundaries.

Besides emphasizing the communicational aspect of globalization, Anthony McGraw, enumerates the following features for it, and according to him:

Political, social, and ideological activities will have trans-boundary mutual effects;

The volume of mutual actions shall increase and a new world order will emerge;

The intensity and the areas of communication will increase and time and distances will diminish;

The growing communication will cause new transnational issues that concern all mankind and call for global cooperation;

Intense networks will emerge and limit the national (political) players and reduce their sovereignty and autonomy.

But the question is: With these features what are the chances of globalization? The liberalistic point of view provides an optimistic answer to this question because according to it, globalization is a natural trend that will inevitably encompass the entire world, sooner or later. According to this view, along

with globalization the world will witness the universalization of liberal democracy while the other cultural trends fade away in the face of its formidable waves.

On the other hand, the leftists and the radicals consider globalization as a new version of the imperialistic power play and emphasize it as being a project and believe that globalization will face a number of resistances in the form of labour movements and regional coalitions.

From the Islamic point of view, human ideas and thought are transient and lack stability and permanence and fade away before religious thought. This is because religious thought, owing to its innate potential and capacity and because of the fact that it is in coordination with the primordial human nature, is by far more appealing than human ideas. This, however, requires the presentation of religious logic in an acceptable framework as well as a presentation of the true picture of Islam to the world. Once this is achieved, the world shall witness an Islamic globalization instead of Western liberalism.

## **B. The Global Islamic Rule**

The concept of global Islamic rule is based on the universal approach of Islamic teachings. This points to the fact that Islam is the universal religion that offers a comprehensive programme for the worldly welfare and prosperity for all mankind. The purpose of Islam is in fact the same purpose for which the final Prophet (S) had been appointed and it is the philosophy behind the reality of prophethood whose ultimate goal is the perfection and salvation of humankind. However, in order to attain this ultimate goal, Islam begins with the spread of religious values and, especially social justice, and will continue to do so until the establishment of global justice. Therefore, the foremost objectives of the mission of Prophet Muhammad (S) were the imparting of sublime ethics, the spread

of social justice, and to inspire the human society to strive towards the attainment of fairness and justice. In this regard, the mechanism suggested by Islam in order to achieve these goals is the establishment of a religious rule, the purview of whose government extends beyond national boundaries and is on a global level. The most important features of the global Islamic rule during the period of the reappearance of the Mahdī are as follows:

### 1. The Rapid Progress of Science and Knowledge

According to Islamic Prophetic Traditions (*ahādith*) and religious texts, the social conditions of the period of the emergence under the global rule of the Mahdī - the Imam of the Age - have been described in a way, the understanding of which would only become possible with the spread of knowledge and information technology that is being referred to as “globalization”. It is for this reason that this great and fundamental evolution has been referred to as Divine miracle. For example Imam Sādiq (‘a) has been quoted to have said: “Knowledge has twenty-seven letters and all that has been revealed (to mankind) through the prophets (‘a) comprises (merely) two letters and till this day except for these two letters mankind has no other knowledge. When our Qa’im arises the other twenty-five letters will be revealed and welcomed by mankind in addition to the two letters, so that all twenty-seven letters are made manifest.”<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, as per the above-mentioned *hadith*, the ratio of science and knowledge – both rational as well as natural sciences – that mankind will have access to at the time of the emergence of the Mahdī and what has been available throughout history shall be 25:2. It will be under the umbrage of the progress of science and technology that it shall become possible to establish a global rule throughout the world and all the citizens of the global rule shall gain connection with each other.

Imam Sādiq expresses this matter in the following words: “During the times of the Qā'im, a believer living in the East shall be able to see his brother living in the West and the one living in the West shall be able to see his brother living in the East.”<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, the progress in the area of information and communication technology which is referred to as the most important element of globalization and is known to bridge the gaps of time and distance shall reach its zenith during the time of the emergence of the Mahdī such that everyone will be able to simultaneously receive his universal message through sound waves. As regards this, a Prophetic Tradition mentions: “When our Qā'im rises God will empower the hearing and sight of our Shi'ah (true followers), to the extent that there is no intermediary between them and the Qā'im; they will speak (with him) and hear and see him, while he is in his own place.”<sup>7</sup>

This undoubtedly refers to the technological aspect of globalization which is not in any contradiction with the idea of a global Islamic rule but in fact makes it perceivable in a most logical and acceptable manner. Although the perception of this *hadith* may have raised questions in the past, the advancement in information and communication technology today, has already endorsed its validity and does not leave room for skepticism any longer. It will be within such a society that people with lofty thinking and keen foresight shall be nurtured who will pave the path for the establishment of a global Islamic rule and a just and stable society because the citizens of such a society will endeavour towards just interaction and social relations under the auspices of the rule of the Mahdī and the rationality that shall be the hallmark of the sublime teachings of the age of his emergence.

## 2. Economic Development and Social Justice

Economic development in the form of material prosperity as well as a quantitative and qualitative rise in the standard of living have always been one of the prime concerns of mankind and holds an important place in the socio-political affairs even in today's times. However, on the other hand, social justice, too, is an ideal that the human society has always been chasing besides economic development. If economic development is considered as one of the most important responsibilities of governments, social justice and the establishment of equal opportunities for all the citizens, too, is one of their most important duties. As far as these two matters are concerned, even though the second one has been of more significance, it has hardly been given its due attention. The rich and the powerful have always had exclusive control over economic resources and they continue to pursue increasing their wealth at the cost of adding to poverty in the weak and deprived societies. In spite of the apparent economic development, social justice has been neglected because of the desires and interests of all those who monopolize economic and political power and, therefore, there is hardly any sign of social justice. In a world in which 80 percent of the material resources are controlled by merely 20 percent of the people, it would be a utopian dream to speak of social justice which is the innate ideal of every human being.

However, under the global rule of Islam social justice shall materialize in its absolute form and material well-being and economic development shall flourish for the benefit of one and all. The economic development brought about by the global rule of Islam shall bridge the gap between the rich and the poor and shall discard the north-south boundaries at once. This is the form of development that has been emphasized in the Islamic *ahādith*.<sup>8</sup> According to another *hadīth*, the noble Prophet of Islam (S) has said: "There will be unprecedented economic

welfare in the society of the time of the emergence (of Mahdi, the awaited Universal Savior) and my Ummah (community) will enjoy exceptional resources during the times of the Mahdi. The skies will pour down ample rains upon them and the earth will not withhold the sprouting of any kind of plant.”<sup>9</sup>

The question that arises here is: How will all this unprecedented abundance and progress be distributed? This will probably be the most important merit that the global Islamic rule will hold over the phenomenon of globalization because even if globalization does ensure the progress of science, technology, and even a free economic market, its benefits are and will only be reaped by the affluent people and not everyone. However, under the global Islamic rule, all human achievements and economic advantages shall come to be distributed in such a manner that not the least injustice will be inflicted upon the rights of any individual. ‘Alī Kūrānī mentions in his book that “his (the Mahdi’s) Ummah shall seek refuge in him just like the honey bees seek refuge in their queen bee; he will fill the earth with law and justice, in the same way that it had earlier been filled with oppression and injustice.”<sup>10</sup>

The spread of justice in the global Islamic rule is related with the universal mission of this religion and goes beyond all superficial boundaries. The spread of justice through the Imam of the Age (the Mahdī - May God hasten his emergence) is a Divine blessing that like true Islam, which brought the message of Divine Inspiration, will benefit all of mankind. Therefore, in the same way that the society of the time of the emergence of the Ultimate Savior will be a society of globalization the system of justice of that society, too, will be a global one. The noble Prophet (S) has said: “I give you the glad tidings of (the emergence of) the Mahdī who will be Divinely-appointed in my Ummah when (major) differences and vacillation will be rampant among the people and (who) will fill the earth with

fairness and justice in the same way that it will have been filled with oppression and tyranny (before his emergence) and everyone on earth and the heavens will be pleased and satisfied with him.”<sup>11</sup>

### 3. Global Governance

Another feature of the global Islamic rule is global governance; “governance” in the sense of the fulfillment of the theory of a “global rule” and its actual manifestation in the planning and management of the human society. The idea of a global Islamic rule is not merely a theoretical phenomenon but it is in fact a historical process that gets fulfilled throughout human society and through the establishment of religious teachings. Therefore, under the aegis of the global Islamic rule all the national governments fade away and all superficial boundaries get eliminated.

The noble Prophet of Islam (S) is quoted to have said in a *hadith* that: “My successors are twelve in number; the first one being ‘Ali and the last one, Mahdī... He (Mahdī) will brighten the world with Divine light and his rule will spread to the East and the West of the globe.”<sup>12</sup>

It goes without saying that the concept of a global Islamic rule - which as per the various terms and expressions in numerous verses of the glorious Qur’ān and the sayings of religious leaders is the expression of the superiority of Islam over other religions and the universalization of this Divine religion - will only come to be established under the global rule of the Imam of the Age (the Mahdī - May God hasten his emergence). While explaining the meanings of some verses from the glorious Qur’ān like the one that says: “... *that He might cause it to prevail over all religions, though the polytheists may be averse*” (9:33), a number of exegetes have emphasized that this can only become possible with the

establishment of a global Islamic rule during the age of the emergence of the Universal Savior. Thus, it can be inferred that the global Islamic rule will be accompanied with establishment of the sublime Islamic teachings throughout the world.

Imam Bāqir (‘a) has been quoted to have said: “The Qā’im will become victorious through awe (he will inspire in hearts) that will help him triumph, the earth will voluntarily reveal its treasures to him; his rule will be proclaimed in the east and the west, and Allah the Almighty will make His religion prevail (over all deviated beliefs) even if the polytheists dislike this. No ruin (or wasteland) will remain but will flourish and Jesus son of Mary will descend (from heaven) to pray behind him (the Mahdi).”<sup>13</sup>

### **C. A Comparison between Global Islamic Rule and Globalization**

The features that were enumerated for the global Islamic rule can also be found in the phenomenon of globalization. However, there are some very outstanding distinctions between the two. These distinctions are also indicative of the inadequacy of globalization in universalizing the Western culture of liberalism. A brief comparison between the enumerated features from the viewpoint of the two schools of thought can, on the one hand, highlight the dynamism of the idea of the global Islamic rule and on the other hand, pinpoint the inadequacies of globalization.

#### **1. The Development of Science and Technology**

The most significant feature of globalization is the astonishing progress of science and technology. But the important question is concerning whether the level of human ethics has improved at par with this rapid progress of rationality

or not. This is perhaps the most important distinction between the feature of globalization and the age of the emergence of the Mahdi because during the age of the Universal Saviour, science and technology shall progress alongside intellectual sciences. As a matter of fact, during his age the human intellect and ethics too, will develop and reach perfection, in turn paving the path for the acceptance of the global Islamic rule. There are a number of Prophetic sayings (*ahādīth*) that clearly indicate that during the age of the Mahdī, the human intellect reaches perfection, as a result of which healthy and just human relations become possible.<sup>14</sup> In the society of the age of the Mahdī, the human intellect reaches its zenith and human ethics get perfected leading to friendly social relations, devoid of vindictiveness and jealousy, which are the root causes of all conflict.

## 2. Economic Development and Social Justice

One of the most important challenges faced by globalization is the widening gap between the rich and the poor such that some experts are of the opinion that globalization is a trend that is moving to the benefit of capitalism and towards serving the interests and desires of the rich. This same problem has prompted writers like Samir Amin and Paul Sues to refer to globalization as the new face of capitalistic imperialism especially since even though mankind will obviously experience outstanding development, progress and economic welfare through the process of globalization, these achievements will however only remain under the control of a handful of societies. Therefore, the age of globalization will prove to be, both, the age of booming trade and economy as well as the age of increasing poverty and deprivation for the weaker societies. The astonishing economic inequality during the age of globalization will end up placing all the economic resources at the disposal of only 20 percent of human societies and all their incredible

affluence will only be attained at the cost of the deprivation of a countless number of oppressed human beings.

However, during the age of the global Islamic rule – as per the descriptions provided by *ahādith* – besides material affluence, the human societies will also experience unprecedented justice and equality. In such a society, no one's rights will be violated and in fact all the material and non-material facilities and resources will be equally at the disposal of everyone.

### 3. Global Governance

One of the similarities between globalization and the global Islamic rule is the concept of global governance. If Islam had, from the very first days of its emergence from the age of ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*), spoken of the concept of global governance and universal rule and the elimination of communal, racial, and territorial boundaries, it is only today, following the downfall of its archrival communism, that capitalism is making claims of universalization and speaking of the spread of what it calls the global governance of liberalism and Western liberal democracy.

However, there is a very serious difference between the two. The global Islamic rule, keeping in view its own quintessence of being in tune with the basic human and primordial nature, has very strong subjective and objective grounds for popular acceptance. The acceptance of the global Islamic rule is, on the one hand, rooted in the compatibility of Islamic teachings with the innate human desires and on the other hand, it is rooted in the despair and disillusionment of human societies with the existing schools and systems. The despair and disillusionment that has been caused by the widening cultural, political, and economic contradictions in the liberalistic societies

will growingly prepare the grounds for the acceptance of Islamic teachings.

Therefore, although “globalization” in the sense of a cultural homogeneity and the imposition of the ideology of liberalism will be faced with resistance by the dissatisfaction of other societies, and particularly the Eastern and the Muslim societies, the global Islamic rule shall be willingly welcomed by all mankind. As a matter of fact, from this angle one of the features of the global Islamic rule is its universal and global governance of Imam Mahdi (‘a). It has been emphasized in the *ahādith* that “all the inhabitants of the earth shall willingly give their consent to him and accept him.”<sup>15</sup> It will be a rule that all human societies shall love <sup>16</sup> and accept willingly.

## Conclusion

Taking into consideration the characteristics of the global Islamic rule as well as the elements that constitute globalization the following concluding points can be derived from the foregoing discussion:

1. The global Islamic rule shall encompass such features as the growth and progress of science and technology, the maturity of the human intellect, the expansion of social justice alongside economic development and welfare, and finally the universal governance of Islamic teachings and laws.

2. Whether globalization is considered as a Western project or a natural process and a historical phase, it possesses a few outstanding features the most important of which include the unprecedented growth in the areas of science and communication technology, the bridging of distances and the breaking of time barriers, the expansion of transnational relations, and the formation of international institutions and networks.

3. Some aspects of globalization and particularly its technological aspect can be utilized for a better understanding and perception of the idea of the global Islamic rule. Through the communication technology of the age of globalization it would be possible to universalize the culture and teachings of Islam and to spread the powerful Islamic logic which is commensurate with human nature, throughout the world. It can finally be said that even though the ideology of globalization negates the idea of a global Islamic rule and is in serious conflict with it, it would be possible to utilize its technological aspect as a powerful means for expanding Islamic thoughts and paving the path for the universalization of the ideology of Islam.

### Notes:

1. Rajā'i, Farhang, *International Relations in a Globalized World* and Sajjādpūr, Kāzim, *Globalization: Interpretations and Consequences*, Bureau for Political Studies, Tehran, 2002, p. 406.

2. Suess, Paul, Amīn, Samīr and others, *Globalization for What Purpose?* translated into Persian by Zarafshān, Nāsir, Agāh Publications, Tehran, 2001, p. 7.

3. Fukuyama, Francis, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Free Press, New York, 1992, p. 4.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

5. Majlisi, Muhammad Bāqir, *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 52, p. 336.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 391.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 336.

8. *Ibid.*, vol. 51, p. 68.

9. Kūrānī, 'Alī, *Jāmi'ah-ye Asr-e Zuhūr*", quoting pp. 98-99 from Ibn Hamārah, ms. The Islamic Propagation Organization, Tehran, 2000, p. 364.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Qundūzī, *Yanābī' al-Mawaddah*, p. 431 and *Ithbāt al-Mahdī*, vol. 7 p. 8.

12. Qundūzi, *Yanābi' al-Mawaddah*, quoted from “The Global Rule of Imam Mahdi from the Viewpoint of the Qur’ān and the ‘*Itrah*” Dār al-Sa‘ādatayn Publications, Qum, p. 161.

13. Majlisi, Muhammad Bāqir, op. cit., vol. 52, p. 191.

14. “Allāh will bestow His blessings and mercy upon His servants and shall grant them intellectual perfection such that their ethics gets perfected”, Kulayni, Muhammad bin Ya‘qūb, *Usūl al-Kāfi*, Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, Vol. 5, p. 25.

15. Muhammadi Rayshahri, Muhammad, *Mizān al-Hikmah*, vol. 1, p. 187.

16. *Ibid.* The wording of the *hadīth* is “*Yuhibbuhū ahl al-samāwāt wa al-arz*” (the people of the heavens and the earth hold him in affection)

# **Globalization and Inter-Religious Dialogue**

*By: Muhammad Masjid Jāmi‘i*

*Translated by Zahrā Shujā‘ Khānī*

Globalization and inter-religious dialogue are the two most universal, important, and essential issues of our times. The author has analyzed the topic under discussion in five parts based upon his personal experiences through the course of his active participation in the arenas of inter-religious and inter-civilizational dialogue.

## **1- The Historical Background of Inter-Religious Dialogue**

Although the history of inter-religious dialogue dates back to hundreds and even thousands of years, its present form is a relatively new phenomenon dating back only to the late 1980's and the early 1990's and, thus, in order to be able to perceive the concept of religious dialogue and its dimensions and outcomes, a thorough understanding of the conditions prevalent during those years becomes obligatory.

The most important factor contributing to the phenomenon of inter-religious dialogue was the lacunae caused by the unexpected and rapid fall of the Eastern bloc and its subsequent ramifications. As a result of this sudden change the political and international order that was dominating the world collapsed and various cultural, ethnic, and historical realities that were mainly inspired by the religious legacy of the various communities began to surface.

The changes within the Eastern bloc, and particularly the Balkans and the erstwhile Soviet Union were very extensive, rapid, and crucial. Moreover, the world was becoming increasingly and inevitably interdependent and intermingled, coupled with the exodus of the workforce as well as the large number of migrations prompted by the domestic turmoil and the civil wars in the region. Even those who had migrated to Europe after the World War II exhibited an increasing inclination towards the preservation of their religious and cultural principles and values. This unexpected phenomenon, on the one hand, attracted the world public opinion and gave rise to new political, social, and legal issues on the other.

Another important contributing factor was the emergence and the rapid growth of the doctrine of the defense and the institutionalization of the rights of the minorities within the existing social, political, and legal structures. At the same time, there was also an evident inclination towards an anti-cultural society in the world to an extent that issues like “rights of the minorities” and “multi-cultural society” became the most important concerns of the intellectuals and the political parties.

The global conditions were now different from the more or less stable and static conditions of the 1960’s, the 1970’s, and the 1980’s and everything was on the verge of change. It was under such circumstances that the idea of religious dialogue, whether inter-religious or inter-sectoral, emerged and was

widely welcomed. The scope of these dialogues covered the Semitic religions as well as the various sects of Christianity.

Although there are some followers as well as authorities from various religions who criticize such dialogues and reject them as being ineffective, inter-religious dialogues have generally proved to be quite fruitful and effective. In the absence of these talks the world would most certainly have been facing far more bizarre conditions. The improvement in the very tense and volatile relationship between the Catholic and the Orthodox churches in the early and mid 1990's is to a great extent indebted to such talks. The same holds true for the existing relationships between the followers of other faiths including Islam and Christianity.

Besides, these inter-religious talks were an effective and suitable response to the demands of the masses that were yearning to see their own religious leaders alongside the religious leaders of other faiths. The initiation of these talks served as a soothing and consolatory move for the masses and it continues to do so. And needless to say, these inter-religious talks were also greatly welcomed by the religious authorities since they provided them with the opportunity of meeting with their peers from the other religions and holding talks with them. Following the 1990's, not only were all the obstacles to such meetings and dialogues eradicated but in fact such initiations were even encouraged and supported since these talks practically proved to be very effective in creating and maintaining peace and harmony during those years.

Keeping in view the role and the importance of inter-religious dialogues in today's world as well as the need for their continuation and taking into consideration the volatile global conditions and the grave dangers threatening the world the need of the hour is to make these dialogues more specific, critical, unequivocal, and specialized while cutting out on unnecessary

protocol and sycophancy thereby paving the way for more effectual discussions.

## **2- The Reality of Globalization Calls for Dialogue**

Without any attempt to venture into the definition of the phenomenon of globalization and the factors contributing to its emergence, it needs to be admitted that our world has changed to a great extent and many fundamental concepts like “power”, “domain”, “ownership”, “sovereignty”, and “nationality” have found new definitions, thus, initiating inevitable changes in the meanings of the issues related to those terms and concepts. For instance, at present the level of influence is not in any way commensurate with the level of power and the mechanism of the transformation of might into influence is utterly different from the past and, therefore, it is no more possible to adequately resolve the existing issues and problems through the earlier methods and means.

Under such circumstances, it is of strategic importance in our times to endeavour to find solutions to the existing problems through dialogue. Unlike ever before, in today's world – whether it is the weak or the mighty, the rich or the poor, the developing or the developed – everyone has an impact on the fate of the issues related to the future of our world making it practically impossible to overlook anyone. Thus, keeping this in view, it is logical to come to the realization that the best way to win universal support and cooperation is through the means of dialogue.

From this viewpoint, “inter-religious dialogue” could prove to be a very suitable response to the requirements and the very nature of the era of globalization.

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### **3- Globalization and Religion: The Importance of Inter-Religious Dialogue**

Although the phenomenon of globalization has provided religion with certain opportunities, it has undoubtedly also turned into the most important challenge that has faced religion throughout the contemporary times; a challenge that will prove to be even more extensive and powerful in the years to come. Thus, serious attention needs to be paid to this trend, calling for thought and cooperation in comprehending the nature and the various dimensions of globalization as well as discovering methods relating to it. Inter-religious dialogue is an important step that can undoubtedly come to the rescue of all religions.

It goes without saying that the most important feature of globalization that will in all probability cause the biggest friction with religion is the fact that the very nature of this phenomenon calls for religion to re-interpret itself so as to be able to answer to the calls of the era of globalization.

As mentioned earlier we are today living in a world in which everything happening in one part of the globe inevitably impacts the rest of it and in fact each part of the world plays a significant role in impacting the fate of the rest of the world. This statement has always held true from the theoretical and the philosophical points of view and has today manifested itself into a powerful and tangible reality.

The existing conditions are such that no country or group of countries can isolatedly expect to live prosperously and in absolute security and peace. Our world is practically reaching a stage in which it has to design and implement only such programmes that would benefit all. It is no longer possible or even in the interest of any group to be concerned only with its own prosperity without including others.

As far as religion is concerned the phenomenon of globalization can be explained in these words. We cannot expect

to protect our religion by being concerned merely with the followers of our own faith. However, the same can successfully be achieved if the followers of other religions are ensured the freedom and the opportunity to believe in and to practice their own religions. In other words, in order to safeguard our own religion we need to envision a world in which the followers of different religions will have the freedom to live according to the precepts of their own faiths. An ideal world is the one in which the believers of all religions can remain dedicated to the principles and the fundamentals of their faiths.

Should this point gain agreement, it will provide a great opportunity for multi-lateral dialogues and cooperation, and more importantly, the path will be paved for suitable theoretical and practical interactions among the various religions of the world. To put this in other words, the continuation of multi-lateral talks does not merely call for good intention, and efforts should also be made in order to create the tangible and expandable grounds for it.

Another important point to consider is that religion needs to provide a new interpretation for itself that will prove to be in harmony with the characteristics and the requirements of the era of globalization. This is an extremely subtle and difficult task that will have widespread effects on one and all, irrespective of whether one lives in rich industrialized countries or in the poor or developing ones. It is important to note that even the “advanced” societies of the pre-globalization era were “closed” societies in comparison with the post-globalization times; “closed” in the sense that they viewed and evaluated the world and the others from the viewpoint of their own national or group interests and benefits, irrespective of whether they were part of a small group or a big one, and no matter which religious sect or social denomination they belonged to and regardless of whether

they were part of a large socio-economic bloc or of a wider historical, cultural, and religious unit.

Such an approach will no longer be able to find a place for itself within the realities of the era of globalization and the need of the hour calls for a fresh approach. Religion, too, needs to come up with its own fresh interpretations. Needless to say, the notion of the inseparability of the fates of the various religions of the world in today's times as well as the attempts to strengthen mutual cooperation in order to find suitable answers for the contemporary needs of man will themselves pave the way for suitable grounds for inter-religious dialogue.

#### **4- Inter-Religious Dialogue and Mutual Expectations**

Today, following the developments in the recent months, a lot of talk is going on regarding the issue of mutual expectations, whether it is from the socio-political aspects or from the religio-belief angles. This is an important issue that will continue to persist and it is, thus, vital that the religious scholars first examine and evaluate it, failing which political, social, and even religious tensions could arise and complicate matters further.

There is no doubt that every religion will have to come up with a fresh interpretation, keeping in view the existing realities and needs. At the same time, it is an accepted fact that such an interpretation will eventually prove to serve the interests of each religion, its followers, the followers of other religions as well as the general peace and harmony. However, it is important to take into account the fact that no religion can present an acceptable interpretation on any matter without taking into consideration its fundamental principles and without resorting to an authentic methodology, and in fact a lack of these would never allow the religion to survive or to attract its believers to itself. Every

believer devotes himself to a particular religion because of his faith in its truth and this fact makes it unavoidable for him to reject or even show an adverse reaction to anything that his religion does not consider as valid and does not grant legitimacy to. Moreover, the religious legitimacy of issues and methodologies of every religion ultimately stems from its own internal system and does not rely upon any other external factor.

All great religions of the world possess the essential principles, the capacity, and the means to restructure themselves in the light of new conditions and it is exactly for this very reason that they have succeeded in withstanding the vagaries of time. Thus, our expectations of them cannot and should not go beyond what is demanded by these intrinsic factors. Indeed the foregoing discussion, that has referred only to some important points on the subject, could serve as one of the best and the most practical grounds for inter religious dialogue and could prove to be much more powerful in ensuring global peace and harmony than biased and prejudiced political suggestions.

It is absurd to expect the followers of any religion to perceive, interpret, and propagate their religion according to the demands made by others. Such a thing would be completely unacceptable and would go against common sense, scientific methodology, and even the rationale of dialogue.

## **5- The Grounds for Cooperation**

As mentioned earlier, globalization is proving to be the most important challenge to religion in the contemporary history of mankind. As a matter of fact it is a challenge that faces all religions rather than any one particular religion, thereby calling for a better and closer cooperation among them. However, the pre-requisite to any such cooperation would be a common realization of the dangers that lie in wait for one and all.

The velocity at which the phenomenon of globalization is spreading as well as the focus of the world public opinion on daily political and social issues have diverted the world from probing into the nature of globalization, biotechnology, and everything that is taking place in genetic engineering.

We are currently living a world in which we are left with a much lesser impact on the upbringing and the character building of our children than ever before. They grow in conditions that are more or less cut off from their past history and culture. More importantly, they are growing in an age in which great developments are taking place in genetic engineering. No one can really tell how the man of tomorrow is going to turn out to be.

Notwithstanding the various consequences of the extremely rapid developments that are taking place within the field of genetic engineering, the issue to note is that our legal authorities are gradually losing their say in such matters and it seems that in the near future we will be facing a deep lacuna in this area which is a completely new phenomenon.

The developments of modern history always took place within the legal and permissible frameworks that were in turn formed on the basis of the existing ethical, legal, and normative principles of society. But it seems that our world will soon be facing situations for which the present legal systems will not have sufficient answers.

The fact is that at no point of time in human history had such epoch-making developments taken place. More importantly, never before were the religions so indifferent towards scientific and technological developments. A glance at history clearly reveals that even during the periods in which religion was in a much weaker position as compared to science, it did not shy away from showing its response to scientific developments, whether or not it was accepted. However, in spite

of the fact that today people are more eager to hear what religion has to say on such issues, it seems that in our times all religions are plunged into some sort of negligence or laxity and hold back their reactions. Incidentally, for many obvious reasons today religion has much more to offer and say in this field than anything else.

Inter-religious cooperation in these areas can prove to be of great benefit. New global threats are facing the world today, and thus, such cooperation can on the one hand, provide tangible grounds for scientific and practical cooperation for better mutual understanding, and on the other hand, can help to unitedly withstand the above-mentioned threats while helping to preserve the legal and lawful authority of religion and preventing unchecked scientific development from taking place within a legal lacuna.

Perhaps it would not be out of place to recall a similar cooperation that took place in the mid 1990's. As a result of dialogue and close cooperation between Islam and Christianity, religion could withstand the extremist ideas of the radical modernists. These modernists had demanded a legal recognition of the issues discussed at the international conferences held in Cairo, Beijing, Copenhagen, and Istanbul under the auspices of the United Nations Organization in the 1990's, openly contradicting the accepted ethical and religious principles as well as historical traditions. Not only did they demand the recognition of such issues but they also sought to openly impose them upon society. This inter-religious cooperation successfully managed to bar such moves, details of which however, call for a separate discussion.

# The Relation Among Justice, Unity and Security

*By: Sayyid ‘Alī ‘Abbās Mūsawī\**

We live in a world, which does not seem to be ever tired of talking of the great human values of equality, justice, tolerance and truth. At no other time in human history have these ideals been so widely publicized as at present; only because of the stupendous hold of the media over our minds, and never before were these higher ideals further beyond the reach of the people as in this age.

Today everyone talks about inter-religious understanding and no one denies its importance, if the world is going to survive. Yet today’s world, which with the advent of modern technology and mass communications is rightly named the global village, is tearing apart because of ethnic clashes witnessed everywhere. This is perhaps due to the fact that no one has been able to suggest any practical way for achieving a viable inter-religious understanding to establish peace, harmony, brotherhood and justice among the followers of different religions, as mankind progresses towards the concept of globalization.

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The reason human values seem to appear abstract and unreachable is because there are no living models thereof; men whose every day life would demonstrate the relevancy and value of these ideals in practice; men who, in effect practice what they preach. The world has always lacked them, craved for them and yet when they came to live in it, albeit rarely, it has spurned them.

One such man, who dwelt upon this earth in 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, was ‘Alī bin Abī Tālib (‘a). He was the one who was closest to Prophet Muhammad (S); unwavering and steadfast in times of adversity and tribulation for Islam as well as for its Prophet (S). He was the tangible model of all the ideals mentioned above because of his unfaltering pursuit of justice and the rule of law. His passionate concern for the oppressed, his obsessive respect for knowledge, truth and piety, his untainted humility even while in power and his fortitude and forbearance in the face of adversity, make him a perfect model. These were some of his qualities that helped to bring distant ideals nearer, not only to the people of his time but also to the people of our age.

He was the hero of many a crucial battle in the initial years of Islam for the liberation of the oppressed. Later he also ruled a vast realm – stretching from North Africa in the west to Central Asia and the borders of India and China in the east. He was an excellent father, an affectionate husband, an affable companion to all those who came in contact with him, an eloquent orator, an intrepid fighter, and an able administrator. He thus combined in himself on one hand the personality of a saint, a philosopher and a preacher, and on the other hand of a statesman, a general and an administrator. Underlying all these facts was the most profound and powerful quality of him, i.e. his fear of God and total submission to His will.

As it was mentioned at the outset, there is an urgent need for promotion of inter-religious understanding in the modern

world and Imam ‘Ali (‘a) is one of those religious figures whose qualities are equally revered by different schools of thought.

Over a millennium and three centuries ago Imam ‘Ali (‘a) placed the importance of justice, unity and security in accordance with the wordings of the Qur’ān and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (S) for the betterment of the life of the people all over the world. If the world were to understand, follow and implement these valuable teachings of Imam ‘Ali (‘a), who combined in himself love and affection, judgement and human sympathy, as well as the qualities of the most erudite scholar and writer due to his firm faith and unshakable belief in God, then the society will reach the stage where peace happiness, brotherhood, tranquility and harmony shall definitely prevail.

The most important aspect of the sayings of Imam ‘Ali (‘a) is the emphasis on moral values that enable a person to lead a good life. His teachings focus on the transient nature of human existence on earth that whatever comes must also go. If a person chooses a morally corrupt life, more or less on the level of animals, it will not only degrade him but would also create perpetual tension and conflicts in society instead of unity. Therefore, it is obvious that any one who faithfully carries out the obligation of an ethically clean life, will be very much active in the worldly affairs, and will also be setting a moral example in performing duties and in discharging responsibilities as an honest person not only with his family but with his neighbours and those with whom he comes into contact. These factors will undoubtedly create unity in the society.

There is no better way of knowing Imam ‘Ali (‘a) than through the great anthology of his sermons, speeches, aphorisms and letters, collected by various early scholars since his lifetime and culminating more than a thousand years ago in the immortal

book *Nahj al-Balāghah* (Highway of Eloquence), the compilation of the celebrated scholar Sayyid al-Razī.

*Nahj al-Balāghah* is not the word of a saint confined to the solitude of a hut, hermitage or an ivory tower. It is the work of a man who from the age of ten had participated actively in Islam's struggles against tyranny, inequality, ignorance and superstition. Thus the basic aim of both the Holy Qur'ān and the *Nahj al-Balāghah* lies in granting the individual a pure, pristine, progressive and perfectly balanced view of life in the context of unity and security which are the social aspects for refining and activating human traits in implementing justice.

The sayings of Imam 'Ali ('a) in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, i.e. the message of love, sympathy, friendship and unity, have acquired eternal meanings, perennial greatness and universal truthfulness in complete harmony and co-ordination with the urges of the changing life style of every age and era.

For instance in Sermon 208 Imam 'Ali ('a) states:

“What you will do with this vast house in this world? If you want to take it to the next world, you should entertain guests in it and be regardful of kinship and discharge all obligations according to their accrual. In this way you will be able to take it to the next world”

How wonderfully Imam 'Ali ('a) has shown the way to create bonds of innate human unity between the common and needy persons and the wealthy and affluent people.

The *Nahj al-Balāghah* is a book in which both the unities, i.e. religious unity and the unity of mankind, have been emphasized for shaping solidarity and harmony between human beings all over the world, in view of the fact that unity which is the basic fundamental as well as an inherent part of mankind's nature, is more precious than the differences which are just superficial and subsidiary. Therefore, the intellectuals and legal experts should avoid such aspects which are controversial and

should try to bring to light views that are agreeable and harmonial for unity, because, God is not *Rabb al-Muslimīn* (the Sustainer of Muslims) but He is *Rabb al-'Alamīn*, that is, the Sustainer of the entire universe. In other words as per the instructions of Imam 'Alī ('a) to Mālik Ashtar, his governor of the then Christian-majority Egypt, the entire mankind is one big and extended family – despite the tribes, ethnic and lingual groups, and creeds that it has split into.

The Christian sociologist, George Jordac, has written a number of books on Imam 'Alī ('a) including *The Voice of Human Justice*, which shows that the sayings of Imam 'Alī ('a) in the *Nahj al-Balāghah* regarding implementation of justice are guidelines for understanding the concept of unity among mankind.

In *Nahj al-Balāghah* the Imam's famous epistle to Mālik Ashtar is a universal message to help resolve the problems of the people of the world in general and of political leaders in particular.

The person who was the greatest scholar of Divine Law and acted upon it more than anyone else – besides his cousin the Prophet (S) – drafted this epistle, rightly called the blueprint of Islamic policy. From a study of Imam 'Alī's ('a) way of governance, as spelled out in its contents, it can be concluded that his aim was only the enforcement of Divine Law and improvement of social conditions and not to disrupt public security or to fill the treasury through plunder, or to strive to extend the political boundaries by fair means or foul. Worldly governments generally adopt constitutions that cater to their narrow interests and they try to change every law deemed injurious to their objects through the so-called constitutional amendments. But every article of the constitution spelled by Imam 'Alī ('a) serves as a custodian of the common interests of mankind and a protector of the collective organization. Its

enforcement has no touch of selfishness or an iota of self-interest. It contains basic principles such as fulfillment of Allah's obligations and protection of human rights without distinction of religion or community – as well as the superficial barriers of colour, class, language and ethnicity. It embodies care of the destitute and the poor and provisions of succour for the low and the down-trodden from which full guidance can be had for the promotion of right and justice, establishment of peace, unity, and security and the prosperity and well being of the people. In outlining the procedure of justice Imam 'Ali's ('a) epistle to Ashtar could be called the highest example of secularism (if this much bandied about term is applied in its correct sense without bias against religious beliefs). He means to say: All the people are like you either in creation by God or brothers in religion. Elaborating on this point, the Imam says:

“Do justice for (the sake of) Allah and do justice towards the people, as against yourself, your near ones and those of your subjects for whom you have a liking, because if you do not do so you will be oppressive, and when a person oppresses the creatures of Allah then, instead of His creatures, Allah becomes his opponent...Nothing is more inductive of the reversal of Allah's bounty or for the hastening of His retribution than continuance in oppression...”<sup>1</sup>

As is clear, Imam 'Ali ('a) considered all human beings equal, a dynamic factor that presents the formula of unity. This could be considered a unique concept for forming governments to rule with justice and to create security and solidarity. The last and the highest form of justice and righteousness is the one that benefits the community as a whole and as a consequence the entire mankind. The Holy Qur'ān, itself the symbol of this highest phase of justice and righteousness, addresses the entire mankind irrespective of belief, since (as pointed out earlier in this article) God is not *Rabb al Muslimīn* but *Rabb al-'Alamīn*.

According to Imam ‘Ali (‘a) if the actions of a governor follow passions he would be greatly hampered in implementing justice, therefore it is better to keep the heart away from passions “and to refrain it at the time of their rise, because the heart leads towards evil unless Allah has mercy... So, control your passions and check your heart from doing what is not lawful for you, because checking the heart means detaining it just half way between what it likes and the dislikes.”<sup>2</sup>

From the contents of *Nahj al-Balāghah* we discover divine views and practical solutions for the terrestrial problems and dedicated ways of achieving unity and security by implementing justice in society, for which Imam ‘Ali (‘a) directed the governor to adopt justice in behaviour with people. He says:

“Habituate your heart to mercy for the subjects and to affection and kindness towards them. Do not stand over them like greedy beasts who feel it is enough to devour them, since they are of two kinds, either your brother in religion or one like you in creation. They will commit slips and encounter mistakes. They may act wrongly, willfully or by neglect. So, extend to them your forgiveness and pardon in the same way as you would like Allah to extend His forgiveness and pardon to you. Because you are over them and your responsible Commander (Imam) is over you, while Allah is over him who has appointed you. He (Allah) has sought you to manage their affairs and has tried you through them.”<sup>3</sup>

In his endeavours to give practical shape to justice in society, Imam ‘Ali (‘a) says:

“Do not regret on forgiving or be proud of punishing. Do not act hastily during anger if you can find escape from it. Do not say: ‘I have been given authority, I should be obeyed when I order,’ because it engenders confusion in the heart, weakens religion and takes one near ruin.”<sup>4</sup>

He further advises his governor by saying:

“The way most desired by you should be that which is the most equitable for the right, the most universal way of justice, and the most comprehensive with regard to the agreement among those under you.”<sup>5</sup>

From the above wordings of Imam ‘Alī (‘a) one can realize the essence of distributive justice and humanistic approach for achieving social peace and stability. The evil of favouritism in one way or the other is probably inherent in all systems of worldly administration. Imam ‘Alī (‘a) declares such rulers as oppressors and therefore, exploiters suppressing the ideals of ethics and morality and damaging the cause of humanity. He expresses disgust over the evil practice of oppression through unfair and unlawful dealings and favouritism for a group of people, since the very concept of distributive justice gets lost in such a situation. Only the God-fearing people avoid such oppressive methods and strive to guide society towards what Imam ‘Alī (‘a) has directed Mālik al-Ashtar for rendering virtuous services to all, especially the poor and deprived people.

“No one among those under you is more burdensome on the ruler in the comfort of life, less helpful in distress, more hateful of equitable treatment, more sticky in asking favours, less thankful at the time of grant, less appreciative of reasons at the time of refusal and weaker in endurance at the time of hardships of life than the chief ones. It is the common people of the community who are the pillars of religious power of the Muslims and defence against the enemies. Your leanings should therefore be towards them and your inclination with them.”<sup>6</sup>

In this direction Imam ‘Alī (‘a) has placed the way of what has become known today as ‘democracy’ (the genuine concern for and support by the people, and not the political sloganeering that it has descended into). He has beautifully delineated issues

like striving for the cause of the people, inclination towards them, qualities of the counselors and advisors of the rulers or governor, with the agreement of the common people because as Imam ‘Alī (‘a) says, the common people of the community are the pillars of religion, power of the state and bulwark against the enemies.

For the proper implementation of justice Imam ‘Alī (‘a) says:

“Unfasten every knot of hatred in the people and cut away from yourself the cause of every enmity. Feign ignorance from what is not clear to you. Do not hasten to second a backbiter, because a backbiter is a cheat although he looks like a well wisher.”<sup>7</sup>

Imam Ali (‘a) in his instructions to al-Ashtar cautions against involving misers, cowards and greedy person in the administration since this will create problems in the implementation of justice. To avoid oppression, he advises against the selection of oppressors as ministers and says virtue and excellence of character should be the criteria in this regard for the sake of ensuring social justice.

“The worst minister for you is he who has been a minister for the mischievous persons before you, and who joined them in sins. Therefore he should not be your chief man, because they are abettors of sinners and brothers of oppressors. You can find good substitutes for them who would be like them in their views and influence, while they would not be like them in sins and vices. They never assisted an oppressor in his oppression or a sinner in his sin. They will give you the least trouble and the best support. They will be most considerate towards you and the least inclined towards others. Therefore make them your chief companions in privacy as well as in public.”<sup>8</sup>

The Imam then goes on to outline the guidelines to his governor for preferring the frank, fair and forthright persons who fear God and embody the high ideals of human behaviour.

“Associate yourself with God-fearing and truthful people; then so habituate them that they should not praise you or please you by reason of an action you did not perform, because excess of praising produces pride and drives you near haughtiness. The virtuous and the vicious should not be in equal position before you because this means dissuasion of the virtuous from virtue and persuasion of the vicious to vice.”<sup>9</sup>

Imam ‘Alī (‘a) gives instructions regarding the good behaviour with the people in order to co-ordinate efforts and justice among all classes of the people.

“You should know that the most conducive for the good idea of the ruler towards his subjects is that he should extend good behaviour to them, lighten their hardships and avoid putting them to unbearable troubles. You should therefore in this way follow a course by which you will have good ideas towards your subjects, because such good ideas would relieve you of great worries. Certainly the most appropriate for your good impressions is he to whom your behaviour has not been good. Know that the people consist of classes who prosper only with the help of one another, and they are not independent of one another.”<sup>10</sup>

In his epistle to al-Ashtar, the Imam has also given instructions for just behaviour toward the needy people of the society. He says in this regard:

“Then the lowest class of the needy and the destitute whose support and help is incumbent, and every one of them has (a share in) livelihood in the name of Allah. Every one of them has a right on the ruler according to what is needed for his prosperity. The ruler cannot acquit himself of the obligations

laid on him by Allah in this matter except by striving and seeking help from Allah and by accustoming himself to adhere to the right and by enduring on that account all that is light or hard.”<sup>11</sup>

Compare and contrast this highly egalitarian attitude of Imam ‘Alī (‘a) towards the masses in order to ensure stability, order and security in society on the basis of the fundamental principle of justice. In fact, his instructions are a manifesto for the deprived sections of society and prevention of their exploitation. The social equilibrium for which he strove is evident by both his words and deeds. The gist of one of his famous sayings is that a person happens to be poor because his due has not reached him and has been stuck with the one who is considered rich. Elaborating further on the rights of the lower class, Imam ‘Alī (‘a) tells his governor:

“Keep Allah in view in respect of the lowest class consisting of those who have little means, the poor, the destitute, the penniless and the disabled, because in this class are both discontented as well as those who beg. Take care for the sake of Allah of His obligations about them for which you have been made responsible. Fix for them a share from the public funds and a share from the crops of lands... All these are those whose rights have been placed in your charge. Therefore luxurious life should not keep you away from them. You cannot be excused for ignoring small matters because of deciding big problems. Consequently do not be unmindful of them, nor turn your face from them out of vanity. Take care of the affairs of those of them who do not approach you being of unsightly appearance of those whom people regard low. Appoint for them some trusted people who are God-fearing and humble. They should inform you of these people’s conditions. Then deal with them with sense of responsibility to Allah on the day you would meet Him, because of all subjects these people are the most deserving

of equitable treatment, while for others also you should fulfill their rights so as to render account to Allah. Take care of the orphans and the aged, who have no means nor go a begging.”<sup>12</sup>

Equity and justice must prevail in the society. In view of the sayings of Imam ‘Ali (‘a), as per Islamic principles, the government has to establish a society based on social justice and public welfare. How beautifully Imam ‘Ali (‘a) has spelled out the equality of all citizens before the law. In other words, governments are required to consider all citizens equal in allocation of advantages and in their treatment. All citizens must enjoy the advantages and blessing of the Islamic government in a fair manner, and no one should enjoy a special privilege without any ground. The establishment of justice in society is a practical solution of Islam, which is attractive for the deprived and oppressed masses of the world. The instructions of the Imam focus on the eradication of the deep gulf between various classes, mainly because of the unlawful and illegitimate factors of affluence and deprivation. As such the deprived and poor, who are the most reliable and faithful people of the state, should feel and that there is a serious sincere move towards the eradication of poverty by government officials. According to Imam ‘Ali (‘a), the best measure for establishing justice in our society is the eradication of deprivation from the deprived, the poor, and the low-income classes.

Imam ‘Ali’s (‘a) reference to revenue collectors in his epistle to al-Ashtar, clearly proves that he wanted the poor working class to be happy, satisfied and prosperous. He cautioned revenue collectors against burdening the poor with undue demands. The following passage provides interesting reading, especially in our era when the lands and the cultivators are being wantonly exploited by industrialists, entrepreneurs and politicians:

“You should also keep an eye on the cultivation of the land more than on the collection of revenue because revenue cannot be had without cultivation and whoever asks for revenue without cultivation, ruins the area and brings death to the people, his rule would not last except a little. If they (cultivators) complain of heaviness (of the revenue collectors) or diseases, or dearth of water or excess of water or change in the condition of land, either due to flood or to drought, you should remit the revenue to the extent that you hope would improve their position. You should not grudge the remission granted by you for the removal of distress from them by you, because it is an investment, which they would return to you in the shape of prosperity of your country and progress of your domain in addition to earning their praise and happiness on meting out justice to them. You can depend upon their strength because of the investment made by you with them through catering to their convenience and can repose confidence in them because of the justice extended to them by being kind to them...The ruin of the land is caused by the poverty of the cultivators while the cultivators become poor when the officers concentrate on collection (of money).”<sup>13</sup>

The *Nahj al-Balāghah* is actually an excellent mirror of the state policy of Imam Ali (‘a). In today’s world, when the distance between the rich and the poor is alarmingly increasing with exploitation of the weak and the deprived becoming the accepted norm (despite the fact that administrations fall from power –as predicted by the Imam – because of their indifference to the toilers of land and the weaker sections of society), it is high time for governments to study and sincerely adopt the way blazed out by Imam ‘Ali (‘a) so as to safeguard society from potential discontent, troubles and insecurity.

Imam Ali (‘a) adopted justice as the base of the administration in all spheres including the matters of distribution

of wealth. He never differentiated man from man and always implemented the principles of equal distribution of wealth to provide social justice. He says in this regard:

“The most pleasant thing for the rulers is the establishment of justice in their area and the manifestation of the love of the people, but their love manifests itself only when their bosoms are clean.”<sup>14</sup>

Justice is comprehensive and of paramount importance in the model administration bequeathed to humanity by Imam ‘Ali (‘a). According to him the most judicious way to deal with people is justice and it must be done to all classes. He says:

“Do not attribute the performance of one to the other, and do not minimize the reward below the level of the performance. The high position of a man should not lead you to regard his small deeds as big. Nor should the low position of a man make you regard his big deeds as small.”<sup>15</sup>

Imam ‘Ali’s (‘a) basic direction is the materialization of justice and equity in society by efforts to prepare the ground for all the people to be able to utilize public facilities and wealth in accordance with their efforts. If no one is oppressed, deprived or overloaded, this will undoubtedly develop and promote the rational growth of man and boost even trade and industry. Imam ‘Ali (‘a) has described the qualities of the judge in his instructions:

“For settlement of disputes among people select him who is most distinguished of your people in your view. The cases (coming before him) should not vex him, disputation should not enrage him, he should not insist on any wrong point, should not grudge accepting truth when he perceives it, he should not lean towards greed and should not content himself with cursory appreciation (of a matter) without going thoroughly into it. He should be most ready to stop (for pondering) at doubtful points,

most regardful or arguments, least disgusted at the quarrel of litigants, most patient at probing into matters and most fearless at the time of passing judgement. Praise should not make him vain and elation should not make him lean (to any side)...then very often check his decisions... You should have a piercing eye in this matter because this religion (Islam) has formerly been a prisoner in the hands of vicious persons when action was taken according to passion and worldly wealth was sought after.”<sup>16</sup>

As per the instructions of Imam ‘Ali (‘a) to his Governor of Egypt, Mālik al-Ashtar, the administration of justice is not the duty of the judiciary alone but all organs of governments must also try their best to make the atmosphere of justice prevail in society because justice and equity are more prominent and superior than any other ideal of government. It is a divine obligation to advise offenders through verbal suggestions, first in a polite and rational manner so as to make them understand the folly of their wrong deeds in disturbing the equilibrium of society. Prohibitions should be made clear to them – as part of the principle of *nahy ‘an al-munkar* – and they should be urged to do good – in line with the principle of *amr bi al-ma‘rūf* – so they do good not only due to religious responsibility but to inculcate will power, determination and courage for justice in their own selves. In his epistle Imam ‘Ali (‘a) has also dealt with the need to monitor misappropriation. He says in this regard:

“Be careful of the assistants. If any one of them extends his hands towards misappropriation and the reports of your informers reaching you confirm it, that should be regarded enough evidence. You should then inflict corporal punishment on him and recover what he has misappropriated.”<sup>17</sup>

Imam ‘Ali (‘a) has instructed his governor regarding the rights of the people, and against following a policy of discrimination and nepotism:

“Further, a governor has favourites and people of easy access to him. They misappropriate things, are high handed and do not observe justice in matter. You should destroy the root of evil in these people by cutting away the causes of these defects. Do not make any land grants to your satellites and supporters. They should not expect from you the possession of land, which may cause harm to the adjoining people in the matter of irrigation or common services, whose burden the grantees place on others. In this way the benefit may be theirs but the blame would lie on you in this world and the next. Allow the right to whomsoever it is due, whether near you or far from you. In this matter, you should be enduring and watchful even though it may involve your relations and favourites, and keep in view the reward of that which appears burdensome on you because its reward is handsome.”<sup>18</sup>

To create justice and equity in all departments of his government Imam ‘Ali (‘a) instructs his governor with the words: “As far as dispensing justice is concerned you have to be very careful in selecting your officers. You must select people of excellent character superior calibre and meritorious record”. He further says: “Do not close your eyes from glaring malpractices of officers, miscarriage of justice and misuse of rights otherwise you will be held responsible for the wrong thus done to others”.

The concept of justice for Imam ‘Ali (‘a) is lofty, all embracing and extends even to the domain of statecraft and external relations. This was not a mere idea but was put to practice during his fruitful life, both during his 25-year silence when he was deprived of his political rights by his opponents and the almost five-year rule of the realm of justice that he practically founded as ruler of lands extending from North Africa to the peripheries of India and China. He instructs Mālik al-Ashtar on how to honour commitments even with the adversaries:

“If you conclude an agreement between yourself and your adversary or enter into a pledge with him, then fulfill your agreements and discharge your pledge faithfully. Place yourself as a shield against whatever you have pledged, because among the obligations of Allah there is nothing on which people are more strongly united despite the difference of their ideas and variation of their views than respect for fulfilling the pledges. Besides Muslims even unbelievers have abided by the agreements because they realized the dangers to come in the wake of violation (thereof). Therefore do not deceive your enemy, because no one can offend against Allah save the ignorant and the wicked. Allah made agreement and pledge the sign of security, which he has spread over His creatures through His mercy and an asylum in which they stay in His protection and seek benefit of His proximity. Therefore there should be no deceit, cunning or duplicity in it.”<sup>19</sup>

Imam ‘Ali (‘a) has given more importance to the avoiding of bloodshed, warning of its undesired consequences in the world as well as in afterlife. The pillars of justice are shaken through such spiteful acts. He says in this regard:

“Do not strengthen your authority by shedding prohibited blood because this would weaken and lower the authority, if not destroy it and shift it. You cannot offer any excuse before Allah or before me for willful killing because there must be the question of revenge in it. You may be involved in it by error and you may exceed in the use of your whip, sword or be hard in inflicting punishment, as sometimes even a blow by the fist or a smaller stroke causes death. Then (in such cases) the haughtiness of your authority should not prevent you from paying the blood price to the successors of the killed person.”<sup>20</sup>

It is thus clear that injustice and unjust killing to satisfy the carnal nature of the ruler or the administration creates disturbances and backwardness in society, which in the end

boomerangs on the system. The epistle goes on to extol the virtues of wisdom, forbearance and forgiveness, since the mission of all Prophets was to establish justice in this world in order to achieve peace and prosperity in life and salvation in the Hereafter.

As per the directions of Imam ‘Ali (‘a), the administration’s policies and plans should be directed towards arranging a humane life for the deprived, since a society in which justice prevails is a divine one. It is incumbent on the government to raise the banner of justice and spare no efforts to establish justice, through strong logic, firm reasoning and solid argument. In the Imam’s instructions to his governor, freedom and civil liberties take precedence and this is not possible except on the basis of just measures that have respect for individual and social rights. A careful study and analysis of the epistle of Imam ‘Ali (‘a) will open a door for the identification and completion of the fundamental human rights, because the sayings of the Imam serve as a guide to these rights, their protection and continuance, with justice for every human being. Thus Imam ‘Ali (‘a) was not giving primacy to human consideration but also taking into consideration the ramification of justice and righteousness as a result of implementing the dynamic code of the *sharī‘ah* in a given situation, which is the higher stage of justice and righteousness, and which benefits the entire mankind. According to Imam ‘Ali (‘a) the ruler can obtain the obedience of the people through justice, which cannot be achieved by force and tyranny.

The model administration of justice founded by Imam ‘Ali (‘a) stands as a beacon of light for all aspiring rulers and governments, and continues to be a guiding force at this critical juncture when the cry for peace and justice is more vociferous than ever. Muslims ought to knit ranks in unity and march towards the single direction, that is the solidarity of the ummah

and the rule of religion as directed by the Holy Qur'ān – a book that speaks for humanity as a whole. Islamic solidarity is superior to the unity of a group or a community, or for that matter a particular political entity or a geographical region, because violation of the egalitarian principles of Islam will breed un-Islamic notion, which in turn will create problems not only for Muslims but for other sections of humanity by not following the principles of justice, brotherhood and peace. Unity is thus a cardinal principle of the divine religion of Islam as the message of Islam is justice, unity and security; factors that are remedy to both the short-term and long-term problems of human societies. By fostering the spirit of cordiality and removing differences and duality from among leaders and the common populace, the very valuable and precious asset of peace and understanding is created, which is essential for the harmonious climate of inter-religious dialogue. The culture of self-esteem is only possible on the basis of piety, which in turn is bred by proper cognizance of the purpose of creation and the relationship between the Almighty Creator and His creatures, and this is not possible except by holding fast to the Holy Qur'ān and fearing no one else besides the Merciful God. The settlement of differences that have cropped up among religions and schools of thoughts because of misconstrued perception coupled with vested interests, is vital for realization of peace and harmony. Divine grace and blessing serve as the source of inspiration for building bridges so essential for dignity, independence and collective development of human societies. The dynamic teachings of Imam 'Alī ('a) shed light on this crucial issue for the benefit of the entire world. How beautifully he instructs Mālik al-Ashtar on sending him to a culturally rich country such as Egypt:

“Do not discontinue the good lives on which the earlier people of this community have been acting by virtue of which

there was general unity and through which the subjects prospered. Do not innovate any line of action that injures these earlier ways because (in that case) the reward for those who had laid down those ways would continue but the burden for discontinuing them would be on you. Keep on the increase your debates with the scholars and discussions with the wise to stabilize the prosperity of your areas and to continue with what the earlier people had remained steadfast.”<sup>21</sup>

The Holy Qur’ān clarifies the principle of unity for proximity between the various peoples and followers of creeds, with the mercy of Allah.

*“And remember when you were enemies and He joined your hearts in love so that by His Grace you become brethren.”*(2: 61)

Based on this guideline, the inter-religious dialogue between followers of various creeds ought to proceed in the direction of unity and harmony. On the basis of these very principles Imam ‘Alī (‘a) has given instructions to his governor to give regard even to opponents for the sake of fostering unity, security and peace in order to ensure justice in society. The teachings of Imam ‘Alī (‘a) offer the necessary guidelines for promoting person-to-person understanding when the atmosphere of controversies and disputes is created.

The following sayings of Imam ‘Alī (‘a) in *Nahj al-Balāghah* are food for thought.

“During civil disturbance be like an adolescent camel who has neither back strong enough for riding nor udders for milking.”<sup>22</sup>

During civil disturbance or trouble Imam ‘Alī (‘a) advises the wise against taking sides with either party or group, but when the clash is between right and wrong, it is obligatory to rise up for the support of right and suppression of wrong.

A famous saying of Imam ‘Ali (‘a), reads:

“Meet people in such a manner that if you die they should weep for you and if you live they should long for you.”<sup>23</sup>

Here Imam ‘Ali (‘a) wants the people to adopt high ideals of personal behaviour that attracts other peoples and fosters unity and good will, factors that will not only be beneficial in life but will also evoke good memories after death because of the good done.

On friendship, Imam ‘Ali (‘a) says:

“Paucity of friends means strangeness.”

“A friend is not a friend unless he affords protection to his comrade on three occasions in adversity, in his absence and at his death.”<sup>24</sup>

“Jealousy by a friend means defect in his love.”

“Have love for your friend up to a limit, for it is possible he may turn into your enemy some day and hate your enemy upto a limit for it is possible he may turn into your friend some day”.

The Imam means to say that friendship is deep-rooted in human nature and what is important for a lasting friendship is combination of the head and the heart that greatly helps reduce differences to the extent that even an enemy can become a friend. On the contrary, if fault finding and jealousy were to occur between friends this would widen differences among people and could even lead to enmity. Thus it is necessary to have mutual respect in the interests of peace and security. As per another saying of Imam ‘Ali (‘a): “Health of body comes from paucity of jealousy.”

In the same context the Imam advises people to avoid quarrels for the upliftment of society, and says: “Nearness with the people in their manners bring about safety from their evil.”

From the sayings of Imam ‘Ali (‘a), the most clear way emerges for building peace and security that will definitely lead to inter-religious understanding among the people of different creeds. No doubt, because of this dynamism and charisma in his personality, the Imam has from time immemorial been the object of admiration and even veneration by followers of different religions. If in ancient times the knights of Byzantine, despite their frequent wars with the Arabs and later the Turks (both Muslim nations) used to hang his portrait in their halls as a symbol of valour and magnanimity, today Christian scholars have written excellent books on his multi-faceted traits that inspire the flowering of humanitarian values. Jordac and Sulaiman Kittani are among the names that instantly pop up to mind.

Even Hindu religious scholars in India have admitted that the sayings of Imam ‘Ali (‘a) in *Nahj al-Balāghah* are the unique guidelines for peace, unity, and security for building a just and healthy society that can be panacea for the ills of a world suffering with a myriad of problems. They point to the perfect code of conduct for dealing even with non-Muslims in a most judicious way that he outlined in his sermons and letters for establishing the rule of justice. Former President of India, the Late Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma wrote in his own handwriting during a seminar that “*Nahj al-Balāghah* is a universal message for humanity.” Dr. Sharma said: “Imam ‘Ali (‘a) makes us realize that the world is transient and that we are accountable for our actions. His powerful preaching, so sublime and yet so practical, has a growing relevance in a world of narrow thought and material pursuits.”

Another Hindu minister of India, G. Venkat Swamy said in the seminar on Inter-religious Understanding in the Light of *Nahj al-Balāghah*: “Imam ‘Ali (‘a) is the founder of secularism

as per his saying that in humanity there are two types of people; brothers in religion and creatures of God like you.”

The gist of the message of this article, in view of the Imam’s saying that justice puts things in their proper place and Justice is the general caretaker, the modern world needs to dispense with the improper and unjustified activities that have become the norm. Humanity needs to understand the transitory nature of life and inculcate the value of justice and being just. If mankind were to act upon the Imam’s advice, no bloodshed will take place on this planet. In other words, it is the absence of justice, wholly or partially, that breeds dissatisfaction and more often leads to actions devoid of reason. Then if injustice in any of its form and manifestation, however small in magnitude, stems from the top, it proliferates and leads to greater corruption. Justice therefore demands that we have to be honest not only to ourselves but also with every one else, friends and foes alike. In fact all those around us deserve justice.

If the present rulers of world countries really wish to convert their states into welfare societies and resist superpower pressures, they have no other choice but to build unity and solidarity among the different strata of society on the principle of justice, as taught by Imam ‘Ali (‘a), since then only will peace, security and stability prevail. Not only the epistle of the Imam to Mālik al-Ashtar could be called the finest charter of human rights – more perfect than what the UN has been able to draft – but also the entire *Nahj al-Balāghah* is a scripture par excellence for the guidance of rulers and the ruled alike for ages to come, as the world hurtles towards globalization.

Islam, as the last revealed set of divine laws, thus invites all mankind towards the way of God Almighty. In fact the main objective of the reappearance of Imam Mahdī (‘a) is for ushering in the global government of peace, justice and equity after ridding the world of the divisive nation states and the

arrogantly ignorant super powers who have pushed Planet Earth to the edge of the precipice through their blind pursuit of injustice, tyranny and exploitation of the human race; factors that are preventing human societies to come together on a common platform of dialogue and understanding.

**Notes:**

1. Letter No. 53, *Nahj al-Balāghah*
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.* Saying no. 1.
23. *Ibid.* Saying no. 10.
24. *Ibid.* Saying no. 134.

# Faithless Hearts: A Study of the Qur'ānic Phrase “*Qulūbunā ghulf*” (Part Two)

*Sayyid ‘Alī Qulī Qarā’ī*

## Summary of Part One:

In Part One<sup>1</sup> of this study were cited different renderings from English translations of the Qur'ānic phrase ‘*qulūbunā ghulf*,’ a phrase which occurs twice in the Holy Qur’ān (2:88 & 4:155).<sup>2</sup> These renderings are largely based on different interpretations the phrase has been given by the commentators in the course of past centuries. These interpretations are as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> *Message of Thaqaalayn*, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 9-39.

<sup>2</sup> The Arabic text of the verses is as follows:

وَقَالُوا قُلُوبُنَا غُلْفٌ بَلْ لَعَنَهُمُ اللَّهُ بِكُفْرِهِمْ فَقَلِيلًا مَّا يُؤْمِنُونَ (بقره/88)  
فِيمَا نَقَضِهِمْ مِيثَاقَهُمْ وَكَفَرِهِمْ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَقَتْلِهِمُ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ بَغَيْرِ حَقٍّ وَقَوْلِهِمْ قُلُوبُنَا غُلْفٌ بَلْ طَعَنَ اللَّهُ  
عَلَيْهَا بِكُفْرِهِمْ فَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا (نساء/155)

[1] *Ghulf* is the plural of *aghlaf*, an adjective meaning something under a cover or within a sheath. Accordingly, the statement of the Jews is similar to that of the Arab idolaters, who are quoted in the Qur’ān as saying, ‘*qulūbuna fī akinnatin mim mā tad’ūna ilayh*’ (41:5). Many of the commentators have understood the phrase ‘a heart within a cover’ to mean one that has been sealed and closed to understanding. A “sealed heart” in Qur’ānic idiom implies one which is closed to understanding (cf. 2:7, 5:46, 42:24, 45:23).

[1a] This variant of [1] was perhaps first suggested by Zamakhshari. He considers the adjective *aghlaf*, in the general sense of something within a cover or sheath, to be derived from its specific sense of ‘an uncircumcised male.’ Zamakhshari gives a theological twist to the debate by suggesting that the Jews claimed that the absence of receptivity in their hearts was something congenital, decreed by Divine will—akin to the Christian notion of original sin—for which they were not responsible.

[1b] Another variant of [1], which appears to be confined to commentaries and translations of the contemporary era, is that the phrase expresses staunch loyalty of the Jews to the Mosaic creed. The supposed covers or coverings over the hearts are interpreted to mean “firm coverings which preserve the hearts from any foreign creed that might penetrate them,” and hence they are claimed to be “secure from external influence” and “impervious to any new call or teaching.”

[2] The second interpretation of the phrase, which has existed since earliest times, was based initially on an alternate reading, *ghuluf* (plural for *ghilāf*), in the sense of a cover or receptacle, suggesting that the Jews meant to say that their hearts were receptacles or repositories of knowledge (*aw’iyah lil ‘ilm*). There are three variants of this interpretation which further elaborate it differently.

[2a] According to the first variant, the phrase *'qulubuna ghulf'* means, "Our hearts are full of knowledge and have no need of Muḥammad or anyone else."

[2b] According to the second variant of [2], the phrase means "Our hearts are receptacles of knowledge. Therefore, if what you said were true, we would have listened to you."

[2c] A third variant of [2], found in relatively later commentaries, interprets the phrase as meaning, "Our hearts are repositories full of [divine] truths and precepts, which have been sealed and have no room for what you bring."

Four reasons were mentioned in Part One for excluding [2] from consideration.

[3] According to this interpretation, the phrase *'qulūbunā ghulf'* means, "Our hearts are uncircumcised."

## 6. Circumcision as a Metaphor in Pre-Islamic Scriptures:

The idiomatic and figurative use of "circumcision" and "uncircumcision" as well as that of the adjectives "circumcised" and "uncircumcised" is a recurrent one in the Judeo-Christian scriptures. In Deuteronomy 30:1-6 (NRSV 1989), we read in the conditional promise given to the Israelites:

When all these things have happened to you, the blessings and the curses that I have set before you, if you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, and return to the Lord your God, and you and your children obey him with all your heart and with all your soul, just as I am commanding you today, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, gathering you again from all the peoples among whom the Lord your God has scattered you. Even if you are exiled to the ends of the world, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there he will bring you back. The Lord your God will bring you into the land that your ancestors possessed, and you will possess it; he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors. Moreover, *the Lord your*

God will *circumcise* your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live.

A similar theme recurs in Leviticus 26:40-42 (NRSV):

But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their ancestors, in that they committed treachery against me and, moreover, that they continued hostile to me—so that I, in turn, continued hostile to them and brought them into the land of their enemies—if *then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity*, then will I remember my covenant with Jacob; I will remember also my covenant with Isaac and also my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.

In Jeremiah 4:4 (NRSV) the Israelites are warned in these words:

*Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, remove the foreskin of your hearts*, O people of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, or else my wrath will go forth like fire, and burn with no one to quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

As can be inferred from these passages, an “uncircumcised heart” is one which is devoid of the life of faith, a heart that has been rendered unresponsive and “unclean” for defying the call to live in accordance with the will of God, a heart which has hardened and become defiant and arrogant due to disobedience or absence of faith. In the following passages, the literal and metaphorical senses occur side by side:

Egypt, Judah, Edom, the Ammonites, Moab, and all those with shaven temples who live in the desert. For all these nations are uncircumcised, *and all the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart*. (Jeremiah 9:26)

In admitting foreigners, *uncircumcised in heart and flesh*, to be in my sanctuary, profaning my temple when you offer to me my food, the fat and the blood. You have broken my covenant with all your abominations. (Ezekiel 44:7)

Thus says the Lord God: No foreigner, *uncircumcised in heart and flesh*, of all the foreigners who are among the people of Israel, shall enter my sanctuary. (Ezekiel 44:9)

By analogy, an “uncircumcised” ear is one which is unresponsive and deaf to the call of faith:

To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? Behold, *their ear is uncircumcised*, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it. (Jeremiah 6:10, KJV)

You stiff-necked people, *uncircumcised in heart and ears*, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do. (Acts 7:51, NRSV)

The adjective “uncircumcised” appears to have had other figurative meanings as well. Thus a poor speaker is referred to as one with “uncircumcised lips,”<sup>3</sup> and “uncircumcised fruits”<sup>4</sup> are those which are either “forbidden” or are to remain unharvested.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> There are two occurrences of this:

(1) And Moses spake before the Lord, saying, Behold, the children of Israel have not hearkened unto me; how then shall Pharaoh hear me, who am of uncircumcised lips? (Exodus 6:12, KJV)

NRSV renders this as follows:

But Moses spoke to the Lord, "The Israelites have not listened to me; how then shall Pharaoh listen to me, poor speaker that I am?"

(2) And Moses said before the Lord, Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips, and how shall Pharaoh hearken unto me? (Exodus 6:30, KJV)

NRSV renders this as follows:

But Moses said in the Lord's presence, "Since I am a poor speaker, why would Pharaoh listen to me?"

<sup>4</sup> And when ye shall come into the land, and shall have planted all manner of trees for food, then ye shall count the fruit thereof as uncircumcised: three years shall it be as uncircumcised unto you: it shall not be eaten of.

## 7. The Idiom “uncircumcised heart” in Islamic Literature:

The phrase “*al-qalb al-aghalaf*” does occur, though rarely, in Prophetic ḥadīth and traditional literature. In a tradition of the Prophet (S) reported on the authority of Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī, “*al-qalb al-aghlaf*,” an “uncircumcised heart,” is said to be the heart of an infidel or someone devoid of faith (*kāfir*).<sup>6</sup> Ṭabarī also cites a similar report under 2:88 on the authority of Ḥudhayfah, and his purpose is to lend support to [1] as against [2] and the reading associated with the latter interpretation. Other commentators have likewise mentioned this report on the authority of Abū Sa‘īd or Ḥudhayfah,<sup>7</sup> but none of them seems to be aware of the Judaic

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(Leviticus 19:23, KJV) NRSV renders this as follows: When you come into the land and plant all kinds of trees for food, then you shall regard their fruit as forbidden; three years it shall be forbidden to you, it must not be eaten.

<sup>5</sup> The exact meaning appears to be somewhat uncertain in this case. A Hebrew-English dictionary gives following meanings for ‘*arel*, the Hebrew for “uncircumcised:”

Ire[’arel {aw-rale} 1) to remain uncircumcised, count uncircumcised, count as foreskin 1a) (Qal) 1a1) to regard as uncircumcised 1a2) to remain unharvested (fig.) 1b) (Niphal) to be counted as uncircumcised.

<sup>6</sup> The text of the tradition (*Musnad Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, ḥadīth no. 10705), which mentions four kinds of hearts, is as follows:

عَنْ أَبِي الْبَخْتَرِيِّ عَنْ أَبِي سَعِيدٍ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ الْقُلُوبُ أَرْبَعَةٌ قَلْبٌ أَجْرَدٌ فِيهِ مِثْلُ السَّرَاجِ يُزْهِرُ وَقَلْبٌ أَغْلَفٌ مَرْبُوطٌ عَلَى غَلَاظِهِ وَقَلْبٌ مَنكُوسٌ وَقَلْبٌ مُصْفَحٌ فَأَمَّا الْقَلْبُ الْأَجْرَدُ فَقَلْبُ الْمُؤْمِنِ سَرَّاجُهُ فِيهِ نُورُهُ وَأَمَّا الْقَلْبُ الْأَغْلَفُ فَقَلْبُ الْكَافِرِ وَأَمَّا الْقَلْبُ الْمَنكُوسُ فَقَلْبُ الْمُنَافِقِ عَرَفَ نَمُّهُ الْكُفْرَ وَأَمَّا الْقَلْبُ الْمُصْفَحُ فَقَلْبٌ فِيهِ إِيمَانٌ وَنِفَاقٌ فَمِثْلُ الْإِيمَانِ فِيهِ كَمِثْلِ الْبَقَلَةِ يَمُدُّهَا الْمَاءُ الطَّيِّبُ وَمِثْلُ النِّفَاقِ فِيهِ كَمِثْلِ الْقُرْحَةِ يَمُدُّهَا الْقَيْحُ وَالِدَّمُ فَأَيُّ الْمَدَّتَيْنِ غَلَبَتْ عَلَى الْأُخْرَى غَلَبَتْ عَلَيْهِ.

<sup>7</sup> While citing Ḥudhayfah’s report, al-Suyūṭī states that it has also been cited by Ibn Abī Shaybah (presumably in his *Muṣannaḥ*) and Ibn Abī al-Dunyā in his *Kitāb al-Ikhlāṣ*. According to Shawkānī, Ibn Abī Ḥāṭim also

background of the phrase as a Biblical idiom.<sup>8</sup> The Arabic lexicographers refer to the Qur'ānic phrase and the Prophet's tradition about four kinds of hearts, but their statements do not go beyond the commentators' understanding of the phrase.<sup>9</sup>

The phrase also occurs in another tradition cited by Bukhārī, Dārimī and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, where the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) is said to be described in earlier scriptures as someone who “will open blind eyes, deaf ears and *ghulf* hearts” with the teaching of *tawḥīd*, i.e. There is no god except Allah.<sup>10</sup> The opening of “*ghulf*

quoted a similar report on the authority of Salmān al-Fārisī.

<sup>8</sup> Although, like Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr (*Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Aẓīm*, Riyāḍ: Dār Ṭayyibah, 1418/1997, under 2:88) and other commentators (like the authors of *Tafsīr al-Furqān* and *Tafsīr al-Bashā'ir wa Tanwīr al-Baṣā'ir*) cite Ḥuḍayfah's report mentioning *al-qalb al-aghlaf*, they do not seem to be aware of the phrase as a Biblical idiom.

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-'Arūs*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ḥijāzī, Beirut: al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1408/1987, vol. 24, pp. 224-225, under *gh.l.f.*

<sup>10</sup> The tradition cited by Bukhārī (*Ṣaḥīḥ*, ḥadīth no. 1981) is as follows;

«حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ سَنَانَ حَدَّثَنَا فُلَيْحٌ حَدَّثَنَا هِلَالٌ عَنْ عَطَاءِ بْنِ يَسَارٍ قَالَ لَقِيتُ عَبْدَ اللَّهِ بْنَ عَمْرٍو بْنِ الْعَاصِ... قُلْتُ أَخْبِرْنِي عَنْ صِفَةِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ (ص) فِي التَّوْرَةِ قَالَ أَجَلٌ وَاللَّهِ إِنَّهُ لَمَوْصُوفٌ فِي التَّوْرَةِ بِبَعْضِ صِفَتِهِ فِي الْقُرْآنِ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ شَاهِدًا وَمُبَشِّرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَحَرِيزًا لِلْأَمِينِ أَنْتَ عَبْدِي وَرَسُولِي سَمَّيْتُكَ الْمُتَوَكَّلَ لَيْسَ بِفَسْطٍ وَلَا غَلِيظٍ وَلَا سَخَّابٍ فِي الْأَسْوَاقِ وَلَا يَدْفَعُ بِالسَّيِّئَةِ السَّيِّئَةَ وَلَكِنْ يَعْغُو وَيَغْفُو وَلَنْ يَقْبِضَهُ اللَّهُ حَتَّى يُقِيمَ بِهِ الْعِلْمَةَ الْعَوَجَاءَ بَأَنْ يَقُولُوا لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَيَفْتَحَ بِهَا أَعْيُنًا عَمِيًا وَأَذَانًا صُمًّا وَقُلُوبًا غُلْفًا»

After citing the above tradition, Bukhārī too, like the commentators and lexicographers, gives the following explanation, indicating a similar understanding of the phrase:

«غُلْفٌ: كُلُّ شَيْءٍ فِي غِلَافٍ، سَيْفٌ أَغْلَفُ وَقَوْسٌ غُلْفَاءُ، وَرَجُلٌ أَغْلَفٌ إِذَا لَمْ يَكُنْ مَخْتُونًا»

Another similar tradition has been cited by Bukhārī (*Ṣaḥīḥ*, ḥadīth no. 4461), Dārimī (*Sunan*, no. 6) and Aḥmad (*Musnad*, no. 6333), which is as follows:

«حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ مَسْلَمَةَ حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ الْعَزِيزِ بْنُ أَبِي سَلَمَةَ عَنْ هِلَالِ بْنِ أَبِي هِلَالٍ عَنْ عَطَاءِ بْنِ يَسَارٍ عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ

hearts” suggests the sense of closed and covered as indicated by the interpretation designated here as [1].

Apart from Prophetic ḥadīth, the phrase occurs in certain letters of Imam ‘Alī (‘a) written to Mu‘āwiyah, wherein the latter is depicted as one possessing an “uncircumcised heart.”<sup>11</sup>

However, there is one tradition narrated from the Prophet (ﷺ) in which the idiom “uncircumcised heart” finds its original figurative sense. Apparently, only Dārimī has cited this report in his *Sunan* (ḥadīth no. 9):

«أَخْبَرَنَا حَيُّوَةُ بْنُ شُرَيْحٍ حَدَّثَنَا بَقِيَّةُ بْنُ الْوَلِيدِ الْمَيْمَنِيُّ حَدَّثَنَا بَحِيرُ بْنُ سَعْدٍ عَنْ خَالِدِ بْنِ مَعْدَانَ عَنْ

بْنِ عَمْرٍو بْنِ الْعَاصِ ... أَنَّ هَذِهِ آيَةَ النَّبِيِّ فِي الْقُرْآنِ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ شَاهِدًا وَمُبَشِّرًا وَتَذِيرًا قَالَ فِي التَّوْرَةِ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ شَاهِدًا وَمُبَشِّرًا وَحَرْزًا لِلْآمِنِينَ أَنْتَ عَبْدِي وَرَسُولِي سَمِيْتُكَ الْمُتَوَكَّلُ لَيْسَ بَقَطٌ وَلَا غَلِيظٌ وَلَا سَخَابٌ بِالْأَسْوَاقِ وَلَا يَدْفَعُ السَّبِيَّةَ بِالسَّبِيَّةِ وَلَكِنْ يَعْفُو وَيَصْفَحُ وَلَنْ يَقْبِضَهُ اللَّهُ حَتَّى يُعْجِمَ بِهِ الْمَلَّةَ الْعَوْجَاءَ بِأَنْ يَقُولُوا لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ فَيَفْتَحَ بِهَا أَعْيُنًا عُمَيَّا وَآذَانًا صُمًّا وَقُلُوبًا غُلْفًا»

Dārimī (*Sunan*, no. 3193) cites another variant of this tradition from Ka‘b:

«حَدَّثَنَا عَمْرٍو بْنُ عَاصِمٍ . . . . عَنْ كَعْبٍ قَالَ عَلَيَّكُمْ بِالْقُرْآنِ فَإِنَّهُ فَهَمُّ الْعَقْلِ وَنُورُ الْحِكْمَةِ وَيَنَابِيعُ الْعِلْمِ وَأَحَدَتْهُ الْكُتُبُ بِالرَّحْمَنِ عَهْدًا وَقَالَ فِي التَّوْرَةِ يَا مُحَمَّدُ إِنِّي مُنَزَّلٌ عَلَيْكَ تَوْرَةً حَدِيثَةٌ تَفْتَحُ فِيهَا أَعْيُنًا عُمَيَّا وَآذَانًا صُمًّا وَقُلُوبًا غُلْفًا»

<sup>11</sup> In a letter to Mu‘āwiyah cited in the *Nahj al-Balaghah* (ed. Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, Qum: Markaz al-Buḥūth al-Islāmiyyah, 1395, pp. 454-455, letter no. 64), Imam ‘Alī (‘a) writes:

«وَعِنْدِي السَّيْفُ الَّذِي أَعْضَضْتَهُ بِحَدِّكَ وَخَالَكَ وَأَحْيَيْكَ فِي مَقَامٍ وَاحِدٍ وَأَنْتَ وَاللَّهُ مَا عَلِمْتُ الْأَعْلَفُ الْقَلْبُ الْمُقَارِبُ الْعَقْلُ...»

In another letter to Mu‘āwiyah cited by Ibn Abi al-Ḥadid (*Sharḥ Nahj al-Balaghah*, Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyyah, 1387/1967, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, vol. 16, pp. 135; see also al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Tehran: Wizārat al-Thaqāfah wal Irshād al-Islāmi, vol. 33, pp. 87, bāb 16) Imam ‘Alī (‘a) writes:

«أما بعد فان مساويك مع علم الله تعالي فيك حالت بينك و بين أن يصلح أمرك، و أن يرعوي قلبك، يا ابن الصخر اللعين! زعمت أن يزن الجبال حلمك و يفصل بين أهل الشك علمك، و أنت الجلف المسافق، الأغلف القلب، القليل العقل، الجبان الرذّل...»

جَبْرِ بْنِ نُفَيْرِ الْحَضْرَمِيِّ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ لَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ لَيْسَ بِوَهْنٍ وَلَا كَسَلٍ لِيُخْتَنَ قُلُوبًا غُلْفًا وَيَفْتَحَ أَعْيُنًا عَمِيًّا وَيُسْمِعَ آذَانًا صُمًّا وَيُقِيمَ أَلْسِنَةً عُوجًا حَتَّى يُقَالَ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ»

In this tradition it is stated in the Prophet's own words that he has come "to open blind eyes, to make deaf ears hear again, and to circumcise uncircumcised hearts." It is in this tradition that the precise figurative sense of the phrase becomes fully explicit.

### 8. The Meaning of Circumcision in Abrahamic Faiths:

We have already referred to the figurative use of the adjective "circumcised" in the Bible. A full appreciation of its figurative sense is not possible without a sufficient understanding of this rite in the Abrahamic creeds. According to the Torah, Abraham initiated this rite as a covenant between God and himself and his progeny. According to Genesis 17:11 when Abraham was 99 years old, God made a covenant with him, saying: "You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you." "Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin," "and his son Ishmael was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin." (Genesis 17:24-25) "And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him" (Genesis 21:4).

Circumcision became a token of loyalty to Abraham's covenant among the Israelites: "Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant" (Genesis 17:14). The rite had so much importance among them that male circumcision became an attribute of the faithful which distinguished them from the heathen, and by extension, a token of purity. Hence the heathen non-

Israelites, individuals and nations, are referred to as “uncircumcised” and “unclean.”<sup>12</sup>

Later on, the Israelites preserved this custom even in the hard conditions of their sojourn in Egypt after Joseph (‘a).<sup>13</sup>

Circumcision as an Abrahamic-Ishmaelite rite was also common among pre-Islamic Arabs.<sup>14</sup> There is a tradition that at the

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<sup>12</sup> “Say to the rebellious house, to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: O house of Israel, let there be an end to all your abominations in admitting foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and flesh, to be in my sanctuary, profaning my temple when you offer to me my food, the fat and the blood. You have broken my covenant with all your abominations. And you have not kept charge of my sacred offerings; but you have appointed foreigners to act for you in keeping my charge in my sanctuary. Thus says the Lord God: No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart and flesh, of all the foreigners who are among the people of Israel, shall enter my sanctuary” (Ezekiel 44:6-9, NRSV). “Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion! Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for the uncircumcised and the unclean shall enter you no more” (Isaiah 52:1 NRSV).

<sup>13</sup> This can be inferred from the passage: “At that time the Lord said to Joshua, ‘Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites a second time.’ So Joshua made flint knives, and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath-haaraloth. This is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: all the males of the people who came out of Egypt, all the warriors, had died during the journey through the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt. Although all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people born on the journey through the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised.” (Jos. 5:2-5). It is probable that the incidence of this custom among Egyptians was due to the influence of the rites of the Israelites.

<sup>14</sup> Dr. Jawād ‘Alī in his history of pre-Islamic Arabs (*Al-Mufaṣṣal fi*

time of the appearance of the Prophet (ﷺ), Heraclius (Hiraql), the Byzantine emperor, is said to have known in a dream about the appearance of “the prince (or king) of the circumcised” (*malik al-khitān*).<sup>15</sup> Apparently, the phrase *malik al-khitān* is meant to imply a leader or ruler of the Arabs.

In Islamic traditions too, Abraham (‘a) is considered the founder of the rite of circumcision.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, circumcision is

*Ta’rikh al-‘Arab Qabl al-Islam*, 1413/1993, vol. 6, pp. 343-344) writes:

«من شعائر الدين عند الجاهليين الاختتان. و هو من الشعائر الفاشيه بينهم، حتي الهم كانوا يعيرون «الاعرل»، و هو الشخص الذي لم يختن. و كان منهم و لاسيما اهل مكه من يختن البنات ايضاً، بقطع «بظورهن». و تقسم بذلك «الختانه» «الختانه». و قد كانوا يعيرون من تكون أمه «ختانه» النساء، فإذا أرادوا ذم أحد قالوا له: يا ابن مقطعه البظور، و إن لم تكن أم من يقال له ختانه»

<sup>15</sup> Bukhārī has cited this tradition (*Ṣaḥīḥ*, nos. 6 & 3107; see also al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 20, pp. 382, bāb 21, from Kāzerūnī in *al-Muntaqā*):

«... و كَانَ ابْنُ النَّاطُورِ صَاحِبُ إِبِلْيَاءَ وَهَرَقْلُ سُقْفًا عَلَى نِصَارَى الشَّامِ يُحَدِّثُ أَنَّ هَرَقْلَ حِينَ قَدِمَ إِبِلْيَاءَ أَحْسَبَحَ يَوْمًا خَبِيثَ النَّفْسِ فَقَالَ بَعْضُ بَطَارِقَتِهِ قَدْ اسْتَنْكَرْنَا هَيْئَتَكَ قَالَ ابْنُ النَّاطُورِ وَكَانَ هَرَقْلُ حَزَاءً يَنْظُرُ فِي النَّجُومِ فَقَالَ لَهُمْ حِينَ سَأَلُوهُ إِنِّي رَأَيْتُ اللَّيْلَةَ حِينَ نَظَرْتُ فِي النَّجُومِ مَلِكَ الْخِتَانِ قَدْ ظَهَرَ فَمَنْ يَخْتَنُ مِنْ هَذِهِ الْأُمَّةِ قَالُوا لَيْسَ يَخْتَنُ إِلَّا الْيَهُودُ فَلَا يَهْمُنُكَ شَأْنُهُمْ وَآكْتُبُ إِلَى مَدَائِنِ مُلْكِكَ فَيَقْتُلُوا مَنْ فِيهِمْ مِنَ الْيَهُودِ فَيَبْتِنَمَا هُمْ عَلَى أَمْرِهِمْ إِنِّي هَرَقْلُ بَرَجَلٌ أُرْسِلُ بِهِ مَلِكُ غَسَّانَ يُخْبِرُ عَنْ خَيْرِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَلَمَّا اسْتَحْبَرَهُ هَرَقْلُ قَالَ أَذْهَبُوا فَانظُرُوا أَمْخَتِنٌ هُوَ أَمْ لَا فَانظُرُوا إِلَيْهِ فَحَدَّثُوهُ أَنَّهُ مُخْتَنٌ وَسَأَلَهُ عَنِ الْعَرَبِ فَقَالَ هُمْ يَخْتَنُونَ فَقَالَ هَرَقْلُ هَذَا مَلِكُ هَذِهِ الْأُمَّةِ قَدْ ظَهَرَ»

<sup>16</sup> ‘Allāmah Majlisī (*Biḥār*, vol. 12, pp. 10, “Abwāb qiṣas Ibrāhīm,” bāb 1, ḥadīth no. 25) cites the following report on the authority of Imam Mūsā al-Kāzīm (‘a) from the Prophet (ﷺ):

«بإسناده عن موسى بن جعفر (ع) عن آبائه (ع) قال: قال رسول الله (ص): أول من قاتل في سبيل الله إبراهيم الخليل (ع) حيث أسرت الروم لوطاً (ع) ففسر إبراهيم (ع) و سنتقده من أيديهم، و أول من اختن إبراهيم عليه السلام اختن بالقدم على رأس ثمانين سنة»

Ibn Abī Shaybah (*Muṣannaf*, “Kitāb al-Awā’il”) cites a report of Sa‘id b. Musayyab that he said that circumcision was one among the observances of ritual bodily purity initiated by Abraham (‘a):

considered mandatory or a highly recommended *sunnah* by the schools of Islamic law and there are many Sunnī and Shī‘ī traditions that stress its importance.<sup>17</sup> Kulaynī devotes a chapter to circumcision in his *al-Kāfī* and styles it “*Bāb al-taḥīr*.”<sup>18</sup> He cites a report from Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (‘a) wherein circumcision is considered a *sunnah* of the prophets<sup>19</sup> and a part of the monotheistic

« كَانَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ ... أَوَّلَ النَّاسِ قَصَّ شَارِبُهُ وَقَلَّمَ أَظْفَارُهُ وَاسْتَحَدَّ , وَأَوَّلَ النَّاسِ أُحْتِنَ ... »

He cites a report (*Muṣannaḡ*, “*Kitāb al-faḍā’il wa mimmā ata Allāhu Ibrāhīma wa faḍḍalahū bihī*”) wherein Sha‘bī is said to have said that circumcision was one of the things whereby Abraham was tested by God, as referred to in verse 2:124 of the Qur’ān: “*And when his Lord tested Abraham with certain words, and he fulfilled them...*”

<sup>17</sup> The following statement is cited in ‘*Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā* (‘a) from Imam ‘Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā (‘a), and similar statements recur in Shī‘ī traditions (see *Wasā’il al-Shī‘ah*, vol. 21, p. 434, bāb 52, “*Bāb wujūb khitān al-ṣabī wa jiwāz tarkuh*”):

« وَالْحِتَانُ سُنَّةٌ وَاجِبَةٌ لِلرِّجَالِ وَمَكْرُمَةٌ لِلنِّسَاءِ »

Among Sunnī works, Aḡmad (*Musnad*, no. 19794; also Ibn Abī Shaybah, *Muṣannaḡ*, bāb 179: “*Fil khitānah wa man fa‘alahā*”) cites a variant of this tradition from the Prophet (ṣ):

« ... عَنْ أَبِي الْمَلِيحِ بْنِ أُسَامَةَ عَنْ أَبِيهِ أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ الْحِتَانُ سُنَّةٌ لِلرِّجَالِ مَكْرُمَةٌ لِلنِّسَاءِ »

<sup>18</sup> Commenting on the tradition which states that there are ten signs of an Imam of which one is that he is born circumcised and pure. Majlisī writes (*Bihār*, vol. 25, p. 168, bāb 4: “*Jāmi‘ fi ṣifāt al-Imām wa sharā’iṭ al-imāmah*”):

« الظاهر أن المحتون تفسير للمطهر فإن إطلاق التطهير على الحتان شائع في عرف الشرع و الكليني رحمه الله عنون باب الحتان بالتطهير. و عن النبي ص طهروا أولادكم يوم السابع ... الخبر »

<sup>19</sup> There are many reports that make this assertion in Shī‘ī works (see *Wasā’il al-Shī‘ah*, vol. 21, p. 434, bāb 52: “*Bāb wujūb khitān al-ṣabī wa jiwāz tarkuh*,” al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-Aḡkām*, vol. 7, p. 445, bāb 40: “*Bāb al-wilādah wal-nifās wal-‘aqīqah*”). One of such traditions as cited by Ku-

creed.<sup>20</sup> According to a tradition cited by Tabrisi in his commentary, circumcision was one of ten rites Abraham was charged to perform as part of the righteous creed, “*Ḥanīfiyyah*.”<sup>21</sup> In a tradi-

layni is as follows (*al-Kāfi*, vol. 6, p. 39, “Bāb al-taḥīr”):

«وَعَنْهُ عَنْ أَحْمَدَ بْنِ مُحَمَّدٍ عَنِ الْحُسَيْنِ بْنِ سَعِيدٍ عَنْ فَضَالَةَ بْنِ أَيُّوبَ عَنِ الْقَاسِمِ بْنِ بُرَيْدٍ عَنْ أَبِي بَصِيرٍ عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ ع قَالَ مِنْ سُنَنِ الْمُرْسَلِينَ الْإِسْتِحْجَاءُ وَالْحَتَانُ».

<sup>20</sup> Kulayni (*al-Kāfi*, vol. 6, p. 39, bāb 23: “Bāb al-taḥīr”) has cited the following report:

«عَلِيُّ بْنُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ عَنْ أَبِيهِ عَنْ ابْنِ أَبِي عُمَيْرٍ عَنْ هِشَامِ بْنِ سَالِمٍ عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ ع قَالَ مِنَ الْحَنِيفِيَّةِ الْحَتَانُ»  
The Sunni sources have “*al-ḥiṭrah*” instead of “*al-ḥanīfiyyah*.” For traditions concerning the five-fold or ten-fold *sunnahs*, see al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, nos. 5439, 5441, 5832; Muslim’s *Ṣaḥīḥ*, nos. 377, 378; Tirmidhī’s *Sunan*, no. 2680, Nasā’i’s *Sunan*, nos. 9, 10, 11, 4956, 4957, 4958; Abū Dawūd’s *Sunnan*, nos. 288, 290; Ibn Mājah’s *Sunan*, nos. 288, 290; Aḥmad’s *Musnad*, nos. 6963, 7479, 8953, 9945, 17606. See also al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Mushkil al-Āthār*, “Bāb man rawā ‘an Rasūlillah fil ashyā’ allati hiyal ḥiṭrah fil ab-dān.”

<sup>21</sup> The tradition as cited from *Majma’ al-Bayān*, under verse 2:124 is as follows (cf. *Wasā’il al-Shī’ah*, vol. 2, p. 117, bāb 67: “Bāb ‘adam jawāz ḥalq al-liḥya wa istiḥbāb tawfirahā qadra qabḍatin aw naḥwahā;” vol. 21, p. 434, bāb 52: “Bāb wujūb khitān al-ṣabi wa jiwāz tarkuh;” cf. *Biḥār*, vol. 12, p. 7, bāb 1: “‘Ilal tasmiyatuhū wa sunnatuhu wa faḍā’iluh;” from *Tafsīr al-Qummī* and vol 73, p. 68, bāb 2: “al-Sunnan al-ḥanīfiyyah” from *Tafsīr al-Qummī* and *Makārim al-Akhlāq*):

«الْفَضْلُ بْنُ الْحَسَنِ الطَّبْرَسِيُّ فِي مَجْمَعِ الْبَيَانِ نَقَلًا مِنْ تَفْسِيرِ عَلِيِّ بْنِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (ع) فِي قَوْلِهِ تَعَالَى وَ إِذِ ابْتَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبَّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَاتَمَّهِنَّ قَالَ إِنَّهُ مَا ابْتَلَاهُ اللَّهُ بِهِ فِي نَوْمِهِ مِنْ ذَبْحٍ وَ لَدَيْهِ إِسْمَاعِيلُ فَاتَمَّهَهَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ وَ عَزَمَ عَلَيْهَا وَ سَلَّمَ فَأَمَرَ اللَّهُ فَلَمَّا عَزَمَ قَالَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى لَهُ تَوَابًا لَهُ إِلَى أَنْ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا ثُمَّ أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْهِ الْحَنِيفِيَّةَ وَ هِيَ عَشْرَةٌ أَشْيَاءَ خَمْسَةٌ مِنْهَا فِي الرَّأْسِ وَ خَمْسَةٌ مِنْهَا فِي الْبَدَنِ فَأَمَّا الَّتِي فِي الرَّأْسِ فَأَخَذَ الشَّارِبَ وَ إِغْفَاءَ اللَّحْيِ وَ طَمَّ الشَّعْرَ وَ السَّوَاكَ وَ الْخُلَالَ وَ أَمَّا الَّتِي فِي الْبَدَنِ فَحَلَقَ الشَّعْرَ مِنَ الْبَدَنِ وَ الْحَتَانَ وَ تَقْلِيمَ الْأَطْفَارِ وَ الْغُسْلَ مِنَ الْحَنَابَةِ وَ الطَّهْوَرَ بِالْمَاءِ فَهَذِهِ الْحَنِيفِيَّةُ الظَّاهِرَةُ الَّتِي جَاءَ بِهَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ (ع) فَلَمْ تُنَسَخْ وَ لَا تُنْسَخَ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ وَ هُوَ قَوْلُهُ وَ اتَّبِعْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا».

tion narrated from Imam ‘Ali (‘a), it is said that God said “*taṭahhar*” (“purify yourself”) to Abraham while commanding him to observe the rite of circumcision.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, in a tradition of the Prophet (ṣ) wherein Muslims are enjoined to observe this rite, the command is made with the imperative “*Tahhirū*” (meaning, ‘purify’).<sup>23</sup> In a tradition cited in *Tafsir al-Qummī* it is asserted that “*Ḥanīfiyyah* is *ṭahārah*” and that the rite of circumcision will last until the Day of Resurrection.<sup>24</sup> In many traditions reported from the Prophet (ṣ) and the Imams of the Prophet’s Household (‘a),

<sup>22</sup> This tradition is quoted by Nūrī (*Mustadrak al-Wasā’il*, vol. 15, p. 149, bāb 38 from *al-Ja’fariyyāt*; see also *Mustadrak al-Wasā’il*, vol. 1, p. 413, bāb 38; also cited in *Wasā’il al-Shi’ah*, vol. 2, p. 115, bāb 66 and *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 12, p. 12, p. 10, bāb 1, and vol. 73, pp. 68, 69, 92, bāb 2, from *Makārim al-Akhlāq* and *al-Ja’fariyyāt*; cf. *al-Ja’fariyyāt*, p. 28; *Makārim al-Akhlāq*, p. 60; *Da’ā’im al-Islām*, vol. 1, p. 124; Rāwandī, *al-Nawādir*, p. 23):

«... حَدَّثَنَا أَبِي عَنْ أَبِيهِ عَنْ جَدِّهِ جَعْفَرِ بْنِ مُحَمَّدٍ عَنْ أَبِيهِ عَنْ عَلِيِّ ع قَالَ قِيلَ لِإِبْرَاهِيمَ خَلِيلِ الرَّحْمَنِ (ع) تَطَهَّرْ فَأَخَذَ مِنْ أَطْفَارِهِ ثُمَّ قِيلَ لَهُ تَطَهَّرْ فَتَنَفَّ نَحْتِ جَنَاحَيْهِ ثُمَّ قِيلَ لَهُ تَطَهَّرْ فَحَلَقَ هَامَتَهُ ثُمَّ قِيلَ لَهُ تَطَهَّرْ فَاحْتَنَنَ»

<sup>23</sup> The tradition as reported by Kulaynī is as follows (*al-Kāfi*, vol. 6, p. 38, “Bāb al-taḥīr;” in the same chapter Kulaynī cites other similar traditions from the Imams Muḥammad al-Bāqir, Ja’far al-Ṣādiq and al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī (‘a); Ṭabrisī cites a similar tradition of the Prophet (ṣ) in *Makārim al-Akhlāq* from *Ṭibb al-A’immah*):

«عَلِيُّ عَنْ أَبِيهِ عَنِ التَّوْقَلِيِّ عَنِ السَّكُونِيِّ عَنِ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ ع قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ (ص) طَهَّرُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ يَوْمَ السَّبْعِ فَإِنَّهُ أَطْيَبُ وَأَطْهَرُ وَأَسْرَعُ لِلْبَيَاتِ اللَّحْمِ وَإِنَّ الْأَرْضَ تَنْجَسُ مِنْ بَوْلِ الْأَغْلَفِ أَرْبَعِينَ صَبَاحًا»

<sup>24</sup> The tradition as cited in *Biḥār al-Anwār* is as follows (vol. 73, p. 68, bāb 2: “al-Sunan al-Ḥanīfiyyah,” ḥadīth no. 3, from *Tafsir al-Qummī*):

«أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ الْحَنِيفِيَّةَ وَهِيَ الطَّهَارَةُ وَهِيَ عَشْرَةُ أَشْيَاءَ خَمْسَةٌ فِي الرَّأْسِ وَخَمْسَةٌ فِي الْبَدَنِ وَآمَّا السَّيِّ فِي الرَّأْسِ فَأَخَذَ الشَّارِبَ وَإِعْفَاءَ اللَّحَى وَطَمَ الشَّعْرَ وَالسَّوَاكَ وَالْحَلَالَ وَآمَّا السَّيِّ فِي الْبَدَنِ فَحَلَقَ الشَّعْرَ مِنَ الْبَدَنِ وَالْحَتَانَ وَقَلَمَ الْأَطْفَارَ وَالْغَسْلَ مِنَ الْجَنَابَةِ وَالطَّهْوَرَ بِالمَاءِ فَهَذِهِ خَمْسَةٌ فِي الْبَدَنِ وَهِيَ الْحَنِيفِيَّةُ الطَّاهِرَةُ الَّتِي جَاءَ بِهَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ فَلَمْ تَنْسَخْ وَ لَا تَنْسَخْ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ وَ هُوَ قَوْلُهُ وَ اتَّبَعَ مَلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا»

Muslims are told to have their male children circumcised on the seventh day of birth. The impurity associated with remaining uncircumcised is considered so gross that it is said that the urine of an uncircumcised male defiles the earth for forty days, which laments and deplores the defilement.<sup>25</sup> Imam 'Alī ('a) is reported to have said that a person who has remained uncircumcised must carry it out even if he has reached old age and is as old as eighty.<sup>26</sup> Being born in a circumcised state is considered one of the virtues of some prophets<sup>27</sup> and it is said that all Imams of the Prophet's Household were born in this manner.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> This is stated in an epistle of the Imam of the Age ('aj) sent in response to a questioner who, among other things, had asked the Imam concerning someone whose prepuce grows again after circumcision (*Wasā'il al-Shi'ah*, vol. 21, p. 442, bāb 57: "Bāb wujūb i'ādat al-khitān in nabatat al-ghulfah ba'dah," from Ṣadūq's *Ikmāl al-Dīn*):

«أَمَّا مَا سَأَلْتَ عَنْهُ مِنْ أَمْرِ الْمَوْلُودِ الَّذِي تَنَبَّتُ غُلْفَتُهُ بَعْدَ مَا يُحْتَنُ هَلْ يُحْتَنُ مَرَّةً أُخْرَى فَإِنَّهُ يَجِبُ أَنْ تُقَطَعَ غُلْفَتُهُ فَإِنَّ الْأَرْضَ تَضِجُ إِلَيَّ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ مِنْ بَوْلِ الْأَغْلَفِ أَرْبَعِينَ صَبَاحًا»

A similar statement occurs in a report cited from Imām 'Alī ('a) in *Waṣā'il al-Shi'ah*, vol. 21, p. 424, bāb 44, no. 20, from Ṣadūq's *Khiṣāl* (in *al-Tahdhīb* on the authority of Imam 'Alī [ 'a] and Imam al-Ṣādiq [ 'a]):

«وَفِي الْحِصَالِ بِإِسْنَادِهِ عَنْ عَلِيٍّ ع فِي حَدِيثِ الْأَرَبِيَّانِيَةِ قَالَ عَقُوبًا عَنْ أَوْلَادِكُمْ يَوْمَ السَّبَاعِ ... اخْتَنُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ يَوْمَ السَّبَاعِ لَا يَمْتَنِعْكُمْ حَرٌّ وَلَا بَرْدٌ فَإِنَّهُ طَهْرٌ لِلْحَسَنِ وَإِنَّ الْأَرْضَ لَتَضِجُ إِلَيَّ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى مِنْ بَوْلِ الْأَغْلَفِ»

<sup>26</sup> This tradition is cited in *Waṣā'il al-Shi'ah*, vol. 15, p. 150, bāb 40: "Bāb anna man taraka al-khitān wajaba 'alayhi ba'da bulūghihī wa law ba'd al-kibar," from *al-Ja'fariyyāt*:

: «أَخْبَرَنَا مُحَمَّدٌ حَدَّثَنِي مُوسَى قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا أَبِي عَنْ أَبِيهِ عَنْ جَدِّهِ جَعْفَرِ بْنِ مُحَمَّدٍ عَنْ أَبِيهِ عَنْ جَدِّهِ عَلِيِّ بْنِ الْحُسَيْنِ عَنْ أَبِيهِ عَنْ عَلِيٍّ ع قَالَ وَحَدَّثَنَا فِي قَائِمِ سَيْفِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ص فِي صَحِيفِهِ أَنَّ الْأَغْلَفَ لَا يُتْرَكُ فِي الْإِسْلَامِ حَتَّى يُحْتَنَ وَ لَوْ بَلَغَ ثَمَانِينَ سَنَةً»

<sup>27</sup> According to one of the versions, their number was thirteen. Shirbīnī al-Shāfi'i (*Mughnī al-Muhtāj ilā Ma'rifat Alfāḥ al-Minhāj*, vol. 8) has cited verses composed to list their names. He writes:

It appears that Imāmi legists have generally considered circumcision to be obligatory for males and commendable for females.<sup>29</sup> Among Sunnī *madhhabs*, Shāfi‘is and Ḥanbalīs consider it obligatory for men while others regard it as an emphasised *sunnah* (*sunnah mu‘akkadah*).<sup>30</sup>

«وَقَدْ تَظَمَ الشَّيْخُ عَلِيُّ الْمَسْعُودِيُّ مَنِ اخْتَتَنَ مِنَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ فَقَالَ :  
 وَإِنْ تَرَدَّ الْمَوْلُودُ مِنْ غَيْرِ قَلْفَةٍ بِحُسْنِ خِتَانِ نِعْمَةٍ وَتَفَضُّلاً  
 مِنَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ الطَّاهِرِينَ فَهِيَ كُهُمُ ثَلَاثَةَ عَشَرَ بِاتِّفَاقِ أُولَى الْعُلَمَاءِ  
 فَأَدَمُ شَيْتٌ ثُمَّ نُوحٌ بَنِيهِ شُعَيْبٌ لِلُّوطِ فِي الْحَقِيقَةِ قَدْ تَلَا  
 وَمُوسَى وَهُودٌ ثُمَّ صَالِحٌ بَعْدَهُ وَيُوسُفُ زَكَرِيَّا فَأَفْقَهُمْ لِتَفَضُّلاً  
 وَخَتَنَ يَحْيَى سَلِيمَانَ مُكَمَّلًا لِعَدَّتِهِمْ وَالْخَلْفُ جَاءَ لِمَنْ تَلَا  
 خِتَانًا لِيَجْمَعَ الْأَنْبِيَاءُ مُحَمَّدٌ عَلَيْهِمْ سَلَامٌ اللَّهُ مِسْكًا وَمَنْدَلًا

Then he remarks:

«أَوَّلُ مَنْ اخْتَتَنَ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ إِبْرَاهِيمُ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَمِنَ الْإِنَاثِ هَاجِرَةُ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى عَنْهَا .  
 تَنْبِيَهُ : خَلَقَ آدَمَ مَخْتُونًا وَوَلَدَ مِنَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ مَخْتُونًا ثَلَاثَةَ عَشَرَ: شَيْتٌ، وَنُوحٌ، وَهُودٌ، وَصَالِحٌ، وَكُوطٌ،  
 وَشُعَيْبٌ، وَيُوسُفُ، وَمُوسَى، وَسَلِيمَانَ، وَزَكَرِيَّا، وَعِيسَى، وَخَتَنَ بَنُ صَفْوَانَ، وَتَبِيئَةَ مُحَمَّدٌ صَلَّى  
 اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ»

<sup>28</sup> Concerning this, see Shaykh Ṣadūq, *Ikmāl al-Dīn*, p. 433, ḥadīth no. 15; *Bihār*, vol. 25, p. 168, bāb 4: “Bāb jāmi‘ fī ṣifāt al-Imām wa sharā’iḥ al-imāmah,” ḥadīth 4, from *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 388.

<sup>29</sup> One of the Shī‘ī texts on *fiqh* states in this regard (*Sharḥ Lum‘at al-Dimashqiyyah*, vol. 5, p. 447):

«يجب على الصبي الختان عند البلوغ أي بعده بلا فصل لو ترك وليه ختانه... ويستحب خفض النساء وإن بلغن، قال الصادق (ع) خفض النساء مكرمه و أي شيء أفضل من المكرمه؟»

<sup>30</sup> An encyclopaedia of Islamic religious ordinances (*al-Mawsū‘at al-Fiqhiyyah*, Wizārat al-Awqāf wa al-Shu‘ūn al-Islāmiyyah, Kuwait, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, under “*al-khitān*.”) has the following to say concerning the relevant positions of various Sunnī schools:

### 9. The Meaning of an "Uncircumcised Heart":

From what has been said it appears that circumcision has been envisioned mainly as a rite of purification in Judaism and Islam. In Christianity, under the influence of Paul and his zeal to convert non-Jews, circumcision lost the significance it possessed in Mosaic Law.<sup>31</sup>

«اختلف الفقهاء في حكم الختان على أقوال: القول الأول: 2 - ذهب الحنفية والمالكية وهو وجه شاذ عند الشافعية, ورواية عن أحمد: إلى أن الختان سنة في حق الرجال وليس بواجب. وهو من الفطرة ومن شعائر الإسلام, فلو اجتمع أهل بلدة على تركه حاربهم الإمام, كما لو تركوا الأذان. وهو مندوب في حق المرأة عند المالكية, وعند الحنفية والحنابلة في رواية يعتبر ختانها مكرومة وليس بسنة, وفي قول عند الحنفية: إنه سنة في حقهن كذلك, وفي ثالث: إنه مستحب. واستدلوا للسنة بحديث ابن عباس رضي الله عنهما مرفوعا: «الختان سنة للرجال مكرومة للنساء» وبحديث أبي هريرة مرفوعا «خمس من الفطرة الختان, والاستحداث, وتشف الإبط, وتقليم الأظفار, وقص الشارب». وقد قرن الختان في الحديث بقص الشارب وغيره وليس ذلك واجبا. ومما يدل على عدم الوجوب كذلك أن الختان قطع جزء من الجسد ابتداء فلم يكن واجبا بالشرع قياسا على قص الأظفار. القول الثاني: 3 - ذهب الشافعية والحنابلة, وهو مقتضى قول سحنون من المالكية: إلى أن الختان واجب على الرجال والنساء. واستدلوا للوجوب بقوله تعالى: «ثم أوحينا إليك أن اتبع ملة إبراهيم حنيفا» قد جاء في حديث أبي هريرة - رضي الله عنه - قال: قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: «اختتن إبراهيم النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم وهو ابن ثمانين سنة بالقدم» وأمرنا باتباع إبراهيم صلى الله عليه وسلم أمرنا بفعل تلك الأمور التي كان يفعلها فكانت من شرعنا. وورد في الحديث كذلك: «ألقى عنك شعر الكفر والختن» قالوا: ولأن الختان لو لم يكن واجبا لما حاز كشف العورة من أجله, ولما حاز نظر الخاتن إليها وكلاهما حرام, ومن أدلة الوجوب كذلك أن الختان من شعائر المسلمين فكان واجبا كسائر شعائرهم»

<sup>31</sup> Paul employs, what appears to be sophistry, in his efforts to downplay for Christian converts the importance of the rite of circumcision, which was mandatory in Mosaic Law. Some of his statements, as they appear in his letters, are as follows:

“Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law; but if you break the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. So, if those who are uncircumcised keep the requirements of the law, will not their uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?” (Romans 2:25-26, NRSV)

“Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but obeying the commandments of God is everything.” (Corinthians 7:19)

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love.” (Galatians 5:6)

“On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised...” (Galatians 2:7)

Nevertheless, despite Pauline disregard of circumcision, it is widely practiced in Western countries for reasons of hygiene, as mentioned by a contemporary source:

“Under the inner layer of foreskin there are situated a number of glands that secrete a cheeselike substance called smegma. Accumulation of smegma beneath the foreskin may result in great discomfort and may serve as the source of a rather penetrating odour, if cleanliness and hygiene are not observed. Studies have indicated that uncircumcised men have a higher incidence of AIDS, syphilis, and other sexually transmitted diseases than circumcised men, and it has been speculated that the foreskin might allow viruses and other microorganisms to survive longer on the skin and thus give the organisms more time to enter the body. Moreover, cancer of the penis is rare in circumcised males and in uncircumcised males with high standards of hygiene. Overall, the physiological value of circumcision may be highest in countries and regions where poverty and endemic disease make high standards of hygiene difficult or nearly impossible. In Western countries, in any event, the operation has been widely practiced as a hygienic procedure. In many hospitals it has

However, even in Christian scriptures<sup>32</sup> and other literature “uncircumcision” retains its metaphoric sense of “not spiritually chastened or purified, irreligious, and heathen.”<sup>33</sup>

been routinely performed upon the newborn unless there is some objection.”

<sup>32</sup> As is indicated by the words of St. Stephen addressed to the Jews: “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do. Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers. You are the ones that received the law as ordained by angels, and yet you have not kept it.” (Acts 7:51-53)

A dictionary explains the phrase “uncircumcised in heart and ears” in these words: “Obstinately deaf and wilfully obdurate to the preaching of the apostle. Heathenish, and perversely so.” (E. Cobham Brewer [1810–1897], *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, 1898.)

A Bible commentator explains the meaning of the phrase in these words: “An uncircumcised ear, signifies the rejecting of instruction; an uncircumcised heart, an obstinate and rebellious will” (*John Wesley's Explanatory Notes on the Whole Bible*, The Book of Jeremiah, 6.10).

<sup>33</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary*, under “uncircumcised.” It also gives the following three instances of the usage of the term:

1643-5 Milton *Divorce* ii. vi, How vain then,..to exact a circumcision of flesh from an infant,..and to dispence an uncircumcision in the soul of a grown man.

1685 Baxter Paraphr. *N.T. Acts* vii. 51 Ye are an unruly obstinate people, whose hearts are unreformed and uncircumcised.

1800 Weems *Washington* xi. (1877) 149 The pirates of Morocco laying their uncircumcised hands on our rich commerce in the Mediterranean.

A Bishop of Canterbury says in a prayer, “O Lord, take away my heart of

It may be said, then, the phrase “uncircumcised heart” means a heart that is unclean, obstinate, hardened and heathenish, a heart closed and deaf to the call of Heaven, a heart devoid of spiritual life.<sup>34</sup> In the light of the above remarks, the question arises: What

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stone, my hardened heart, my uncircumcised heart and grant to me a new heart, a heart of flesh, a clean heart!” (From the writings of Baldwin, Bishop of Canterbury [d 1191]. This prayer is at the end of the Office of the Readings for Thursday of the 18th week of Ordinary time.)

<sup>34</sup> We saw that an uncircumcised heart is the heathen’s heart according to the Prophet’s tradition. The Qur’ān mentions similar characteristics for the hearts of the unbelievers in general and those of the Jews in particular:

There is a sickness in their hearts; then Allah increased their sickness, and there is a painful punishment for them because of the lies they used to tell. (2:10) Then your hearts hardened after that; so they are like stones, or even harder. (2:74) They said, ‘We hear, and disobey,’ and their hearts had been imbued with [the love of] the Calf, due to their faithlessness. (2:93) Then, because of their breaking their covenant We cursed them and made their hearts hard: they pervert words from their meanings, and have forgotten a part of what they were reminded. (5:13) They are the ones whose hearts Allah did not desire to purify. (5:41) There are some of them who prick up their ears at you, but We have cast veils on their hearts lest they should understand it,... (6:25) But their hearts had hardened, and Satan had made to seem decorous to them what they had been doing. (6:43) Thus does Allah put a seal on the hearts of the faithless. We did not find in most of them any [loyalty to] covenants. Indeed We found most of them to be transgressors. (7:101-102). Certainly We have created for hell many of the jinn and humans: they have hearts with which they do not understand, they have eyes with which they do not see, they have ears with which they do not hear. They are like cattle; rather they are more astray. (7:179) So He caused hypocrisy to ensue in their hearts until

did the Jews of the Prophet's times mean by saying that their hearts

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the day they will encounter Him, because of their going back on what they had promised Allah and because of the lies they used to tell. (9:77) They are pleased to be with those who stay back, and their hearts have been sealed. So they do not understand. (9:87) But as for those in whose heart is a sickness, it only adds defilement to their defilement, and they die while they are faithless. (9:125) Allah has turned aside their hearts, for they are a people who do not understand. (9:127) Those who do not believe in the Hereafter, their hearts are amiss, and they are arrogant. (16:22) They are the ones on whose hearts Allah has set a seal, and on their hearing and their sight [as well], and it is they who are the heedless. (16:108) And We cast veils on their hearts, lest they should understand it, and a deafness into their ears. (17:46) Indeed it is not the eyes that turn blind, but the hearts turn blind—those which are in the breasts! (22:46) So woe to those whose hearts have been hardened to the remembrance of Allah. They are in manifest error. (39:22) Those who dispute the signs of Allah without any authority that may have come to them—[that is] greatly outrageous to Allah and to those who have faith. That is how Allah seals the heart of every arrogant tyrant.' (40:35) Do they not contemplate the Qur'ān, or are there locks on the hearts? (47:24) Is it not time yet for those who have faith that their hearts should be humbled for Allah's remembrance and to the truth which has come down [to them], and to be not like those who were given the Book before? Time took its toll on them and so their hearts were hardened, and many of them are transgressors. (57:16) When Moses said to his people, 'O my people! Why do you torment me, when you certainly know that I am Allah's apostle to you?' So when they swerved [from the right path] Allah made their hearts swerve, and Allah does not guide the transgressing lot. (61:5) That is because they believed and then disbelieved, so their hearts were sealed. Hence they do not understand. (63:3) No indeed! Rather their hearts have been sullied<sup>1</sup> by what they have been earning. (83:14)

were uncircumcised? Evidently, they were repeating the words of Jeremiah, the prophet, and St. Stephen that were uttered as a re-proof of their ancestors. The same words were used as a gesture of defiance, though expressed in the form of a lame excuse, towards the call of Islam. Can it be said that by doing so the Jews were in fact confessing to their actual state? If so, why were they denounced for declaring a truth? The answer is that their intent was not to declare or admit the truth about their actual state but to defy the Apostle's call and to reject his teaching. Their response to the Prophet's summon should have been "We believe and affirm" and "We hear and obey," not "We hear and disobey" or "Our hearts are uncircumcised." Hence they were denounced for their defiance and disobedience.

## 10. *Qulūbunā ghulf* in Qur'ān Translations:

### 10.1 *Persian Translations:*

Like the commentators, most of the translators of the Qur'ān into Persian have followed the interpretation [1] in their works, and, like the Late Mujtabawī, have translated the phrase in these words:<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Among others who have adopted this rendering are: 'Umar b. Muḥammad Nasafī (d. 538) in verse 2:88; Jurjānī, *Tafsīr-e Gāzor*, 2:88; Muḥammad Khwājawī, 2:88; Jalāl al-Dīn Farsī, 2:88; Bahā' al-Dīn Khorramshāhī, 2:88 and 4:155; Sayyid Asad Allāh Muṣṭafawī, 4:155 (he substitutes "gūshhā-ye mā," "our ears" for "dilhā-ye mā"); Shahrām Hidāyat, 2:88 ("be pūshish ast"); Ḥusayn Shah-'Abdul-'Azīmī, *Tafsīr-e Ithnā 'Asharī*, 4:155; Āyatullāh Mishkinī, 2:88 (with "az dark-e sokhanān-e tū" in parenthesis). Others, with some difference of wording, have adopted the following renderings:

«دهای ما دارای پوششی است»—Aḥmad Kāwiyān-pūr, 2:88 & 4:155.

«دهای ما در پرده است» —Fath Allāh Kāshānī, in one of the renderings of 4:155; Shāh Walī Allāh, 2:88 & 4:155; Mahdī Ilāhī Qumsheh'ī, 4:155;

Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Astarābādī, 4:155 (adds “*wa ḥijāb-e ghaflat*” in parenthesis); Muḥammad Kāzīm Mu‘izzī, 2:88 & 4:155 (with a slight difference); Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusaynī Hamadānī, *Tafsīr-e Anwār-e Darakhshan*, 4:155; Mīrzā Muḥammad Taqī Tehrānī, *Tafsīr-e Rawān-e Jawīd*, 2:88; Baṣīr al-Mulk, 2:88; Sayyid Riḍā Sirāj, 4:155; Abū al-Qāsim Imāmī, 4:155; Zayn al-‘Ābidīn Rahnamā, 2:88; Riyāḍ Bārī, 2:88, in 4:155 “*dar pardah-hā and*”; Daryūsh Shāhin, 2:88; Akbar Īrān-panāh, 4:155; ‘Alī Akbar Sarwarī, 4:155; Sayyid Ibrāhīm Burūjerdī, *Tafsīr-e Jāmi‘*, 4:155; Sayyid Asad Allāh Muṣṭafawī, 2:88 (“*dilhā-ye mā dar [zir-e] pardeh ast*”); Mas‘ūd Anṣārī, 2:88 & 4:155; Ṭāherah Ṣaffar-zādeh, 2:88 & 4:155; ‘Alī Akbar Ṭāherī Qazwinī, 2:88 & 4:155.

«دلهای ما در پرده غفلت است» —Baṣīr al-Mulk, 2:88; ‘Imād-zādeh, 2:88 (with a slight difference); Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Astarābādī, 2:88 (“*dar pardeh-ye ghaflat nehān ast*”); Kāzīm Pūr-Jawādī, 2:88 & 4:155; Akbar Īrān-panāh, 2:88; Aḥmad Noandish, 2:88.

«دلهای ما در غلاف است» —*Qur’ān-e Quds*, ed. by ‘Alī Rawāqī, 4:155; *Tarjumeḥ-ye Qur’ān, Nuskhah-ye muwarrakh-e 556 Hijri*, ed. Muḥammad Ja‘far Yāḥaqī, 2:88; Maybudī, 2:88; *Tafsīr-e Baṣā‘ir-e Yamīnī*, ed. ‘Alī Rawāqī, 2:88; Shāhfūr b. Ṭāhīr Isfarā‘īnī, *Tāj al-Tarājīm*, 2:88; Mullā Fath Allāh Kāshānī, 2:88; Makhdūm Nuḥ Sīndī, 2:88 & 4:155 (“*dar ghilafhā*”); Ḥusayn Wā‘iz Kāshifī, *Tafsīr-e Ḥusaynī*, 2:88; Sayyid ‘Abd al-Ḥujjat Balāghī, *Hujjat al-Tafsīr*, 2:88; Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir Mūsawī Hamadānī, *Tarjumeḥ Tafsīr al-Mizān*, 2:88; *Tafsīr-e Namūneh*, 2:88; Mīrza Muḥammad Thaqafī Tehrānī, *Tafsīr-e Rawān-e Jāwīd*, 4:155; Sayyid ‘Alī Akbar Qurashī, *Tafsīr-e Aḥsan al-Ḥadīth*, 2:88 & 4:155; Sayyid ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Ṭayyīb, *Tafsīr Atyab al-Bayān*, 2:88; Sharīf Lāhījī, *Tafsīr*, 4:155; Abū al-Ḥasan Sha‘rānī, 4:155; Maḥmūd Yāsīrī, 4:155; Ashrafī Tabrizī, 4:155; Fūlādward, 2:88 & 4:155; Kawkab-pūr Ranjbar, 4:155; Ḥikmat Āl-e Āqā, 4:155; *Tafsīr-e Kābulī*, trans. of Maḥmūd al-Ḥasan’s Urdu *tafsīr*, 2:88; Aḥmad Noandish, 4:155; ‘Abbās Miṣbāḥ-zādeh, 4:155; Muḥsin Qarā‘itī, *Tafsīr-e Nūr*, 2:88;

Āyatullāh Nāṣir Makārim Shirāzī, 2:88; Muṣṭafā Khurramdil, 2:88 (with “*pardahā’i*” in parentheses); Āyatullāh Mishkīnī, 4:155 (with “*wa sokhanān-e tū rā nemi fahmand*” in parentheses).

«دلهای ما غلافدار است» — ‘Abbās Miṣbāḥ-zādeh, 2:88; Maḥmūd Yāsiri, 2:88; Ashrafi Tabrizī, 2:88; Abū al-Ḥasan Sha‘rānī, 2:88; Kawkab-pūr Ranjbar, 2:88; ‘Abd al-Majīd Nobarī, 2:88 (“*wa pardehdār ast*”); Muḥammad Karīm ‘Alawī Ḥusaynī Mūsawī, *Tafsīr-e Kashf al-Ḥaqā’iq*, 2:88 (“*wa pardehdār ast*”).

«دلهای ما پوشیده است» — Abu al-Qāsim Imāmī, 2:88; Zayn al-‘Ābidīn Rahnamā, 4:155 (“*wa basteh*” in parentheses); Shahrām Hidāyat, 4:155; Dāryūsh Shāhin, 4:155 (“*dar pardeh ast, sā ‘iqh ān rā giraft*” in parenthesis).

«دلهای ما در حجاب غفلت است» — ‘Abd al-Muḥammad Āyati, 2:88.

«دلهای ما در حجاب است» — *Tarjumeḥ Tafsīr-e Majma‘ al-Bayān*, 2:88; Bānū-e Iṣfahānī, *Tafsīr Makhzan al-‘Irfān*, 2:88.

«دلهای ما سرپوشیده و در غلاف است» — Muṣṭafā Khurramdil, 2:88.

«دلهای ما در میان پردهها پوشیده شده است» — Sayyid Riḍā Sirāj, 2:88; Āyatullāh Muḥammad Riḍā Qubādī Ādinehwand, 2:88 (“*dilhā-yi mān rā pardehā-yi pūshāndah ast*”).

«بر دلهای ما پرده افکنده شده» — Āyatullāh Makārim Shirāzī, 4:155.

«دلهای ما پرده دارد» — Muḥammad Bāqir Behbūdī, 4:155.

«دلهای ما در پرده و غلاف است» — Ḥusayn ‘Alī Rāshid, 2:88; ‘Imād-zādeh, 4:155 (“*dar pardeh wa dar ghilāf*”).

«دلهای ما را غلافی پوشانیده است» — ‘Alī Akbar Sarwarī, 2:88.

«دلهای ما در غلاف و پوشش است» — Jurjānī, *Tafsīr-e Gāzor*, 4:155.

«قلبهای ما همان و در غلاف است» — Muḥammad Jawād Najafī, *Tafsīr-e Āsān*, 2:88.

«قلبهای ما را پرده گرفته است» — Muḥammad Jawād Najafī, *Tafsīr-e Āsān*, 4:155.

«بر دلهای ما پرده افکنده شده» — *Tafsīr-e Namūneh*, 4:155; Muḥsin Qarā’iti, *Tafsīr-e Nūr*, 4:155 (with a slight difference).

«دلهای ما در درون پرده غلیظ و غلافی است» — Abu al-Faḍl Dāwar-panāh, *Tafsīr-e Nūr*

«دلهای ما در پوشش است»

That is, "Our hearts are in covers," implying a professed incapacity to understand the Prophet's preaching. Hence some of these translators add an explanation to the translation of the verse:<sup>36</sup>

«آنچه می گویی نمی فهمیم»

Some of the translators, sensing resistance and defiance in the statement of the Jews, have added such words as these:<sup>37</sup>

«دلهای ما هرگز دعوت تو را نخواهد پذیرفت»

Some have translated the phrase in such a manner as if the covers were inside the hearts, not the hearts within covers.<sup>38</sup>

*al-'Irfān*, 2:88.

«دلهای ما سرپوش دارد» —Muḥammad Bāqir Behbūdi, 2:88.

«دلهای ما در میان پردهها پوشیده شده است» —Sayyid Riḍā Sirāj, 2:88.

<sup>36</sup> Sayyid Riḍā Sirāj, 4:155. Other similar explanations that are added are as follows:

«چیزی از سخنان شما در نمی یابد» —Mahdi Ilāhī Qumsheh'ī, 2:88.

«ما از گفته تو چیزی نمی فهمیم» —Āyatullāh Makārim Shirāzi, 2:88.

«سخنان پیامبر را درک نمی کنیم» —*Ibid.*, 4:155.

«آن سخن که می گویی به آن نمی رسد» —Maybudī, 4:155.

«از اینکه تو می گویی در نمی یابد» —*Ibid.*, 2:88.

«از سخن شما چیزی درک نمی کنیم» —Imād-zadeh, 2:88.

«نمی توانیم سخنان شما را درک کنیم» —'Abd al-Majid Šādiq Nobarī, 4:155.

«چیزی از سخن حق وارد آن نمی شود» —Aḥmad Noandish, 2:88.

«این بند تو بدو نرسد» —*Tafsīr-e Baṣā'ir-e Yamīnī*, 2:88.

«یعنی پوشیده از فهم و باز داشته شده از قبول» —Ḥusayn Wā'iz Kāshifi, *Tafsīr-e Ḥusaynī*, 2:88.

<sup>37</sup> Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ḥusaynī Hamadānī, *Tafsīr-e Anwār-e Darakhshān*, 4:155.

<sup>38</sup> «در دلهای ما غلاف است» —*Tafsīr-e Kābulī*, trans. of Maḥmūd al-Ḥasan's Urdu *tafsīr*, 4:155.

«در قلب ما پرده ای هست» —'Abd al-Majid Šādiq Nobarī, 4:155; Muḥammad Karim 'Alawi Ḥusaynī Mūsawī, *Tafsīr-e Kashf al-Ḥaqā'iq*, 4:155.

As [1] implies a denial of receptivity, some of the translators paraphrase the statement of the Jews as follows:

«دلهای ما ادراک نمی‌تواند کند»،<sup>39</sup> «دلهای ما مسدود است»،<sup>40</sup> «دلهای ما بسته است»،<sup>41</sup>  
 «دلهای ما فرو بسته است»،<sup>42</sup> «دلهای ما فهم کردن نتواند»،<sup>43</sup> «چیزی نمی‌فهمند»،<sup>44</sup> «دلهای ما  
 نمی‌تواند دعوت اسلام را بفهمند»<sup>45</sup>

Among Persian translators and commentators, only the author of *Tafsīr-e Gāzor* has adopted interpretation [2],<sup>46</sup> while none among them, from among the works consulted, has adopted [3] as the basis of his translation of 2:88 & 4:155. On the basis of [3], an acceptable rendering of the phrase '*qulūbunā ghuf*' would be:

«دلهای ما نامختون است»

### 10.2 Urdu Translations:

Most of the Urdu translators have followed [1] in translating this phrase and rendered it with wordings similar to those of the Persian translators:

(ہمارے دلوں پر پردے پڑے ہوئے ہیں) — Shāh Rafī' al-Dīn, 4:155.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Muḥammad Khwājawi, 4:155.

<sup>40</sup> Jalāl al-Dīn Farsī, 4:155.

<sup>41</sup> Maybudī, 4:155; Abū al-Futūḥ Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 2:88; Āyatullāh Maḥmūd Ṭāliqānī, *Partowī az Qur'ān*, 2:88 (with "yā dar pūshish" in parentheses).

<sup>42</sup> 'Abd al-Muḥammad Āyatī, 4:155.

<sup>43</sup> Abū al-Qāsim Pāyandeh, 2:88 & 4:155 (with a slight difference of wording).

<sup>44</sup> *Tarjumeh Tafsīr-e Majma' al-Bayān*, 4:155.

<sup>45</sup> Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir Mūsawī Hamadānī, *Tarjumeh Tafsīr-e al-Mizān*, 4:155.

<sup>46</sup> «دلهای ما وعاء علم است» — Jurjānī, *Tafsīr-e Gāzor*, in the second rendering of 4:155.

<sup>47</sup> Maḥmūd al-Ḥasan, 2:88 & 4:155; Farmān 'Alī, 2:88 & 4:155; Aḥmad

(ہمارے دلوں پر غلاف ہیں) — Shāh Rafi' al-Dīn, 2:88.<sup>48</sup>

Riḍā Khān Barelawī, 2:88; Dhī-Shān Ḥaydar Jawādī, 2:88; Faṭḥ Muḥammad Khān Jālandharī, 2:88 & 4:155; Mīrzā Ḥayrat Dehlavī, 2:88 & 4:155; Sayyid 'Ammār 'Alī, 4:155; Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khan, 4:155; Khwājah Ḥasan Nizāmī, 4:155; Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīz, *Maṭālib-e Qur'ān-e Ḥakīm*, 4:155; Sayyid Muḥammad Sarwar Shāh (Qādiyānī), 4:155; Muḥammad 'Alī (Qādiyānī), 2:88 & 4:155; Shaykh Muḥammad 'Alī, 4:155; Sayyid 'Alī Ḥasan Bihārī, *Maṭālib al-Qur'ān*, 2:88; Muḥammad 'Abd al-Bārī Farangi-Mahallī, *Alṭāf al-Raḥmān bi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 2:88; Muḥammad 'Abd al-Bārī Ḥyderabadī, 4:155; Ghulām Rasūl Raḍawī, *Tafsīr-e Raḍawī*, 2:88; Muḥammad Ayyūb Khān, 2:88 & 4:155 (in both verses “*Hamāre dil dhake huwe hain*”).

<sup>48</sup> Shāh 'Abd al-Qādir, 2:88 Nawāb Wahīd al-Zamān, 2:88 & 4:155; Sayyid Maqbūl Aḥmad, 2:88; Aḥmad Riḍā Khān Barelawī, 4:155; Dhī-Shān Ḥaydar Jawādī, 4:155 (adds “*fiṭratan*” in parentheses); Sayyid Abū al-'Alā Mawdūdī, 4:155; 'Abd al-Rashīd Nu'mānī, *Tarjumeḥ Tafsīr-e Ibn Kathīr*, 2:88 & 4:155; 'Abd al-Ḥaqq Ḥaqqānī, *Tafsīr-e Ḥaqqānī*, 2:88 & 4:155; Sayyid Zafar Ḥasan Amrohawī, *Tafsīr*, 2:88 & 4:155; Imdād Ḥusayn Kāzīmī, 2:88 & 4:155; Nawāb Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān, *Tarumān al-Qur'ān bi Laṭā'if al-Bayān*, 4:155; Sayyid 'Alī Naqī Naqawī, 2:88 (“*qudratī ghilāf*”) & 4:155; Muḥammad Na'im, *Tafsīr Anwār al-Qur'ān*, 2:88 & 4:155; Sayyid 'Ammār 'Alī, 2:88; Khwājah Ḥasan Nizāmī, 2:88; Muftī Muḥammad Shafi', *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, 2:88 & 4:155; Muḥammad Inshā' Allāh, 4:155; Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīz, *Maṭālib-e Qur'ān-e Ḥakīm*, 2:88; Sayyid Muḥammad Sarwar Shāh (Qādiyānī), 2:88; Shaykh Muḥammad 'Alī, 2:88; Sayyid 'Alī Ḥasan Bihārī, *Maṭālib al-Qur'ān*, 4:155; Pīr Muḥammad Karam-Shāh Azharī, 2:88 & 4:155; Maulawī Muḥammad Husayn, *Tafsīr-e Rabbānī*, 2:88; Muḥammad 'Alī Chāndpūrī, *Tarjumeḥ Tafsīr-e 'Azīzī*, 2:88; Muḥammad 'Abd al-Bārī Ḥyderabadī, 2:88; Sayyid Shabbir Aḥmad, 2:88; Sayyid Amīr 'Alī Malīḥ-

Some of these translators have added, in parentheses, an adjective “*fiṭratan*” or “*qudrati*” (meaning, natural or congenital) to the covers or curtains—something that indicates the adoption of [1a].<sup>49</sup>

Some of the Urdu commentators have considered the covers or curtains over the hearts of the Jews as an indication of their closed minds and absence of receptivity for the new revelation.<sup>50</sup> But some among Urdu translators and commentators have adopted [1b] and translated the phrase in the following, or similar, words<sup>51</sup>,

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ābādī, 2:88; Abū Muḥammad Ibrāhīm, *Tafsīr-e Khalīlī*, 2:88; Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qadīr Ṣiddīqī Qādīrī, *Tafsīr-e Ṣiddīqī*, 4:155; Sayyid Aḥmad Ḥasan Muḥaddith Dehlawī, *Aḥsan al-Tafāsīr*, (follows the interpretation [1a] in both places).

<sup>49</sup> Sayyid ‘Alī Naqī Naqawī, 2:88 (“*qudrati ghilāf*”); Dhī-Shān Ḥaydar Jawādī, 4:155; (“*fiṭratan*” in parentheses); Ghulām Rasūl Raḍawī, *Tafsīr-e Raḍawī*, 2:88.

<sup>50</sup> Abu al-Kalām Azād, *Tarjumān al-Qur’ān*, adopts this interpretation in his commentary on both the verses, so also have Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Tafsīr-e Rabbānī*, Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Bārī Farangi-Maḥallī, *Alṭāf al-Raḥmān bi Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, and Khwājah Ḥasan Nizāmī, *‘Amm-Fahm Tafsīr*, in their commentaries on 2:88. Some of the Urdu commentators, like some of their counterparts in Arabic and Persian, have mixed up between different interpretations. For instance, the honourable writer of *Maṭālib-e Qur’ān-e Ḥakīm*, somewhat implausibly, mixes up [1] and [2c] as follows:

(ہمارے ان لوگوں پر غلاف ہیں (یعنی ہمارے دل ہماری اپنی تعلیم سے اتنے معمور ہیں کہ دوسروں کی تعلیم قبول کرنے کی گنجائش نہیں ہے)

Some of the commentators have adopted contradictory interpretations under the two verses. For instance, the author of *‘Umdat al-Bayān* adopts [1] under 2:88 and [2] under 4:155.

<sup>51</sup> Ashraf ‘Alī Thānawī, 2:88 & 4:155; Sayyid Abu al-A‘lā Mawdūdī, 2:88; Nadhir Aḥmad, 2:88 & 4:155; Waḥīd al-Dīn Khān, 2:88; ‘Abd al-

meaning “Our hearts are secure [against the influence of any new preaching]:”

(ہمارے قلوب محفوظ ہیں)

Sayyid Maqbūl Aḥmad is alone among Urdu translators to adopt [2], which he does in the translation of 2:88. But he too follows [1] in his translation of 4:155. Sayyid ‘Ammār ‘Alī, also a Shī‘ī translator, and a commentator as well, adopts [2], though not in his translation but in his commentary ‘*Umdat al-Bayān*, under 4:155. Probably both of them have followed the old *tafsīr* ascribed to Imam al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī (‘a) which allows both [1] and [2]. Apparently, none among Urdu translators and commentators of the Qur’ān has paid attention to [3] and the Biblical background of the phrase. However, on the basis of [3], an acceptable rendering of the phrase ‘*qulūbunā ghuf*’ in Urdu would be:

(ہمارے دل نامختون ہیں)

### 10.3 French Translations:

Unlike Persian and Urdu, most of the French translators have followed [3] in their translations. However, a number of Muslim translators have adopted interpretations [1] and [2], apparently under the influence of the Arabic commentaries. The interpretations adopted by French translators are given below along with the corresponding renderings.

[1]: *Nos cœurs sont eveloppés dans de voiles.*<sup>52</sup>

Karīm Pārekh, 2:88 & 4:155 (“*ghilāf men mahfūz hain*” in both verses); Abū Muḥammad Muṣliḥ, 2:88 (“*hamāre dil Qur’ān kā athar lene se mahfūz hain*”) & 4:155 (“*hamāre qulūb dūsrōn kī bāten sunne se mahfūz hain*”); Shams Pīr-zādeh, 2:88 & 4:155 (“*hamāre dil band hain*” in both verses); Sayyid Shabbīr Aḥmad, 4:155; Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Bārī Ḥyderābādī, 2:88 (“*hamāre dil ghilāfon men mahfūz hain*”).

<sup>52</sup> Jean Grosjean, 2:88, 4:155 (“*Nos cœurs sont voilés*”); G. H. Abolqasemi Fakhri (Qum, 1999), 2:88 & 4:155 (with a slight variance);

[1b]: *Nos cœurs sont imperméables.*<sup>53</sup>

[2]: *Nos cœurs sont remplis de science.*<sup>54</sup>

[3]: *Nos cœurs sont incirconcis.*<sup>55</sup>

Here, I would like to take the opportunity to thank my friend Dr. Yaḥyā ‘Alavī (who is presently working on the second volume of a scholarly French translation) for pointing out the Biblical background of the phrase ‘*qulūbunā ghulf*,’ Although I knew that several English translations had followed [3] in their rendering of the phrase, I was not well aware of its Biblical usage. His remarks have prompted this study of the occurrence of the phrase in Qur’ānic commentaries and translations.<sup>56</sup>

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anonymous Qādiyānī translator (under the supervision of Mirzā Muḥammad Ṭāhir Aḥmad), 2:88 & 4:155; Rokeya Mahmoud Gabr and ‘Achira Mohammaed Kamel Ahmed, (French translation of *al-Muntakhab*, Cairo: Al-Azhar, 1997/1417), 2:88.

<sup>53</sup> Salah ed-Dine Kechrid, 2:88 & 4:155; Nouredine Ben Mahmoud, 2:88 (“*Nos cœurs sont inaccessibles*”); Cheick Si Hamza Boubakeur, 4:155 (“*Leurs cœurs étaient insensibles*”).

<sup>54</sup> Claude Etienne Savary, 2:88 & 4:155; Régis Blachère, 2:88 & 4:155; Kasimirski, 2:88 & 4:155; Edouard Louis Montet, 2:88 & 4:155; Denise Masson, 2:88 & 4:155; Joseph Charles Victor Mardrus, 2:88 & 4:155; Muḥammad Ḥamidullāh, 2:88 & 4:155; Ahmet Laiméche & B. Ben Daoud, 2:88 & 4:155; Yaḥyā ‘Alavī et Javād Hadidī , 2:88; Sadok Mazigh, 4:155; André du Ryer, 2:88 & 4:155, the first translator of the Qur’ān into French translates the phrase thus: *Notre Cœur est endurci*, i.e., “Our heart is hardened,” Sadok Mazigh follows him in his translation of 2:88.

<sup>55</sup> Cheick Si Hamza Boubakeur, 2:88.

<sup>56</sup> A Persian version of this study was published in the biannual journal *Tarjumān-e Waḥy*, No. 9 (vol. 5, No. 1, 2001), pp. 4-31, No. 10 (vol. 5, no. 2, 2002), pp. 4-25, published by the Center for Translation of the

#### 10.4 German Translations:

Like the French translators, most of the translators into German have followed [3] in their renderings of the phrase, although here too one finds some Muslim translators following [1] and [1b].

[1]: *Unsere Herzen sind in Hüllen gewickelt.*<sup>57</sup>

[1b]: *Unsere Herzen sind unempfindlich.*<sup>58</sup>

[3]: *Unsere Herzen sind unbeschmittten.*<sup>59</sup>

#### 10.5 Italian Translations:

With only one exception, all the translators have followed [3]:

[1]: *I nostri cuori sono avvolti in involucri.*<sup>60</sup>

[3]: *I nostri cuori sono incirconcisi.*<sup>61</sup>

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Holy Qur'ān, Qum.

<sup>57</sup> Ahmad v. Dneffer, 2:88 & 4:155; Amir M. A. Zaidan, 2:88 (“*Unsere Herzen sind bedeckt*”), 4:155 (“*Unsere Herzen sind verhüllt*”); Moustafa Maher, 2:88, 4:155 (“*verschlossen*”); Muḥammaed Ibn Ahmad Ibn Rasoul (Köln, 1955), 2:88, 4:155 (“*Unsere Herzen sind hinter einem Schleier*”); Scheich ‘Abdullāh as-Ṣāmit, 2:88, 4:155 (“*Unsere Herzen sind verhüllt*”); Anonymous Qādiyāni translator, 2:88 & 4:155.

<sup>58</sup> Maulana Sadr-ud-din (Qādiyāni), 2:88 & 4:155; Fatima Heeren (Munich: HKD Bavaria, 1997), 2:88 & 4:155.

<sup>59</sup> Theodor Grigull, 2:88 & 4:155; Lazarus Goldschmidt, 2:88 & 4:155; Ludwig Ullmann, 2:88 & 4:155; Friedrich Rückert, 2:88 & 4:155; Max Henning, 2:88 & 4:155; Rudi Paret, 2:88 & 4:155; Adel Theodor Khoury, 2:88 & 4:155.

<sup>60</sup> Only the anonymous Qādiyāni translator follows this interpretation.

<sup>61</sup> Federico Perone, 2:88 & 4:155; Hamza Roberto Piccardo, 2:88 & 4:155; Alessandro Bausani, 2:88 & 4:155; Luigi Bonelli, 2:88 & 4:155; Eugenio Camillo Branchi, 2:88 & 4:155; Aquillo Fracassi, 2:88 & 4:155;

### 10.6 Spanish Translations:

Some translators into Spanish have followed [1] and [1b] under the influence of the commentaries, while most of them have adopted [3] as the basis of their rendering.

[1]: *Nuestros corazones están cubiertos.*<sup>62</sup>

[1b]: *Nuestros corazones están insensibles.*<sup>63</sup>

[2]: *Nuestros corazones son depósitos.*<sup>64</sup>

[3]: *Nuestros corazones están incircuncisos.*<sup>65</sup>

*Concluded—walḥamdu lillāh*

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Angelo Terenzoni, 2:88 & 4:155; Arnaldo Fracassi, 2:88 & 4:155.

<sup>62</sup> Anonymous (Qādiyāni Spanish translation based on Muḥammad ‘Alī’s English version; Ahmadiyyah Anjuman Lahore, 1986), 4:155; Alvaro Marchodom Comins, 4:155 (*Nuestros corazones están enfundados*).

<sup>63</sup> Ahmed Abboud & Rafael Castellanos, 2:88 & 4:155; Abdel ghani Melara Navio, 2:88 & 4:155 (“*Nuestros corazones están cerrados*”).

<sup>64</sup> Abdurrasak Pérez (Spanish translation based on Muḥammad Asad’s English version), 2:88 & 4:155 (“*Nuestros corazones están ya rebosantes de conocimiento*”); Anonymous (Qādiyāni translation based on Muḥammad ‘Alī’s English version), 2:88.

<sup>65</sup> Juan Vernet, 2:88 & 4:155; Julio Cortés, 2:88 & 4:155; Juan Bentista Bergua, 2:88 & 4:155; Joaquin Garcia-Bravo, 2:88 & 4:155; Alvaro Machordom Comins, 2:88 (he renders the phrase in these words: “*nuestros corazones están endurecidos*”); Juan Manuel Dominguez, 4:155.

# Globalization and Dialogue of Religions

*In Conversation with Dr. Ghulām Rizā A‘wānī*

**All Human Beings Throughout History Have Been Invited to Follow the Divine Religion!**

*Q: Dr. A‘wānī, could we start this discussion with a question on your understanding of the issue of globalization? Would you call this phenomenon a process or is it a project in your opinion?*

**Dr. A‘wānī:** Globalization has itself turned into a global issue. However, to begin with, we need to define its nature and examine its emergence. In its present concept, globalization is a western phenomenon that emerged alongside Western modernity and has now reached its zenith. Therefore if we were to consider modernism as a project, since globalization too possesses the same characteristics as modernity and modernism, it can in fact be said to be the zenith and the perfection of modernity that is its rational outcome.

Globalization possesses the same characteristics as modernism. The basic characteristic of modernism is secularization and secularism, and in other words it could be said that modernism views the world from a materialistic outlook. Such a materialistic viewpoint has been a growing trend in the

western worldview in the modern age. Modern philosophy is more or less a secular philosophy. It is not as if to say that God has no place in modern philosophy, but instead, we could say that modern philosophy simply relates to knowledge and wisdom from a materialistic outlook.

If religion were to present the concept of globalization it would have a divine characteristic. For instance, Christianity possesses a global divine message. Or Islam for that matter is not confined to any particular community, nation, or historical period. All these features stem from a divine perspective. However, globalization in its present sense is devoid of divine characteristics and is in fact “western” in nature and has spread with the emergence of modern science, modern philosophy, and with the expansion of the modern Western civilization.

However, as regards the enquiry as to whether globalization is a process or a project, it needs to be mentioned that it is possible for something to be, both, a process as well as a project. In this case, it depends on whether we consider “westernism” and “modernism” to be a process or a project. In my opinion it could be both since it began as a process at a particular point of time owing to certain factors along with the emergence of modern philosophy, modern science, and the new paradigm of thinking. An examination of what those factors that were later converted into a project were, calls for an altogether different discussion. To stay on this particular subject, however, we would need to draw a line between modernism and modernization. Modernism is a process whereas modernization is a project. This is because thinkers from the age of intellectualism as well as philosophers have defended and promoted modernism – albeit not out of force – through their books and theories which also found their way to other countries. Later on, however, this trend of thought attracted supporters who tended to impose their views upon others. In other words, this was no longer an issue of modernism but in fact

became an issue of modernization which was at times also enforced through military means or through the power of the state. The moves of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Turkey cannot by any means be termed as modernism and were much rather “modernization” and the imposition of modernity. In Iran, Rizā Khān, too, harbored the same motives. However, in the case of the Western world, it was the issue of modernity and not modernization, although it did contain some weak leanings towards modernization. Later on, the West tried to impose modernization upon the East over a short period of time and in the course of a few years and also tried to deal a blow to the Eastern world.

As regards globalization, too, it has become an issue of “globalizing” and the West that claims sovereignty over the world intends to impose it upon the East in the form of a project. Therefore, it can be seen that their forces easily occupy a country or attack its interests. As a matter of fact, the West has returned to the period of the ideology of globalizing.

*Q: It appears that you give a great deal of emphasis upon military action in the process of globalizing.*

**Dr. A‘wānī:** This entire thing began as a trend of thought to which came to be added a political angle that has now also taken a military dimension. Take a look at our neighbouring countries and just see what is transpiring there. The US is doing whatever it pleases in the other countries in the guise of globalizing and since it has the right of veto it uses that right to nullify whatever is against its own liking, completely unresponsive to the opinions or the objections of the others. It gives itself the right to act as it pleases, and intends to achieve its objectives through military force, even if it may not succeed everywhere. However, economic issues as well as the power of modern technology have contributed greatly to this type of globalization. It is unfortunate that many people in the world have been deceived by the claim of

the Westerners to be “thinkers”. Under the current circumstances one is left perplexed as to whether to believe in their claims or to judge them through their actions. Their actions are completely contradictory to their tall claims.

*Q: Thus, could we say that in your opinion globalization is currently a project?*

**Dr. A‘wānī:** I would say that globalization is no more an idea or a philosophical thought since today’s politicians are not committed to philosophical thought and idea and are instead busy chasing their own objectives.

*Q: As per the beliefs of certain people, could we say that the advocates of the project of globalizing are busy scheming and implementing upon a certain plan to direct world religious leaders, forums, and institutions towards their own leanings in order to maintain control over this widespread trend? For instance, they gathered all the world religious leaders in the UN and organized the World Council of Religious Leaders in Thailand. Could this move be considered as beneficial for religions?*

**Dr. A‘wānī:** I am not aware of what has transpired behind the scenes. The situation could be as certain people believe it to be. However, this move could in a way prove to be advantageous from the point of view of religions. It may perhaps be that the religious leaders, who gathered at the UN, did so with a good intention which is in itself an auspicious and promising factor. But even if this conference was organized with a planned ulterior motive and for political purposes, such gatherings could serve as a good beginning for dialogue, which could bear positive results if continued. This is because any kind of dialogue among religious leaders is positive and beneficial.

It should always be kept in mind that religion cannot be tampered around with and even if there is a covert political agenda behind their moves, it will not last long and will soon be

exposed. This is because religion belongs to God and God is the “best of planners” and He exposes the plots of all the evil schemers!

*Q: The globalization of modernity, which in your opinion has no divine aspects, has emerged at the global level through special ways and means and is even making progress. Which faith or religion can the critics of this type of globalization rely upon in order to provide them with appropriate ways and means for promoting another kind of globalization? Secondly, Islam claims to be the universal religion and one of the objectives of the return of the Twelfth Imam, the Mahdī (May Allah hasten his reappearance) is universalizing Islam. What in your opinion are the consistent points in this ideal that you could highlight under the current global conditions?*

**Dr. A‘wānī:** The globalization of the first kind is secular, materialistic, non-spiritual, and at times even satanic in nature. But the globalization of the religious kind is based upon divine principles because religion can never abide by unchecked values and principles and is governed by its own specific standards.

Although the term “globalization” is not used in religions, globalization as an ideal very much exists within their framework. We do have global religions in the sense that the message of the divine religion is universal and is for all mankind throughout history. When the Qur’ān addresses the Prophet Muhammad (S) in the words: “*We have not sent you but as a mercy to the worlds*” (21: 107), it in fact implies that the message of Islam is universal and is for all mankind. This idea has also been highlighted in another verse of the Qur’ān that says: “*O mankind! Surely We have created you of a male and a female ...surely the most honourable of you with Allah is the one among you most careful of his duty*” (49: 13).

This message presents a trans-communal, a trans-national, and a global worldview. As a matter of fact this is the core of the

message of Islam, which is not confined to any particular boundaries and which addresses every human community or nation for all times. Thus, care should be taken to refrain from mixing up these two different concepts of globalization. This is because the first kind of globalization is based upon Western values and its objectives are purely materialistic whereas the second type of globalization is based upon divine principles. This means that in this kind of globalization man views history as well as the entire creation from a divine worldview and considers resurrection as a divine affair. In other words, in this view human life is based upon divine virtues and dignity. The universe is the manifestation of God and His divine and sacred presence and He is present in everything and everywhere; “He is with you wherever you are”.

However, even though in the Western form of globalization there is no overt mention of materialism – of course, there are also a few notorious groups from among them that overtly claim to have materialistic goals – it is a materialistic worldview that prevails over Western ideology. Whenever a worldview is devoid of godliness, even if it is not admitted openly, it is a materialist worldview and blocks the path of God, the higher realms, and generally the truth and it in fact confines man within this worldly realm, appearing to have created a paradise for him, even though in reality it has only opened up the gates of hell for man. Thus we see that these two paths are totally apart from one another even though they may appear to resemble each other in some ways. They are very different, both in their nature as well as their purpose, and should not be mixed up.

*Q: How will this worldview actually manifest itself in human life?*

**Dr. A‘wānī:** It is bound to manifest itself. When life becomes divinely-inspired, all areas are influenced by it including man’s perception, his temperament, his personal behaviour, and

his government. All the prophets of God ('a) were sent for guiding mankind and to transform man's perception of life.

The prophets ('a) were not actually sent to perform any supernatural feats but they were rather sent to guide mankind on matters that they are generally heedless about; and to return man to the truth of his real being and to make him aware of that reality. Remembrance of God in all affairs is the essence of religion and this truth is present in the core of the being of everything. The divine prophets ('a) came to awaken this reality in the core of existence of the human beings and to make them aware of the source of life, that is, God, and to enable them to reach to the highest levels that have divinely been bestowed upon mankind. Now, does man possess this awareness or not? If he has divine awareness then he should gain knowledge about himself and man truly does possess this potential and religion is also there to guide him and to take him towards an absolute awareness. However, each individual can gain this awareness to the extent of his personal capacity.

Meanwhile, all these prophets of globalization are false and they are playing evil games with mankind. If history would some day decide to evaluate the contribution of such people to mankind it would surely be a negative one. Do we have any idea of what they have inflicted upon themselves and mankind? Since we are Muslims, we may overlook certain facts, but it needs to be admitted that man has really lost his value and his human dignity. On the one hand, such people harp upon human dignity while on the other hand, their actions show complete disregard for human worth and dignity. This is the paradox of mankind today.

*Q: Man has both spiritual as well as material needs and desires to live according to the latest and the most up-to-date advancements. Now it may be that some of these advancements that have been the result of modern civilization may prove to run against his true nature and his ultimate felicity. The Western*

*civilization which harbours a secular worldview, openly declares that it has nothing to do with religion, religiousness, and the salvation of man. However, religion that claims to ensure the worldly as well as the other-worldly needs of man is responsible for providing man with all his needs and to provide answers to all the social, cultural, educational, scientific, and economic needs of individuals and societies and to supply whatever is expected from a state and that too without neglecting the aspect of man's spiritual needs. Do you agree with this point?*

**Dr. A'wānī:** It is absolutely true that man has certain needs and should enjoy the good things of this world. Islam specifically stresses this point. However, Islam does not consider this world and its pleasures as the ultimate goal of man's life even though it allows that man should have his due share of the lawful pleasures of this world. God, Who has endowed these natural blessings upon His creation, truly wishes for them to be used well by man.

Religion has certain parameters and the world is one of those parameters. However, the purpose of religion is not confined to this world even though the world has its own importance. The Hereafter is yet another of those parameters. Man is constantly chased by death and death is within another paradigm. Life after death is in a different realm altogether that has its own laws. Religion also gives due attention to this reality and prepares man for that other paradigm after death so that he attains perfection.

It could happen that man gets caught up in tomfoolery and does not traverse the path to perfection. Just like a seed that rots and fails from becoming a tree, if man, too, does not live according to the divine worldview that addresses all the various parameters, he truly perishes. But a believer is aware and all his acts are based upon his awareness. The world has its own place in a believer's life but it is a world which is very different from the world of the secularists. In secularism, the Hereafter is believed to

be a personal parameter which is inconsequential on the whole, and what is given importance is this very world. Thus, we can see how these two “worlds” are different from each other.

*Q: Is it possible for believers to achieve their religious goals in a society that is not governed by religious fundamentals or is it necessary to have these fundamentals on the basis of religious beliefs?*

**Dr. A‘wānī:** This is how Islam has fundamentally been. It was with the descent of Divine Revelation that the Islamic society came into being and the society of Medina was formed on the basis of religion; and it was from there that Islam spread to other places. The growth of Christianity in Christian societies was of the same nature and was not based upon force or coercion. The divine personality of Prophet Jesus (‘a) gave rise to this worldview.

Generally speaking, whenever the dominant worldview in a society changes, everyone is under the sway of its influence. Same was the case in China during the age of Confucius. However, such issues have arisen for us because we are living within a different worldview that negates all the earlier mentioned parameters. In other words, we are living in an atmosphere that is rapt with secularism and modernism while we earlier lived within a traditional society in which no other worldview existed and in which nothing else was even perceivable.

Interestingly, Ghazzālī has written a book called, *al-Iqtisād fī al-I‘tiqād* (Balance in Belief), and what he implies through the term “economy” is the safeguarding of the main parameters of faith. Of course, we do need to keep in mind here that each religion has its own parameters. The term “economy” has not been used by Ghazzālī in its current material sense but has instead been used to indicate the shortest path to salvation and deliverance. For man to attain salvation and deliverance in the shortest time span and with the least difficulty and for him to gain

awareness of God, he should pay due attention to “economizing” through the parameters of faith. These parameters provide the basic elements that reach man to his final goal that is well-defined by religion. This is called “religious economy” or as Ghazzālī has beautifully put it, “economy of faith” which has one definition in Christianity and another according to Islam even though both these definitions may come close. However, the ultimate goal according to both religions and in fact as per all the divine religions is the salvation and the deliverance of man and attaining to the awareness of God.

*Q: Globalization does not apparently negate religion but only treats it as a personal issue which is apart from collective or social issues. Keeping in view the different interpretations of the various religions on this issue, can inter-religious dialogue help create proximity among the followers of different religions so that they can give due importance to the social and collective aspect of religion and motivate believers to take up this stance vis-à-vis globalization?*

**Dr. A‘wānī:** The secular world converts religion into an individual and personal issue and considers it to be a personal matter that can be as per the individual preference of each individual without it having any global dimension. As a matter of fact, the secular world does not consider religion to hold any epistemological, divine, or ontological fundamentals and considers it to be a subjective issue that is defined by individuals within the parameters of their own minds and introduces religion as something baseless for the recreation of the common man. This interpretation of religion is exactly contradictory to the beliefs of the religious people.

The followers of religions believe that religion is a divine truth and is the Divine Law based upon man’s being and his primordial nature. Moreover, God is the “Giver” of religion and, therefore, the believers believe in a Source that has created man

and the entire universe and the wisdom of this creation reaches its peak only if and when, after the creation of man, he is addressed and guided. This completes the external or religious guidance along with natural inner guidance with which all human beings are created.

*Q: The movement of the religious traditionalists gained its identity vis-à-vis modernity. How can this movement which believes in the exalted unity of all divine religions support the cause of dialogue among civilizations in attaining the social objectives of the believers?*

**Dr. A'wānī:** People generally consider “tradition” to be a habit or a general or normative behaviour. However, when we refer to the word “tradition” (*sunnah*) what we are referring to is the tradition that is flowing through everything, or to put it in another expression, it is the “Tao”. Based upon this definition, all of life is “Tao”. I am sure you are aware that tradition is not limited to religion but it in fact flows within the very nature of everything. This *sunnah* or tradition is the tradition of Allah or to put it in the Qur'ānic words: “*This is Allah's law (tradition), which has indeed obtained in the matter of His servants...*” (40: 85) or “*For you shall not find any alteration in the course of Allah; and you shall not find any change in the course of Allah.*” (35: 43)

It is only Allah's tradition that does not accept any change or alteration. The law of being is as it always was and always shall be. It is eternal and is the same pure primordial nature. It is the same pure religion that is from eternity to eternity but appears in different manifestations. But the truth of religion is the same. In other words, the common term “religion” is not the only shared feature among all religions. If there is a commonality only in the “term”, then it is not worthy of being called by the name of “religion” and perhaps another term should be employed for it. The term “religion” has a common truth just as the term “human”

is used commonly for every person because whether a person is Iranian, or Indian, or Chinese, all of them are firstly human beings even though they may be different in appearance. The truth of being human remains the same in all cases failing which, we would need to use an altogether different term of reference. Similarly, the term “religion”, too, implies a common truth. Thus, in the same manner that everything else gains manifestation in this universe, religion too gets manifested and appears in various forms even though its basic truth is eternally one and the same.

God is the “Giver” of religion. The truth of religion is God and all divine religions are from God and since they all stem from a single Source, there is a unity among them. All divine religions have addressed human beings and the One and only God has addressed man through religion. Even if they have appeared in different forms, the purpose of religion has always been the same and there is truly no difference among them.

All the divine prophets (‘a) also came to guide mankind and all of them are the manifestations of the divine name *al-Hādī* (The Guide) and they are the manifestations of divine guidance. They are unlike the Satan who is the manifestation of evil, as the *al-Muzill* (The Debaser).

The prophets (‘a) have no differences in their basic principles and according to the Holy Qur’ān all of them testify and confirm a common truth. Nowhere in the Holy Qur’ān has it been mentioned that a prophet has rejected another prophet but in fact all of them confirmed the truth of the previous prophets (‘a) and their Divine Books. This is because in reality they had all brought the same, one message. We should know that if any differences have emerged between the principles of the various religions, these are actually differences between their historical forms and do not concern their essential forms. The prophets (‘a) have all been sent to eradicate differences and to present the purest form of religion.

In its truest nature, religion is like pure water that springs out from a single fountainhead. When that same water flows into the different rivers and into polluted areas it takes on the colour of that place and manifests that same pollution. Now the question here is whether we should judge the water in the pure form that it emerged or whether we should only see it in its polluted form? The very same principle applies for religion. Religion, too, has passed through innumerable souls before it has reached us. Has the religion that we are following today reached us through purified souls and through the souls of the intimate “friends” of God or has it reached us through sources that were not of this kind. Just like water, religion too can either be polluted if it has passed through impure places or then it can be pure and clean if it has reached us through pure and unpolluted courses.

When we speak of religion, we should focus upon its fountainhead and only then will we realize that all of them are the various paths of guidance in reality. All true religions were divine in nature and all of them guided man towards deliverance and brought absolute awareness for him and imparted to him the path to attain nearness to God.

I would also like to stress here that religion can never be abrogated. Can the message of Prophet Abraham (‘a) be annulled?! And if Prophet Abraham (‘a) were to be present today, even though it is an impossible supposition, it would be obligatory on us and on all religious scholars to follow him. After all he is a divine prophet (‘a). Is it a simple matter to be able to reach the exalted status of prophethood? And Abraham (‘a) is one of the five greatest prophets. Allah also instructs Prophet Muhammad (S), notwithstanding his grand status, to observe the path of Prophet Abraham (‘a). Our theologians speak of the abrogation of some holy verses. They are right in a way since abrogation is possible in matters that cannot last on the strength of their own nature. Or in other words, laws that can accept

abrogation cannot be eternal. However, the religion of guidance cannot ever be abrogated. Can the message of unity that was brought by Prophet Abraham (‘a) ever be abrogated?! If anyone even attains a whiff of the “*Abrahamī tawhīd*” (the monotheism of Abraham), he is from those who attain salvation. When some people speak about the abrogation of all the religions their claims are not justified.

We should firstly clarify as to what can be abrogated and what cannot. The basic principles of religion can never be abrogated. No prophet (‘a) ever came to preach the message of disbelief or polytheism but in fact all of them stressed upon divine guidance, monotheism, resurrection, virtues, and good acts. Therefore, an important part of religion and particularly the part that relates to divine knowledge and guidance and the principles of religion can never ever be abrogated.

*Q: Some people believe that spiritualism has spread through the world while others believe that we may be at the beginning of some sort of pull towards religiousness. However, some of the so-called spiritual sects in the US and in Europe have nothing to do with religiousness. Everyone admits that it was following the Islamic Revolution of Iran that a return to religion began to spread throughout the world. Do you think that this trend of returning to religion will continue or do you believe that what today is referred to as a return to religion and spirituality is in no way related to divine religions?*

**Dr. A‘wānī:** Your question has two parts to it. One is regarding whether spiritualism has been on the rise in today’s society, without reference to Iran. In this regard you presented two opposing views. Many critics believe that humanity has distanced itself from spiritualism and I agree with this view.

Spiritualism cannot be a farce or a show. Spiritualism only emerges within the being of spiritual and divinely-oriented people. Do our times have more divinely-oriented people or did

they thrive more a hundred or a thousand years ago? Are they more in number in today's times? Sure, religiousness as a "parade" is on the rise. In the US, religion is just like a vogue or a fad! But this superficial inclination is not indicative of true and divine spiritualism. If there is spiritualism then where are the saints? If there is spiritualism then where are the intimate "friends" of God? Thus, if we focus our attention on the truth of religion and not on its external paraphernalia it is not difficult to sense the absence of spiritualism. There is a lot of hullabaloo about spirituality in the West. Of course, it is also impossible to reject the fact that there has been a kind of revival of religiousness for in some ways religion has been revived. But the question is whether attention is being paid to religion in its totality? I doubt it. At the same time, Imam Khumaynī's true intention was to revive religion in its pure sense because extremist trends like secularism had emerged in the society that was heading towards a non-religious life and the elimination of religion. The Imam was determined to revive Islamic thought. However, the question is whether we have attained to that goal or not. Although our revolution has relatively succeeded, we should also evaluate our position in the world.

What is our scientific and economic standing? Attention should be paid to the religious principles of these issues and efforts should be made to eradicate the existing shortcomings. It is absolutely necessary to focus on virtues. Are we really focused on the principle of *tawhīd* (belief in the Oneness of God)? Are we paying the due attention to the reality of *wilāyah* (divine guidance)? Even though we may all be monotheists and believe in *tawhīd*, have we attained a substantial amount of divine awareness? Thus, we could say that the steps that we have taken thus far are good but they are insufficient. We have many shortcomings and need to accept that fact. One of those shortcomings is our neglect of ethical and spiritual virtues as well

as the inner and true dimensions of religion. More attention needs to be paid to the principles of religion because the secondary laws of religion are safeguarded only if the principles of religion are protected.

*Q: What is your vision for the future?*

**Dr. A'vānī:** The path has been opened out but it will only bear fruit when it reaches its perfection. The Qur'ānic virtues are very important and we believe that these virtues had reached their perfection in our Infallible Imams ('a). We, too, need to endeavour to this same end but have unfortunately neglected to do so. We have paid much more attention to the externals of faith rather than its essence. However, it is also necessary to pay the due attention to the externals but the essence of religion is only revived by giving due attention to the Holy Qur'ān. It is not enough to say that we have a religious state. A religious state also needs justice. Justice is an Islamic and a Shi'ite principle and only the School of the Ahl al-Bayt has stressed upon the ideals of justice and Imamate in its fundamental tenets and in fact some Muslims do not believe in these two principles as being the basic principles of religion. In any case, we need to ask ourselves if justice which has many angles to it, has been implemented in the society? For instance, can a Muslim whose rights have been violated manage to regain his rights? To what extent have we managed to progress in implementing social and economic justice? An Islamic state should pay attention to the divinely-inspired social, economic, and cultural values. I think we still have a long way to go from the angle of social justice.

## Book Review:

# On Getting the Last Word In

*(Part Two)*

*Dr. Muhammad Legenhausen*

● Descartes thought that God could have made true what we regard as impossible. This is a really interesting suggestion. One way to interpret it is to say that according to Descartes, there is no impossibility. Even contradictions are possible in ways we cannot imagine because God could force truth upon them, such is the might of His omnipotence. Another way to look at it is to take Descartes to be saying that the modal structure of the world could be other than it is. Contradictions are indeed impossible, but they are not necessarily so. There are plenty of modal logics that could be employed to elaborate this suggestion. We might start by defining a contradiction as a proposition that implies falsehood.

$p$  is a contradiction =<sub>df.</sub>  $p \rightarrow \perp$ , i.e.  $\Box(p \supset \perp)$

Then all we need to do is to pick some modal logic in which one cannot prove the characteristic axiom of S4:

$\Box p \supset \Box \Box p$

Far from being unintelligible, the semantics of modal logics provides a picturesque way of imagining how the S4 axiom could fail, how what is impossible may not be necessarily impossible. The S4 axiom is reflected in possible worlds semantics in which the accessibility relation is transitive. To allow for violations of that axiom, one need only allow that the accessibility relation need not be transitive. Contradictions are false in every possible world,  $w$ , accessible to the actual world,  $@$ . For some such  $w$  there might be another world  $w'$ , such that  $w'$  is accessible to  $w$  but not to  $@$ , and such that the contradiction is not false in  $w'$ .

Nagel will protest that no one can really imagine any possible world, no matter how inaccessible to us, in which a contradiction turns out to be true. To this protest, the following responses may be made.

First response. We don't have to imagine *how* a contradiction could be true in  $w'$  to be able to imagine *that* it could be. We know how to build a model for such a thing, and that is enough.

Second response. We can imagine that in  $w'$  the logical structure of reality differs from the structure it has in the actual world and in worlds accessible to the actual world. Standard logic describes the structure of the real world, and paraconsistent logics describe the logical structures of inaccessible worlds.

Third response. Logical truths do not describe reality any more than do grammatical rules. Logical truths merely specify the logical system we employ. A contradiction might be true in  $w'$  not because of some difference in the logical structure of reality, but because of differences in the appropriate logical conventions to adopt in that world.

Another objection that Nagel might want to raise pertains to how we understand logic. Reality does not have any sort of

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logical structure. Logic describes formal relations among sentences, statements or propositions, not factual relations. Logical truth is not to be understood in terms of correspondence, but prescriptively as setting the rules for intelligible assertion in a given tradition of discourse. If some sort of line on the philosophy of logic and mathematics such as this is accepted, Descartes' claims that we might be making mistakes when we affirm the principle of non-contradiction or do simple arithmetic would seem to be misplaced. It is not possible for  $2+3$  to be 4 because the framework for intelligible assertions about arithmetic requires that  $2+3=5$ . Any apparent denial of a truth so basic would indicate that the symbols used were not properly understood or were not properly employed. Call this position absolute logical prescriptivism.

The relativist may grant the basic principles of logical prescriptivism, but urge a relativist version. The rules for intelligible assertion by no means need be absolute, unrevisable or incorrigible. Maybe our minds have been so scrambled by the evil daemon that we think the best framework to be that of standard logic and ordinary arithmetic, while in fact it would be better in some way we cannot imagine if we used some weird logic and arithmetic.

Suppose that Nagel protests that we are playing with words. To change the rules of logic would be to change the meanings of the logical connectives and particles. Negation would not be negation in a system in which non-contradiction was denied. In that case Nagel could tell Descartes that not even God could make the impossible true, because to think otherwise would be to violate the meaning postulates required for thinking about what God could do. Descartes has no use for meaning postulates or anything remotely like logical prescriptivism. He means to claim that given the standard meanings of negation and other logical and arithmetic terms, God could make the theorems

false. Another sort of response to Nagel can be found by imagining that Quine found religion. A born again Quine could claim that God could make true things we hold to be impossible precisely because he denies the form/content distinction on which the unintelligibility claim is based. Prescriptivism is based on the idea that we can neatly divide factual content from logical form. This is what was at the heart of Carnap's introduction of meaning postulates and the logical conventionalism of the positivists. Quine argued against this in favor of a radical form of holism. So, Quine could say that we can well imagine that a rational defense might be given for the adoption of a non-standard logic, and that such adoption does not amount to a mere change of meanings because there are no identifiable meanings to be changed. Habits of usage, conservatism and elegance might lead us to say that while we used to think that negation could be defined in terms of the axioms of standard logic, we now find that the use of this term is flexible enough to recommend its usage in systems without a law of noncontradiction.<sup>1</sup>

Nagel says that Descartes' claim that God could bring about the impossible is not only incorrect, but is unintelligible. Even if we hold that the views described in defense of the Cartesian claim are wrong, they are certainly not unintelligible. If they are intelligible, so is the claim that God could do the impossible. It might be wrong, but it is not nonsense.

● Nagel continues along the same vein:

All alternative possibilities that we can dream up, however extravagant, must conform to the simple truths of arithmetic and logic...(64)

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<sup>1</sup> For the sort of defense of pluralism about logical consequence that I would endorse see Greg Restall, "Carnap's Tolerance, Meaning, and Logical Pluralism," *The Journal of Philosophy*, XCIX, No. 8, Aug. 2002, 426-443.

Why? The reason Nagel gives is not compelling. He speaks of domination, and such talk will always prompt others to talk of resistance. Some thoughts dominate over others in a way that we cannot escape. We are prisoners of the tyranny of logic and arithmetic. This is supposed to rule out skepticism about logic. This argument fails for two reasons. First, standard logic is not as inescapable as Nagel imagines. There are plenty of cogent alternatives around, such as traditional Aristotelian logic, for example, as opposed to the Frege-Russell system he seems to favor. Second, even if some essential principles of logic and arithmetic are inescapable, that does not mean that we must hold them to be true. I can admit that I have nothing better to offer while insisting that what is at hand is dubious. Nagel imagines that the only way for the skeptic to succeed is by getting us to reach some plane at which we not only suspend judgment about the ultimate truth of logic, but cease to rely on it as well. More typically, the skeptic takes a position like that of Hume, who admits that he cannot shake himself free of the ideas about which he is skeptical.

Nagel continues that not only is skepticism about logic 'impossible' but so are all relativist and pragmatist interpretations of logic. Once again, his reason is that we must rely on simple logical truths "whose validity we regard as universal and not subjective." (65) Here Nagel repeats the fallacy of inferring universal absolute validity from unavoidable reliance. Nagel would probably claim that the very arguments I have offered against his position presuppose the universal absolute validity of logic, but there is no such presupposition. I use logical reasoning in the hope that it is reliable enough to lead us from error, but without exaggerated claims of absolute universal validity. Likewise, one may be skeptical about the self-evidence of an axiom without doubting its truth, and one

might find it as useful as the frictionless planes of physics while denying it to be true or self-evident.

● Nagel says that subjectivist comments on the claims of reason contradict themselves because they are only intelligible as objective claims *not* grounded merely in our inescapable responses. (67) He ignores the large territory between objective absolutist claims and mere inescapable responses. To argue is not merely to show a reaction. It is not merely an expression of approval or disapproval. Perhaps there are very radical subjectivists who would want to contend that arguments against a proposition are no more than displays of anger. This seems rather silly, not even worthy of any reply other than a bellow. But short of this there is certainly room for a variety of views incompatible with the absolutist objectivism seen by Nagel as the only alternative. At the more absolutist edge of the spectrum, one could hold that all claims are to be understood as having an implicit margin of error because of subjective factors. At the more subjectivist edge, one could give a rule governed expressivist account of argumentation, according to which all assertions and arguments are seen as expressions of emotion that follow certain rules. Nagel will respond to the latter by saying that the expressivist has to admit that rules are objectively and really followed. But the expressivist might allow that even his own assertion of expressivism and all its components are to be understood the same way. There need be nothing self-contradictory or paradoxical about such views. If they are wrong, they are wrong for other reasons.<sup>2</sup>

● Nagel turns next to infinity and our grasp of it as a model for how internal considerations rule out naturalistic reductions. He claims that we cannot understand counting unless we see it

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<sup>2</sup> See Richard Foley, *Working Without a Net* (New York: Oxford, 1993), 62-67.

as part of something infinite. It seems to me that Nagel's reasoning here is a good example of his studied negligence of views counter to his own. For example, in the Aristotelian tradition, no actual infinities are considered real. Infinity is to be understood in terms of the potential for expansion. There is no actual infinity of numbers. Numbers are products of the mind, not independent existents in a Platonic heaven. There have also been some interesting studies of the sort of mathematics that results from the assumption that we have an indefinitely large set of numbers rather than an infinite such set.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, one could get a grasp of the idea of counting if we saw it as part of something indefinitely large rather than infinite.

● Gödel's incompleteness proof is often taken to demonstrate that mathematical truth cannot be reduced to mathematical proof. For a different view of the matter, see Michael Detlefsen, *Hilbert's Program: An Essay on Mathematical Instrumentalism*, (Boston, MA, and Dordrecht: Reidel, 1986). Nagel asserts that the moral of Gödel's Theorems is antireductionist, but he does not even mention dissenting interpretations.

● Nagel thinks that the best way to see what is wrong with Kantian subjectivism is to notice its circularity: it presupposes the independent validity of reason in its attempts to show that reason is mind dependent. I am no Kantian, but this seems like a cheap shot, although Kant's infamous obscurities invite them. On a more charitable reading, Kant does not presuppose the mind independent validity of reason; rather he takes reason to provide decisive arguments about the nature of the phenomenal world and our understanding of it. That decisiveness does not put reason in the noumenal realm. The philosophical reasoning Kant employs makes use of concepts and categories that are by no means independent of the nature of the human mind. Nagel

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<sup>3</sup> See Shaughan Lavine, *Understanding the Infinite* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

seems to think that with this admission, Kant has to give up the force of reason. For Nagel, the force of reason can only be maintained if it is independent of any subjective factors, if its validity subsists at a level prior to such contingencies. Why? Surely it would be fallacious to think that if reason is dependent on some contingent factors, it cannot issue any necessary judgments. The judgments of reason need not inherit whatever features we attribute to reason itself.

● Nagel states his problem (75) as how human beings can have gained access to the portal to reality provided by reason. A popular answer is that evolution provides the key to understanding how this is possible. Nagel dismisses this as laughable, and footnotes his *View from Nowhere*. There, he complains that evolution makes our rational capacities accidental; while it seems to him that the universe must contain some really fundamental correspondence or *fit* between our understanding and reality. Even if evolutionary theory cannot show why humans had to acquire a capacity of reason that reveals logical truth, it certainly seems to suggest how this capacity may have evolved, for animal studies have shown that humans are not the only creatures with some rational capacities. There are apes that can count, and dolphins that perform well in tests of practical reasoning. Even if we cannot imagine what it would be like to be a bat, it is not as though our rational capacities and those of other animals have nothing in common. Later Nagel returns to this issue; and that will afford opportunity for a more detailed critique.

● Another sort of explanation of the fit between reason and reality is religious. Nagel complains that theories that postulate a divine creator who makes the world and human reason in such a way that by means of the latter we can understand the former do not seem to him to really explain anything because the concept of God is so obscure. Here we shouldn't be too hard on Nagel, because he admits that this might be because of his own inadequate understanding of religious concepts. Maybe some sort of preaching would be more appropriate here than

theological argument, for throughout history religious concepts have been examined in greater detail than most other concepts employed by philosophers. Religious concepts are not easy to understand properly, especially for those coming from a non-religious background, but they are not so obscure as to be unfathomable by such a deep thinker as Nagel. Maybe Nagel's remark is tongue-in-cheek. Sometimes philosophers say that they cannot understand things because they consider them unintelligible. But Nagel's official complaint here is that religious concepts don't seem to have the capacity to explain. Maybe Nagel's problem is that he is looking to religion for the wrong type of explanation. Religious concepts, at least in the monotheistic traditions, typically explain things by showing how various multiplicities point in the direction of an ultimate unity. Diverse aspects of human life find meaning and coherence in the religious quest. The external world, sense perception, trade, law, reason, art, the innermost longings of the heart, and all the complex relations among these and more are all gathered in religion as manifestations of the divine. If Nagel finds this sort of explanation woefully inadequate as philosophy, it may be because of the inadequacy of the sort of explanation he expects from philosophy.

● Nagel's own take on the problem is that "there is something wrong with the hope of arriving at a complete understanding of the world that includes an understanding of ourselves as beings within it possessing the capacity for that very understanding." (76) This seems odd. Even if we grant that there is some deep sense in which we cannot find subjective facts (e.g., "That's me.") within an objective view of things, this does not seem to have the limiting consequence suggested by Nagel. Of course, there might be something wrong with the hope of arriving at a complete understanding of anything, just because of human imperfection, but otherwise, there does not seem to be anything particularly paradoxical about understanding our own epistemic condition in the world. Consider:

(A) S knows that (A) is true.

If (A) is true, S knows it, and if (A) is false, he doesn't. That's no paradox. There is a cousin of the liar lurking here, but it is not (A). Consider (B):

(B) S knows that (B) is not true.

If (B) is true, then since knowledge implies truth, (B) is not true. Hence, (B) is not true. If S knows this, (B) is true. Hence, S does not know it, that is, (B) is not true but S does not know that it is not true. There is still no paradox, but it's pretty close to being a paradox, for S can certainly reason correctly that (B) is not true, yet a contradiction results if we attribute to S *knowledge* that (B) is not true. Consider (C):

(C) S does not know that (C) is true.

There is no problem with this. It just implies that S does not know it.

Nagel's problem is with an understanding of the world, which we can imagine to be a proposition (D) that implies that we understand (D). If (D) is true, then we understand it, but it may be false, in which case we may or may not understand it. There is no paradox here.

Maybe another example will help wipe away Nagel's doubts. We can recognize when a child comes to understand that he himself understands things. He first must become a member of the community of those who understand things, and then he can come to see himself as a member of such a community. The self-understanding involved here does not require the postulation of any boundaries at which absolutely objective limits are reached free from interpretive interference.

Nagel assumes that when I am thinking that I am thinking, there have to be two thinkings, the one I'm doing and the one I'm thinking about. The fact that he doesn't produce any conclusive argument for this does not mean that he's wrong. Maybe there can't really be any thought thinking itself, or if there is, maybe we can always sort out the active from the

passive aspect. If that were so, there would be a sort of limit on self-understanding reached when we ascend the series: thinking, thinking that I am thinking, thinking that I am thinking that I am thinking,.... However far we go, we arrive at clause that begins with a thinking that is not the object of some other thinking, or there always remains some completely active aspect of the thinking. Nagel also assumes that what is subjective or subject to relativizing constraints must be the object of thought, or a passive aspect of thought, thought acted upon by culture, the will to power, or whatever. Even if we are willing to swallow this much, however, Nagel's absolutist conclusions (to the effect that the content of some thought has validity free of relativizing constraints) do not follow, for it may be that thought only becomes meaningful, only takes on content, when it is not purely active. If there is a purely active aspect of thinking, that is not the aspect that is true or valid, for these values are only applied to thought content, the passive aspect of thought.

In Islamic philosophy, there is a way to arrive at knowledge that is not polluted by relativizing constraints. This sort of knowledge is called *knowledge by presence*, but it is not the sort of knowledge or thinking to which Nagel's arguments apply, because he only considers propositional knowledge and attempts to arrive at some claim of absolute validity for some propositional knowledge. Even knowledge by presence, however, is not purely active in the way required by the reconstruction of Nagel's argument given above; rather, in knowledge by presence the active and passive are united, the knower, the knowing and the known are one. One may agree that the painful consciousness, its actively being aware of pain and the pain are all the same, or are different aspects of a single thing, but this is different from the thought *that* I am in pain. Once we cross over to propositional knowledge, fallible human concepts interfere with all their vagaries. For example, it is not clear whether a person has a single throbbing pain, or a series of pains, each being a throb; and it is unclear how uncomfortable a sensation must be before you call it 'a pain'. The answer given

by eliminative materialists is that there *are* no pains, because the concept of pain is so polluted with dualistic metaphysics. Regardless of how these issues are resolved, they are to be resolved through the eminently fallible process of evaluating opposing arguments. Personally, I think that the issues can be resolved in such a way as to win certainty, but the sort of considerations Nagel relies upon fall way short of the mark.

We cannot hold out for a last word that is unpolluted by the cultural invasion because all words are cultural inventions. To arrive at a truth that is absolutely free of that baggage, we need to go beyond propositional thought to mystical insight. Such truth is not to be found in any description of the sweetness of the sugar, but in tasting it.

## 5. Science

● In the fifth chapter Nagel extends his critique of relativism to the sciences, the very heartland of those who have argued against objectivity and for the interference of all sorts of subjective and social factors. His strategy is to show that the force or authority of the first-order statements of scientific truth is sufficient to overthrow relativistic or subjectivistic claims about science that give rise to suspicions about such first-order statements. This strategy seems as flawed as Dr. Johnson's refutation of idealism.<sup>4</sup> What is needed is argument, not insistence.

● Nagel tells us that we begin with the *a priori* idea that the world is some determinate way and then proceed to try to discriminate between mere appearance and reality. A good relativist will not even let Nagel get away with this, unless the word '*a priori*' is replaced by 'naïve'. The naïve absolutist

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<sup>4</sup> In his biography, Boswell claims that Johnson violently kicked a stone to refute Berkley's idealism.

begins and ends with the idea that any given object in the real world out there is either at rest or in motion. The relativist urges that there can only be motion relative to a frame of reference, and, analogously, all the first-order judgments that scientists make that are considered true, are considered true only relative to some conceptual frame of reference. The method of discriminating between appearance and reality is one learned in a context of shared assumptions without which it could not get off the ground. Nagel responds to this sort of point by trying to back up against an absolute. If the truth of the claim that a given object is at rest is relative to a framework, the claim that the object is at rest relative to a given framework will be absolute. The relativist here must protest that the analogy with motion cannot be pushed this far because the identification of frameworks is made possible by an absolute physical distinction between acceleration and its absence. In the case of metaphysics, however, there is no analogue to acceleration on which to fall back. Any attempt to specify the frame of reference relative to which a given claim may be counted as true will itself require reliance on further unexamined presumptions and systems of concepts.

Nagel himself admits that in our scientific search for laws and order, we assume that our experiences present us with an arbitrary or random sample of the universe. When we see that there is no way of knowing this to be true even if it is, and when we see how much our search depends upon implicit standards of simplicity and elegance, even to judge where there is order, and where a mere grueish specter of order, then we might well wonder whether all that is taken on board in the search might not increase the odds that we shall never make it across the broad back of the sea to truth. In the face of such uncertainty, courage is required, not courage born of repetition of the lie that we know we will make it, but the courage to plod on while fully cognizant that the road may not take us where we want to go, that we need to continue only because there is no better course

available.

Nagel claims that he is not begging any questions. He admits that there are two possible views of the world and science, one realist and one subjectivist. There is no *a priori* reason to pick one over the other. They are at a stand off. In this situation, he argues that the credibility of first order scientific claims can carry over to support for realism. This argument is flawed. The subjectivist points out various culture bound variables that influence theory acceptance, and then argues that recognition of this influence raises doubts about claims to scientific objectivity, and this in turn challenges the naïve attitude toward theoretical claims. One cannot then stand behind naïve intuitions as if they were sufficient to preponderate for objectivism. The subjectivist and objectivist are not, aside from naïve intuitions, equally matched. To defend objectivism, some sort of argument is needed as to why the subjective influences on theory acceptance (such as the presumptions of order and its standards) should be ignored, how objective truth may be achieved despite them. If scientific theories are accepted partly because of the political intrigues of scientists in pursuit of grants, and if such intriguing may prevent theories of greater merit from being accepted, then there is reason to have doubts about scientific claims to objectivity. If subjective elements infect the very warp and woof of scientific reasoning, theory evaluation, and even the concept of truth itself, then the entire objective point of view starts to seem fishy.

Nagel states: "Unless, as Kant thought, it [robust realism] is a picture that can be ruled out a priori, there is no reason why those judgments should not themselves weigh against a Kantian interpretation of them. In the same way, certain first-order moral judgments can resist emotivist interpretations by their own weight." (86-87). The first problem with this statement is that it assumes that the only contenders are Kantian and robust realist. Surely, however, we need not buy the noumena/phenomena distinction to have good reason to reject naïve (or robust) realism. At least this much should have been learned from Hegel or from the significant amount of philosophical writing from the mid-nineteenth through early twentieth centuries in which a wide variety of idealisms and

realisms were debated.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, Nagel makes it sound as though doubts about naïve realism must arise from some sort of a priori prejudice, while what is usually found among those who reject naïve realism is an evaluation of the competing philosophical theories current (something notably lacking in Nagel's book) in which argument is given in favor of one of the rivals to naïve realism. The doubters and deniers of naïve realism usually draw upon empirical evidence that the sorts of considerations that normally elicit reasonable doubt about first-order claims in fact infect the entirety of human reasoning. Third, the fact that first order claims are unreflectively asserted in a way that implies a view of the world inconsistent with Kant's is not sufficient to demonstrate that Kant's view was wrong. Fourth, moral realism cannot be established on the strength of first order moral claims. Prescriptivists are no less insistent than realists about murder being wrong. If prescriptivism is to be rejected (as I agree it should be), philosophical arguments must be rallied to show why it is inferior to some alternative metaethical theory.

To carry the analogy with the debate about moral realism further, suppose that Nagel were to advance arguments for his own anti-subjectivism similar to those of the British moral realists who think that realism about values can be demonstrated through an analysis of moral language. Some non-realists have responded that if moral realism is implicit in the acceptance of moral claims as true, then moral claims should be considered false. This is the 'error theory' defended by Mackie.<sup>6</sup> The same sort of response can be expected in the philosophy of science. Semantics alone cannot prop up realism, for if considerations of meaning do imply that some assertions are intended realistically, whatever reasons the non-realist has against realism will carry over to the first-order claims as well.

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Ralph Barton Perry, *Philosophy of the Recent Past* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1926).

<sup>6</sup> J. L. Mackie, *Ethics, Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), ch. 1.

Nagel gives the example of the law of gravity. He claims that subjectivist proposals pits two hypotheses against one another, first, that objects attract as stated in the law, and second, that it is only in a peculiar language game that objects attract as stated by the law. He states that unless the first hypothesis can be ruled out on some other grounds, “it remains considerably more plausible than the second.” (86) What we have here is a claim for the *prima facie* justification of realism. All other things being equal, naïve intuitions should be counted as preponderating reasons. Even if this is so, the argument between realists and anti-realists is well past the stage when all other things can be considered equal, especially when it comes to the sorts of assertions made in scientific theory. Consider Nancy Cartwright’s disillusioning discussion of the very law of gravitation mentioned by Nagel.<sup>7</sup> Objects do not attract each other as stated in the law, because in the real world, objects are always subject to factors additional to distance and mass. One could make this point with a Wittgensteinian accent by stating that just as geometry does not describe real triangular objects, but elaborates a language game in which proofs are constructed about ideally regular triangles, likewise the law of gravitation has an explanatory function only relative to a language game that presupposes ideal objects in a frictionless world.

● Nagel attacks Putnamian internal realism in much the same way as mentioned above regarding other forms of subjectivism. The strategy is to claim that qualifications cannot be given *ad infinitum*. The claim that truth claims must be qualified or relativized to what is actually or potentially acceptable is itself a truth claim that cannot be so qualified or relativized. We can put Nagel’s point in terms of a qualifying

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<sup>7</sup> Nancy Cartwright, *How the Laws of Physics Lie* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 59ff.

operator: #. The internal realist says that what we assert, or know, is never a bald proposition about the world,  $p$ , but must always be a qualified proposition, that relative to some idealized notion of acceptability  $p$ , that is,  $\#p$ . Nagel then observes that in the assertion  $\#p$ , while  $p$  is qualified,  $\#p$  is not, and no reiteration of #'s will help the matter. It seems that the strategy a subjectivist must take must be to argue that the qualification is not a mere appendable operator, but rather inheres in the very nature of assertion itself, even though people are not generally aware of this in the form of any conscious intention. The situation is comparable to that in which I use the English language to make an assertion, with the implicit qualification that my statement is to be understood as a statement in English, rather than, for example, some artificial language. The anti-realist or internal realist should hold that his own preferred qualifications inhere in assertions like the implicit qualification that this sentence is to be understood as English. Even when the qualification is made explicit, in the form of  $\#p$ , we are to understand the new compound of the statement with its qualification made explicit as governed by yet another implicit qualification. We can never make all the implicit qualifications to our assertions explicit, but that does not prove that they are not there.

● The anti-subjectivist attitude springs from indignation. The mush minded subjectivists seem to be saying that reality itself is a social construction from whole cloth, like visions constructed in the imagination. The anti-subjectivist responds that it would follow that this statement itself is no more than a report of some fantasy. The sophisticated subjectivist should respond by distancing himself from the simple-minded subjectivist. He holds that subjective factors inevitably impinge on everything we hold to be true, including this very statement, but that does not mean that anything goes. A sophisticated

subjectivism of this sort is defended by David Hoy in his discussion of Gadamer's hermeneutics:

Hence arguing that interpretations are relative to the historical cultural situation of the interpreter is not *necessarily* relativistic. Contextualism demands justifying reasons for interpretations, and these reasons can be assumed to be as factual or "objective" as an objectivist could produce.<sup>8</sup>

Hoy's defense of Gadamer is representative. In general, those who argue in favor of the impact of subjective considerations on our understanding go to some lengths to distinguish their positions from one in which all evaluations are to be taken as equally valid. The fact that evaluative distinctions are made among interpretations does not imply that the stance from which these interpretations are judged is itself immune from the limitations of prejudice. To think otherwise would seem a rather arrogant form of self-deception.

Nagel next turns his attack not to Gadamer but Kant, although where Kant stands on this is infamously unclear. Kant seems to say that all that we can describe are appearances, yet he describes something beyond appearances, *noumena*. Kant's transcendental idealism is a theory about the world or reality; so, Nagel asserts that we may use our ordinary methods of theory evaluation to evaluate it. Kant would no doubt protest that the ordinary methods only pertain to reasoning about *phenomena*. Of course, Kant does not mean to say that his philosophy should not be subject to any rational evaluation. After all, he offers arguments for why the critical stance is superior to the naïve one. Perhaps we must ultimately find Kant's arguments

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<sup>8</sup> David Couzens Hoy, *The Critical Circle: Literature, History, and Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 69.

irredeemably obscure or in some other way flawed, but Nagel thinks that since ordinary reasoning is held by Kant to apply *only* to phenomena, his own philosophy must be beyond rational evaluation altogether as a given certainty. However, Nagel insists, Kant's theory is just one contender among many, and by this very fact, invites evaluation by the very reason it would limit. This is unfair to Kant because it is obvious that Kant does not mean to say that reason cannot be used to evaluate his philosophy. Kant's point is that the reasoning used must be critical. We must not allow the standards used for phenomenal understanding to extend beyond their reach to metaphysics. Nagel begs the question against Kant by insisting that we do precisely this.

Nagel's interpretation of Kant is more bluntly expressed in his claim: "To accept transcendental idealism we would have to cease to regard our ordinary forms of thought as being about the world at all, and I think we cannot do that." (94-95) This claim has two parts, both of which are contentious. First, however, we need to get clear about what is meant by *the world*. According to some interpreters of Kant, *the world* can be used to refer to either the phenomenal world or the noumenal world. Most commentators today hold that Kant does not think that these are really two worlds, but two different ways of thinking about the one and only world there is. The phenomenal world is the world as considered through the categories, while the noumenal world is the world considered in abstraction from the categories of judgment.<sup>9</sup> So, to accept transcendental idealism we do not have to cease to regard our ordinary forms of thought as being about the world at all, rather we have to regard them as being about the *phenomenal* world, i.e., about *the world* as it appears to us. If, on the other hand, we read Kant as holding that the

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<sup>9</sup> See Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford, 2000), 3-30.

phenomenal and noumenal worlds are separate and distinct, then if transcendental idealism implies that our ordinary forms of thought are not about the world at all, the world they are not about would be the noumenal world, and in that case, there is no reason to accept Nagel's claim that we cannot cease to regard our ordinary thinking as being about *that*, for our ordinary reasoning is about the phenomenal world.

After some more bluster about the inescapability of the "outer frame" of our view of ourselves, and more exasperation about how anyone could take Kant seriously in view of the empirical facts, Nagel concludes his chapter on science as follows:

Try as we may, there is nowhere to escape to from the pretensions of human reason. If we try to reinterpret it in a more modest fashion, we find ourselves, in carrying out the project, inevitably condemned to forming beliefs of some kind about the world and our place in it, and that can be done only by engaging in untrammelled thought.  
(99)

It seems to me, however, that we can quite well proceed by engaging in trammelled thought. After reading Kant or some other philosopher who denies naïve realism, I may find all my thinking accompanied by a reserve that disposes me to admit that none of my beliefs are to be taken at face value. Of course, it will be impossible for me to make explicit exactly where and how my thoughts cease to reflect the world and reflect, instead, the conditions of my own understanding. If I were able to do this, I would have arrived at the untrammelled thought from which Nagel tells us we cannot escape. But the sort of doubt that infects the sophisticated Kantian is much more obscure. It is a doubt that any of our thoughts provides a pure reflection of reality. All our thoughts are polluted by the conditions of our own thinking in ways that it is impossible for us to filter out.

There are obvious cases of this, as in Ptolomeic astronomy. Nagel admits this, and provides the example. Then we become aware of how much in science depends on our needs for certain preferred forms of explanation rather than on any independent reality. Finally, we come to see that there is no way to distinguish the content from the sorting of what we find in the world. Perhaps it would be better to say that we may rank cases in which subjective considerations have more or less influence, but that this spectrum is open ended. We never arrive at the purely subjective or purely objective.

● Quine's attack on the analytic synthetic distinction may be read as an attack on the idea that we can neatly distinguish the subjective from the objective factors that go into what we think and assert. Quine argued that there is no way to neatly separate the influence of the world and the influence of meaning on the truth of an assertion, so that we cannot say that analytic statements are true because of meaning, while synthetic statements are true because of the world. World and meaning are so thoroughly mixed up together in our assertions that there is no way to begin to sort them out. Quine would conclude that it is as much a fact about bachelors as it is a fact about the way we define 'bachelor' that makes it true that no bachelors are married.

I wouldn't go quite so far as Quine here. It seems to me that the proposition that bachelors aren't married tells us less about the world than about meanings. But I'm sufficiently impressed by Quine's arguments to think that there are no absolutes here. No propositions are made true solely by meaning and completely independent of how the world is, and none are made true solely by the way the world is independent of meanings. When we assert propositions, we cannot directly assert anything about the world. The subjective considerations of language and how it works always interfere. We assert our

propositions through language. Whatever we assert carries all sorts of assumptions about how language relates to the world. The naïve view suppresses all these assumptions in a heroic attempt to conquer the world. Nagel thinks that the naïve view must always triumph, at least at the outer limits of critical thought. After all, we cannot be consciously critical of everything! But the critical thinker need not be consciously critical all the time in order to acknowledge the pervasive influence of subjective factors.

● The naïve view seems to mar Tarski's *Convention T*. According to this convention, a comprehensive definition of truth should have as consequences, every statement of the form: ' $p$ ' is true (in English) iff  $p$ . But snow could be white even if there were no language at all, so the right to left direction of the biconditional will be false of such imagined situations. Why didn't Tarski himself see this? Why didn't he (or his major commentators) even discuss it? It seems so obvious! Maybe the possibility that there should be no language was thought to be irrelevant because the T convention was proposed as a stricture for the construction of languages containing a truth predicate. Both sides of the biconditional are in an assumed language. If there were no language, the biconditional would not be false, it would fail to exist.<sup>10</sup> The problem, however, is that the actual sentence before us is such that one side of its biconditional is true of situations that the other side is not true of. So, the T convention does not generate necessary truths. Even if the last word is about the world, it must be made using the imperfect medium of language. Likewise at the outer limits of thought, no matter how much one intends to think something about reality period, one must think using the imperfect medium of human thought.

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<sup>10</sup> This was suggested in correspondence by Hamid Vahid, 9 Dec. 2002.

● Consider Rorty's favorite ancient analogy of the mirror and what it shows. It is said that concepts are like mirrors through which the world is seen. At times we may focus on the mirror itself, as when we want to inspect the glass. Normally, however, when we look through the mirror we disregard the mirror and focus on the objects depicted. The history of science teaches us that the mirror of science is flawed. Some of the characteristics of what it shows are due to irregularities in the glass. What is the significance of this? Two unreasonable extreme positions are prominent. Nagel's targets are those who would claim that everything that science says is to be explained in terms of the irregularities in the glass, as it were. But Nagel himself seems to go to the other extreme, as if the fact that we use the mirror to see the world is itself sufficient to justify disregard of the irregularities.

● A more judicious approach to the issue may be found in Ian Hacking's *The Social Construction of What?*<sup>11</sup> With regard to the version of subjectivism with which Hacking is concerned, social constructivism, there are a number of important questions raised.

1. Could science have developed successfully in a manner very different from the course it has taken?
2. Are scientific *facts* consequences of the ways we represent the world?
3. Does stability in science result from factors external to the overt content of science?

The subjectivists answer all these questions in the affirmative. Arguing that there is some outer limit of thought from which

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<sup>11</sup> Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

subjective factors are barred can successfully refute none of these affirmative answers. Nagel's approach is too facile.

## **6. Ethics**

● In this chapter Nagel attempts to export his foot stomping from the science wars to ethics. Hume's theory of practical reasoning is dismissed in two or three sentences. (102-103) The claim that the foundational passions of Hume's theory can always be subject to rational appraisal is one with which I happen to agree, but a successful defense of this claim requires much more effort than Nagel seems willing to expend. Nagel admits that his case is not as clear-cut in ethics as in the former chapters, but he insists that all attempts to get outside the object language of moral reasoning "will eventually collapse before the independent force of the first-order judgments themselves." (103)

● There is a very old attempt to get outside the object language of moral reasoning that has seemed successful to a fairly sizeable segment of intelligent scholars for centuries. The basic idea is that moral reasoning on its own is not capable of discerning what is right and wrong, and that it is only by means of divine revelation that any knowledge about such issues may be obtained. This is the view that became prevalent among Sunnī Muslim scholars during the Abbasid period (750-1258) and that has remained dominant ever since.<sup>12</sup> It is defended by no less an intellect than Ghazzālī. I think Ghazzālī's position is wrong, but I also think that this cannot be demonstrated without a considerable amount of *theological* argumentation. The independent force of first-order moral judgments flags when faced by strong religious conviction.

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<sup>12</sup> See A. Kevin Reinhart, *Before Revelation: The Boundaries of Muslim Moral Thought* (Albany: SUNY, 1995).

● Nagel rightly points out that some critics of moral absolutes are guilty of the genetic fallacy. They claim that since one's moral view is shaped by contingencies of birth and rearing, no such view is better than any other. Even if one holds a belief for reasons that have nothing whatsoever to do with its truth, this by no means shows that the belief is no better than any other. The belief might have superiority to others precisely in being true. In other words, one may well be unjustified in holding true beliefs. Showing that one is not justified does not show that one's belief is false. Furthermore, showing that the method of reasoning one uses was obtained as a result of contingencies, so that it is possible that things could have worked out in such a way that you would have reasoned in a different manner, does not imply anything about whether either method is sound or not. The genetic fallacy is a fallacy of *relevance*. The causes that generate belief are not relevant to the truth of the belief. Nagel even gets this point mixed up. He writes, "The reason the genetic fallacy is a fallacy is that the explanation of a belief can sometimes confirm it." (103) Imagine some belief that S has that  $p$ , B<sub>sp</sub>, such that no explanation as to why S holds this belief could ever confirm it. In that case would the possibility of the genetic fallacy lapse? Surely not. Perhaps S is mad and comes to beliefs in a completely haphazard way. At random, some of his beliefs are true. Nothing about the explanation for S's belief could ever confirm it, yet it would remain a fallacy to argue from this to the conclusion that his belief was wrong.

Regardless of how Nagel understands the genetic fallacy, he seems to think that pointing the fallacy out in the reasoning mentioned above is sufficient to undermine moral subjectivism. This is rather simplistic. Instead of attacking straw men, Nagel would have done much better to take a look at the actual arguments given against moral absolutism. A good example of how one might argue from the contingencies of one's moral

views to a rejection of absolutism may be found in Gilbert Harman's most recent book, *Explaining Value and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*.<sup>13</sup> Harman's argument may have flaws, but the genetic fallacy is not one of them. While Nagel claims that universal claims about what ought to be done can always be legitimately raised, and always require a normative answer, Harman denies this. Harman claims that a person ought to do something if and only if there is warranted reasoning that would lead the person to do that thing, and that there is such reasoning if and only if a failure of the person to do that thing can be attributed to some sort of error: inattention, lack of time, failure to consider appropriate arguments, ignorance of available evidence, irrationality or weakness of the will. If a person does not do something, and his failure to do it cannot be attributed to some such error or failure, then it must be assumed that the person had no reason to do it, and hence was not obligated to do it. Given these premises, Harman can argue from the contingencies of moral differences to a denial of moral absolutes. If you had been raised differently, you would not have the beliefs about human rights that you currently hold; you would not consider yourself obliged to respect human rights *per se*. In other respects, it is assumed that you would be perfectly reasonable. Your failure to respect human rights could not be attributed to negligence, weakness of the will, irrationality, etc.; so, it would have to be concluded that you would have had no reason to respect human rights, and hence no duty in that regard.

I do not mean to endorse Harman's argument. The fact that an intellectual criminal may feel no obligation to respect the lives of those outside his group while otherwise seeming to be

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<sup>13</sup> Gilbert Harman, *Explaining Value and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Harman's argument against absolutism was previously published as "Is There a Single True Morality?" in David Copp and David Zimmerman (eds.), *Morality, Reason and Truth* (Totowa: Roman & Littlefield, 1985), 27-48.

reasonable, or at least cunning, would seem to me to be best explained by his ignorance of various moral truths. Harman does not recognize any such absolute moral truths, so we are at a standoff. Anyway, without a convincing argument against the existence of such truths, his argument does not establish the falsity of moral absolutism. Harman assumes a naturalistic worldview, and he admits that the moral absolutist may invoke a theory of moral autonomy at precisely the spot that the relativist invokes naturalism.

The point is that Nagel misrepresents the relativist when he accuses him of the genetic fallacy, and to successfully refute his opponents, Nagel ought to provide reasons in support of his view of moral autonomy, instead of simply insisting upon it.

● Next, Nagel takes on Hume. Nagel seeks to defend rationalism in ethics against Hume's theory that all motivation originates in desires. Nagel argues that practical reasoning must govern the relation between actions and desires. It must decide which actions are to be acted upon and which ignored. Of course, a defender of Hume would respond that some higher order desires are needed to motivate us to employ such practical reasoning. To this, Nagel replies that we can still go back and ask what weight to give to the higher order desires, and when we see that we can do this, we must. Such is the force of practical reasoning, regardless whether it is moral or egocentrically self-interested.

No one should have any trouble imagining the sort of response to be expected from Hume's camp: reason just doesn't have the capacity to grasp all the desires at work on our actions. The employment of reason itself will reflect non-cognitive forces at work on us even as it attempts to control them. Nagel sees this, and his only answer is that they cannot prove that it is so.

On this view whatever we do, after engaging in such an intellectual ritual, will still inevitably be a manifestation of our individual or social nature, not the deliverance of impersonal reason—for there is no such thing.

But I do not believe that such a conclusion can be established a priori, and there is little reason to believe it could be established empirically. (110)

The supporters of Hume respond with a general theory of motivation, a sort of foundationalism with passions or desires serving as the foundations of all motivation. Like most positions in philosophy, it is to be defended neither by an a priori demonstration nor through the empirical sciences, but by consideration of its theoretical virtues in comparison with its rivals. Even if, at the end of the day, we find Humean theories wanting, they still deserve more of a hearing than Nagel seems willing to tolerate.

● Nagel admits that we have to weigh the plausibility of competing meta ethical theories when he turns to a consideration of the views of Bernard William.<sup>14</sup> Immediately after this admission, however, he claims that to think about this we should consider the incompatibility of specific moral claims about what ought to be done with the idea that there are no moral obligations independent of motivational grounds. Then he balks at the idea that instead of a substantive ethics we should be left with a psychological reduction. (115) Ultimately, he relies on two intuitions: the intuited feeling of tension between substantive moral claims and subjectivist moral theory, and the intuited feeling of the strength of the claims. Two sorts of responses suggest themselves. First, one might deny the strength of either or both of the intuitions; and second, one could deny

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<sup>14</sup> Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Harvard, 1985).

that the intuitions are reliable. One could question the alleged tension between first order moral claims and subjectivist theory by arguing that there are motivational factors that are shared among all human beings. Motivational factors that are extremely widespread and deep-seated could be held to be responsible for the illusion that the moral claims conditioned by them are absolute. These nearly universal and entrenched factors might not be sufficient to ground any particular substantive ethics, but it would not be surprising to find that appeal to such universal aspects of human motivation could provide good reasons to think that one should have *some* sort or another of substantive ethics. Williams himself seeks to take the punch out of relativism by arguing that the universal application of one's moral convictions need not be restricted with the recognition that they are made possible only in the context of a particular, e.g., modern, motivational structure; that is, the fact that a particular moral claim is relative to motives associated with modern liberal culture does not mean that the scope of such claims has to be restricted to those who feel their force because they have the appropriate motives. Human sacrifice would be judged by modern people to be morally horrible even as practiced in the past by those whose motivational structure prevents them from seeing it that way.<sup>15</sup>

Nagel seems to be worried that if morality is relative to subjective factors such as one's motivational structure, moral convictions will have no more authority than culinary preferences. The subjectivist, however, will argue that the difference between a dislike for shrimp and moral repugnance for human sacrifice is to be explained rather than denied by appeal to motivational structure.

● Nagel finds a similar sort of conflict of intuitions in the problem of freedom and determinism. We have intuitions that

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<sup>15</sup> Williams, 158-159.

we are free and that our freedom is incompatible with causal determinism. Nagel claims that the intuitions on which he is relying here are not merely theoretical, but that implicit in our engagement in practices of reasoning about our actions is a denial of causal determinism. But in a parenthetical remark he gives the game away: “(I leave open the possibility that there is a form of causal determination that is compatible with rationality; if so, we could simultaneously engage in practical and theoretical reasoning and believe that we were so determined—including being so determined to believe that we were.)” (117) The whole point of sophisticated subjectivism is to argue for a general form of compatibilism. Reasoning does not lose its point just because the outcomes of its use are subject to outside influences, even if the outside influences are determinative of the outcomes. The need to deliberate and decide does not just go away when someone accepts a philosophical theory of causal determinism. “We cannot evade our freedom,” (118) Nagel writes; and the inescapability of freedom remains regardless of whether we take subjective factors or outside causes to determine what we do and think.

One of the big mistakes that loom in discussions of the freewill problem pertains to conflicts between inclinations and morals. There is a sense in which we are more free when we have the ability to restrain our inclinations to accord with the judgments of our moral reasoning. This is independent of the issue of whether or not our moral judgments are determined by subjective factors or external causes.

Some people feel some sort of *Angst* or nervousness when they think that their free choices might be determined by remote causes. Perhaps they should be encouraged to take the ostrich approach.<sup>16</sup> That would seem to be better than leading

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<sup>16</sup> This is the rather tongue in cheek recommendation of John Earman in his *A Primer on Determinism* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1986), 250.

them on to think that our subjective sense of freedom provides some sort of philosophical justification for the idea that there are no such causes, and we can breathe a sigh of relief.

● Nagel also seems to confuse values and obligations. One might hold an objectivist or realist theory of values but adhere to a subjective theory of obligation. A position of this sort is discussed by Robert Adams in his *Finite and Infinite Goods*.<sup>17</sup> Before introducing his divine command theory of obligation, he begins by recounting the advantages of a social theory of moral obligation: obligations arise in the context of social relations. A social theory of obligation has an advantage over theories according to which obligations are deliverances of reason independent of social ties, because it better explains how obligations motivate. However, not any system of social requirements will issue moral obligations. The system itself must fulfill certain criteria with regard to objective value. Nagel is concerned that a theory of reasons for action should show why we have reasons to be concerned with the welfare of others, and he thinks that subjectivist or agent-relative accounts will fail in this respect. One way to answer Nagel would be to appeal to a line of argument similar to that employed by Adams. Any account of practical reasoning must be agent-relative in the sense that it has to admit that the only reasons that can motivate anyone to act are reasons that are available to the agent. We might say that some sets of reasons available to an agent will qualify as *moral* when they satisfy certain conditions of objective value. Limitations on the sorts of reasons available would make the theory agent-relative without implying any sort of egoism.

● Nagel gives first-order substantive moral beliefs an absolute status that they don't deserve. Those beliefs are

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Merrihew Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

foundational in a sense that seems to imply incorrigibility. If they are not incorrigible, then what sorts of considerations are relevant to changing one's judgment about them? One way such judgments change is when we try to put them into the context of a more general theory. The interplay between considerations of first-order judgments and theory play an important role in Rawls notion of *reflective equilibrium*.<sup>18</sup> If Rawls theory constitutes a sort of weak foundationalism in ethics, what Nagel recommends seems to be an implausibly extreme foundationalism.

### **7. Evolutionary Naturalism and the Fear of Religion**

● Perhaps this is the most interesting chapter of the book. It appears to have been inspired by reading Alvin Plantinga's arguments against naturalism in his *Warrant and Proper Function*.<sup>19</sup> Plantinga's argument is that accounts of our cognitive faculties based on evolutionary naturalism are self-defeating, because there is no reason to think that the process of natural selection would lead us to have faculties that enable us to grasp the truth rather than some other useful substitute. Plantinga uses this argument to defend a theistic epistemology. Nagel is not theistically inclined, but he appreciates the force of Plantinga's argument, and makes some rather surprising admissions about the "fear of religion" that seems to pervade the Western intellectual atmosphere.

The thought that the relation between mind and the world is something fundamental makes many people in this day and age nervous. I believe this is one manifestation of a fear of religion which has large and

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<sup>18</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1971), 20f.

<sup>19</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), ch. 12.

often pernicious consequences for modern intellectual life.... I speak from experience, being strongly subject to this fear myself: I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that. (130)

Nagel continues with speculation that much of the reductionism and scientism that is prevalent is fueled by this fear of religion, and he condemns the influence of this fear as irrational. He also notes that there is as much reason to look for psychological factors behind unbelief as there is to consider subconscious motivations for religious faith. On the other hand, he does not think that the defects of evolutionary naturalism require a theistic response, although he hints that the basic structure of the universe may be governed by teleological laws that accommodate the emergence of mind.

● Believers can be expected to applaud Nagel's admissions, but we should not feel too self-satisfied about having answers to problems that seem insoluble on the basis of atheistic naturalism. If we are troubled by the chasm between the contents of the mind and that of external reality, we should not be too quick to paste it over with religious assurances. The mere supposition of the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent God will provide no guarantee that the world is as we suppose it to be or that our cognitive faculties are generally reliable. God may have designed our faculties in such a way that they would correctly apprehend some truths but not others. Or, as Paul says:

*For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.*<sup>20</sup>

If someone objects that this would be contrary to the goodness of God, because it would imply willful deception on His part, the reply is that the sort of deception involved in the creation of beings with limited cognitive faculties that do not correctly apprehend reality need by no means contradict divine goodness, for, firstly, in such limitation God presents no untruth in revelation to man so that He could be called a liar; secondly, God is in no way obliged to provide His creatures with faculties whereby they might understand things as they really are; thirdly, the divine wisdom might well find it best for humans to reason through faculties that systematically distort what they would know, perhaps with intimations that something much more perfect cannot be attained by them in this world. We know that systematic distortions are built into our perceptual faculties because of the existence of optical illusions, for example, yet no one would accuse God of lying to us on this account. There are also individuals with psychological disorders whose cognitive faculties give them a distorted picture of reality, yet we do not say that God is willfully deceiving them. Would divine justice prevent God from instilling intuitions in human beings that make Euclidean geometry seem to describe necessary features of the space around us?<sup>21</sup> So, the prospect that the human

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<sup>20</sup> 1 Cor 13:12 (King James version).

<sup>21</sup> This is a theistic twist on Nozick's evolutionary argument, which is discussed further below. My point is that it makes no difference whether our intuitions are a product of natural selection, divine providence or the basic structure of a mind-friendly universe: it is possible that our rational intuitions give us a somewhat distorted picture of reality, but one that provides us with a more useful map of those aspects of reality that we need to maneuver in than an accurate picture that might be beyond our cognitive capacities altogether.

cognitive faculties in general do not put us in touch with reality as it is without distortion cannot be ruled out on account of divine honesty. And He knows better than do we of the affair.

If we are to consider our reasoning trustworthy, we need something more than mere faith in the existence of a good God. Nagel suggests that Peirce's later writings indicate that despite the fame of his pragmatism, he believed in a "Platonic harmony" between our thoughts and the logical relations among propositions. However, Platonism should give more cause to worry about the chasm than to be satisfied with realism. After all, Plato taught that the world as we see it is only one of shadows of a transcendent reality, and Peirce's ideal of convergence at the infinite limit of inquiry is only a hope that we are moving in the right direction coupled with a recognition of the fact that we have a long way to go. What Plato and Peirce teach is that appearances have a long, perhaps infinite, way to go to catch up with reality. The chasm still gapes.

● Religious thinkers have often reflected on the shortcomings of human rationality, and have sought divine aid to discover reality as it is by other means. Mawlawi (a.k.a. Rūmi) is an internationally famous exponent of this view. As William Chittick explains:

Rūmi has nothing but pity and disdain for those who look at the world around and within themselves and do not understand that what they are seeing is a veil over reality. The world is a dream, a prison, a trap, foam thrown up from the ocean, dust kicked up by a passing horse. But it is not what it appears to be.<sup>22</sup>

Mawlawi is not an irrationalist, however; he does not encourage the mere abandonment of reason. Rather, he sees discursive

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<sup>22</sup> William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love* (Albany: SUNY, 1983), 19.

reason as comparable to a blind man's stick.<sup>23</sup> It can help the blind to get around, but it is a limited aid. In love there is a means for understanding that goes beyond what the intellect affords:

If a child does not see the states of the intellect, will a rational man abandon it?

And if a rational man should not see the states of love, love's auspicious moon will not decrease.<sup>24</sup>

The point does not require the acceptance of an esoteric mystical philosophy. If we see that our intellectual abilities come in various strengths, and that people often find the right course through love rather than the application of rational decision theory, should we not then put less reliance on our own intellectual abilities? Undoubtedly, Nagel would reply that this itself is a piece of reasoning, and that we are locked into reliance on our own intellects.

The intellect says, "The six directions are limits and there is no way out." Love says, "There is a way, and I have traveled it many times."<sup>25</sup>

● What Nagel tries to show is that we are forced by the very nature of thought itself to rely upon our thinking to understand the objects of thought. We cannot step beyond the forever receding horizon of criticism. I often find arguments that aim to show that there is no alternative to some thesis to be dubious. The arguments proceed by shooting down unacceptable alternatives, but they leave the anxiety that there may be another that has not been considered. The claim that there is no other way often indicates a lack of imagination. Maybe we *can* adopt

<sup>23</sup> See *Mathnavi*, I:2135-40.

<sup>24</sup> *Mathnavi*, V:3932-33. Cited in Chittick, 112.

<sup>25</sup> *Divan-e Shams*, 1523.

a critical stance that includes all our claims, even the claim that we are being critical, and so withhold the trust Nagel says that we must extend to our own thinking. Maybe we can understand the objects of thought by relying on some faculty other than thought in the sense Nagel assumes, such as mystical union, for instance. But even if we are forced to rely on our own reasoning, forced reliance is no guarantee of reliability; and the intuitions generated by forced reliance should be subject to a healthy degree of suspicion, for it is little more than wishful thinking to imagine that the only tools available to us are all that is needed to accomplish the job for which we would like to employ them.

● A related suspicion of the judgments of reason can be found in the Calvinist tradition. Since sin infects the cognitive faculties, revealed truth is to be preferred over fallen reason. Nagel would protest that the decision to rely on revelation is based on the very faculty of reason whose reliability is denied. So, the Calvinist relies on reason after all, to make his argument, despite the fact that he deems reason unreliable! Isn't that self-defeating? Three responses on behalf of the Calvinist come to mind. First, he might agree that if the decision to rely on revelation were made through the argument given, it would not be on very solid ground, because of his skepticism about argumentation. In that case the argument would only function to spur those who incorrectly rely on reason to find another way. A more moderate reply would be that some of the deliverances of reason are less reliable than others. The validity of simple syllogistic reasoning is not unreliable, because it is not prone to the effects of sin. However, where reason goes beyond this to build atheistic philosophical systems, excuses for flouting religious commandments, and the like, it displays its servitude to the devil. A third reply would be to admit that the human situation forces us to rely on what we know to be less than fully reliable. There is no more contradiction in this than in using an

unsturdy ladder. It is not wise to use such an instrument when superior alternatives are available, but when there is no better choice, one can rely on what is not completely reliable without throwing caution to the wind.

An engaging discussion of such Calvinist themes in the works of Jonathan Edwards, and related ideas of John Henry Newman and William James is offered by William J. Wainwright in his *Reason and the Heart*.<sup>26</sup> Newman argued in favor of putting trust in reason, despite the fact that he argued that it could be corrupted by sin: "Again, we [rightly] rely implicitly on our memory, and that, too, in spite of its being obviously unstable and treacherous.... The same remarks apply to our assumption of the fidelity of our reasoning powers."<sup>27</sup>

● The dispute about evolutionary naturalism is interesting in its own right. Nagel's chief target is Nozick, but evolutionary arguments to support the reliability of reasoning are by no means uncommon in contemporary philosophy. One early attempt to provide an evolutionary account in support of human reason (although the discussion is limited to *moral* reason) may be found in a writer who displays a rather pronounced antipathy for religion, Prince Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921). While criticizing Kant's ethics, Kropotkin asks why reason guides the soul through its inner struggle to accept the conclusions of morality, rather than some other decision, and he answers that this is because the fundamental faculty of human [moral] reason is the conception of justice, and, he continues, "It is impossible

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<sup>26</sup> William J. Wainwright, *Reason and the Heart: A Prolegomenon to a Critique of Passional Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>27</sup> John Henry Newman, "The Nature of Faith in Relation to Reason," in *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford* (Oxford, 1843; reprint, Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, 1966), 213-214, cited in Wainwright, 79.

to explain this faculty of our reason in any other way than in connection with the progressive development, i.e., the *evolution*, of man and of the animal world in general.”<sup>28</sup> Kropotkin also mentions that ethics cannot be based on an “*accidental* accumulation of habits that were helpful to the species in its struggle for existence.”<sup>29</sup> He promises to take up the issue at greater length in the planned second part of the book that death prevented him from writing.

Nagel also turns to practical reason in the final section of the last chapter of his book, and the topics discussed are very similar to those found in Kropotkin’s musings about Kant and Spencer. But while Kropotkin clings until his dying day to the hope that ethics can be given a scientific basis in evolutionary theory, Nagel remains decidedly Kantian. Nagel provides several arguments for rejecting evolutionary explanations of practical reason and ethics. First, the justification for an action given through practical reasoning is completely normative, that is, the justification is to be sought in the content of the reasoning, and this cannot be replaced with an evolutionary account about how this sort of thinking emerged in primates through natural selection. To this argument we may reply, on behalf of Kropotkin, that the evolutionary account need not be a *reduction* of ethics or practical reason to some alleged facts about human evolution. An appeal is made to evolution in order to explain how the moral faculties emerged, but this does not replace them. Likewise, an account of the physical structure of iron is no substitute for a hammer. In all fairness, however, it must be admitted that Peter Alekseyevich seems to be after more than a merely descriptive account of how moral reasoning came

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<sup>28</sup> Prince Peter Alekseyevich Kropotkin, *Ethics: Origin and Development*, trs. Louis S. Friedland and Joseph R. Piroshnikoff (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1947), 221.

<sup>29</sup> Kropotkin, 294.

about. He appeals to evolution as some sort of basis for morality. What sort of basis? He does not try to show that any given action is right or wrong merely by correlation with the facts of evolution. I think that what he is after is a basis in natural science for progress that we recognize as advancement toward moral value through increasingly sophisticated and self-conscious applications of the principle of mutual aid. These scientific discoveries are no replacement for moral reasoning, but provide a certain sort of *explanation* through which we can see how the natural evolution of our faculties makes possible judgments that accord with what we consider to be valuable in the natural progression. He is not ready to label as ethical any chance tendency that has survival value, but he would insist that what makes an action moral is not merely its endorsement by reasoning about what should be done. We seek a critical stance through which we can say that the endorsements made by using this faculty are not only reliable, but accord with what we find valuable in evolutionary progress. We might deride the nineteenth century faith in natural science as naïve, but the quest to seek an explanation to justify reliance on our faculties beyond the uncritical judgments of those faculties themselves is the very essence of reflective thought.

The argument suggested by Kropotkin differs from that discussed by Plantinga and Nozick. Plantinga and Nozick explore the limitations of the argument that our faculties must be reliable indications of the truth because otherwise they would not have survived in our species.<sup>30</sup> Kropotkin, on the other hand, has a much more modest aim: to show how the moral judgments we make are rooted in evolutionary progress.

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<sup>30</sup> This sort of argument is attributed to William James and criticized in Wainwright, 102.

● Nagel objects to Nozick's theory of the evolutionary development of human rationality as presented in his *The Nature of Rationality*.<sup>31</sup> Nagel thinks that the evolutionary hypothesis is incompatible "with continued confidence in reason as a source of knowledge about the nonapparent character of the world." (135) Endorsing Plantinga's arguments against evolutionary naturalism, Nagel says that if our rational capacity was the product of natural selection, "There would be no reason to trust its results in mathematics and science, for example. (And insofar as the evolutionary hypothesis itself depends on reason, it would be self-undermining.)" (135) In the very next sentence, however, Nagel suggests a way out: "Unless it is coupled with an *independent* basis for confidence in reason, the evolutionary hypothesis is threatening rather than reassuring." In a footnote Nagel admits that he is not sure he has understood Nozick's position correctly, because Nozick claims that when we understand that evolution selects for faculties that deliver only approximate truth, we can sharpen our methods to improve on the reliability of our judgments. Nagel thinks that such improvement is impossible without a firm foundation on which to stand, but there are various ways to correct for inaccurate instruments through the use of those very instruments, even if complete accuracy is unattainable. Nevertheless, Nagel and Plantinga are right to point out that if the *only* reason for having any confidence in our cognitive faculties were the facts according to evolutionary theory, there would be little reason for confidence at all. To see whether Nagel's fears of evolutionary theory are well-placed or not, we should take a closer look at how it is used to explain human rationality.

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<sup>31</sup> Robert Nozick, *The Nature of Rationality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). The issue of evolution and rationality is also taken up and further elaborated in Nozick's last book, Robert Nozick, *Invariances: The Structure of the Objective World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

● According to Nagel, the faculty of reason has the power to apprehend the supportive relation between reasons and hypotheses. Nozick calls this sort of position *the a priori view* and he objects to it because for many sorts of arguments it does not explain why hypotheses supported by reasons are often true when the reasons are. The second view, favored by Nozick in his *Philosophical Explanations*<sup>32</sup> and dubbed *the factual view*, is that the evidential relation is a contingent relation, such that the evidence may be said to track a hypothesis when the probability of its truth varies proportionately with the probability of the supported hypothesis. Other factual views have been elaborated in addition to Nozick's 'tracking the truth' suggestion. In *The Nature of Rationality*, Nozick expresses dissatisfaction with factual views because they fail to explain the apparent self-evidence, in simple cases, of the supportive relation. So, he suggests that the two views should be combined:

A reason  $r$  for  $h$  is something that stands in a certain . . . factual relation to  $h$ , while the contents of  $r$  and  $h$  stand in a certain structural connection that appears to us strikingly to make  $h$  (more) believable given  $r$ .<sup>33</sup>

On the combined view, the relation of rational support has objective and subjective elements. It is an objective relation which appears to us in a certain striking way. But it is only in order to explain the subjective aspect of this that Nozick suggests an evolutionary account: there was selection among organisms which favored those for whom the factual relation of support seemed to be valid, so that for such organisms, the factual relation of evidential support would appear to be more than a factual relation. Those for whom a factual relation

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<sup>32</sup> Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), .

<sup>33</sup> Nozick (1993), 108.

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seemed to be intuitively valid would learn to recognize that relation more readily than others. This could have survival value, so that they would leave offspring distributed around their own degree of finding it evident. "Over generations, then, there can be movement toward finding that connection more and more self-evident."<sup>34</sup>

Nozick points out that although the intuitive self-evidence of general deductive and inductive methods of reasoning may have been selected through an evolutionary process, this does not guarantee that the best and most accurate methods of reasoning are the most intuitive. Likewise, the intuitivity of Euclidean geometry may be a product of evolutionary selection, because for all the geometrical problems faced by our ancestors, Euclidean geometry provided the right answers within any degree of tolerance they could have required, even though it is commonly assumed today that physical space is non-Euclidean. The point is not that the principles of deductive and inductive reasoning may be incorrect, but rather that an explanation of their intuitive self-evidence may be given without invoking their necessity.

Hume and Descartes both struggled with the question of how we could show that the deliverances of reason matched reality. In Hume this problem led to skepticism about induction, and in Descartes to reliance on the grace of God to effect the correlation. Kant suggested that instead of viewing reason and its objects as two independent realms, the objects of knowledge are to be seen as dependent on the nature of human rationality, so that what are known are not things in themselves but empirical reality. Nozick proposes that Kant was right to hold that rationality and reality are not independent, but was wrong about the order of dependence. It is not reality which conforms to reason, but rather our rational intuitions are shaped by reality

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<sup>34</sup> Nozick (1993), 109.

through the process of evolution. The avoidance of some errors may be more important for survival than the avoidance of others, and thus, evolutionary selection will favor an intuitive framework not simply because this will result in the avoidance of error, but because it will result in the avoidance of important errors, even if a price for this must be paid in less important errors. So, it is not maximum reliability which is selected by evolution, but approximate reliability. Although our intuitions may have been shaped by a process which does not favor maximal reliability, in cases where our intuitions conflict with maximal reliability, we are able to discount our intuitions, and indeed, much progress in physics and mathematics has required such discounting, despite the fact that the elementary parts of the process which led to the recognition of the need to discount the value of rational intuitions was based upon these very intuitions themselves. In such cases the intuitive principles are not dismissed entirely, but contexts are recognized in which they may fail to hold. Hence, in quantum physics, for example, one may expect to find theories where the principle of excluded middle is violated along with our intuitions, although we will continue in other areas to rely upon the principle. Although the very faculties whose deliverances are criticized are used in formulating the criticism, corrections can be made by finding particular areas (such as intuitions) where the faculties are less reliable when what they endorse seems to conflict with other cognitive or theoretical goals.

To claim that self-evident propositions were selected for through evolution, Nozick admits, is not to provide reason for believing them to be true. They might function analogously to Euclidean geometry, not exactly true, but close enough for the purpose of providing a framework within which rationality can be applied to the problems we confront in ordinary life. At this point Nozick claims that his account is in agreement with those

of Wittgenstein, Dewey, Heidegger and Polanyi, all of whom “see rationality as embedded in a context and playing a role as one component along with others, rather than as an external, self-sufficient point that judges everything.”<sup>35</sup>

In addition to biological evolution, Nozick suggests that there may be another homeostatic mechanism in terms of which a function of rationality may be understood: the processes by which societies mold their members. Nozick admits that although the ability to develop rational abilities may have an evolutionary explanation, people are not born rational, and rational processes are shaped and overlain by socially instilled processes, norms and procedures. Social institutions may be responsible for the development of people with a certain sort of rationality, people who are responsive to certain sorts of incentives and who learn to take into account certain kinds of constraints, in order to reproduce these institutions themselves, not that the institutions try to reproduce themselves, but simply in the sense that those which foster a certain kind of rationality will tend to have a greater propensity for successful self-reproduction than their rivals. “Hence, a significant function of rationality may be to propagate institutions into temporally later institution stages, not to serve the interests of the individuals who are trained and shaped into rationality.”<sup>36</sup>

Some noteworthy points about evolutionary accounts of rationality are also made by Nicholas Rescher.<sup>37</sup> Rescher begins by considering a popular argument against such accounts. It is argued that an evolutionary account must be defective because all characteristically mental operations involve meaning, value and purpose, and these have no place in the causal mechanisms

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<sup>35</sup> Nozick (1993), 123.

<sup>36</sup> Nozick (1993), 126.

<sup>37</sup> Nicholas Rescher, *A System of Pragmatic Idealism, Vol. II: The Validity of Values* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

which govern genetic selection. In defense of the evolutionary accounts, Rescher points out that all that such accounts require is that there be an inheritable, physically transmissible basis for the operations of mind by way of the brain and its operations. No particular theory in the philosophy of mind needs to be accepted, and particularly, one need not be a materialist regarding the nature of mind in order to accept an evolutionary account of rationality. One may even adhere to a traditional religious account of the soul as immaterial. What is required is merely that reproductive success results from rationality which is dependent on a heritable trait, such as brain structure. Evolutionary accounts of the mind are consistent with the view that mental functions such as intending can only be understood “from within”, by experiencing them. Thus, an evolutionary account of rationality will not remove the need for a hermeneutic account. Rescher goes one step even further: not only are the evolutionary and hermeneutic accounts of rationality compatible, they are not possibly incompatible, for the inner phenomenology of thinking simply lies outside the range of evolutionary biology. Likewise, religious dualists hold that the soul attaches itself to an appropriate body, and an evolutionary account of the development of such bodies will have absolutely nothing to say about the transcendent reality of the soul, and hence cannot possibly conflict with propositions that assert its existence.

There are three ways in which religious people have been made uncomfortable by evolutionary theories. The most notorious source of discomfort is philosophically the least interesting: the incompatibility of evolutionary theory with scripture. Certain Christian fundamentalists, for example, claim that since the Bible says that the world was made by God in six days, it cannot have evolved over the course of eons, as evolutionary theory insists. Muslim scholars, on the other hand,

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though castigated by the Western media as fundamentalists, have readily interpreted the reference to the six days of creation as symbolizing six periods, and have even sought to utilize evolutionary theory in support of the authenticity of the scripture. Second, there is the point mentioned above by Rescher, that people sometimes seem to think that evolutionary theory is incompatible with religious doctrines of the soul. No one, however, denies that there is any link between the body and the soul. When the finger is burnt, the intellect apprehends this. The evolutionary account of mental functions does not require anything more than this connection between body and soul, no matter how that is to be explained. Materialists will contend that the evolution of the mind is nothing more than the evolution of the brain, but one might also interpret evolutionary theory not as providing an account of the evolution of the mind, but an account of the evolution of the connection between mind and body. In Platonic terms one could even understand an evolutionary account of neurophysiology as an account of how the spirit comes to be entrapped in the body. The fact that embodied rationality has a genetic basis does not preclude the immateriality of the rational intellect itself, nor the possibility of its eternal existence, nor that it should be subject to divine rewards and punishments.

A third point of religious contention concerning evolutionary theory concerns the idea of purposiveness. Evolutionary theory makes natural development the result of causal processes, and this seems incompatible with the claim that this development is guided by divine purpose. An examination of some relevant remarks made by Rescher will prove instructive.

To say that a purposive being cannot arise by evolution in a theretofore purpose-lacking world is much like saying that a seeing being cannot arise by evolution in a

theretofore vision-lacking world or that in intelligent being cannot arise by evolution in a theretofore intelligence-lacking world. A commitment to the spirit of Darwinianism may well impede an acceptance of the purposiveness of nature, but it clearly does not and cannot impede an acceptance of purposiveness in nature through the evolutionary emergence within nature of beings who themselves have purposes, goals, and so forth. No doubt, Darwinian natural selection ill accords with an anthropomorphism of nature, but it certainly does not preclude an anthropomorphism of human beings.<sup>38</sup>

Rescher suggests that evolutionary theory is not compatible with an anthropomorphic theology, although he does not explicitly say this, but speaks instead of impediments imposed by “the spirit of Darwinianism”. Whatever this perhaps malevolent spirit demands, evolutionary theory is not incompatible with even a heretically anthropomorphic theology, of the sort refuted by our theologians, according to which God literally has physical hands, physically sits on a physical throne, etc. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim theologies, whether anthropomorphic or not, attribute to God omnipotence. If God is omnipotent He can bring about his will in any way He wishes. As we learn from the Noble Qur’àn, He need only say “Be” and it is. In that case, it is certainly possible for God to bring about his purposes by causal means. It is certainly God’s purpose that the Prophet of Islam, may the Peace and Blessings of Allah be with him and with his progeny, was born, and He established this purpose through natural means. Likewise, God may establish some of his purposes for the development of nature by biological evolution. The fact that a causal explanation can be provided by natural selection does not mean that the result thereby achieved is not

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<sup>38</sup> Rescher (1993), 99.

purposive, even if the major proponents of theories of natural selection have been motivated by the opinion that nature is purposeless. Instead of considering natural selection to accord ill with an anthropomorphism of nature, one might see in natural selection the causal mechanism through which nature achieves its aims.

In making these points, I do not mean to be defending Darwinianism. But whatever faults Darwinian theory has, are faults as biological theory and are independent of its irrelevance to theology.

The evolutionary theory of rationality also occupies much of the final two chapters of Alvin Plantinga's *Warrant and Proper Function*. Plantinga mentions two views about evolutionary accounts of rationality. First, there are the views of Darwin himself and Patricia Churchland. Darwin expressed doubt about "whether the convictions of man's mind, which has been developed from the mind of lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy." Churchland also declares that the principle purpose of the development of rationality is to get the rational organism to behave appropriately so that it can survive and reproduce, and truth is of lesser importance. Second, there are the views of Popper and Quine, who find consolation in evolutionary theory. Popper claims that since we have evolved and survived, we may be confident that our hypotheses about what the world is like are mostly correct. Quine writes that creatures who made wrong inductive inferences would most likely die before reproducing. Nozick seems to have taken a middle course in this controversy, since he thinks that rationality can be expected to produce approximate truth, even if, as in Euclidean geometry, it does not lead to precise truth.

Plantinga argues that it is possible that rationality developed as indicated by evolutionary theory and functions to enhance reproductive success through the acquisition of false

beliefs. This possibility he terms “Darwin's doubt”. The only way out, he suggests, is like Descartes to trust in the reliability of reason because of faith in God. I have argued that neither Plantinga nor Nagel have given us reason to deny that rationality has developed through natural selection, and that the problem of how we can know that our cognitive faculties provide us with a reliable picture of the world remains unsolved even if we have firm faith in the existence of the good honest and omnipotent God, glory be to Him!

● We might do best to let Mawlawi have the last word here:

If everything were in truth as it appears to be, the Prophet, endowed as he was with a vision so penetrating, so illumined and illuminating, would never have cried, ‘Lord, show me things as they are.’ ‘Thou showest a thing as fair, and in reality it is ugly; Thou showest a thing as ugly, and in reality it is lovely. Therefore do Thou show us every thing just as it is, that we may not fall into the snare and that we may not go astray perpetually.’ Now your judgement, however good and luminous it may be, is certainly not better than the Prophet’s judgement. He used to speak in this fashion; so do you now not put your trust in every idea and every notion. Be ever humble and fearful before God.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> A. J. Arberry, *Discourses of Rêmi* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1993), 18, cited in Chittick, 19.

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